

Quality Assurance Council

Audit Manual Sub-degree Operations of University Grants Committee-funded Universities



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1. Introduction

The Context for the Quality Audit

The University Grants Committee (UGC) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is an independent and non-statutory body that advises the Government on the funding needs and development of higher education institutions in Hong Kong.

The UGC is committed to safeguarding and promoting the quality of UGC-funded universities and their activities. In 2007, the UGC established the Quality Assurance Council (QAC), a semi-autonomous non-statutory body under its aegis, to assist it to discharge its responsibilities in quality assurance.

The QAC has the following terms of reference:

- ◆ To advise the UGC on quality assurance matters in the higher education sector in Hong Kong and other related matters as requested by the Committee;
- ◆ To conduct audits and other reviews as requested by the UGC, and report on the quality assurance mechanisms and quality of the offerings of institutions;
- ◆ To promote quality assurance in the higher education sector in Hong Kong; and
- ◆ To facilitate the development and dissemination of good practices in quality assurance in higher education.

The QAC Members are appointed by the Secretary for Education. The Council may have up to 9 members, as follows:

- ◆ A Chairman, who is a UGC member (or becomes a UGC member once appointed).
- ◆ Overseas members (maximum 2).
- ◆ Local academics (maximum 2).
- ◆ Local lay members (maximum 2).
- ◆ Cross-membership with the UGC (2): one is the QAC Chairman and the other may belong to one of the above categories.
- ◆ The Secretary-General, UGC (ex-officio).

The Council is supported by a full-time Secretariat, led by a Deputy Secretary-General, UGC, who serves as the Secretary of the Council, under the overall supervision of the Secretary-General, UGC.

Since its establishment, the QAC has conducted two rounds of quality audits, the first between 2008 and 2011 and the second between 2015 and 2016. By

virtue of its mission, however, these audits include only first degree level programmes and above offered by the UGC-funded universities.

The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is responsible for monitoring quality assurance for all non-self-accrediting institutions of higher education. It conducts accreditation reviews of sub-degree and degree-level programmes at non-UGC funded institutions. Its reviews are conducted both at programme level and institutional level, and include an examination of the institutions' quality assurance activities¹.

The Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC), established by the Heads of Universities Committee (HUCOM) in 2005, monitors the quality of self-financed sub-degree programmes in the UGC-funded universities. The JQRC conducted an initial peer-based 'Preview' exercise scoping these sub-degree programmes in 2007. This was followed by a more comprehensive investigation, the 'Institutional Review' in 2009. This process was more evidence-based, and included the programmes within the institutional context - the level of support provided for these sub-degree programmes and their quality assurance mechanisms. As a follow through exercise, the units within the universities offering the sub-degree programmes were required to submit 'Interim Reports' to JQRC between 2010 and 2012. JQRC also requires annual reports from the units on admission profiles, student enrolment data and updates on quality assurance developments.

The need for greater systematisation and externality in monitoring the quality of sub-degree level programmes was recognised by the Government and led to the establishment of a Working Group comprising representatives from UGC, HKCAAVQ and HUCOM, to establish a process of external quality audits on UGC-funded universities' sub-degree operations. The Working Group completed its deliberation and made its recommendation to the Government in June 2015. The Government has considered the Working Group's recommendations on the framework and the long-term mechanism for the external quality audits, and endorsed the recommendations in full. In particular, the Government has given policy support for and invited the UGC to be the overseeing body of the quality audits, with the QAC as the audit operator.

Guiding Principles for the Quality Audit

- ◆ The self-accrediting status of the UGC-funded universities is honoured. (The quality audit is not designed to be a process of sub-degree programme validation or accreditation.)

¹ HKCAAVQ also validates some non-education degree programmes at The Education University of Hong Kong for which the university does not currently have self-accrediting status.

- ◆ A degree of flexibility in the quality audit process addresses the diversity of structural arrangements that deliver sub-degree level programmes across the UGC-funded universities.
- ◆ The quality audit is centred on the quality of student learning and the factors that contribute to it throughout the lifecycle of programmes.
- ◆ Sub-degree Providing Units (SDPUs) of the universities are partners in the audit process, with the self-study and the shaping of follow-through action plans being as important as the review component.
- ◆ Through participation in the quality audit process, the quality culture within SDPUs and the universities should be strengthened.
- ◆ Both the self-study and the review components consider the sub-degree programmes and the quality systems that monitor them in the wider context through the use of reference points.
- ◆ The quality audit methodology reflects the 'Approach-Deployment-Results-Improvement' (ADRI) model used in QAC audits and in higher education quality systems in many countries.

2. Aims of the Quality Audits of Sub-Degree Operations in UGC-Funded Universities

The Quality Audits of Sub-Degree Operations in UGC-Funded Universities aim to:

- ◆ Assure the quality of learning in the SDPUs of UGC-funded universities through providing independent third-party review;
- ◆ Support the provision and certification of student learning at an internationally comparable level;
- ◆ Support the SDPUs in undertaking critical and comprehensive self-study and follow-through actions in the interests of ongoing quality enhancement to student learning outcomes;
- ◆ Increase transparency and enhance public and stakeholder confidence in the internal quality assurance mechanisms of SDPUs and their host universities; and
- ◆ Assure that SDPUs are delivering on claims and promises made in public media.

3. Scope of the Quality Audits of Sub-Degree Operations in UGC-Funded Universities

The quality audits of sub-degree operations in UGC-funded universities will cover all organisational units offering sub-degree level programmes within UGC-funded universities, i.e. the SDPUs.

These units represent a diverse range of organisational structures. Some are regular faculties and departments of the universities. Others are separate organisational units affiliated with the university or its faculties/departments. Some are freestanding incorporated entities owned by the university. In some cases, the awards carry the university's seal (the 'University Proper') and in other cases the awards are issued in the name of the SDPU.

This diversity of structure requires an audit approach with considerable flexibility. The audit methodology is designed to consider the operations of the SDPU in the context of the university, though the specifics of the audit foci may differ depending on the structural relationship between the SDPU and its host university.

While the quality audit is not a process of accreditation or review of individual programmes, some sampling of programmes is a necessary component of assuring the quality of SDPU operations. (This sampling methodology is further described in Section 4.)

For sampling purposes, the audit scope includes programmes at Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) Levels 1 to 4, or equivalent², however funded, leading to a qualification wholly or partly awarded by the SDPUs/universities.

Where SDPUs are offering programmes in conjunction with local, regional or international partner institutions or organisations leading to a sub-degree qualification wholly or partly awarded by the SDPUs/universities, these programmes also are considered to be within the scope of the quality audit.

² Including programmes endorsed by JQRC that are aligned with HKQF Levels 1 to 4 but that have not been placed on the Qualifications Register; and programmes endorsed through the universities' internal mechanism as comparable to those programmes at HKQF Levels 1 to 4.

4. Audit Methodological Approach

In keeping with the periodic quality audits of UGC-funded universities conducted by the QAC, this quality audit of sub-degree operations fundamentally is based on a 'Fitness for Purpose' approach. It considers the nature and strength of those operations in terms of the vision, mission and goals of the university and the SDPU(s) within it. Because this audit process is focused specifically on sub-degree programme operations, this requires a multi-level approach.

The degree of alignment between the SDPU and the university's vision, mission, goals and strategic priorities will be considered. Where a university has multiple SDPUs, the audit also will investigate the degree of alignment across the SDPUs. It will consider the extent to which there is a coherent and synergistic relationship between the SDPU(s) and the university as a whole.

While the focus of the audit is not on individual programmes, the audit process will also consider the alignment between the vision, goals and strategic priorities of the SDPU(s) and those represented in a sampling of programme areas. This 'drilling down' investigates the extent to which the programmes reflect university and SDPU policies and priorities.

There is now a significant body of international research on what good practice looks like in higher education, and increasing emphasis is being placed on considering the worth of particular practices in terms of a set of external reference points. In some countries, this takes the form of a required set of *Standards for Higher Education*. In other nations, the key external reference point is a codification of *Good Practice Guidelines*. Internationally, external reference points have assumed greater importance, utilising strategies such as hard data benchmarking with partner universities, comparison with aggregate data at a national or system level, and involving peer academics and professional stakeholders in the processes of curriculum design and the evaluation of programme outcomes.

In this audit of sub-degree operations in UGC-funded universities, the organising framework is captured in the '*Dimensions and Sub-Dimensions*' outlined in Section 5. This framework attempts to capture both the operations of the SDPU(s) within the context of the host university and what might be considered the 'lifecycle' of programme operations, from the design of the curriculum, through the practical provision of the programme, to the evaluation of programme outcomes.

The '*Dimensions*' framework will be used by a university as it undertakes self-study and by the Audit Panel as it conducts a desk audit of materials provided by the university and conducts interviews during site visits. It also will be used as the organising framework for the Audit Report. An expanded

version of the ‘*Audit Dimensions and Sub-Dimensions*’ framework with guiding questions added in each sub-section is located in Appendix C.

ADRI

The acronym ADRI represents what has become a standard approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement in higher education. It recognises that the maintenance and enhancement of quality requires a cyclical approach that is ongoing. This is sometimes referred to as ‘the Quality Cycle’. It is widely applicable from the whole-of-university level to the programme level. It is based on four questions:

<i>Approach</i>	What is the purpose that is being addressed?
<i>Deployment</i>	What strategies or actions are being applied to achieve that purpose?
<i>Results</i>	What evidence is there that progress is being made towards the achievement of that purpose?
<i>Improvement</i>	How is that evidence being used to inform ongoing improvements?

Inherent to this quality cycle is data-rich/evidence-based interpretation and decision-making. As new actions are being planned, there is an investigation of what data exists to suggest this action is needed (i.e. baseline data). There is consideration even in the first phase of the cycle about what data will be gathered during implementation and what indicators will be used post-implementation to judge the effectiveness of the action. When the results are in hand, this is not the end of the change process, but the beginning of a new cycle of ongoing improvements.

The focus of this audit of sub-degree programme operations is the quality of student learning and therefore the ongoing enhancement of student learning. Since the UGC-funded universities are already familiar with the ADRI quality cycle, it is expected that the SDPU’s considerations of student learning will be data-rich. The Audit Panel will be looking for evidence that this quality cycle is in use across the levels of individual programme offerings and at the level of the SDPU itself. Data should be used not only to track the quality of student learning, but to inform decisions about ways to enhance it.

Learning Outcomes

The UGC-funded universities are familiar with the learning outcomes approach to curriculum design. Those responsible for academic quality in the universities know that the full implementation of a learning outcomes approach in practice is neither simple nor fast. This quality audit will consider the extent of implementation of the learning outcomes model in the university’s sub-degree programmes.

In keeping with the audit approach to the ‘lifecycle’ of programmes, as it samples at the programme level, it will consider how the programme learning outcomes were developed initially, what external inputs were made to the development process, and how the programme designers tried to ensure those learning outcomes would meet the current and future needs of Hong Kong. It will anticipate that individual courses have been ‘backwards mapped’ to the programme-level learning outcomes, so that every course has a designated role to play in the achievement of specific intended learning outcomes at the programme level.

The audit will consider the ways in which the design of the learning environment, including the pedagogical approach and learning resources, address the desired learning outcomes and how the learning progress of students is being tracked during the period of study.

And in keeping with the ADRI quality cycle, attention will be paid to learning outcomes data at the programme level - the strategies that the SDPU is using to gather systematic data on graduate quality and monitor graduate success beyond the point of graduation.

The Audit Panel will seek evidence of ongoing enhancement of learning, where data from quality assurance activities has been used to identify a need for improvement, help inform actions to address that need, and measure the efficacy of the action taken.

Audit Trails

In keeping with the second audit cycle of the QAC, this quality audit of sub-degree programme operations will make use of a limited number of audit trails. The identification of these audit trails will begin during the desk audit phase, when individual members of the Audit Panel are reviewing materials submitted by the university. After referring to the *Dimensions* and *Sub-Dimensions* listed in Section 5 and expanded in Appendix C, the Audit Panel will identify several topics where a more in-depth investigation is indicated. The focus of an audit trail most likely will begin at the level of the SDPU, and may be pursued through one or more programme areas. University personnel from outside of the SDPU may also be interviewed to better understand how the particular topic is addressed in practice. For example, depending on the nature of the topic, staff providing student support services to sub-degree students, technology-related staff or library staff might be included. Thus, the nature of the audit trail will influence decisions about sampling programme areas and the selection of staff for interview.

