Institutional Review of the

HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE)

Date: 11-15th October 2021 (virtual audit)

Table of Content

1 Introduction

1.1 Goals and Design of the HKU SPACE institutional review

Between October 11-15th 2021 an international review team at the request of the HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) conducted an external quality assurance audit of the institution. The Panel consisted of the following persons:

- Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić (former Head of Higher Education, UNESCO, Senior Advisor to CHEA, Chair, Croatia)
- Peter P. T. Cheung (former Secretary General, University Grants Committee, Hong Kong, and former Executive Director of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ))
- Grahame T. Bilbow (former Director of Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning and Acting Director of E-learning Pedagogical Support Unit, The University of Hong Kong)
- Peter van der Hijden (former head of Higher Education Section, European Commission, Independent Higher Education Policy Advisor, Netherlands)
- Shah Meet Rajesh, (President of the Student Union of HKU SPACE´s International College, Hong Kong)
- Iring Wasser (Managing Director of ASIIN, Panel Secretary, Germany)

The goals of this institutional review and the assignment for the five-member Panel were clearly defined and agreed on beforehand. The review was commissioned with the overarching goal to provide advice as to how HKU SPACE can further mature into a World Class Centre of Excellence in continuing education, life-long learning as well as transnational education using international benchmarking as an analytical tool and device for sustained development in the process.

HKU SPACE and the International Panel developed an Assessment Framework with close reference to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) criteria consisting of the following five assessment areas:

1. Vision, Strategy and Governance
2. Relevance to society
3. Teaching and Learning
4. Quality Assurance
5. Viability

This Assessment Framework contained a number of lead questions for each of the five sections which are enumerated under each of the corresponding sections of this report and to which the Panel provided answers to the best of its ability.

In addition, HKU SPACE requested that the institutional review be conducted based on European standards. Therefore, Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) which governs the requirements for internal QA operations in the European Higher Education Area were the basis of the review's approach. A last minute change regarding the composition of the international review team was introduced. A student representative was added to the group of international reviewers in line with the procedural guidelines of the ESG. Under the section "Quality Assurance", the Panel honoured this request by arriving at a judgement on the compliance level of the Internal Quality Assurance System of HKU SPACE against each of the 10 criteria, which make up part 1 of the ESG.

In the process of evaluating the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) system of HKU SPACE against the ESG, the Panel also decided not to treat "Teaching and Learning" (assessment area 3, see above) as a separate topic but to deal with it and the related research questions as part of the review of the Internal Quality Assurance system.

Furthermore, the Panel was asked for comments on how HKU SPACE´s aspirations may best be benchmarked in the international context. It was also requested to advise on the appropriateness of future regular review cycles to achieve its goals. The Panel considered the issue of International Benchmarking a critical one for the further development of the School. This has been added to and integrated in assessment area 5, now labelled Viability and International Benchmarking.

Last, but not least, HKU SPACE also requested comments on the potential of Lifelong Learning as well as on its scholarly approach to teaching and learning, areas which the Panel addresses under the heading "viability" and "quality assurance, teaching and learning" respectively.

1.2 Framework conditions of this institutional review

The institutional review of HKU SPACE has been conducted at an interesting time and under challenging circumstances for a number of reasons.

As with every higher education institution globally, the operations of HKU SPACE as well as the execution of this review have been heavily affected by the impact of the continuing Pandemic. The Covid-19 crisis in many ways has disrupted teaching and learning activities and resulted in major adjustments regarding its financial management and administration, which the Panel was challenged to evaluate.

It is also worth noting, that in the week of the review, Hong Kong suffered, uncommon for the season, two massive typhoons placing further stress on the institution and its representatives, who managed remarkably well to deal with the associated uncertainties.

Equally important, the review was executed under the "Sword of Damocles" of the pending "Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance", commonly referred as the Cap 320 initiative. Everybody involved clearly sees Cap 320 as a potential game changer regarding the future positioning of self-financing institutions in the private Higher Education market of Hong Kong. Even if the corresponding legal changes have not yet materialized, the Panel tried to evaluate its potential impact on the future development and positioning of HKU SPACE and its relationship with its mother body, The University of Hong Kong (HKU).

Finally, this international review was undertaken in the context of two major reviews of HKU SPACE by the Hong Kong University Grants Committee (the last visit in 2018 and the upcoming one in the fall of 2023) as well as the review by The University of Hong Kong itself in 2019. This international review was, in fact, one of the recommendations of the UGC review. The Panel explicitly acknowledges the findings of these preceding exercises and strive to build on them, following up on the recommendations by their colleagues in the process.

1.3 Conduct and execution of the review

Given the travel, immigration and meeting restrictions of the global pandemic at the time, the original plan to have an on-site face-to-face meeting could not be realized to the great regret of everybody involved. Instead, the contracting parties agreed to conduct a virtual audit in the 41st calendar week of 2021 and the coordinating institution ASIIN, in cooperation with HKU SPACE, proceeded to organize it taking into account the time lag between Europe and Hong Kong.

The visit programme on day 1, October 11th, 2021, included scheduled meetings with the Director of HKU SPACE, Professor William K.M. Lee, members of the Board of Directors, a meeting with HKU Senior Management, discussions with members of the Quality Assurance Committee of HKU SPACE, the Board for Continuing and Professional Education and Lifelong Learning (CPE&LL) as well as the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) of HKU proper.

On October 12th 2021, day 2, the discussions continued with structured interviews involving the group of college heads and associate heads of all academic units and subsequently the administrative units, followed by meetings with senior staff in part-time and full-time program management.

On October 13th, day 3, the focus shifted to discussions with full-time and part-time teachers of HKU SPACE as well as to the interviews with representatives of the student body.

As October 14th proved to be a public holiday in Hong Kong, the review continued on October 15th by discussions of the Panel with the group of external stakeholders, former alumni as well as representatives of the employer side and terminated with an exit meeting with HKU SPACE Senior Management. During this exit meeting, preliminary findings of this External Quality Assurance (EQA) exercise were presented which have been further processed in this report.

The complete visit programme including the name of the interviewees can be found as an appendix to this report.

The Panel finally also agreed that the interviews could be recorded for the sole purpose of facilitating the drafting of its findings and that these recordings will be deleted upon delivery of the final report to HKU SPACE.

