

QUALITY ASSURANCE COUNCIL (QAC)

THIRD AUDIT CYCLE

Questions and Answers for University Participants in a QAC Quality Audit

Background of QAC Quality Audit

1. *What is QAC?*

- QAC was established in 2007 as a semi-autonomous non-statutory body under the aegis of the University Grants Committee (UGC) of Hong Kong.
- UGC is a non-statutory committee responsible for advising the Government on the funding needs and development of higher education institutions in Hong Kong.
- QAC's mission is to assure that the quality of educational experience in all programmes at the levels of sub-degree, first degree and above, however funded, offered in UGC-funded universities is sustained and improved, and is at an internationally competitive level.

2. *What is a QAC Quality Audit?*

- QAC undertakes quality audits in cycles to assure that the quality of the student learning experience in the UGC-funded universities is sustained and improved, and is at an internationally competitive level.
- QAC's audit activities cover all programmes at the levels of sub-degree, first degree and above including programmes offered outside Hong Kong, however funded, leading to a qualification wholly or partly awarded by UGC-funded universities.
- The first and second rounds of QAC quality audits, which covered first degree programmes and above only, were conducted from 2008 to 2011 and from 2015 to 2016 respectively.
- The QAC took up the role of audit operator on sub-degree operations of UGC-funded universities, with the sub-degree audit cycle conducted from 2017 to 2019.

3. *How will the quality audit proceed in the third audit cycle?*

- The third audit cycle, which was deferred by 12 months due to the disruption brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, is to cover all programmes at the levels of sub-degree, first degree and above, however funded, leading to a qualification wholly or partly awarded by the UGC-funded universities. The audit cycle has commenced and audit visits are scheduled to take place from early 2023 for completion by end 2024.
- The QAC has also decided to conduct the audit visits in the third audit cycle virtually to minimise the potential disruption to individual audit visits.
- The starting point for a QAC quality audit is a critical self-review by the university of its current arrangements for the review and enhancement of academic quality and standards and an assessment of their effectiveness. The self-review process and outcomes will be captured in the institutional submission of “Self-Evaluation Report” (SER) to QAC, which forms the principal source of information for the conduct of the audit.
- An Audit Panel, appointed by QAC from its Register of Auditors, will review the SER and have virtual audit meetings with the university to meet with a wide range of staff, students and other stakeholders to discuss the issues identified in the SER and explore any selected lines of enquiry.
- The Audit Panel’s findings will be presented in an Audit Report, supported by detailed analysis and commentary.

4. *How does a QAC quality audit work in the third audit cycle?*

- Quality audit of this cycle is based on a ‘Fitness for Purpose’ approach whereby it provides confirmation that universities have appropriate procedures in place to meet their stated roles and missions and to secure the quality and academic standards of their academic programmes.
- Audit panels will assess how the university reviews and changes its approach to the management of academic quality and standards to

improve students' learning experience in both physical and virtual environments.

5. *What are the aims of the QAC quality audits in the third audit cycle?*

- The quality audits of the third audit cycle aim to –
 - (a) Confirm that existing arrangements for quality assurance are fit for purpose and conform to the university's role and mission;
 - (b) Provide assurance that the standards of higher education align with expectations in Hong Kong and can be compared to provision by similar institutions in other jurisdictions;
 - (c) Ensure that students have access to appropriate learning opportunities in both physical and virtual environments through taught provision, private study and supported learning;
 - (d) Promote and enhance high quality teaching and learning in both physical and virtual environments;
 - (e) Confirm that students are fully supported in their academic and personal development in both physical and virtual environments;
 - (f) Advance the highest possible levels of student achievement;
 - (g) Encourage strategic developments which enrich the curriculum and enhance students' opportunities for employment and career development;
 - (h) Provide public information, through Audit Reports and other documents, about the quality and academic standards of the educational provision of UGC-funded universities to assist prospective students, employers and other interested parties;
 - (i) Demonstrate that the quality of education provision and academic standards are internationally comparable;
 - (j) Exhibit that universities are committed to continuously improving the quality of their academic programmes, and students are well taught and well supported to ensure that they are able to achieve the expected academic standards; and
 - (k) Provide independent, objective evidence of the quality of academic provision.