Audit trails will be limited to a manageable number - usually not more than four. The university will be advised of the nature of the audit trails selected at the conclusion of the Mutual Briefing Session and may be invited to assist in

the selection of appropriate sample programmes or the identification of relevant interviewees.

5. Audit Dimensions and Sub-Dimensions

The *Dimensions* and *Sub-Dimensions* presented in this section address important aspects of sub-degree operations. *Dimensions 1* and *2* deal with sub-degree programme operations in the context of the university.

Dimension 1 considers the ways in which the SDPU's operations reflect the vision, mission and strategic planning of the university. It also considers academic governance and how the policies and procedures of the SDPU align with those of the university as a whole.

Dimension 2 considers the university's (and/or the SDPU's) overall approaches to programme quality assurance. This Dimension takes a broad overview of quality assurance policies and systems. Because quality assurance activities occur across all aspects of the support of student learning, specific applications of quality assurance also are mentioned in each of the remaining *Dimensions*.

Dimensions 3-8 are focused on ensuring and enhancing the quality of student learning and are organised according to the 'lifecycle' of programmes. They are clustered within three broad phases of operational decision-making - the Planning Phase, the Action Phase and the Reflection and Follow Through Phase.

The *Dimensions* and *Sub-Dimensions* are outlined below, and in Appendix C they are treated in a more discursive fashion, with guiding questions that explore the nature of good practice in each of the *Sub-Dimensions*. These guiding questions should assist the SDPU/university staff as they undertake the self-study, and auditors as they conduct the desk audit of materials and frame questions for interviews.

Sub-Degrees in the University Context

Dimension 1: Governance, Management, University Planning and Accountability

- 1.1 Clarity of SDPU(s) Purposes
- 1.2 Alignment between SDPU(s) and University vision, mission, strategic planning
- 1.3 Strategies for monitoring the performance of SDPU(s)
- 1.4 Following through to enhance the performance of the SDPU(s)

Dimension 2: Approach to Programme Quality Assurance

- 2.1 Suite of academic policies to support quality assurance and quality enhancement of programmes

- 2.2 Gathering, analysing and interpreting data on the student experience of learning at subject and programme levels
- 2.3 Gathering and analysing data on the quality of the physical and virtual learning environments
- 2.4 Approach to tracking student learning progress throughout the duration of programmes and at the point of graduation
- 2.5 Approach to monitoring sub-degree programme quality drawing on multiple data sources (for example, evaluations of the learning environments, programme viability and sustainability, student satisfaction measures, graduate success in gaining entry to and completing subsequent academic programmes, employment rates and employer satisfaction data)
- 2.6 Approaches to ensuring academic standards meet international norms
- 2.7 Approaches to ensuring that reports of programme quality are followed through in the interests of enhancement

Ensuring the Quality of Student Learning - the Planning Phase

Dimension 3: Curriculum Design, Programme Development and Approval Processes

- 3.1 Policies for curriculum design, programme development and approval
- 3.2 Practical application of policies on curriculum design, programme development and approval
- 3.3 References to external regulatory requirements and descriptors (for example, where applicable, HKQF Generic Level Descriptors, and Revised Common Descriptors for Associate Degree and Higher Diploma Programmes and para-professional accreditations at the programme level)
- 3.4 Development of programme-level learning outcomes in curriculum design
- 3.5 Use of intended learning outcomes as key curriculum design features
- 3.6 Policies and practices related to admission standards
- 3.7 Approach to monitoring learning progress as a component of curriculum design
- 3.8 Selection of international partners for exchanges and collaborative programmes
- 3.9 Student recruitment materials

Ensuring the Quality of Student Learning - the Action Phase

Dimension 4: Programme Delivery, including Pedagogical Approaches, Learning Environments and Resources, Scheduling

- 4.1 Routine monitoring of programme practices
- 4.2 Pedagogical approaches across the programme
- 4.3 Learning resource collections to both hard copy and electronic resources
- 4.4 Physical learning environments
- 4.5 E-learning environments
- 4.6 Scheduling arrangements

Dimension 5: Support for Teaching Quality including Pedagogical Development

- 5.1 Human resources policies and practices for teaching staff
- 5.2 Approaches to keeping teaching staff up to date with their fields
- 5.3 Academic leadership and programme teaching teams
- 5.4 Evaluating teaching quality
- 5.5 Pedagogical development of teaching staff
- 5.6 Retention of quality teaching staff
- 5.7 Use of peer evaluation and peer networks
- 5.8 Reward and recognition schemes

Dimension 6: Student Learning Assessment

- 6.1 Policies and practices of student assessment
- 6.2 Alignment of intended learning outcomes and assessment strategies
- 6.3 Approaches to informing students about assessment tasks and grading policies
- 6.4 Checking the validity of assessment tasks and the reliability of grading
- 6.5 Approaches to fair and consistent grading
- 6.6 Practices related to student achievement levels and international standards
- 6.7 Approach to grade appeals
- 6.8 Policies and procedures to address cheating or plagiarism
- 6.9 Policies and procedures for certification of student learning

Dimension 7: Student Participation and Student Support Services

- 7.1 Approaches to student engagement
- 7.2 Approaches to students' personal development and/or the development of soft skills
- 7.3 Student participation in governance

- 7.4 Student support services - for example, academic skill development programmes, language development programmes, career planning advice and preparation for employment activities, and personal support services
- 7.5 Non-local students' access to support services tailored to their needs

Ensuring the Quality of Student Learning - the Reflection and Follow Through Phase

Dimension 8: Systems for Acting on Quality Assurance Data to Make Ongoing Enhancements to Student Learning

- 8.1 Approach to using systematic data on course and programme quality to make ongoing improvements to curriculum and teaching approaches and to track the outcomes of changes over time
- 8.2 Use of trend data at programme level
- 8.3 Approach to addressing under-performing programmes

6. Audit Panels

Role of the Audit Panel

An external panel of auditors is an essential component of any quality audit of higher education. This externality is important from several perspectives. For those within the SDPU and the host university, it is an opportunity to learn from peers drawn from other institutions and systems. When external auditors are skilled questioners, the questions themselves help raise the awareness of internal staff about issues of quality even before the *Audit Report* is made available. The Audit Panel provides the SDPU/university with an opportunity to see their familiar operations through new eyes and to identify areas where enhancements of student learning might be made.

Once the *Audit Report* is produced, the university's staff are asked to consider the findings of the Audit Panel, noting areas of good practice that have been commended by the Panel; affirmations in areas in which the SDPU/university already has identified where enhancements can be made and has taken action to address them; and recommendations that identify where changes are needed in the interest of enhancing the quality of student learning. This evaluative commentary is an important contribution made to the SDPU and the host university by the panel of external auditors. This approach is in keeping with the systems of peer review that have long characterised scholarship and higher education quality assurance.

An external panel of auditors also has value for stakeholders outside of the SDPU and university. Prospective students and their families, community and professional leaders build confidence in the quality of the sub-degree programme operations of a university, as a result of the scrutiny and positive judgments of these external experts. This is an important form of public assurance of quality. Further information on the roles and expectations of Audit Panel members, Chairs and the Audit Coordinator is contained in Appendix D.

Expertise of Audit Panel

The Audit Panel as a whole needs to be well balanced, with the members having complementary areas of expertise. Since this quality audit is not a process of programme accreditation, but is focused on the operations of the SDPU(s) within the university context, the scope of its investigations is broad and will cross many disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, whilst the Audit Panel may not need specific disciplinary knowledge, it will need deep knowledge and extensive experience of higher education quality systems and audit practices.

Knowledge of SDPU operations, the provision of sub-degree level programmes, and the economic and policy environment within which sub-degree programmes operate is also a valued area of expertise on Audit Panels.

Given the importance of the employability of graduates of sub-degree programmes, the expertise of professional leaders or employer representatives may also make a valuable contribution to the deliberations of an Audit Panel.

To fully understand the nature and challenges of SDPU operations, and evaluate the internal quality assurance of sub-degree programmes, including consideration of their learning outcomes, local, regional and international knowledge will play a part. Members of Audit Panels collectively will need to draw upon all of these areas of expertise.

It is assumed that members of Audit Panels will be familiar with general audit principles and approaches prior to their appointment. They will be provided with a copy of this *Audit Manual* and additional briefing notes prior to receiving the *Institutional Submission* and appended materials specific to an audit. Auditors begin their individual review of documents utilising this skill set. To ensure that all members of an Audit Panel are well prepared for the face-to-face components of the audit process, they also will participate in a workshop prior to the Mutual Briefing Visit.

Composition of Audit Panel

The QAC maintains an updated Register of Auditors that will provide a pool from which auditors will be drawn.

The Audit Panel will be composed of three auditors who are either international or regional experts in higher education quality assurance, drawn from a higher education system based outside of Hong Kong. One of these auditors will serve as the Panel Chair.

To provide the essential peer review element, the Audit Panel will include at least two local members, at least one of whom should be drawn from another UGC-funded university. First-hand experience at the sub-degree level would be an asset.

Given the special purposes and characteristics of sub-degree level programmes, the QAC also reserves the right to appoint to Audit Panels (i) a layperson with appropriate expertise and/or (ii) an expert in quality assurance at the sub-degree level drawn from an agency within Hong Kong or an international organisation.

Audit Coordinator and Administrative Support

The QAC also will appoint an Audit Coordinator to be responsible for the management and organisation of the audit programme, including devising the preparation workshop for auditors, recording notes from meetings of the Panel, liaising with the SDPUs/university and coordinating the preparation of audit reports based on contributions from members of the Audit Panel. The Audit Coordinator is not a member of the Audit Panel and does not share the collective responsibility for the findings of the audit. See Appendix E for further information on Audit Panels and management of conflict of interest.

7. Description of Process

Preliminary QAC Activities

1. The process begins with QAC's determination of a timeline and sequence for the quality audits of sub-degree operations at the UGC-funded universities. The timing of particular audits will be negotiated with the university concerned. An indicative timeline for the audit process is included as Appendix G.

Preliminary Preparations by the University and its SDPU(s)

2. Given that the UGC-funded universities organise sub-degree programme operations using different structural models, at the outset of the audit process, the university should provide the QAC Secretariat with a written statement giving a clear indication of the number and type of SDPU(s) in the university, and sub-degree programmes offered by each SDPU which fall within the scope of the audit. The information on SDPU structures will be an important factor in the design of the audit process for each university.
3. The university and its SDPU(s) create a set of goals for the audit that captures what they hope to gain from participation in the audit process. In order to do this, they consider the strategic goals of the university and the SDPU(s) and the *Dimensions* (outlined in Section 5 and expanded in Appendix C), and utilise their knowledge of the strengths and challenges of their sub-degree programme operations.
4. The university then submits its written goal statement (for details of which see Appendix I) to the QAC Secretariat. This will be shared with the Audit Panel. At the conclusion of the quality audit process, the university will be asked to evaluate its experience of the audit process, both through the QAC's usual feedback process and in terms of its own goal statement.

The Self-Study and Institutional Submission

5. The self-study is one of the most important components of the audit process. It should be undertaken with a self-critical eye, and capture all *Dimensions* of the support of student learning, including the SDPU in the university context, the operations of the SDPU(s), and student experience and learning outcomes at the programme level.
6. The self-study should consider the guiding questions about good practice provided in the expanded version of the *Dimensions* in Appendix C. It

should go beyond a description of practice to evaluate the effectiveness of current practices.