1.4 Words of Appreciation

The Panel would like to thank HKU SPACE for the professional conduct of this review under unusual and extraordinary circumstances. The management displayed remarkable flexibility in organizing this international review at very short notice, convening the discussion groups with numerous representatives of all important stakeholder groups with very little advance notice.

The Panel also highly appreciated the quality of the material and data provided to them. The Self-Evaluation Report, a detailed SWOT analysis, as well as a considerable number of informative appendices submitted to the Panel, were comprehensive and well structured. On request, additional material was always quickly provided and open questions answered immediately.

The Panel furthermore appreciated very much the open atmosphere of the discussions and the targeted responses given to all questions, which greatly facilitated its task. The nature of the debate in all discussion rounds has been a clear indicator of the existing quality assurance culture within HKU SPACE and equally of its innate drive to become a world-class institution and render the best services possible to stakeholders.

Last but not least, the Panel would like to thank everybody involved for their contributions, time and effort at a time when Hong Kong had simultaneously to deal with the impact of typhoons and the on-going Covid conditions.

2 Areas of Investigation

2.1. Vision, Strategy, Governance

Vision, Strategy and Governance were identified as the first target area for this international review by the agreed Assessment Framework. The corresponding research questions were as follows:

"What are the institution´s vision, mission, aims and strategy? Are they shared by all stakeholders? How is the institution positioned (internally and externally) to achieve these? How does the institution´s governance, including HR policies and budget allocation, contribute to achieving its vision and mission? Is institutional decision-making organized in such a way that these may be achieved?

In addressing these questions, the Panel is of the opinion that in its Self-Assessment Report and on its website, HKU SPACE presents a well-articulated and compelling Vision, Mission and Values Statement (VMV). The institution "aspires to be a world class centre of excellence for the provision of professional and continuing education in Hong Kong, Mainland China and the region". This VMV statement is based on HKU SPACE´s core values in the pursuit of "innovation, creativity as well as Lifelong Learning for a better future". The Panel notes that an impressive proportion (75%) of HKU SPACE part-time students reportedly holds at least a Bachelor´s degree or above and sees this as testimony to HKU SPACE´s holistic view on education and its aspiration to offer life-long learning for everybody. With the establishment of its "Smart Age Series", the School honours the fact that more than 10% of its enrolment is among the senior age group of 60 years and above.

The vision and mission statement has an important impact on the issue of branding and more than anything else defines and outlines what HKU SPACE aspires to be. During the interviews, the Panel repeatedly inquired among different stakeholder groups what HKU SPACE meant to them, what the institution stood for. It was not surprised to learn that there are widely varying perceptions of the institution´s role and mission. Some refer to HKU SPACE being a "supermarket with the possibility to choose from multiple offers, being sold by friendly shopkeepers in a competitive market". Other interviewees characterize it as an "institution providing valuable pathways to students who otherwise would not articulate to higher education degrees" or they emphasize its role as a "provider of professional higher degrees much in need for the development of Hong Kong society". The Panel finds by contrast, that the HKU SPACE central aspiration to be a world-class centre of excellence for professional and continuing education is less prominently present in the discussions and needs to be communicated more clearly to internal and external stakeholders and the Higher Education community.

As regards the strategic set up and governance structure of HKU SPACE, the review team commends the School on its clear sighted, forward-looking management. The Panel acknowledges that strategic planning is high on the agenda of HKU SPACE leadership and underpinned by suitable instruments. Vital tools for positioning HKU SPACE as a self-financing institution in a competitive market are in place and well implemented. Evidence to this effect can be found in the existence and continuous update of a comprehensive Strategic Plan (currently for the period 2017-2025) underpinned by so-called "Annual Operating Plans" (AOPs), which give a detailed forecast for the next academic year and an outline forecast for the following two years. The AOPs are discussed in meetings of HKU SPACE´s senior management team at the beginning of each year and their implementation is closely monitored. Equally important is the existence of a Compliance Manual as well as an extensive Risk Register in which all areas (currently 10 areas and another 57 subcategories) of concern for the healthy development of the institution are flagged and suitable counter measures identified.

One of the most compelling signs that HKU SPACE is a well-managed institution can be derived from the fact that it managed to come out of the challenging period of the Pandemic almost unscathed. The institution disposes of impressive financial reserves permitting it to survive even during potentially longer periods of adverse conditions while being in a position to provide necessary investments whenever needed. In terms of satisfaction ratings, HKU SPACE consistently can be found among the top providers, stakeholders attribute high scores to its reputation, the quality of its human resource potential and course portfolio.

In the discussion with representatives at all management levels, the Panel witnessed multiple examples of advanced reflection, anticipatory planning and a healthy interactive working relationship within the institution. The various responsibilities within the institution are clearly defined in its Governance Manual. HKU SPACE is thus well prepared to find appropriate answers to the manifold rampant changes in global education markets. Among the most challenging trends figure the continuing diversification of higher education, the heightened competition with new/alternative educational providers, the individualization of educational pathways in combination with the emerging system of micro-credentials, the trend to offer short courses at an advanced level of the local qualifications framework etc.

The Panel is especially impressed with how the planning in connection with the imminent issue of Cap 320 legislation has taken place. Given the potentially far-reaching consequences of the reorganization of the private, self-financing higher education sector in Hong Kong, the leadership and management of HKU SPACE is meticulously preparing itself for all exigencies. In order to define the way forward, the School has been convening important internal and external stakeholders to discuss necessary adaptations to its strategic set up and to find answers on how to best prepare for the epochal changes to come. A joint Taskforce on Cap 320 was proposed at the recent HKU SPACE Board / Management Retreat by a University Director.