6. *Who are the members of the Audit Panel?*

- An Audit Panel normally consists of four members drawn from the QAC's Register of Auditors.
- The Audit Panel has two local auditors with a background in the Hong Kong higher education system and two non-local auditors. One of the non-local auditors will be appointed as Panel Chair to preside over the Panel's activities with a degree of detachment from the UGC-funded universities. QAC also reserves the right to appoint lay members to Audit Panels where it is deemed appropriate.
- The Panel is accompanied by the Audit Coordinator.
- Universities will be informed of the members of their Audit Panels in advance of their audits. Brief biographies of the auditors appointed to the QAC's Register of Auditors can be found at:

<https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/quality/auditors.html>

The QAC Quality Audit Visit

7. *Why have I been chosen to meet the Audit Panel?*

- An Audit Panel meets with a variety of staff and students in groups during the Audit Visit.
- The Audit Panel will identify a number of topics or themes it wishes to discuss, and will seek the university's assistance to identify appropriate representative groups to meet the Audit Panel.
- Stakeholders that the Audit Panel expects to meet include, but are not limited to, the following groups:
 - (a) The Head of University and other senior staff;
 - (b) Staff with responsibility for the management of teaching and learning quality;
 - (c) Staff with involvement in policies relating to the Audit Theme;
 - (d) Academic managers such as faculty deans and heads of departments;
 - (e) A range of teaching staff, both full- and part-time, from different academic disciplines, levels and length of service;

- (f) Academic support staff;
 - (g) A representative range of students, both full- and part-time, from different academic disciplines, including sub-degree, undergraduate, TPg and RPg students; and
 - (h) Other interested parties including employers, recent graduates and representatives of professional associations.
- The outcomes of audits are primarily for the benefit of universities and their students (current and future), and for the Hong Kong higher education sector in general.
 - Through engaging in a dialogue with staff, students and other stakeholders, the Audit Panels aim at assisting the universities to continue to improve the quality of their educational provision and of the student learning experience.

8. *What questions will I be asked?*

- The Audit Panel decides on what questions to ask after they have considered the SERand identified the issues and lines of enquiry they wish to explore.
- At the beginning of each meeting, the Panel Chair outlines the topics to be discussed. If the Audit Panel wishes to pursue very specific lines of enquiry, the Audit Co-ordinator will notify the Institutional Representative so that those attending the meeting can be alerted in advance.
- In general terms –
 - ◆ *Staff* may, for example, be asked to discuss how the university reviews and changes its approach to various teaching and learning policies and procedures and their relative effectiveness in assuring and improving the quality of the student learning experience in both physical and virtual environments.
 - ◆ *Students* may, for example, be asked about various aspects of their learning experience in both physical and virtual environments, such as their opportunity for providing feedback (both on their programmes and on support services and facilities) and what evidence they have that their views are taken seriously and can influence change. They may be asked how clearly

they understand what they are expected to know by the end of a particular study block and how these student learning outcomes are to be assessed; and about the facilities and services available .

- ◆ ***Graduates*** may, for example, be asked in what ways their studies and student experience prepared them for leaving the university (either to pursue their chosen career or to undertake further studies or training); and about their opportunities for interaction with the university since graduation.
- ◆ ***Employers and professional organisation representatives*** may, for example, be asked about their involvement with the university in designing curricula, to ensure that appropriate student learning outcomes were embedded within curricula and demonstrated through student achievement in terms of their relative “fitness for employment”.

9. *Will my comments be made public?*

- Although your comments may be used in general terms to support a particular statement within the Audit Report, ***comments will not be attributable to individuals.***

After the QAC Quality Audit

10. *What will happen after the Audit Visit?*

- The Audit Panel will produce a draft Audit Report, a copy of which will be provided to the university for comment on any factual errors or misinterpretation.
- The university will be invited to submit a brief Institutional Response, which will be appended to the Audit Report.
- QAC and UGC will review the audit findings and raise any concerns with the university.
- Upon endorsement of the Audit Report, UGC will write to the university to confirm the conclusion of the audit process and to convey its comments on the audit outcomes.
- Audit Reports are published in both English and Chinese on the QAC

website. Universities shall also make their reports available on their own websites.

11. *What follow-up actions are required from the universities after the Audit Visit?*

- The university is requested to provide UGC with an Action Plan within three months of the publication of the Audit Report to address the outcomes of the audit with specific reference to the recommendations.
- The Action Plan forms the basis of the university's Progress Report, which will be submitted to QAC for consideration 18 months after the publication of the Audit Report.
- The Progress Report should include further details about the implementation of the Action Plan and information about how the university assesses the effectiveness of its action.

More information

12. *Where can I find more information on the audit process?*

- The QAC website (<https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/index.html>) provides information on QAC and gives access to the QAC Audit Manual of the Third Audit Cycle, which contains full details of the audit process and methodology.
- Please email us at qac_s@ugc.edu.hk if you have any queries.

QAC Secretariat
November 2023