7. The self-study should be evidence-based. Since the universities are familiar with the ADRI approach that characterises the audits conducted by the QAC, they should have available hard data on both the operations and outcomes of SDPUs and their programmes. Trend data is particularly valuable as is data that can demonstrate the impact of changes made in the interests of enhancing the quality of student learning. Student and graduate satisfaction data should be included.
8. External reference points are important. The most valuable is benchmarked data with similar programmes or units, and data on graduate success, employment rates, and employer satisfaction survey data. It is recommended that the views (and perhaps active participation) of external stakeholders be included in the self-study process. Academics from other institutions or industry partners who have participated in the design and/or delivery of the sub-degree programmes, or reviewed programmes, are likely to have useful perspectives to enrich the quality of the self-study.
9. The self-study process and outcomes are captured in the *Institutional Submission*, structured in accordance with the *Dimensions* as outlined in Section 5. This document should be rich with data and evaluative commentary. Each chapter of the report should conclude with a brief summary that outlines the conclusions of the university/SDPU(s) in terms of aspects that are being well done and areas where further work is needed.
10. Where sub-degree programmes are being offered by multiple SDPUs within a university, and those SDPUs are of different types with different ways of operating, it may be necessary to devote sub-sections within some chapters to particular SDPUs.
11. Guidelines for the *Institutional Submission* and other information requirements are provided in Appendix I.
12. It should be noted that universities may be asked to provide supplementary information at any point during the audit process. This might include statistical summaries, annual programme reports, data on key performance indicators etc. Audit Panels also are likely to request programme-specific information, as they sample aspects of programmes as part of the audit process.

The Site Visits

13. The Audit Panel will make a minimum of two site visits. The Panel will visit the university for a *Mutual Briefing Session* approximately 6 to 8 weeks prior to the major Audit Visit. Where the university has sub-degree programmes operating on different campuses, this Mutual Briefing may include a short tour of the relevant campuses as a way to help Audit Panels understand the range of the SDPUs and the SDPU operations in place. This visit will provide an opportunity for the university to brief Panel Members on the context of the university's sub-degree operations and on the goals the university has set for the audit. It also will provide an opportunity to introduce members of the Audit Panel, clarify aspects of the major Audit Visit arrangements, indicate major lines of enquiry that have been drawn from the *Institutional Submission*, and by the conclusion of the visit, indicate the Audit Trails that will be explored. In most cases, this visit should be of one day's duration, but where the university has multiple SDPUs and/or multiple campuses offering sub-degree programmes, it may extend to a second day to allow site visits. Further information on the Mutual Briefing Session is located in Appendix H1.
14. The major Audit Visit provides an opportunity for the Audit Panel to clarify aspects of institutional policy and procedures, to investigate the extent to which these policies and procedures are being implemented across SDPUs within the university and its sub-degree programmes, and to consider all aspects of the quality of support for student learning. While the Audit Panel will not directly investigate individual programmes, it will consider the efficacy of the university's operations and quality assurance procedures at the programme level. The university will assist the Audit Panel by indicating the most appropriate people to be interviewed in each session. They also may be asked to assist as the Panel makes decisions about sampling programme areas as part of the audit trails and in helping select a representative group of students to meet with the Panel.
15. The major Audit Visit will normally be of three day's duration. Where a university has multiple SDPUs, especially if these are of different types, it may be necessary to extend the visit into Day Four. Group interviews comprise the major component of the visit, with approximately 12 interview sessions in total. The Audit Panel may also meet in camera for some of the visit. Campus tours are not a required part of the agenda, but the Audit Panel may choose to visit specific campus locations as they consider the quality of learning environments and learning support services. An exit meeting with the Head of the University (and his/her nominees) will conclude the visit. It should be noted that one or more staff members of the QAC Secretariat may be present as observers during

the site visits and as government staff, they are bound by policies regarding non-disclosure and conflict of interest. Further details on the Audit Visit are contained in Appendix H2.

Initial Reporting

16. Two weeks after the Audit Visit, a letter of principal findings is provided to the Head of the University. This letter is prepared by the Audit Coordinator, with input from the Chair and members of the Audit Panel. The letter outlines the principal findings of the audit and provides a timeline for the publication of the final Audit Report.

The Audit Report

17. The production of the *Audit Report* is the responsibility of the Audit Panel, facilitated and supported by the Audit Coordinator. It represents the judgments of the Panel as a whole, and the Panel takes collective responsibility for the audit findings. Typically, members of the Audit Panel share the responsibility of producing a draft of specific chapters, with the Audit Coordinator ensuring overall consistency and a uniform writing style. The Audit Report is a QAC publication and the QAC has ownership of the text.
18. A *Draft Audit Report* will be provided to the university six weeks after the Audit Visit, with an invitation to comment in writing on any factual errors or misinterpretations. The Audit Coordinator and/or the Panel Chair may meet (face to face or virtually) with the university, on behalf of the Audit Panel, if any issues within the draft report need to be clarified.
19. After this feedback is considered, a final version of the *Audit Report* will be produced by the Audit Coordinator, with the assistance of the Audit Panel. This final *Audit Report* will be sent to the university, with an invitation to provide a one to two page(s) written response (the 'Institutional Response') which will be appended to the *Audit Report*.
20. The *Audit Report* and *Institutional Response* will be submitted to the QAC and the UGC.
21. The Audit Report will then be published, in full, on the QAC website.

Audit Follow Through

22. Upon completion of a quality audit of sub-degree operations, the university/SDPU(s) will produce an *Action Plan* to address those areas where it is acknowledged that worthy development is already underway

and areas where work is needed in the interests of enhancing student learning (i.e. the *Recommendations* made by the Audit Panel).

23. The *Action Plan* may be in a matrix form, and should include an outline of each intended action, with goals expressed as deliverables, assigned responsibilities and timelines. In keeping with the ADRI approach, it would also be useful for the university/SDPU(s) to indicate how they will judge the effectiveness of these planned changes over time.
24. The *Action Plan* should be submitted to the QAC three months after publication of the *Audit Report*. The QAC considers the *Action Plan* and may invite the Panel Chair and/or Audit Coordinator to peruse and comment on the *Action Plan*.
25. A *Progress Report* against the *Action Plan* is submitted to the QAC 18 months after the publication of the *Audit Report*. The QAC considers the *Progress Report* and may invite the Panel Chair and/or Audit Coordinator to peruse and comment on the *Progress Report*. In keeping with the ADRI approach, the *Action Plan* and *Progress Report* will be included in material provided to auditors for the next cycle of audits.

An indicative timeline for the audit process can be found in Appendix G. Further information on the ‘Audit Report and Follow Through’ is located in Appendix J.

Appendix A

Hong Kong Qualifications Framework - Relevance to the External Audit

The Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF, www.hkqf.gov.hk) aims to ‘encourage and facilitate lifelong learning, with a view to enhancing the capability and competitiveness of the workforce in Hong Kong’. It provides a seven-level framework that covers all types of qualification from Level 1 Certificates to Doctoral degrees. It provides clear and objective standards for qualifications across the academic, vocational and professional, and continuing education sectors. It is concerned with assuring the quality of qualifications and learning programmes and airing the relevance of learning to industry needs.

As self-accrediting institutions, the UGC-funded universities are not compelled to comply with the HKQF, however many sub-degree programmes in the UGC-funded universities do so. According to the HKQF, sub-degree programmes encompass Levels 1-4, including Foundation Certificates, Certificates, Diplomas, Higher Certificates, Higher Diplomas and Associate Degrees etc.

HKQF provides Generic Level Descriptors for each level of qualification, across four domains: (i) Knowledge and Intellectual Skills; (ii) Processes; (iii) Application, Autonomy and Accountability; and (iv) Communication, IT and Numeracy.

There are three key features of qualifications recognised under the HKQF: Level, recognising the depth and complexity of learning; Award Title, reflecting the nature and area(s) of study, as well as level; and Credit, indicating the volume of learning leading to the qualification.

Since 2013, award titles have been standardised for qualifications that are recognised under the HKQF, to enhance the transparency of qualifications. This is the ‘Award Titles Scheme’ (ATS). The Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS), and Policy and Principles of the HKQF are also relevant. More information on award titles and requirements can be found at: https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/filemanager/en/content_16/HKQF_ATS_E_2012_10.pdf. More information on CATS can be found at: <https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/en/KeyFeatures/cat/index.html>

Under the HKQF, Industry Training Advisory Committees have been established in many industries and have assisted in compiling competency standards for their industries and creating guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in their workplaces.

Recognition by the HKQF is not mandatory for sub-degree qualifications offered by the UGC-funded universities, but this recognition assists potential students, employers and the community at large to understand the nature of the qualification and to know that it has been approved for listing in the online database - the 'Hong Kong Qualifications Register' (HKQR). The HKQF is under the aegis of the Education Bureau, which is part of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The agency with formal authority to manage the HKQR is HKCAAVQ.

The current audit of sub-degree programme operations of the UGC-funded universities is not a process of programme accreditation, so auditors will not be reviewing programmes against the requirements of the HKQF. Nonetheless, the HKQF is an important aspect of the Hong Kong context for sub-degree programme provision, and it is appropriate for auditors to consider how the universities and the SDPUs make use of the resources and guidelines provided by the HKQF as programmes are being designed and operated. How do they ensure that the titles of their awards are in keeping with the conventions of the ATS? Where SDPUs have made a decision not to place specific programmes on the HKQR, it would be useful to understand the rationale for this decision.

Appendix B

Guidelines for the Self-study

Introduction

International experience has shown that institutions frequently report that the self-study exercise they have undertaken is the most valuable component of the quality audit experience. This is not surprising, given that a critical aspect of higher education is the maintenance of a 'quality culture' among the university's staff. Participation in a self-study heightens the awareness of staff to the quality of everyday activities that otherwise might remain invisible to them.

This audit design asks universities to develop a set of goals for the audit experience prior to the commencement of the full self-study process. This is an opportunity for the university to help shape the audit process to meet its own needs. It might be expected that these goals would be few in number, and would identify areas where the university itself has questions or issues it wants to explore. The self-study exercise is an opportunity to devote time and attention to these questions, while at the same time, addressing all of the *Dimensions* of sub-degree operations as required by the external audit process.

Who should participate in the self-study?

It will be a decision for each university to determine who should lead the self-study process, and who should be members of the steering group. Given that the focus of this audit is the operations of sub-degree programmes, the leaders of the SDPU(s) would be important participants. In order to get a broad range of perspectives, however, the university may wish to involve some teaching staff, student representatives, recent alumni and perhaps external stakeholders or chairs of programme advisory committees where these bodies play a role in programme quality assurance.

The university might also choose to involve staff from outside the SDPU(s), for example, a representative from the university's executive team, especially the person who carries ultimate responsibility for the quality of sub-degree programmes. Staff from the central organisational units responsible for teaching and learning quality, student administration, student services etc also might be involved.

Approach for the self-study

It is most important that the self-study be undertaken with a critical eye. This exercise is unlikely to serve the university well, if it is seen as a public relations exercise. The self-study is an opportunity for a serious 'stock take' of sub-degree programme operations, and an opportunity for the university as a

whole to consider whether its sub-degree programmes are fitting well within the mission and strategic vision of the university.

The audit can be very useful for the university because it focuses attention on an area of operation that can be of particular strategic value to the university and the communities it serves, but that might otherwise not be at the forefront of the university's concerns.

The *Dimensions* and *Sub-Dimensions* listed in Section 5 and elaborated in Appendix C provide a framework for the self-study. The guiding questions included for each *Sub-Dimension* in Appendix C are designed to be a stimulus for the self-study as well as for the external auditors. It is not necessary to write separate responses to the questions, but they are designed to foster discussion among the team conducting the self-study, and highlight some of the important aspects of good practice in the offering of sub-degree programmes.

While there are specific guiding questions for each *Sub-Dimension* listed in Appendix C, the general questions that might guide the self-study team are based in the ADRI approach to the quality cycle. They are:

- ◆ What are we trying to achieve in this particular dimension? Why are these goals/objectives appropriate, and how do they contribute to student learning outcomes?
- ◆ How are we trying to achieve our goals/objectives in this dimension? Is this the best way? Are our policies and procedures followed consistently across all of the SDPUs and programmes? How do we know?
- ◆ How do we know we are achieving our goals/objectives? What performance indicators or other measures do we have in place? Are they appropriate, and why? What does the evidence tell us?
- ◆ How do we respond to what the evidence tells us? How do we identify and rectify problems? How do we raise standards?

A significant benefit of the self-study is that the university itself is likely to identify various aspects of its activities which it can improve. In terms of quality enhancement, much of the value of the audit process can come from a thorough and honest self-study.