While the Panel, generally speaking, sees HKU SPACE well prepared for the future, it equally identifies a number of areas, where further actions and reforms are warranted:

One area of improvement relates to the nature and set-up of communication channels between HKU SPACE and its mother body, "HKU proper" in view of the upcoming Cap 320 legal changes. In spite of the fact that the timeline for their initiation is not completely clear (in the discussions it is predicted that they might materialize as early as late 2022 with a three year transition period), the Panel was somewhat surprised to learn that, thus far, no structured discussion between the two entities have taken place. Instead, both parties are currently preparing separately for all eventualities (the so-called "Plans A" and "B") without being fully aware of the intentions of the other side/partner. In its view, there is a broad range of topics which deserve advance planning and communication, such as suitable governance structures under Cap 320 auspices, a potential need for the review of HKU SPACE´s Memorandum and Articles of Association, its future portfolio as a potentially degree awarding entity or the distribution of market shares in the Greater Bay Area. Other areas for joint deliberation regard the aspects of reputation and branding, areas of intensified cooperation, selection of international partners and financial arrangements and whether this would represent an opportunity to overcome some of the current difficulties HKU SPACE faces because of it not being regarded by the Government as fully self-standing under certain subsidy schemes.

The Panel suggests therefore the establishment of appropriate, direct, high-level communication channels, which exceed the formats in place. The current quarterly meetings of the HKU SPACE Board of Directors Meeting, the interactions in HKU Senate or the more technical cooperation in the Quality Assurance Committee, in the Board for Continuing and Professional Education and Lifelong Learning (CPE&LL) or, for that matter, in the Joint Consultative Committee, are no substitute for targeted consultations and in-depth discussion in view of the manifold challenges described above.

A more pronounced acknowledgment of the remarkable accomplishments of HKU SPACE management in the Panel´s opinion will also contribute to an even more fruitful cooperation between the two partners.

The issue of (international) benchmarking at various levels also deserves heightened attention on the part of HKU SPACE in its strategic quest to become a world class continuing and professional education institution. The Panel takes note of the comment in the report of the Hong Kong University Grants Committee (UGC)´s Quality Assurance Council, which recognized progress made to date in respect of external benchmarking. In spite of the fact that the Panel came across manifold examples of benchmarking initiatives during the review, it equally finds that a comprehensive, integrated benchmarking strategy is currently not fully in place. In order to implement such a strategy, it recommends further clarifying the different notions and dimensions of benchmarking as a means to boost and sustain HKU SPACE's quest to become

a world class centre of excellence. More detailed suggestions to that regard can be found in the concluding parts of this report.

2.2 Relevance to Society

HKU SPACE, in commissioning this review, identified "Relevance to Society" as the second area of investigation. The corresponding research questions put to the expert panel are as follows:

"How does the institution define its goals with regards to societal relevance, both nationally and internationally? Do the activities that the institute employs contribute to achieving these goals?"

The Panel finds ample evidence that HKU SPACE is of great relevance to Hong Kong society and beyond:

The institution offers a vast array of different part-time and (since the year 2000) also full-time study programmes on practically all levels of the HK Qualifications Framework for multiple purposes and different groups of students in Hong Kong and Mainland China. Altogether, this year more than 1,000 programmes are on offer, with around 350 of them belonging to the category of formal award bearing courses. The impressive portfolio of educational offerings includes a broad range of professional programmes, articulation programmes as well as programmes and courses for the purpose of personal development.

The nature of the School´s massive intake of students (reportedly over 20,000 full-time equivalents each year) is equally a sign of its deep anchoring in, and relevance to, Hong Kong. Students of all age groups and educational/professional backgrounds, ranging from high school graduates to high calibre business corporates and executives from Hong Kong and Mainland China, are enrolled at altogether 10 learning centres in Hong Kong and 5 additional ones in Mainland China.

Other available data further support the institution´s prominent and privileged positioning in HK society. HKU SPACE has been unquestionably the longest established and most important provider of part time courses in Hong Kong. Its Community College, established in the year 2000, is considered a strong force in fulfilling government's requests to increase the participation rates of HK secondary school graduates in advanced studies. HKU SPACE offers a substantial number of two-year sub-degree programmes, namely vocational Higher Diplomas and well as academic Associate Degrees. The latter, while standalone academic awards, serve as articulation pathways to local and international universities and degrees on upper levels of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework. In addition, the School also offers a one-year Diploma in Foundation Studies, designed to assist high school graduates who do not manage to pass the entry requirements of these Associate Degrees and Higher Diplomas.

HKU SPACE has also managed remarkably well to counteract the impact of a steep decline in the school-leaving cohort witnessed after 2013, continuously contributing its share to increase educational opportunities for the young generation in Hong Kong in line with government aspirations.

HKU SPACE´s (virtual) International College for its part adds further societal value by providing cherished opportunities for its Community College graduates to obtain international academic degrees based mainly on Strategic International Partnerships with a small number of respected universities mainly in the United Kingdom but increasingly also in Australia. The extent of Transnational Education (TNE) has considerably increased over the past thirty years. Currently there are more than 4,300 students enrolled in TNE programmes at HKU SPACE, including 500 full-time students progressing from sub-degree programmes, with the remainder being part-time students.

The educational and societal relevance of HKU SPACE extends beyond Hong Kong, as students in the Greater Bay Area and other parts of Mainland China equally benefit from the broad range of educational services on offer. The establishment of the Institute for China Business and the Senior Executive Academy in 2010 and 2019 respectively offering executive programmes as well as postgraduate diplomas to students in Mainland China and to corporates of HK and Mainland companies in promising business areas attests to this.

HKU SPACE´s societal relevance is also vested in its vast networks and intensive community links. An important institutional outcome of this symbiosis is HKU SPACE Po Leung Kuk Stanley Ho Community College (HPSHCC), the joint venture with a prominent charitable, education and social welfare body. HPSHCC is providing important educational opportunities to Hong Kong society. Extensive collaboration of HKU SPACE's subject groups with various community stakeholder organizations providing much needed work placement opportunities completes the picture. In addition, the School is also a member of a number of Chambers of Commerce, such as the Hong Kong General Chamber as well as the British, Australian, Canadian and US Chambers.

The most direct expression of the School´s relationship with the community is its Honorary Fellowship Scheme, which annually provides a small number of honorary fellowship awards in recognition of individuals who have contributed to the community, to the School or life-long learning.

The Panel finally also takes into consideration the results of recent survey results (Image Survey on Hong Kong Continuing Education Providers) exploring the level of awareness of continuing education providers, the perception of its status/image and its competitive position in the HKSAR. In all of these categories, HKU SPACE continues to sustain a leading position among CE Providers, thus attesting to its relevance to Hong Kong society.