Use of data

The self-study needs to be strongly evidence-based. While some descriptive detail is important, it needs to go beyond a description of policies and practices to provide evidence of the effectiveness of those practices. This will require data of many kinds. Formal performance indicators relevant to the sub-degree operations will be important, and there may be many other forms of data that

help explain what the university knows, how it knows, and what it concludes from those data.

Trend data is of particular interest, and whenever time series data on such indicators is available, they should be included. For example, if available, a university might include five years of data trends. But in keeping with the notion of a quality cycle, the story should not end with the data itself. Information on how the university interprets that data, and what it does about it, should also be part of the self-study.

External data sources are also of particular interest. When the university can make comparisons with aggregate data drawn from sub-degree programmes in similar institutions, or through benchmarking exercises with particular partner universities, it is better placed to be able to answer the quality question ‘how good is this result?’. Strictly internal comparisons are not able to provide compelling answers to that important quality question.

Both qualitative and quantitative data have a place in understanding the nature and quality of the support for student learning, but qualitative data alone will not be sufficient. An important element of any evaluative data will be the extent to which it is systematised. Anecdotal data alone, for example, will not provide an adequate picture of the quality of graduates. It will take data from many sources to provide a comprehensive picture of graduate quality, and therefore programme quality. As indicated in *Dimensions 2* and *8*, the university might wish to consider how systematic its approaches are to consolidating these multiple data sources into usable programme quality reports that can inform ongoing enhancements.

For every *Dimension* of sub-degree programme operations, the self-study team should consider what it has concluded from its investigations, what is being well done, what has been learned about areas in need of further enhancement, and what actions are needed to address them. These conclusions will be included as summaries in the *Institutional Submission*. When Audit Panels endorse a university’s own findings, this can be a powerful stimulus to improvement.

Further information on the *Institutional Submission* can be found in Appendix I.

Appendix C

Expanded Audit Dimensions with Guiding Questions for Good Practice

The questions posed under each *Sub-Dimension* are meant as a stimulus and guide only. It is not necessary for universities to address all of them or address each one individually.

Sub-degrees in the University Context

Dimension 1: Governance, Management, Institutional Planning and Accountability

1.1 Clarity of SDPU Purpose(s)

- ◆ Does the SDPU have a clear sense of its purpose(s)? Where are these purposes stated and in what form? (Goals? Aims? Objectives? Strategic Priorities?)

1.2 Alignment between SDPU and University vision, mission, strategic planning

- ◆ How does the university's executive leadership understand the purposes and activities of the SDPU(s)? How effective is communication between the SDPU(s) and other organisational units within the university?
- ◆ To what extent are the purposes and activities of the SDPU(s) aligned with the overall mission, vision and strategic plans of the university?
- ◆ What contributions are the SDPU(s) seen to be making to the achievements of the university?
- ◆ Is there a sense of common purpose both at the university leadership level and the SDPU leadership level?
- ◆ To what extent are staff within the SDPU(s) committed to the university's goals?

1.3 Strategies for monitoring the performance of SDPU(s)

- ◆ How is the performance of the SDPU(s) monitored? (By whom? How frequently? Where are the performance data reported?)
- ◆ What performance indicators are used? (How are these indicators related to those used elsewhere in the university? For example, do they contribute to larger aggregates of data used for monitoring faculty or university performance?)
- ◆ What trends are evident in the performance data? How does/do the university/SDPU(s) interpret these data?

- ◆ What benchmarked data is used to help interpret SDPU performance in terms of external reference points? Where there are multiple SDPUs within a university, are any forms of internal benchmarking used? For example, does the university gather and consider any common data sets across all its SDPUs? Does the university gather, for example, graduation rates for all sub-degree programmes, or use a single survey of employment rates for sub-degree graduates?
- ◆ How does the university ensure that SDPU operations are well managed in a business sense and what types of financial oversight/support are provided for the SDPU(s), to ensure the separation of fee income and government funding?

1.4 Following through to enhance the performance of the SDPU(s)

- ◆ How is the performance data of the SDPU(s) followed through as a matter of routine activity? Are there examples where any poor performance areas of SDPU(s) have been identified and addressed?
- ◆ Especially where the sub-degree programmes carry the university seal (i.e. the university makes the award, not the SDPU as a free-standing entity) what evidence is there that the university actively monitors the operations of the SDPU(s) and the quality of the awards issued?

Dimension 2: Approach to Programme Quality Assurance

2.1 Suite of academic policies to support quality assurance and quality enhancement of programmes

- ◆ How comprehensive is the suite of academic policies that guide the quality assurance of sub-degree programmes? Are these policies sufficiently robust, given the university is self-accrediting?
- ◆ What strategies does/do the university/SDPU(s) employ to monitor and update its academic policies?
- ◆ To what extent are the academic policies guiding quality assurance in sub-degree programmes university-wide? If they are specific to the SDPU, are they of equivalent rigor to those applying to the degree programmes of the university? Where academic authority has been delegated to SDPU-specific positions or committees, are these delegations appropriate?

2.2 Gathering, analysing and interpreting data on the student experience of learning at subject and programme levels

- ◆ What approach does the SDPU(s) have to gathering, analysing and interpreting data on the student experience of learning at subject and programme levels?

- ◆ If student questionnaires are used, what data is sought and how reliable are the results? (for example, how and when is it administered, and what response rates are maintained?)
 - ◆ How is the data on student experience analysed and interpreted? What happens to these data? Who has access to them and what responsibilities exist for following through on the results?
 - ◆ How well do students understand why they are asked to provide this feedback and do they know what happens as a result?
- 2.3 Gathering and analysing data on the quality of the physical and virtual learning environments
- ◆ What strategies are used to track space utilisation and monitor the quality and suitability of classrooms, laboratories and other learning spaces?
 - ◆ How is/are the university/SDPU(s) monitoring the quality of the virtual learning environments provided for sub-degree students?
 - ◆ How does/do the university/SDPU(s) gather feedback from users on the quality of the physical and virtual learning environments?
- 2.4 Approach to tracking student learning progress throughout the duration of programmes and at the point of graduation
- ◆ What strategies is/are the university/SDPU(s) utilising to ensure that graduates have met all of the intended learning outcomes for the programme?
 - ◆ How is data on the extent of achievement of intended learning outcomes factored in to programme evaluation?
 - ◆ When concerns emerge about the quality of a sub-degree programme, how does the SDPU respond? What policies and procedures guide it in this case?
 - ◆ Where a sub-degree programme is being offered at multiple sites, what comparisons in terms of student outcomes are made across campuses?
- 2.5 Approach to monitoring sub-degree programme quality drawing on multiple data sources (for example, evaluations of the learning environments, programme viability and sustainability, student satisfaction measures, graduate success in gaining entry to and completing subsequent academic programmes, employment rates and employer satisfaction data)
- ◆ What strategies enable the collation of data from many sources to provide an overview of programme quality?
 - ◆ How are these multiple data sources integrated into programme quality reports?

- ◆ Who compiles these reports, and how frequently? How efficient is their compilation in terms of staff effort required?
- ◆ Are these reports utilitarian (i.e. are they useful to those who carry responsibilities for programme quality)?

2.6 Approaches to ensuring academic standards meet international norms

- ◆ What forms of external reference points are being used systematically in the SDPU's approach to sub-degree programme quality?
- ◆ Where in the lifecycle of a programme are academics from other well-regarded universities involved? Similarly, where are professional leaders involved?
- ◆ How systematically is feedback on graduate quality sought from employers, and how is this data used in the interests of enhancing the quality of programmes?
- ◆ What mechanisms are used to communicate the outcomes of quality assurance activities to external stakeholders?
- ◆ What forms of benchmarking are being used, and how well is it developed? On what basis are benchmarking partners selected, and what insights have emerged from the benchmarking relationship?
- ◆ Which sub-degree programmes carry professional (or para-professional) accreditation? How is this impacting programme quality?
- ◆ What strategies is the SDPU using to try to ensure the grading practices in programmes are in keeping with international academic standards?

2.7 Approaches to ensuring that reports of programme quality are followed through in the interests of enhancement

- ◆ What policies guide the production and follow through of programme quality reports?
- ◆ Who receives reports on programme quality? Do the policies require these reports to go beyond the SDPU to academic governance groups at a higher level in the university? (for example, a faculty and/or university Academic Board or Teaching and Learning Committee?)
- ◆ What happens as a result of the reports?
- ◆ Who carries the responsibility for following through on programme quality reports? How are action plans developed to address any quality issues identified, and how is this progress monitored over time?

Ensuring the Quality of Student Learning - the Planning Phase

Dimension 3: Curriculum Design, Programme Development and Approval Processes

3.1 Policies for curriculum design, programme development and approval

- ◆ How does/do the university/SDPU(s) make decisions about the suite of sub-degree programmes to offer? What strategic thinking guides this decision-making? How and where is the viability and sustainability of potential programmes considered? What risk analysis is undertaken as part of the decision to offer new programmes? How is economic viability ascertained at the outset and monitored throughout the life of the programme? What other factors are considered as decisions are made about developing and offering new programmes?
- ◆ What academic policies guide the design, development and approval of programme curriculum? Are these policies at university level or specific to the SDPU?
- ◆ How does the policy match the extent of the curricular change being sought with the level of the approving body? (i.e. do more extensive changes in curriculum require a higher level of approval than small-scale changes?)

3.2 Practical application of policies on curriculum design, programme development and approval

- ◆ What written guidelines and/or workshops are available to assist programme design teams to ensure that they are following policies on curriculum design and development?
- ◆ How does/do the university/SDPU(s) monitor the development of new sub-degree programmes?
- ◆ To what extent are sub-degree programmes designed to articulate into degree programmes? How is this articulation managed in terms of curriculum design?

3.3 References to external regulatory requirements and descriptors (for example, where applicable, HKQF Revised Common Descriptors for Associate Degree and Higher Diploma Programmes and para-professional accreditations at the programme level)

- ◆ During the design of new programmes, how does/do the university/SDPU(s) make use of the relevant Generic Level Descriptors of the HKQF as an external reference point in establishing the sub-degree programmes? If the programmes are aligned with an HKQF level, how well are the intended learning outcomes aligned with the four Domains of Generic Level Descriptors? (i.e. Knowledge and Intellectual Skills; Processes; Application, Autonomy and Accountability; and Communication, IT and Numeracy).
- ◆ What factors influence the decision-making on whether the sub-degree programme will seek registration on the HKQR? Are these decisions soundly based in terms of programme quality and the interests of students and prospective students?

- ◆ Which office carries the responsibility to ensure that titling of all programmes (both new and existing), student records and parchments awarded on completion are in keeping with the HKQF ATS? Where in the development process is this checked?
- ◆ Where relevant Industry Competency Standards have been produced for the sub-degree sector, how are these utilised as programmes are being designed or re-designed? What strategies are in place to ensure the SDPU is aware of new or revised standards or regulatory changes?
- ◆ How and when are representatives of professional (or para-professional) accreditation bodies involved in sub-degree programme design and development?

3.4 Development of programme-level learning outcomes in curriculum design

- ◆ How are the programme intended learning outcomes devised? What external sources inform the selection of these critical design features? How is the curriculum design informed by current and future needs of the workforce and community?
- ◆ How are the design responsibilities for sub-degree programmes shared between the leadership of the SDPU and the relevant faculties or departments? Where sub-degrees articulate into degree programmes, are both the SDPU and faculty/department represented on the design teams?
- ◆ How is the curriculum design benchmarked with similar programmes in Hong Kong, the region and internationally?
- ◆ What guidelines ensure the intended learning outcomes are usable in practice? (for example, are there guidelines to ensure the number of intended learning outcomes is manageable?)

3.5 Use of intended learning outcomes as key curriculum design features

- ◆ How evident is the alignment between intended learning outcomes at the sub-degree programme level and individual courses? Is it possible to determine the contribution to programme intended learning outcomes made by every course?
- ◆ How is student assessment structured to monitor learning progress towards the intended learning outcomes? How are capstone subjects, internships, or other forms of comprehensive assessment used to provide an overarching assessment of graduate capabilities in terms of the intended learning outcomes of the programme?
- ◆ How does the pedagogical model align with the intended learning outcomes, and how well is that pedagogical model reflected in the individual courses that comprise the sub-degree award?