While HKU SPACE´s societal relevance cannot be underestimated and has to be highly commended, the Panel nevertheless, in discussion with various stakeholder groups, identifies a number of areas to which HKU SPACE´s leadership should pay heightened attention.

The Panel note of repeated concerns voiced especially by senior management representatives of HKU SPACE during the interviews that there is a perceived bias to focus exclusively on programmes and courses with a high return of investment, while side-lining other educational offerings that may be equally valuable but generate less income. On occasions, the incubation and nourishment of educational offerings that might be of value to the HK community yet whose short-term return of investment is considered not lucrative enough, may therefore not materialize. Supplementary material provided to the Panel explained that some 40% of programmes are loss making and subsidised by surplus generating programmes while Recognition of Prior Learning activities are also reported to be loss making. The Panel nevertheless encourages HKU SPACE leadership to continuously examine how the tension between market needs, the drive for excellence and service to the community can best be resolved and managed.

Greater societal impact is also potentially linked to the planned strategic expansion in the Greater Bay Area, whose design further needs to be negotiated with HKU proper. The same applies to the impact of Cap 320 legislation and its repercussions for the future portfolio and legal standing of HKU SPACE.

2.3. Teaching and Learning

Teaching mode, pedagogic approaches, support for teachers

Are teaching and learning organised in such a way that they contribute to the vision and aims of the institution? How do the study programmes reflect the institutional mission and goals? Does the institution promote a student-centred and flexible approach to teaching and learning? How does the institution support students? How is the feasibility of the programmes ensured and promoted? Is student assessment aligned with teaching and learning as well as with the institutional aims?

Regarding this third area of investigation with the corresponding research questions part of the Assessment Framework, the Panel has decided in favour of integrating their answers and findings as part of the subsequent point "quality assurance".

Teaching and learning, as well as human resources, the qualifications and further training of university staff are, after all, integral parts of the European Standards and Guidelines. The subsequent compliance check of the School´s Internal Quality Assurance System consequently contains the findings of the Panel related to this bullet point.

2.4 Quality Assurance – Compliance of HKU SPACE Internal Quality Assurance System with the European Standards and Guidelines

How does the institution ascertain that its goals and mission are achieved? How does the institution monitor progress and improvement on various levels? What does the institutional quality assurance policy consist of? Does the institution involve all relevant stakeholders in Quality Assurance? Is QA aligned between all organisational levels? How does the institution ensure that its educational programmes are of the intended level and quality?

Approaching the issue of quality assurance, the Panel has opted in favour of a two-fold approach. On the one hand, it engaged in a compliance check against each of the 10 criteria of the European Standards and Guidelines, part 1. At the same time, it did not conduct a classical QA review, going into every single aspect of the vast and complex HKU SPACE Internal Quality Assurance setup.

This balancing act is a result of the Panel´s recognition that HKU SPACE has been regularly reviewed and extensively audited in the course of recent years. It is happy to note the findings of a number of reviews by the Hong Kong University Grants Committee (UGC) Quality Assurance Council (QAC), the last of which took place in 2017/2018 targeting the quality of the HKU SPACE's sub-degree programmes. As part of the recommendations of that review, HKU proper conducted its own additional review in 2019. Further external quality assurance exercises have been conducted by the Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC) as well as the United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) on a number of transnational partnership programmes.

The Panel sees limited value in duplicating these efforts, reiterating in the process the findings of these thorough External Quality Assurance exercises. From reports provided to the Panel, it is satisfied that recommendations from these reviews have been implemented with a high degree of professionalism. The Panel, after conducting the onsite virtual review and talking to all stakeholder groups, is nevertheless pleased to comment in a more general fashion on the compliance level with the European Standards and Guidelines Part 1 as well as on the maturity level of QA arrangements of the institution. Simultaneously, it follows up on the deficiencies identified in recent reviews while signalling areas of improvement, which deserve further attention in their opinion.

ESG Criterion 1.1: "Policy for Quality Assurance"

<u>Standard:</u> Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

The ESG guidelines reflect the notion "that policies and processes are the main pillars of a coherent institutional quality assurance system ideally forming a cycle for continuous improvement and contributing to the accountability of the institution. It supports the development of quality culture in which all internal stakeholders assume responsibility for quality and engage in quality assurance at all levels of the institution. In order to facilitate this, the policy has a formal status and is publicly available".

The Panel endorses the general finding of prior reviews that HKU SPACE disposes of a well-functioning, comprehensive, long-standing centralized QA system formally institutionalized in the year 2000. Relevant policies, procedures, criteria and the assignment of responsibilities are clearly defined. They have been published in various documents such as the Quality Assurance Manual, the Quality Assurance Booklet as well as the QA Manual for Full-time Sub-degree programmes.

The Panel furthermore attests a common understanding of quality assurance measures and the existence of a participatory quality assurance culture linked to the strategic management and development of the institution. A common understanding of vital elements of HKU SPACE's quality assurance culture among internal and external stakeholder groups is noted, quality assurance measure and policies are concisely implemented, monitored and revised, feedback loops are closed. It also notes that all staff are required to sign an annual compliance declaration that they are familiar with the Compliance Manual, which is a compilation of the School´s various handbooks, guidelines and policies.

HKU SPACE thus is found to be in compliance with the corresponding standard and guidelines of this ESG criterion.

ESG Criterion 1.2 "Design and Approval of Programmes" in combination with ESG 1.9 "On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes".

Standard (1.2): Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Standard (1.9): Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

The Panel combines these two standards of the ESG under this section as they logically belong together. It recognizes the advanced level of HKU SPACE´s Internal Quality Assurance System, which has matured over time and displays evidence of a quality assurance culture focusing on quality enhancement. An impressive example is the programme validation process related to the initiation of all new award-bearing programmes at HKU SPACE, in which internal and external stakeholders are involved on a regular basis as a matter of policy for input to curriculum design. The same applies to the organisation of the cyclical 6-year reviews to modernize running programmes. The institution undertakes on a regular basis comprehensive annual planning processes, market analyses and on frequent occasions consult with professional bodies and other stakeholder groups, seeking input for the design and modernization of educational offerings.

The Panel is aware of the fact that the quality of HKU SPACE programmes is following the same quality assurance design as its mother body, HKU proper. HKU staff and educational/QA committees play a significant role in establishing and monitoring the quality of HKU SPACE programme´s design, approval, delivery and their periodic review. Subject groups on a routine basis prepare outline submission for new programme proposals; in a typical year, around 80 new programmes at HKQF Level 4 and above are launched. Before their initiation, they are first discussed in the respective college/institute boards, before passing to HKU SPACE´s School Academic and Management Board, followed by a discussion in the Joint Consultative Committee of HKU and HKU SPACE for award-bearing programmes. Proposals then go to the CPE&LL Board for final approval. The Panel concurs that the symbiotic relationship between HKU and HKU SPACE exerts a substantial, positive influence on quality assurance in HKU SPACE.

Work in progress is still the overall assessment of achieved learning outcomes (LO) at the programme level. While suitable instruments have been implemented monitoring the achievement of learning outcomes at the level of individual courses and modules, a complementary

mechanism at programme level has only commenced in a systematic manner in the last year. The Panel therefore reserves its final judgement as the impact of this measure is not completely clear.

Overall, it finds HKU SPACE in compliance with the ESG Criterion 1.2 "Design and Approval of Programmes" as well as ESG 1.9 "Ongoing Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes".

ESG criterion 1.3 "Student Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment"

Standard: Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

The Panel confirms that two key pedagogic approaches, i.e. an Outcome-based Approaches to Student Learning (OBASL) and Criterion-Referenced Assessment (CRA), are well established and implemented at HKU SPACE. They equally note that the related concepts are understood and operationalised at all levels from Senior Management through teachers to students themselves.

Regarding **OBASL,** the Panel, in its discussions with relevant stakeholders, came across encouraging examples of how teaching staff at HKU SPACE have been introduced to the theoretical underpinnings of this approach (e.g. Bloom´s taxonomy) and how they are working hard to implement and foster active, student-centred learning trying to encourage critical thinking in their classes. The Panel salutes and encourages these efforts. It recognizes that delivering high quality teaching and learning experiences is a work in progress, and welcomes even more efforts to further enhance active learning. It also finds, that the experience of being required to teach online during the Covid-19 pandemic has helped many staff to find ways to make their teaching more engaging, served as a catalyst for staff members to become more innovative in their teaching styles, exploiting the many features of the new modes of teaching and learning. The Panel acknowledges that, during this period, considerable support has been provided by HKU SPACE to boost interaction and dialogue between teachers and students, and staff have been instructed in how to use different "activating functions" (e.g. using the polling function on Zoom, letting other students "draw over" the screen to show their understanding, asking them to keep on their cameras). It recognizes the positive impact of the Maisy Ho Centre for Teaching and Learning in supporting these developments. The Panel nevertheless suggests that HKU SPACE reinforces its support for all activities ensuring that interactive, student-centred learning and teaching become the norm for all educational offerings.

As regards the learning experiences of students in HKU SPACE´s International College, the Panel suggests that their educational experience can and should be improved in one respect. In its opinion, there is a clear need to provide a real international learning environment for its

students, who comment that they do not have sufficient interaction with their counterparts at collaborating foreign universities, instead mainly interacting among themselves.

Outcome based assessment is a definite strength of HKU SPACE. The Panel found conclusive evidence that the assessment system rests on a broad range of different types of assessment. The fact that assessment rubrics are in place on a systematic level attests to the finding that the achievement of course learning outcomes is taken seriously and that the assessment system is of an advanced nature.

The Panel finds HKU SPACE in compliance with Criterion 1.3: Student Centred Learning, Teaching, and Assessment. The learning experience of students in the International College deserves some further attention, as mentioned above.

ESG 1.4 "Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification"

Standard: Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

The Panel commends the School for being an inclusive educational institution with fair and transparent admission criteria, striving to provide multiple qualification channels to students from various educational backgrounds.

It equally commends the institution on its efforts to coordinate the learning outcomes of associate degree and higher diploma programmes in order to smoothen the articulation of its graduates to Bachelor degrees in collaborating universities, thereby facilitating the recognition of prior learning and the access to higher semesters of partner universities.

Regarding student progression, drop-out rates and the deviation from standard periods of study, student success within HKU SPACE reportedly is closely monitored. Students in the interviews were generally satisfied with their educational experiences; the same conclusion can be derived from pertinent survey results. The School has put in place both processes and tools to collect, monitor and action on information on student progression. Student cohorts are generally progressing and graduating in time.

The Panel has no further comments and attests compliance with this ESG criterion.

ESG Criterion 1.5 Teaching Staff

Standard: Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

As regards the quality and further training of Teaching Staff, the Panel takes note of the current composition and boundary conditions of staff recruitment of HKU SPACE´s Staff. Compared to the staff composition of HKU proper, which disposes of a more pronounced international background, HKU SPACE academic staff are mainly recruited locally from Hong Kong and Mainland China. A further characteristic is linked to the fact that HKU SPACE employs a very high proportion of part-time staff, mainly from industry, which is a strength and a challenge at the same time.

The School relies on an extensive network of around 2,000 part-time teachers, close to 300 of whom have advanced to the position of Adjunct Lecturer after proving their teaching competence over a period of time. Part-time lecturers are appointed by the Colleges and Institutes, the appointment process being centrally monitored .

Normally, at least a Master's degree or professional qualifications in the subjects of the programmes are required. No teaching qualification is needed as a prerequisite to assume a teaching position at the School (in common with most other providers). Coming from industry per se counts as an important professional qualification. Against this background, the Panel endorses the institution´s plans to employ more full-time teachers, the recruitment of full-time teachers being flagged as one the institution's strategic priorities.

The Panel notes the importance of the Training and Staff Development Committee, which plays a crucial role in the School´s quest to upgrade the qualification level of its teaching staff. It also acknowledges that HKU SPACE provides multiple offers and incentive systems for the professional development of its staff. The School has accordingly implemented a staff discount scheme for courses offered by its Colleges and financial support is given for approved internal and external programmes. Further subsidies for upgrading their academic awards are granted, though in discussion, some of the interviewees expressed their wish that a greater proportion than the current amount of up to HKD30,000 per staff per year for Bachelor, Master and Ph.D. degrees be taken on by HKU SPACE.