3.6 Policies and practices related to admission standards

- ◆ How are admission standards determined? Are they included in the curriculum design? Have they been adhered to consistently across programmes and the SDPU(s)?
- ◆ What language requirements are in place for admission, and how consistently have these been applied?
- ◆ What RPL strategies have been used and how does/do the university/SDPU(s) ensure that these are in keeping with the approach outlined in the HKQF?
- ◆ Where students have been admitted on the basis of special consideration, how have their individual capabilities been assessed, and how is their learning progress being monitored? (support services to assist students to meet the intended learning outcomes are considered in Dimension 7.)
- ◆ Are admission standards subject to periodic review? How are retention and success rates monitored for cohorts of sub-degree students? What has the SDPU learned from such reviews, and have any modifications been made as a result?

3.7 Approach to monitoring learning progress as a component of curriculum design

- ◆ How does the curriculum design help ensure that student learning builds in coherent ways towards the achievement of the intended learning outcomes?
- ◆ What does the curriculum design indicate about approaches to monitoring the quality of the programme even prior to the graduation of a first cohort of students? Where and what types of data will be gathered during the programme?

3.8 Selection of international partners for exchanges and collaborative programmes

- ◆ How are international or regional partners selected for exchanges and collaborative programmes? What due diligence checks are undertaken?
- ◆ How does the specific partnership align with the strategic goals of the university/SDPU(s) for international engagement? What benefits will this partnership bring to the university/SDPU(s)?
- ◆ What risks have been identified in this partnership (financial? reputational?) and what risk mitigation strategies are in place?
- ◆ Have these collaborative arrangements been formally approved in accordance with the university's policies on international engagement and academic programmes? How comprehensively are they covered

by contracts that include a requirement for periodic review of programme quality and follow through?

- ◆ How carefully have the curricular contributions from both partners been considered, and how well do the curricular components fit together? Does the programme as a whole align with the intended learning outcomes?

3.9 Student recruitment materials

- ◆ What protocols does/do the university/SDPU(s) follow in terms of the production of student recruitment materials - both hard copies and virtual recruitment strategies? Who takes responsibility for maintaining the accuracy of this information? How is it kept updated?
- ◆ To what extent do the recruitment materials accurately portray the experience of students enrolled in sub-degree level programmes? (For example, it would not be appropriate for recruitment images to include research laboratories or libraries to which the sub-degree students do not have access.)
- ◆ To what extent do the recruitment materials accurately portray the career opportunities this sub-degree will open to graduate?
- ◆ Where third parties are involved in recruiting students, what strategies does/do the university/SDPU(s) employ to ensure that these agents are acting appropriately?
- ◆ To what extent do enrolled sub-degree students and graduates believe their learning experience matches/matched that which was promised in recruitment materials?

Ensuring the Quality of Student Learning - the Action Phase

Dimension 4: Programme delivery, including pedagogical approaches, learning environments and resources, scheduling

4.1 Routine monitoring of programme practices

- ◆ What strategies does/do the university/SDPU(s) employ to monitor the curriculum within sub-degree programmes over time? Are there periodic reviews to consider whether the original programme design remains appropriate? What form do these reviews take? How are external sources canvassed in such reviews? How are recommendations actioned and followed through?

4.2 Pedagogical approaches across the programme

- ◆ How well do teaching staff understand the sub-degree programme design, and the contributions their course needs to make to the programme intended learning outcomes?

- ◆ Who is responsible for ensuring new teaching staff are well briefed on the programme design and for monitoring pedagogy at the course level?

4.3 Learning resource collections, both hard copy and electronic resources

- ◆ How do policies governing library access and collections ensure sub-degree students have appropriate access to learning resources?
- ◆ To what extent do sub-degree students enjoy equivalent access to library resources as do degree students? Do they have similar access to library services such as photocopying, search engines, databases and specialised support from library staff?
- ◆ Are library opening hours and access to e-resources suited to the characteristics of the sub-degree programme student body?
- ◆ How are library services quality assured? What trend data is collected and analysed? What benchmarking is done with other libraries supporting sub-degree programmes?

4.4 Physical learning environments

- ◆ What university/SDPU policies ensure that classrooms and other physical facilities (for example, labs or studios) are appropriate for the learning needs of sub-degree students?
- ◆ What user satisfaction data about the physical environment is routinely collected and analysed? Which office collects these data and what is done with them? For example, are they integrated into data sets related to overall programme quality?
- ◆ How do the needs of sub-degree students and programmes (related to the physical environment) get factored into decision-making about campus facilities?
- ◆ Where sub-degree programmes require specialised equipment, how is the maintenance and updating of this equipment managed? Are academic staff able to request replacement or updating of equipment as needed? What is the mechanism for considering, approving and funding such requests?

4.5 E-learning environments

- ◆ What policies govern online learning resources and support services for sub-degree students? (For example, is there a published e-learning strategy or set of guidelines for e-learning in sub-degree programmes?)
- ◆ How are teaching staff in sub-degree programmes upskilled and supported in the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to support learning and teaching?
- ◆ How are the uses of ICT/learning management systems being monitored at the sub-degree programme level? Which office is

responsible for gathering data on e-learning utilisation, and what is done to follow through on this data?

4.6 Scheduling arrangements

- ◆ Given that some sub-degree programmes may enroll mid-career students who are balancing full time work and study, how does scheduling try to accommodate these students?
- ◆ Where sub-degree programmes are operated in non-traditional modes, how is user satisfaction data gathered on scheduling, and how is it followed through to support student learning? Can the regular systems of the university be modified to serve the scheduling needs of sub-degree students and programmes, or are specialised approaches and systems needed?

Dimension 5: Support for teaching quality including pedagogical development

5.1 Human resources policies and practices for teaching staff

- ◆ To what extent are the teaching staff of sub-degree programmes understood to be a separate workforce to those teaching at the degree level? Are there different human resources policies covering teaching staff in sub-degree programmes to those of other teaching staff in the university? Does the university value different qualities in its sub-degree teaching workforce from those teaching at degree level? How does it recruit the workforce it values?
- ◆ Does the university have consistent requirements in terms of qualification levels and professional experience for those teaching in all sub-degree programmes, or does this differ across programmes/SDPUs?
- ◆ How are teaching staff recruited for the sub-degree programmes? To what extent are programmes delivered by regular faculty members and part-time teaching staff? How does this proportionality differ from the university's degree programmes?
- ◆ How does/do the university/SDPU(s) check that its expectations of teaching staff qualifications, professional experience and competence are in keeping with those of other higher education institutions offering similar programmes?

5.2 Approaches to keeping teaching staff up to date with their fields

- ◆ What policies and procedures exist to support the professional development of sub-degree programme teaching staff? Are there requirements for currency of professional experience, for example?

- ◆ How are teaching staff encouraged to participate in professional development activities and maintain their currency of knowledge in their fields?

5.3 Academic leadership and programme teaching teams

- ◆ Who do sub-degree teaching staff turn to for advice on issues related to the academic content of the courses in which they teach? (Are they in touch with Department Chairs, Discipline Heads, Programme Coordinators etc. from the university faculties?)
- ◆ Who do sub-degree teaching staff turn to for advice on administrative matters?
- ◆ Given the importance of understanding how specific courses fit within a programme design, who holds the responsibility for developing teamwork skills and a shared sense of purpose within a programme teaching team?

5.4 Evaluating teaching quality

- ◆ How is the performance of sub-degree teaching staff monitored? What approaches are used? How are these results followed through? Who holds overall responsibility for the quality of the teaching in the sub-degree programmes?
- ◆ What actions are possible in following through on performance data of teaching? (For example, might a teacher be asked to participate in a professional development activity, or be reassigned to a different teaching team or be provided other forms of support?)
- ◆ If the poor results in teaching quality persist even after support has been provided, what sanctions are available, and who carries this responsibility?
- ◆ If a sub-degree programme is being offered on multiple sites, how is teaching quality monitored across campuses?

5.5 Pedagogical development of teaching staff

- ◆ What policies and procedures provide teaching staff with access to professional development activities (for example, supported conference attendance)? If they are external to the university, are they resourced?
- ◆ If the university has a centre for the advancement of learning and teaching quality, what access do sub-degree teaching staff have to this expert advice?
- ◆ How does the university encourage the scholarship of teaching for sub-degree teaching staff?

5.6 Retention of quality teaching staff

- ◆ What does the data say about retention of teaching staff at sub-degree level? To what extent is turnover of teaching staff an issue for the SDPU(s)?
- ◆ What does/do the university/SDPU(s) know about the factors that lead sub-degree teaching staff to be retained?
- ◆ How is/are the university/SDPU(s) supporting retention of quality teaching staff?

5.7 Use of peer evaluation and peer networks

- ◆ How does/do the university/SDPU(s) support the development of peer networks among sub-degree teaching staff (and perhaps regular faculty members)? What opportunities do sub-degree teaching staff have to interact with university staff beyond the SDPU? Would they feel part of the university's scholarly community?
- ◆ Is peer evaluation one of the strategies used to assist in professional development of teaching staff? How is this organised and what use is made of the evaluative data?

5.8 Reward and recognition schemes

- ◆ What forms of reward and recognition are available for sub-degree teaching staff? Are these staff included in such schemes at university level, or are they specific to the SDPU?
- ◆ How do sub-degree teaching staff know that their efforts are appreciated and their achievements celebrated? Do sub-degree teaching staff feel valued? How does/do the university/SDPU(s) know how staff feel?

Dimension 6: Student learning assessment

6.1 Policies and practices of student assessment

- ◆ What academic policies govern the extent and nature of student assessment in sub-degree programmes? Are these policies university-wide or specific to the SDPU? Do they cover all aspects of assessment of student learning?
- ◆ How is criterion-referenced assessment conducted? Is it fully implemented in all programmes or are there still some norm-referenced assessment practices in use? If both approaches are still in use, how are they reconciled in practice?
- ◆ How does/do the university/SDPU(s) check that assessment practices are fully compliant with policies of the university/SDPU? Who holds responsibility for ensuring practices are aligned with the policies,

and what actions are taken if assessment practices are found to be non-compliant?

- ◆ Given the importance of assessment as a learning activity, what do the policies require in terms of feedback to students? Is feedback timely and useful to students to better understand the material being assessed, and/or the reasons for the grade they received?
- ◆ Where a sub-degree programme is offered at multiple sites, are assessment practices consistent across campuses? How is the consistency of outcomes monitored across campuses?

6.2 Alignment of intended learning outcomes and assessment strategies

- ◆ Do the programme designs show how assessment at the course level enables student learning progress to be tracked? Is the relationship among course content and assessment and programme intended learning outcomes clear?
- ◆ How do the programme designs ensure that at the point of graduation, all requirements have been met and the intended learning outcomes realised? In keeping with a learning outcomes model, how do these final overall assessments try to capture the ability of the student to utilise all they have learned in a practical application?

6.3 Approaches to informing students about assessment tasks and grading policies

- ◆ What strategies do the policies require to ensure students are clearly informed about the nature of the assessment, the intended learning outcomes each assessment task addresses and the criteria by which achievement levels will be determined?
- ◆ What use is made of grading rubrics to inform students in advance of the factors that will determine their grade level on an assessment task?

6.4 Checking the validity of assessment tasks and the reliability of grading

- ◆ How do the policies and practices address the grading of student work and checking of the validity and reliability of assessment decisions?
- ◆ What forms of grade moderation or external examination are required for sub-degree programmes? Is there a consistent approach to these strategies, and what changes in assessment practices have occurred as a result of this feedback?

6.5 Approaches to fair and consistent grading

- ◆ What strategies are in place to ensure consistency in grading?
- ◆ Where small group assessment is being used, how does the approach ensure individual students are treated fairly?