Manifold offers for professional development are furthermore provided by the Maisy Ho Centre for Teaching and Learning that plays an important role in upgrading the qualification profile of the staff. An important tool in this regard is the compulsory Continuing Personal and Professional Development (CPD) scheme, which requires a minimum of 15 hours of approved activity in a two-year cycle for academic staff. All academic and administrative staff who complete 30 hours, and for support staff 20 hours of CPD, are entitled to receive a CPD award. While staff training is obligatory for full-time staff, it is voluntary for part-time staff who however are arguably in greater need of pedagogic and other support.

The Panel also commends the School for institutionalizing other incentive schemes such as the "Outstanding Teacher Awards" (5 for each part-time College/Institute, 10 for the Community College). In their discussions with staff, it learned that there is a pronounced wish to profit from more challenging research opportunities and schemes. Examples in case are the desire to function as co-investigators on research projects, and to have greater access to funding opportunities from the Research Grants Committee. The Panel supports this, especially in relation to pedagogical research and the scholarship of teaching and learning.

It also notes that there are additional internal QA assurance mechanisms in place related to upholding and upgrading the quality of teaching at HKU SPACE. One important instrument consists of scheduled visits to teaching lessons on the part of senior staff as an internal control mechanism. If the record of staff in pertinent performance reviews is satisfactory, the monitoring visit can be skipped.

The Panel recommends a change of perspective in this regard. Peer mentorship should be regarded as a development tool rather than primarily a monitoring device. The continuous professional improvement of less experienced colleagues is a key to institutional enhancement. It suggests that more robust peer mentorship be provided (including a measure of peer observation) along with regular showcasing of good practice. The Panel believes that these measures will be instrumental in further developing teachers' competence, especially in the case of part-time teachers with little experience of teaching.

The Panel recognises the efforts of HKU SPACE in closely monitoring and evaluating teachers' performance by means of "Learning Experience Surveys" (LES). The collective performance is also an integral part of so-called Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs), around 350 of which are compiled on an annual basis by the responsible Academic Committees.

In the discussion with stakeholders during the audit, the Panel received mixed signals regarding whether these LES are formative or purely judgemental in nature. Against this background, it suggests that this instrument could be complemented by qualitative supplementary measures such as regular and structured dialogues with students, peers and managers, triangulating comments and findings from the LES as a contribution to the enhancement of teaching quality in the process.

The Panel furthermore recommends looking more closely into the issue of exchange programmes for teaching staff with international partnering providers, e.g. on the level of transnational education. It considers such a strategy to be a good investment in view of the institutions quest to become a world-class education centre of continuing education on upper levels of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework.

Irrespective of these recommendations, the Panel finds HKU SPACE in compliance with this ESG criterion.

> **ESG Criterion 1.6 Learning Resources and Student Support**
>
> Standard: Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.

The ESG guidelines for this criterion note, that for a good higher education experience, institutions provide a broad range of resources to assist student learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries, study facilities and IT infrastructure to human support in the form of tutors, counsellors and other advisers.

As regards the physical infrastructure, HKU SPACE´s courses and programmes are offered in 10 HK downtown learning centres usually located near central MTR stations, 70% of which are owned and 30% on a leasing arrangement. They dispose of teaching rooms of different sizes as well as specialist facilities such as computer labs. The HKU University Campus provides to some extent also larger theatres for lectures and events such as graduation. HKU SPACE staff and students also can use the library and some research facilities of HKU against payment of a fee. HKU SPACE has 8 major support units providing services to the academic programmes, namely units for Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Registry Affairs, Accommodation and Facilities, Research and e-Learning, Institutional Advancement (Media, Alumni, Branding, Promotion), Finance, Human Resources and Information Technology Services. The quality of these services is regularly monitored by surveys among stakeholders.

The Panel takes note of the impressive financial reserves of HKU SPACE and its long-standing record of generating surpluses while providing the necessary investments for upgrading the quality of educational experience within the institution.

Significant progress has been made in upgrading the physical infrastructure with the Pandemic serving as a catalyst. The equipment within classrooms and laboratories in the School's learning centres has been modernized in order to facilitate the surge in online connectivity, as well as the associated training costs. With the pandemic, classes were successfully shifted to online video conferencing platforms, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Adobe Connect.

The Panel commends the School for its massive investments in response to the Pandemic and the drive to switch to virtual forms of teaching. More than 20 Million HK Dollars are reported as investment during the past two years alone. It also commends HKU SPACE for providing grants of 2,000 HKD of financial support to every full-time HK student for the provision of modern IT and to aid the additional costs required for switching to online formats of teaching and learning in accordance with the School´s Strategy for E-Learning and Technology.

The implementation of SOUL (SPACE Online Universal Learning) 2.0 as a moodle-based platform for scheduling of courses, dialogue between teacher and student, uploading and down-

loading teaching and learning materials used during lectures, has been instrumental in up-grading the quality of teaching and learning. The current version of the app is reportedly a huge improvement on what it was. The Panel positively notes that induction days are orga-nized on a regular basis to familiarize students with using the app. The Panel learns that the SOUL 2.0 system will be moved to a cloud based support basis in early 2022 and this is also expected to lead to improved service quality.

Noting all these advances in technology, the Panel, as a result of its interviews during the au-dit, concludes that the user interface needs to be updated in order to clearly show students what everything does with a simplification of the buttons. It appears that lack of regular up-dates is causing the app to suffer from easily solvable bugs and the consequential issues faced by students and teachers alike include the app crashing unexpectedly and lagging.

On a more positive note, the Panel notes, that both full-time and part-time teachers are pro-vided with adequate support as well as bilingual training so that they were well versed with the apps and have a strong understanding of the relevant platforms. Students are generally satisfied with the quality of their staff and the administrative support provided by the School.

Overall, the Panel sees the School in compliance with this ESG criterion. The institution dis-poses of enough financial power to be adequately prepared for future challenges. The biggest problem in Hong Kong is space not money. As HKU SPACE does not currently have its own campus, it has to do with learning centres spread across the city and in Mainland China.

ESG Criterion 1.7. Information Management

Standard: Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

The Panel notes that HKU SPACE has a comprehensive information and QA management sys-tem in place generating and providing sufficient data on the macro-level. This data is instru-mental in effectively managing the institution, positioning the School in a competitive local and international education market, informing strategic decision making and feeding into cor-responding SWOT analysis or measuring the achievement of Key Performance Indicators as part of its Risk Register.

At the same time, the information system generates important data for the further develop-ment of the institution´s courses and programmes, for organising its learning resource and student support, for monitoring the performance and satisfaction of teacher and students alike and for monitoring the educational and career paths of its graduates. The challenge at hand is the same for any Higher Education Institution: given the abundance of data generated by multiple devices, how can an Internal QA system best process this data?

The Panel positively notes that HKU SPACE in July 2021 has reacted by establishing a Quality Analytics Team as part of its Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit.

The Panel sees the School in compliance with this ESG criterion.

ESG Criterion 1.8 Public Information

Standard: Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

In the opinion of the expert team, HKU SPACE provides sufficient information to its stakeholders regarding its portfolio and activities.

Regarding its more than 1,000 programmes offered annually, the biannual Spring and Autumn Prospectus gives a clear overview with all relevant information. This includes the selection criteria and learning outcomes/competence profiles for the programmes they offer, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures they use, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students as well as graduate employment information.

The Panel finds compliance with this ESG criterion.

ESG Criterion 1.10 Cyclical External Quality Assurance

Standard: Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

The fact that HKU SPACE has undergone and undergoes multiple reviews especially in recent years has been mentioned in earlier parts of this report. HKU SPACE is on track, using more and more external reviews on a regular basis for the purpose of institutional development. The latest step in this regard is the commissioning of this International Panel for the conduct of this institutional review. In 2023, there will be another review of the UGC QAC, which will have a closer look at the quality of all HKU SPACE's programmes. The Panel acknowledges that the findings of External Quality Assurance review teams are looked upon seriously and that appropriate steps are being taken to follow up on recommendations and requirements.

While the School is organizing QA on the level of study programmes under the umbrella of HKU QA system, external accreditation by independent international quality assurance agencies, externalizing the quality assurance schemes of HKU proper, is currently still underdeveloped.

There are some exceptions to this general finding in as much as the experts witness examples of accreditation by external professional bodies or by institutions such as the UK Quality As-

surance Agency looking into the quality of some of the transnational quality assurance arrangements and programmes. The Panel encourages the management of HKU SPACE to consider international accreditation and certification as an important step in its international benchmarking strategy and its quest to become a world-class centre for continuing education. The topic is also related to the issue of student subsidy and to the automatic recognition of credits in support of smooth articulation pathways.

While the overall impression is positive as to the maturity of HKU SPACE´s internal quality assurance mechanisms, the Panel nevertheless stresses the new and heightened possibilities of QA measures in the virtual world. Quality Assurance can now take place almost on a daily level (checking e.g. the quality of teachers as well as gathering student feedback) instead of waiting until the end of a semester to monitor and act. As regards the i-graduate Survey, the expert group would appreciate clarification as to how it has been instrumental in initiating educational and administrative reforms at HKU SPACE.

Overall, the Panel finds compliance with this ESG criterion.

2.5 Viability – the role of International Benchmarking

Is the institution viable in light of expected developments, demands, threats and opportunities present in its internal and external environment?

The Panel, due to travel restrictions, has not been able to visit the institution and its facilities in person. The information provided, including a ten-minute video about the impressive development of the institutions since its establishment as Department of Extra Mural Studies back in 1957 and its transformation into the School of Professional and Continuing Education in 1992, attest to the viability of HKU SPACE and its potential for future development. This impression has been reinforced by the feedback from its discussion rounds with all stakeholder groups.

The Panel sees the institution well positioned in its local and international context. The School is a well-functioning institution with a very qualified, committed, entrepreneurial leadership and management with a clear vision on the future direction of the institution.

An important asset for the future viability of the School is the existence of a well-established internal Quality Assurance system, which is fit for purpose and living up to international QA requirements as exemplified by its compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines. Most importantly, HKU SPACE has managed to develop not only an internal QA system, but also a quality assurance culture among its ranks geared towards continuous improvement and innovation. The fact that currently the new Quality Analytics Team is established as part of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit will support this positive trend.

One of the strongest assets of HKU SPACE is the existence of an extensive Alumni network with more than 300,000 entries at this stage. This strong alumni database serves multiple purposes beneficial to the further development of HKU SPACE: with the delivery of a lifelong learner card connected to the formal membership as alumni the School increases the marketability of its course portfolio. In addition, it promotes donations further increasing its financial viability. There certainly is also a strong connection to the recruiting of suitable human resources on all levels.

In terms of financial viability, HKU SPACE disposes of substantial financial resources and impressive reserves. Of considerable importance in terms of income is the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), whereby the government reimburses up to 20,000 HKD per student on approved courses. HKU SPACE with some 2,000 courses and modules in this category has an impressive market share of 28.5%. On the downside, currently students of the School are not eligible for grants for self-financed top up degrees as well as for the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP). On balance however, HKU SPACE is clearly operating under very healthy economic conditions with considerable financial internal and external monitoring systems in place. There is bi-weekly scrutiny by the School Academic and Management Board constantly checking income versus forecasts; external auditing was provided by Pricewaterhouse Coopers.

In terms of resources, money is not an issue; rather space and the lack of a home campus in addition to its currently 15 Hong Kong and Mainland learning centres spread across the city and Mainland China. The Panel members wondered why the HKU SPACE Po Leung Kuk Stanley Ho Community College (HPSHCC) cannot serve as a campus for the future. They are informed that this is not really an option, as HPSHCC is a separate legal entity. The campus is on PLK land and in fact only has a capacity to sustain about 2,500 full-time students. Under the joint venture agreement, HKU SPACE can however use of the campus in the evenings and weekends.

Regarding the viability of Human Resources, the School disposes of a large network of committed and qualified predominantly part-time staff and has managed to deal effectively with the challenges of the ongoing pandemic. The recruitment of more full-time teachers as a strategic priority will be a necessary step in the future to fulfil its promise to be one of the premier academic institutions in Hong Kong and the region. This will even more be necessary in case that HKU SPACE under Cap 320 potentially develops into a fully-fledged private university offering degree-awarding programmes also on higher levels of the HK Qualifications Framework on a regular basis.