- ◆ Where students are involved in work placements or internships, and workplace supervisors have some responsibility for assessment, how is fairness to students supported?
- 6.6 Practices related to student achievement levels and international standards
- ◆ What forms do these strategies take? (For example, are regional or international academics involved in periodic programme reviews in which they consider assessment strategies and grading practices, or act as ‘critical friends’ to programmes?)
 - ◆ Have the internal programme designers examined assessment strategies and grading rubrics from similar programmes in other well-regarded institutions?
 - ◆ Is comparison of assessment strategies and grading rubrics included in benchmarking agreements?
- 6.7 Approach to grade appeals
- ◆ What opportunities do sub-degree students have to appeal a grade and on what grounds? How are grade appeals processed, and what is the range of possible outcomes?
 - ◆ When an appeal is made, what feedback is provided to the teaching staff member responsible for the course, and what actions might follow?
- 6.8 Policies and procedures to address cheating or plagiarism
- ◆ How are sub-degree students educated about the conventions of citing sources and avoiding plagiarism in academic writing?
 - ◆ How and when are students informed of the penalties that can be applied for plagiarism or cheating?
 - ◆ What types of software are used to assist students to avoid plagiarism and help assessors detect it?
 - ◆ How do the assessment policies address student integrity? Is there a range of possible penalties depending on the seriousness of the offence? Are records kept of these instances and the sanctions applied? How are these data mined to provide insights on breaches of student integrity and ways of addressing it?
- 6.9 Policies and procedures for certification of student learning
- ◆ How do parchments and transcripts indicate the university making the award? Are these documents accurately capturing the nature of the SDPU in the university context? Who has responsibility for checking

that the wordings of these documents are accurate? (Are they approved by the University Registrar?)

- ◆ Are all sub-degree award titles in keeping with the HKQF ATS and the recording of credit points?

Dimension 7: Student Participation and Student Support Services

7.1 Approaches to student engagement

- ◆ To what extent do policies on student services and student conduct apply only to sub-degree students? Do sub-degree students enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as other students at the university?
- ◆ To what extent are policies and procedures for sub-degree students the same across all the SDPUs in the university?
- ◆ How is sub-degree student engagement with the extracurricular offerings of the university encouraged? Do these students have needs or lifestyle limitations that mean their types of engagement are different from those of students enrolled in degrees? How does/do the university/SDPU(s) respond to these different needs?
- ◆ How is/are the university/SDPU(s) monitoring student engagement outside of the formal curriculum? How important is this aspect of an education for sub-degree students?

7.2 Approaches to students' personal development and/or the development of soft skills

- ◆ If areas such as personal development or the development of soft skills are assessed outside of the formal curriculum, what has/have the university/SDPU(s) learned from these data, and how has it responded?
- ◆ Given the short duration of some sub-degree programmes, are the Graduate Attributes of the university applied to graduates of these programmes, or are there Graduate Attributes that are unique to the sub-degree programme?
- ◆ Where graduates of the sub-degree are likely subsequently to be admitted to a degree programme at the same university, how are the Graduate Attributes managed across both levels of programme? Are they aligned? Can this junction be addressed if sub-degree holders are to be admitted to a degree programme in another university? (i.e. is there any form of collaboration across universities to try to assist sub-degree holders to gain entry to degree programmes?)

7.3 Student participation in governance

- ◆ What opportunities do sub-degree students have to become engaged with governance roles? At what level? Are there opportunities for sub-degree students to sit alongside students in degree programmes in governance committees?

- ◆ How are sub-degree student representatives briefed on the nature and operation of governance bodies on which they sit? What leadership training is available to them?

7.4 Student support services, for example, academic skill development programmes, language development programmes, career planning advice and preparation for employment activities, and personal support services.

- ◆ What support services are available to sub-degree students? How is the need for services determined? How are their performance and outcomes monitored? How is data on user satisfaction collected and used?
- ◆ To what extent are sub-degree students able to access support services and programmes outside of the SDPU? How heavily are services utilised by sub-degree students?
- ◆ How is the SDPU monitoring and supporting students' language development? How well is this approach ensuring that graduates of sub-degree programmes have achieved the appropriate level of language attainment required for their future careers?
- ◆ How has the student body been changing over time, and what changes in student needs have been noted and addressed? What new needs are emerging?

7.5 Non-local student support services

- ◆ What is known about the needs of non-local students? How does/do the university/SDPU(s) know about these needs? What actions have been taken to address those needs? Which office has responsibility for services designed for non-local students?
- ◆ What is the growth trend in non-local students, and what does this mean for support services?
- ◆ To what extent has it been possible to tailor services for non-local sub-degree students? What are the barriers to meeting the remaining needs?
- ◆ What is known about the success/adequacy of support services for non-local students?

Ensuring the Quality of Student Learning - the Reflection and Follow Through Phase

Dimension 8: Systems for Acting on Quality Assurance Data to Make Ongoing Enhancements to Student Learning

8.1 Approach to using systematic data on subject and programme quality to make ongoing improvements to curriculum and teaching approaches, and to track the outcomes of changes over time

- ◆ What policies and procedures at the SDPU or the university guide the use of quality assurance data for ongoing enhancements of student learning support?
- ◆ How systematic is this important phase of the ‘quality cycle’? How are programme leaders and course leaders interpreting and using quality assurance data in the interests of enhancement?
- ◆ Developing a quality culture amongst all staff is a very important aspect of quality enhancement. How is/are the university/SDPU(s) encouraging self-study at the local level and a commitment to quality enhancement?

8.2 Use of trend data at programme level

- ◆ How is trend data on programmes being monitored? Do programme review approaches track trends over time and take action to address persistent issues? For example, do approaches to annual reports on programmes follow up on quality issues that were identified in the previous cycle? How do short term data (for example, semester or annual data) feed into longer term review processes (such as five yearly programme reviews) so that trends are visible?

8.3 Approach to addressing under-performing programmes

- ◆ What form does programme record keeping take in terms of review recommendations, action plans, actions taken and the results of those actions? Which office has responsibility for ensuring the quality cycle is completed? Especially in the case of programmes with quality issues, which academic governance body receives these reports and monitors follow through?

Appendix D

Roles and Responsibilities of Audit Panel Members and the Audit Coordinator

Audit Panel Members

Audit Panel members are selected on the basis of their expertise in higher education. Experience with higher education quality assurance is an important consideration, and given the nature of sub-degree level programmes, experience with this level of academic programme operations is also valued.

Audit Panel members will receive written briefing materials in preparation for the audit, and will participate in a briefing session provided by the QAC with assistance from the Audit Coordinator. The briefing session will include information on the audit methodology and current approaches to higher education provision in Hong Kong. Local members of the Audit Panel will make a valuable contribution in helping overseas members better understand the Hong Kong higher education context.

Principal Expectations of Audit Panel Members include:

- ◆ Careful reading of materials on audit procedures provided by the QAC;
- ◆ Careful reading of background documentation about the university provided by the QAC, and audit materials submitted by the university;
- ◆ A commitment to analysing information on the university in terms of the specifics of the Audit Manual and in the Hong Kong higher education context;
- ◆ Utilising their expertise to make sound judgments about the sub-degree operations of the university;
- ◆ A commitment to showing respect to all those involved in the audit process, including fellow members of the Audit Panel, staff and students in the university and QAC colleagues;
- ◆ Utilising their communication skills in focused questioning during interviews, in discussions with other Panel Members, and in producing written drafts of assigned sections of the Audit Report;
- ◆ Demonstrating good teamwork in terms of responding to requests in a timely manner, and sharing responsibility for collective judgments;
- ◆ A commitment to respecting the confidentiality of the audit process.

Audit Panel Chair

The Audit Panel Chair is selected on the basis of his/her expertise in leadership in higher education, with extensive experience of quality assurance in universities. The Chair will need to have well-honed leadership skills in order to help the Panel reach consensus, and to act as the spokesperson for the Panel

on all matters. In addition to the expectations of Panel Members listed above, the Chair should meet the expectations detailed below.

Principal Expectations of the Audit Panel Chair include:

- ◆ Liaising with the Audit Coordinator in all phases of the audit process;
- ◆ A commitment to ensuring that the Audit Panel conducts itself in a manner that upholds the values and reputation of the QAC/UGC;
- ◆ Taking active leadership of meetings of the Panel, to ensure all members participate fully, and that necessary tasks are well understood and completed in a timely manner;
- ◆ Ensuring that questions asked at interviews during the Audit Visit are relevant to the topic being pursued, and that the interviews remain on schedule;
- ◆ Leading the Panel towards consensus by utilising conflict resolution skills, where necessary;
- ◆ Communicating respectfully and clearly with the university's executive leadership team and interviewees during audit interview sessions;
- ◆ Working closely with the Audit Coordinator as documents and reports are being produced;
- ◆ When invited to do so, contributing to relevant discussion of the audit findings, and following up the relevant documents and reports at meetings of the QAC.

Audit Coordinator

The Audit Coordinator acts as a guide to the Panel Chair and Panel Members, ensuring that the audit methodology is followed consistently. The Audit Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that Panel judgments are soundly supported by evidence.

While the Audit Coordinator accompanies the Panel Members throughout the Audit Visit, it should be noted that the Audit Coordinator is not a member of the Panel, and does not share the Panel's collective responsibility for audit findings.

The Audit Coordinator is responsible for the logistics of the audit including liaising with the university/SDPU(s), confirming the programme for the *Mutual Briefing Session* and the Audit Visit. Given that each university has a unique approach to the operations of sub-degree programmes, logistical management will pose a challenge in this audit process. The Audit Coordinator will need to work closely with the Audit Panel Chair as decisions are made about locations for interviews and sampling approaches.

The Audit Coordinator keeps a written record of interviews, the deliberations of the Panel and summarises findings as the audit progresses. Colleagues

from the QAC Secretariat may assist with this record keeping. The Audit Coordinator liaises with the *Institutional Representative* to ensure the Audit Visit operates smoothly, and checks with the *Institutional Representative* on a daily basis, to receive feedback on any concerns the university/SDPU(s) may have regarding the conduct of the Audit Visit.

Appendix E

Conflict of Interest

To avoid perceptions of bias, and to ensure the integrity of the audit system, it is essential that conflicts of interest be avoided. The QAC requires auditors to declare any matters that could lead to a conflict of interest in being appointed to a particular Audit Panel, and universities are given the opportunity to object to a particular appointed auditor if they consider there may be a conflict of interest.

Circumstances in which a conflict of interest may exist or be perceived include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ◆ The auditor is an employee of the university to be audited, or has been an employee within the last three years.
- ◆ Any close relative of the auditor is an employee of the university.
- ◆ The auditor is a failed applicant within the last three years, a current applicant or a prospect for a position at the university.
- ◆ The auditor is a senior advisor or consultant to the university, or has/had been in the last three years.
- ◆ The auditor, or any close relative, is a student at the university.
- ◆ The auditor is a graduate of the university within the last three years.
- ◆ There is kinship, close friendship or animosity between the auditor and any senior manager in the university.
- ◆ The auditor is antipathetic to the mission, goals or ethos of the university.

Being an employee of another higher education university in Hong Kong is not in itself regarded as a conflict of interest.

Auditors are asked to declare before appointment to a particular Panel whether there are any circumstances, including but not limited to those above, which could lead to a conflict of interest. Similarly, universities are asked before a Panel is finalised whether they object to any potential member of the Audit Panel on grounds of perceived conflict of interest or for any other material reason. The decision on appointment is made by the QAC after considering the information provided by the auditors and any objections raised by the university.

The Audit Coordinator is subject to the same policy and procedures on conflict of interest as members of the Audit Panel.

Appendix F

Privacy and Disclosure of Information

An effective audit requires access to a considerable amount of information, some of which may be sensitive or confidential. The QAC has therefore developed policies and procedures to safeguard such information. Universities and their staff can be assured that confidential information disclosed during an audit will not be publicly released or used in an inappropriate manner.

The QAC's policy on privacy and disclosure of information is as follows:

- ◆ Information provided by a university is used only for the purpose of audit.
- ◆ Information marked by a university as confidential is not disclosed by the QAC or by individual auditors, though it may be used to inform audit findings.
- ◆ Staff, students or other stakeholders who are invited to provide information may elect to do so in confidence, in which case the information is treated in the same way as confidential information provided by the university.
- ◆ Audit interviews are confidential in the sense the Panel does not reveal outside a session what is said by any individual, nor are individuals identified in the audit report. The university is encouraged to require the same degree of confidentiality from interviewees.
- ◆ The QAC and auditors must keep confidential information in a secure fashion.
- ◆ Auditors are required to destroy material relating to an audit, including the Institutional Submission and any notes or annotations they have made, once an audit is complete.
- ◆ Auditors make no media or other public comment on audits in which they participate. The only persons authorised to comment on an individual audit are the Secretaries and Chairs of the QAC and UGC.
- ◆ The auditors (on appointment to a Panel) sign a confidentiality agreement which binds them to follow the QAC procedures.

Appendix G

Indicative Timeline for Audit

Timeframe	QAC	University
12 months before the Audit Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Confirm the dates for the <i>Mutual Briefing</i> and the major Audit Visit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Submit a list of SDPUs, and the number and types of sub-degree programmes on offer in each SDPU.
9 months before the Audit Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Select Audit Panel Chair and Members. ◆ Check for conflict of interest with the university. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Develop institutional goals for the audit process. ◆ Submit the goal statement to QAC Secretariat.
Starting 4 months before the Audit Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Audit Coordinator discusses logistical arrangements with the university, including arrangements for the <i>Mutual Briefing</i>. ◆ Panel reviews the <i>Institutional Submission</i> and the supporting materials. ◆ Panel identifies issues requiring supplementary information. ◆ Panel begins consideration of potential audit trails. ◆ Panel requests for supplementary information forwarded to the university. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide the <i>Institutional Submission</i> to QAC, including supporting materials, information on electronic access, updated data sets on the SDPU(s) and the programmes. ◆ Submit supplementary materials as requested by Panel.
6-8 weeks before the Audit Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Audit Coordinator confirms the logistical arrangements for the major Audit Visit. ◆ Panel meets in private to discuss key issues, further information to be requested, and finalise schedule for the Audit Visit. ◆ Panel participates in the <i>Mutual Briefing</i> session with the university. ◆ Audit trails identified, and a selection of suitable programme areas related to audit trails identified after consultation with the university. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Mutual briefing</i> session with Panel at the university. May include brief campus tours if the SDPU(s) is/are located on more than one campus. ◆ University consults with Panel on suitable programme areas to be sampled for audit trails.
2 - 3 weeks before the Audit Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Audit Coordinator confirms the audit programme and outlines the agenda for each meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Submit information for audit trails and the further information as requested by the Panel.

Timeframe	QAC	University
Major Audit Visit occurs	-	-
1 day after Audit Visit (or as soon as possible after visit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Audit Coordinator and Panel develop principal findings of the audit. 	-
2 weeks after Audit Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Audit Coordinator issues a letter on principal findings to the university. 	-
2-6 weeks after the Audit Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Audit Coordinator drafts the <i>Audit Report</i> with input from Panel Members. 	-
6 weeks after the Audit Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Audit Coordinator submits draft <i>Audit Report</i> to the university for correction of factual errors. ◆ A meeting (or virtual meeting) of Audit Coordinator, Panel Chair and the university may be arranged to ensure the university's understanding of audit findings, if necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The university submits written comments on any factual errors and misinterpretations. ◆ A meeting (or virtual meeting) of Audit Coordinator, Panel Chair and the university may be arranged to ensure the university's understanding of audit findings, if necessary.
12 weeks after the Audit Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The final <i>Audit Report</i> is provided to the university. 	-
14 weeks after the Audit Visit	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The university provides the <i>Institutional Response</i> for inclusion in the Audit Report to be published.
QAC and UGC meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The QAC and the UGC review audit findings and raise any concerns with the university. ◆ Audit Coordinator (and/or Panel Chair, if necessary) joins the QAC discussion. ◆ The <i>Audit Report</i> is published upon the UGC/QAC's endorsement. 	-
3 months after publication of the Audit Report	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The university submits <i>Action Plan</i> to the QAC.
QAC meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The QAC reviews the <i>Action Plan</i> and raises any matters of concern. ◆ Panel Chair and/or Audit 	-

Timeframe	QAC	University
	Coordinator may be consulted on the <i>Action Plan</i> .	
18 months after the publication of Audit Report	-	◆ The university submits the <i>Progress Report</i> to the QAC.
QAC and UGC meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The QAC and the UGC review the <i>Progress Report</i> and raise any matters of concern. ◆ Panel Chair and/or Audit Coordinator may be consulted on the <i>Progress Report</i>. 	◆ The university provides response to the UGC/QAC if any issues of concern have been raised.

Appendix H1

Indicative Programme for Mutual Briefing Session

Meeting No.	Participants and Focus	Duration
1	Presentation by the university providing an introduction to the university and its sub-degree operations with discussion time	90 mins
2	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	30 mins
3	Discussion with relevant senior staff/ leaders of SDPU(s) to discuss proposed audit schedule and procedures	60 mins
4	Lunch and private meeting of the Audit Panel	90 mins
5	Discussion with members of relevant academic governance bodies	60 mins
6	Brief campus tour focusing on spaces relevant to sub-degree programmes	45 mins
7	Time if needed for questions and answers by the university or the Audit Panel	30 mins
8	Audit Coordinator and <i>Institutional Representative</i> meet to confirm arrangements	30 mins

Note:

- ◆ If multiple SDPUs are involved and they are located on different campuses, brief visits might be made to those campuses. This may necessitate extending the *Mutual Briefing* Session to part of a second day.
- ◆ Participants in all interviews should be limited to a maximum number of 10.

Appendix H2

Indicative Programme for Audit Visit

Day 1	Participants and Focus	Duration
Meeting No.		
1	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	45 mins
2	Meeting with the Head of University and relevant senior staff	60 mins
3	Meeting with SDPU Head(s) and other members of the team guiding the self-study	60 mins
4	Lunch and private meeting of the Audit Panel	60 mins
5	Meeting with Heads of Departments/ Deans/ other leaders to whom the SDPUs report	60 mins
6	Possible time for campus tour(s) if needed	-
7	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	60 mins

Day 2	Participants and Focus	Duration
Meeting No.		
1	Meeting with 'front line' teaching staff	60 mins
2	Meeting with sub-degree programme leaders/coordinators	60 mins
3	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	30 mins
4	Lunch meeting with external stakeholders - alumni, employers, professional organisation representatives, representatives of universities in which sub-degree graduates pursue subsequent studies etc.	75 mins
5	Meeting with staff from academic support services	60 mins
6	Meeting with a representative group of students	60 mins
7	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	30 mins

Day 3	Participants and Focus	Duration
Meeting No.		
1	Meeting with students who serve on governance committees	30 mins
2	Meeting with members of relevant academic governance bodies, for example, Academic Board at University, College, Faculty levels	60 mins
3	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	120 mins
4	Lunch	
5	Time available to clarify any remaining questions or issues. Participants will be advised by close of Day 2.	60 mins

Day 3	Participants and Focus	Duration
Meeting No.		
6	Concluding session with Head of University and his/her nominees	20 mins
7	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	60 mins

Note: Interview sessions should have no more than ten interviewees.

Appendix I

Information Requirements

Introduction

The most significant document for this audit of sub-degree programme operations in UGC-funded universities is the report of the self-study, the *Institutional Submission*. Information on the parameters for this document is given below. As a component of the *Institutional Submission*, Supplementary Materials will provide additional background information of which auditors will make particular use during the first phase of the audit process.

Additional materials may be requested by the Audit Panel after they have perused the *Institutional Submission*, after the *Mutual Briefing Session* or on occasion, during the major Audit Visit. For the benefit of both university staff and the auditors themselves, the Audit Coordinator will try to limit late requests for additional information. All auditors' requests for additional information and the provision of the requested material to auditors must occur through the Audit Coordinator as these materials will need to be recorded and labeled appropriately.

Format of Audit Materials

Universities are not required to submit materials in hard copy. Universities should create a secure folder of audit information on their intranet and ensure that it is password protected. Members of the Audit Panel should be issued with passwords to enable them to access the materials in the secure folder. It should be possible for auditors to easily download the entire collection of materials to their home machines, to enable them to navigate more readily (avoiding the necessity for 'capture' codes when moving between documents or returning to the materials after a short break) and search using key words. In addition, memory sticks containing the materials should be provided to the QAC Secretariat for distribution to each of the Audit Panel Member as backup.

If hyperlinks are provided to Supplementary Materials in the *Institutional Submission*, care will need to be taken to ensure these links work as intended.

If the university wishes to direct auditors to live sites (i.e. outside of the secure folder) in order to demonstrate some feature of student learning support or staff information, for example, care will be needed to ensure the auditors' passwords allow access to those sites.

Information on SDPUs and Sub-degree Programmes

At the very commencement of the audit process (12 months in advance of the Audit Visit) the university will need to submit to the QAC a list of all SDPUs in the university, with the sub-degree programmes offered by each SDPU which fall within the audit scope.

Some explanatory notes will be needed, to indicate the nature of the SDPU(s). For example, the SDPU may be a regular department or faculty of the university, offering sub-degree as well as degree programmes. It may be a separate College or School, that offers only self-financing programmes. It may operate as a specialist department within a faculty or within the university generally. It may be constituted as a separate entity owned by the university and issue qualifications in its own name.

The list of sub-degree programmes should contain the following information -

Name of SDPU(s)	Name of programmes	HKQF Level with which the programmes are aligned	Duration of the programmes	Mode of delivery	Remarks*

(* Including the reasons for not aligning the programme(s) at an HKQF Level or placing the programme(s) on the HKQR; location and partnering institutions for offshore programme(s); phasing out plan of the programme(s) etc.)

There is a very high level of diversity across the UGC-funded universities in terms of structural arrangements and the degree of autonomy of the SDPUs. It will be very important for the QAC, the Audit Coordinator and ultimately the auditors to have a very clear understanding of how sub-degree programmes operate in each particular university. Decisions will need to be made about the sites for Audit Visit, the sampling of programme areas as part of the audit trails and the timing of the Audit Visit, depending on this information. It also will need to be reflected in the structure of the *Institutional Submission*.

Goal Statement

There is no set format for this document, but it is suggested it should be a brief statement, probably not more than one page in length. Universities should consider what it is they would like to achieve through the audit process - what areas of their own policy and practice for sub-degrees that they would like to better understand and enhance through this process. The document capturing

those goals is then submitted to the QAC approximately nine months prior to the Audit Visit.

Universities will be invited to consider the extent to which their own goals have been met at the conclusion of the audit process. A brief statement capturing the university's conclusions about goal achievement will be submitted at the same time as the university submits the evaluation form to the QAC Secretariat to provide its feedback on the audit exercise. The Audit Panel and the QAC will not be evaluating the university's own goals for the audit, or this brief statement on the extent of achievement of those goals. Nonetheless, given that this audit design aims to make the audit experience beneficial to the university, the QAC will appreciate hearing to what extent the university's own goals for the audit have been achieved.

The Institutional Submission

The *Institutional Submission* should be presented in two parts – the Main Submission and the Supplementary Material – described below. To limit the effort required by the university and the Audit Panel, the Main Submission should be limited to a maximum of 12 000 words, plus any relevant statistical and other data. The suggested content is outlined below.

Part A: Main Submission

Introduction to the University and the SDPU(s)

The aim of the introduction is to convey a thumbnail sketch of the university and its history including its offering of sub-degree level programmes.

A brief history of the university (for example, date of foundation or conferral of self-accrediting status, antecedent institutions, significant shaping events) that includes:

- ◆ the university's role, mission and/or goals;
- ◆ the range of programmes offered, with an emphasis on those at sub-degree level;
- ◆ key data about the university, including total student enrolment, number of staff, number and location of campuses;
- ◆ the updated list of sub-degree programmes;
- ◆ An organisational chart that indicates the overall institutional structure, including faculties, schools, departments, administrative units, support services (the graphic/s should clearly indicate the structural location of the SDPU(s) and their reporting lines).

It would be appropriate also to include a brief section on how the self-study was conducted.

The university may include other information it considers relevant, but should bear in mind that this is an introductory section and avoid unnecessary detail.

Addressing the Dimensions

The *Dimensions* and *Sub-Dimensions* outlined in Section 5 and elaborated in Appendix C provide a structure for the *Institutional Submission*. For example, *Dimension 1: Governance, Management, Institutional Planning and Accountability* provides an opportunity to describe how the various SDPU(s) fit(s) within the university as a whole. Similarly, *Dimension 2: Approach to Programme Quality Assurance* functions as an overview of the quality assurance approaches used in the university. These approaches may be university-wide or in some cases may be specific to particular SDPU(s). It should be clear what combination of university-wide policies and procedures and SDPU-specific policies and procedures are in place. The *Dimensions* are designed to encompass all aspects of the lifecycle of sub-degree programme operations.

Because each university has a different organisational structure in terms of the SDPU(s) and the nature of those units also differ among universities (as well as in some cases, within a single university), the section devoted to each *Dimension* may well be structured differently in different universities.

Where all SDPUs within a university have a similar location in the organisational structure and similar accountabilities, it may be possible to address the content of each section in a unified manner. However, where the nature of the SDPUs differ markedly within a university, it may be necessary to subdivide sections according to each different type of SDPU.

The *Institutional Submission* should address all *Dimensions* and *Sub-Dimensions*. However, the questions posed under each *Sub-Dimension* in Appendix C are meant as a stimulus and guide only. It is not necessary to address all of them or address each one individually.

While *Dimension 2* provides for an overview of quality assurance approaches, the following *Dimensions* provide an opportunity for more specific information on aspects of quality assurance and enhancement.

It is important to provide hard evidence on quality indicators and quality assurance mechanisms wherever possible. Graphical presentations of data (for example, graphs, histograms, pie charts) are usually easier to interpret than numerical presentation (for example, tables).

Each section should indicate where and how external reference points are used. Wherever possible, quantitative data should be presented either as a time series

(indicating a trend over time) or as a comparator (indicating performance relative to an external reference point).

If convenient, data may be presented as Appendices to the Main Submission rather than embedded in the text.

It can be useful for auditors' understanding if the *Institutional Submission* includes some illustrative examples of how policies or procedures have been actioned in specific SDPU(s) or programmes. Particularly in the final *Dimension* on quality enhancement, there also might be examples of the quality cycle in action - cases where quality assurance data has been used to identify an area needing enhancement, the nature of the action taken, and a brief account of how successful that action has been in terms of enhancement. These illustrative examples are best placed in separate text boxes so that the flow of more general descriptive text is not interrupted.

At the end of each section, the *Institutional Submission* should include a brief summary of the conclusions drawn in the self-study, and a list of any issues or aspects that the university has identified as needing further enhancement.

Conclusion

The conclusion should provide a brief summary of the self-study exercise. It may be interesting to consider the outcomes of the self-study in terms of the goals the university has set for the audit experience as a whole. To what extent has the self-study component of the audit helped the university address the goals it had set?

References

Throughout the Main Submission, appropriate reference should be made to relevant institutional or external documents. The form of referencing (for example, footnotes, side-bars, end-notes) may be chosen by the university, but references should be sufficient to allow the Audit Panel to locate the corresponding documents. If hyperlinks to the Supplementary Material are used, care will be needed to ensure copies of those documents are included in the online folder of audit materials, so that the links continue to work even when auditors download the folder of audit materials to their own computers.

Key documents should be included in the Supplementary Material, described below.

Part B: Supplementary Material

This component of the *Institutional Submission* includes key university documents (for example, role statement, assessment policy, annual reports of SDPUs) which are referred to in the Main Submission. It also may include key external documents (for example, statements of professional standards, extract of external review reports) referred to in the Main Submission.

The university needs to exercise some judgement in deciding which of the documents referred to in the Main Submission are sufficiently important to include in the Supplementary Material. Some guidance is provided below.

Guidance on Supplementary Material

Documents in the Supplementary Material should be labelled SM1, SM2, SM3, etc., together with a brief title (for example, SM1: Role Statement). These labels should be used for referencing the documents in the Main Submission.

Documents that are referred to frequently in the main submission should be included in the Supplementary Material but not every document referred to in the Main Submission need be included. Rather, the Supplementary Material should be limited to those documents which the Panel is most likely to wish to peruse in order to fully understand the Main Submission.

Very long documents are unlikely to be relevant to the auditors in their totality. If there is a specific reason for including a very long document, it would be better to provide a relevant extract, fully referenced. If auditors need to follow up other details in such a document, they can request a complete copy.

Documents included in the Supplementary Material should be pre-existing documents, rather than being written specially for the audit. Some inclusions might be:

- ◆ Reports of reviews of SDPU(s) and learning support services undertaken in the last five years, including reviews by external bodies (such as examples from major professional accreditations), and any reports prepared for JQRC during this period;
- ◆ Reports of periodic sub-degree programme reviews; or
- ◆ Information on any sub-degree programmes offered in conjunction with partners, including for each programme the partner, duration of the partnership, and student enrolment.

Key data sets (management information) used by the university, for example, as the basis for strategic planning or to drive the development of teaching and learning policies or procedures and which might be referenced in sections of the Main Submission.

Appendix J

Audit Report and Follow Through

Introduction

The *Audit Report* provides an evaluative commentary on the university's management of the quality and standards of sub-degree level programme operations. It does not provide a quality report on individual programmes, but may make mention of a programme as an example of some broader point the Audit Panel wishes to make.

The *Audit Report* is aimed at two primary audiences. Firstly, it provides a feedback mechanism to the university, so that the university is well informed about the Audit Panel's conclusions, and is able to plan a course of action in the interests of ongoing enhancement. Secondly, it provides a source of information for the public about the level of confidence it can have in the quality of the sub-degree programme operations of the UGC-funded universities.

Report Structure

All Audit Reports adopt a similar structure. Common elements of each report are as follows:

1. Preface, outlining the background and conduct of QAC Audits;
2. Executive Summary, outlining the principal findings of the Audit Panel;
3. Introduction, including an outline of the audit methodology and an overview of the nature of the SDPU(s) within the university;
4. Body of report, consisting of sections for each of the eight *Dimensions* of sub-degree programme operation;
5. Conclusion; and
6. Appendices, including the *Institutional Response* to the audit findings, abbreviations and acronyms, membership of the Audit Panel, as well as the QAC's terms of reference and membership.

Report Content

The body of the report will provide a detailed discussion of the university's overall approach to supporting the quality of learning by students in sub-degree level programmes. Included in each section will be evaluative commentary on the university's sub-degree operations, supported by relevant data and evidence. Where information at the level of individual programmes is included, it will be in support of broader points about the quality and enhancement of learning support.

The Panel will draw upon its review of the *Institutional Submission* and any supplementary information provided and on the interviews it conducts during the course of the Audit Visit. The Panel's conclusions will be described with an indication of supporting evidence for each major point. Policies and practices that the Panel strongly supports will be commended within the text. Similarly, the Panel may affirm directions where the university has begun a course of action in the interests of enhancement, but has not yet completed those actions. Areas where the Panel believes improvement is needed will be identified, with recommendations for action.

Compiling the Audit Report

The *Audit Report* represents the combined judgments of the Audit Panel and the Panel takes responsibility for the content. Individual auditors may take responsibility for drafting text in assigned sections of the report, but the Audit Coordinator is responsible for the overall development of the *Audit Report*, based on the contributions of auditors and for a consistent writing style. The Audit Coordinator will share drafts of *the Audit Report* with members of the Audit Panels, and each auditor will see and endorse the whole report prior to its submission. The QAC retains ownership of the report.

Two weeks after the Audit Visit, the Audit Coordinator writes a letter on the principal findings of the audit to the university.

Six weeks after the Audit Visit, a draft Audit Report is provided to the university for the correction of any factual errors and misinterpretations. If necessary, in the interests of a full understanding of the Audit Panel's findings, a meeting may be arranged between the *Institutional Representative* and the Audit Coordinator and/or Audit Panel Chair. This meeting may be face to face or held using virtual communication strategies.

Twelve weeks after the Audit Visit, a final version of the *Audit Report* is forwarded to the university. The university then has two weeks to prepare a written response, for inclusion in the published report.

Fifteen weeks after the Audit Visit, the *Audit Report* and written response is submitted to the QAC Secretariat and taken to the QAC for review. The QAC will consider whether due process has been followed in the conduct of the audit, and that the conclusions are fair, evidence-based and constructive. The Audit Coordinator (and/or the Audit Panel Chair, if necessary) will be invited to attend the QAC and UGC meetings and address the *Audit Report*. The QAC approves the *Audit Report* for publication and forwards the Report and a recommendation to the UGC for consideration.

The UGC receives the report and considers any issues identified. The UGC writes to the university to confirm that the outcomes of the audit have been fully considered and accepted.

The *Audit Report* is then published on the QAC website.

Following Through on the Audit Report

If the UGC/QAC considers that any issues require immediate attention, the UGC/QAC can request the university to expedite an action and provide evidence of early completion of that action. Generally, however, within three months of the publication of the *Audit Report*, the university submits to the QAC an *Action Plan* indicating how recommendations from the Audit Panel will be addressed.

The QAC considers the *Action Plan*, and may invite the Audit Coordinator and/or Audit Panel Chair to comment on the *Action Plan*.

The *Action Plan* confirms that the university has understood the findings of the Audit and committed to addressing the recommendations contained within it. The *Action Plan* is a working document, and while it is acknowledged that some changes may occur over time, nonetheless, it should clearly indicate what changes or developments are proposed, who has responsibility for following through on the action, and what indicators will be used to measure the effectiveness of the changes. It should also include a timeline for implementation. A template for the *Action Plan* is included below.

The *Action Plan* forms the basis of a *Progress Report* to the QAC 18 months after publication of the *Audit Report*. The QAC considers the *Progress Report*, and may invite the Audit Coordinator and/or Audit Panel Chair to comment on the *Progress Report*.

The *Progress Report* provides evidence that the proposed actions have been undertaken, as well as describing any other related developments that have occurred during that period. If the progress has not met the expectations outlined in the *Action Plan*, an explanation and revised timeline should be submitted to the QAC.

The QAC forwards the *Progress Report* and any explanations provided by the university to the UGC for consideration. If satisfied with progress, the UGC writes to the university, confirming its acceptance of the progress made. If the UGC/QAC is not satisfied with the progress, it may specify additional measures that need to be taken to address the concerns that were raised in the *Audit Report*.

The *Progress Report* is published on the QAC website.

In the next audit cycle, the *Action Plan* and *Progress Report* will be made available to the new Audit Panel as part of the materials the QAC provides as background for the audit.

Audit Follow Through: Template for Action Plan

Content of Recommendation (or Affirmation)	Goals/ Objectives	Strategies	Key Deliverables with Timelines	Leadership Responsibility	Indicators of Successful Outcome(s)

Appendix K

Representations by Universities

The QAC makes every effort to ensure that the audit procedures are conducted fairly and consistently, and that all universities are given the opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of their quality systems and procedures. If, however, there is reason to challenge the outcomes of the audit, universities may make a representation to the QAC. Representations will be considered on two grounds only, viz:

1. the university can present evidence that the audit procedures have not been properly followed.
2. the university can demonstrate that the judgments of the Audit Panel were not based on existing evidence and were consequently unjustified.

The QAC's policy on handling representations from universities is as follows:

1. The QAC will investigate all representations made by universities.
2. The QAC does not investigate representations or complaints from individuals. Such representations should be made to the relevant university in the first instance.
3. Representations will be considered as quickly as possible following the receipt of information.
4. Representations will normally be made in writing and accompanied by the relevant evidence.
5. Representations should be sent to the Audit Coordinator, who will carry out an initial review of the submission and supporting evidence. If possible, the Audit Coordinator will seek to resolve matters directly with the university.
6. Representations that cannot be resolved by the Audit Coordinator will be passed to the Secretary of the QAC, and if still unresolved, to the Chair of the QAC. The Chair, in consultation with other members of the QAC if necessary, will determine what action, if any, should be taken. The Chair's decision is final.
7. The QAC will report the outcomes of representations to the UGC.
8. The QAC reserves the right to make public the outcomes of representations, if this is considered appropriate.

Appendix L

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADRI	Approach-Deployment-Results-Improvement
ATS	Award Titles Scheme
CATS	Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
HKCAAVQ	Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications
HKQF	Hong Kong Qualifications Framework
HKQR	Hong Kong Qualifications Register
HUCOM	Heads of Universities Committee
ICT	Information and communications technology
JQRC	Joint Quality Review Committee
QAC	Quality Assurance Council
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SDPU	Sub-degree Providing Unit
UGC	University Grants Committee