The viability of an institution is closely connected to its reputation in the market. There is ample evidence that HKU SPACE is highly respected and has a very good reputation and standing. This is one of the most important assets for its continuing and future success. While acknowl-

edging its excellent performance record and appreciation of its services in the local and international higher education market, it is equally clear that it also profits from the radiance and importance of the HKU proper brand. The symbiosis of the mother body with HKU SPACE is one of the cornerstones of past and future success. It is equally true that HKU SPACE needs to further invest in boosting its own branding and define more clearly, in which areas it wants to expand under Cap 320 auspices. The same applies to its expansion to Mainland China and in particular the Greater Bay Area, given the fact that Hong Kong´s highly competitive education market with a population of only 7 million is limited.

The Panel considers a clear and comprehensive International Benchmarking strategy as yet another important element to sustain the School's claim to be a hub for world-class education in the future. Currently the School as a response to this challenge has joined the i-graduate survey on a biennial basis to compare student feedback across a range of factor with universities internationally. In addition, the School organizes an International Conference on Quality and Self-financed Higher Education "Connecting Local and Global", which is scheduled on a biennial basis to learn from international best practice, new ideas and developments. Last but not least, the School has commissioned this very international review.

The Panel acknowledges these developments but sees value in defining a comprehensive benchmarking strategy with different dimensions by HKU SPACE as a serious long-term commitment.

A first dimension, which is readily achievable, is to accept that benchmarking starts at home, even if the ultimate objective is international. No doubt HKU SPACE aspires to achieving academic standards equivalent or comparable to those of its mother body, the HKU proper, and the Panel understands that this is the rationale in claiming that all HKU SPACE programmes and awards are quality-assured and acknowledged 'within the HKU system'. Given the status and reputation of HKU both locally and internationally, it is safe to assume that by strictly aligning standards with its mother body, which supposedly has done a good degree of benchmarking with the best institutions and best practices around the world, HKU SPACE will be able to, by this step, categorically say that the groundwork for international benchmarking is already in place. However, to convince the public and its stakeholders, the Panel is of the opinion that an official statement of intent from both HKU proper and HKU SPACE as to the exact status of HKU SPACE programmes and awards should be in order. In actual practice, the Panel expects this to operate as an additional driver for continually enhanced quality and stringent Quality Assurance at both ends, in HKU SPACE in particular.

A second dimension relates to looking systematically into the possibilities and the potential of undergoing international benchmarking by recognized international accreditors and external quality assurance agencies in preparing for the future positioning of the School. They bring to the table modern cross-national qualification frameworks and competence profiles, against which HKU SPACE´s intended and achieved course and programme-learning outcomes will be

measured. In its discussion with stakeholders, the Panel learns that some of HKU SPACE´s pro-grammes are already submitted to professional bodies for external recognition in areas like accountancy, law, nursing and medical laboratory services on a case-by-case basis. With HKCAAVQ, there is an interface regarding the entry of a small number of around 20 non-local programmes in the HK Qualifications Register and some 2,000 courses eligible for the govern-ment´s Continuing Education Fund. The Panel equally understands that an internal qualifica-tions framework is reportedly in place with the Registry Affairs Unit in cooperation with the Qualifications Framework Working Group vetting qualifications against this internal QM framework.

The current approaches in its view are however no substitute for a routine external recogni-tion procedure by an independent QA body, especially if the School will acquire degree award-ing powers in the future. It is worth noting that this strategy is currently also used by the emerging private higher education sector in China offering new professional degrees on the Bachelor and Master level.

External accreditation of programmes and certification of LLL modules (i.e. Certificate for Modules eligible for the Government's Continuing Education Fund), short courses, and other forms of continuing education will also provide the bridge to formal higher education and for the recognition of academic credentials in the future. This is all the more important in view of the emergence of international qualification frameworks based on micro-credentials and the perspective of more individualized and heterogeneous learning pathways in the near future. In Europe, this qualification framework for micro-credentials will be passed in December of this year, with other continents, including Asia, certainly following suit. HKU SPACE already provides multiple educational offerings on practically all levels of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework. In view of potentially becoming a degree awarding institution in the future under Cap 320, this line of action will become essential for HKU SPACE´s quest to become a world-class institution of continuing education across the entire educational value chain.

A third dimension of a comprehensive benchmarking system relates to benchmarking exer-cises in a group of educational providers of a comparable nature to learn from international best practice. The Panel does not accept the line of argument that HKU SPACE is rather unique in its set up and operations and points to comparable alliances of groups of Higher Education Institutions on a global level. The Panel positively notes during the discussions that within the Quality Assurance management of HKU SPACE some preliminary ideas about a Transactional Quality Network involving renowned overseas partners are presented to that regard and are in the process of being developed. It encourages the School´s leadership further pursuing this venue. An interesting facet in this discussion and context is the development of a new genre of "European universities", large networks of national institutions, which cooperate in provid-ing international degrees by pooling their resources and combining their strengths. By the year 2025, the forecast predicts the existence of around 60 European universities of that sort. The

Panel sees potential of HKU SPACE developing similar models in its international benchmarking alliances.

A fourth dimension would be to relate precisely to chosen benchmarks. There are readily available 'barometers' such as the i-graduate exercise but more specifically the School might identify institutions or practices to benchmark against by deliberate and informed choice. Here, the Panel recommends systematically looking into best practice across the entire range of applications starting with the area of curriculum development, the assessment of learning outcomes by external examiners, the optimization of recruitment processes and so forth.

A fifth dimension involves taking a leadership role and setting high standards for oneself, using examples from elsewhere as appropriate. Given the leading status of HKU SPACE and its comparative maturity as an institution in the self-financing lifelong learning sector, it is possible for the School to set goals of excellence beyond current levels, then to achieve them and promote them, thus locking herself in a continuous effort to do better. This might sound a tall order; but the Panel is optimistic that given time and due efforts, HKU SPACE, while striving to measure up to these best standards, will be benchmarked against or followed by others. If that becomes the case, it is all the more worthwhile for the institution to be holding professional seminars periodically in Hong Kong or elsewhere, to further promote the idea and the standards, for both local and international communities.

3 Summary of Recommendations

While the Panel has gathered evidence and concludes that HKU SPACE has a strong base to build on and promising potential of further developing into a World Class Centre of Excellence in Continuing Education, Life Long Learning and Transnational Education, it has compiled the following list of recommendations to assist the School in this endeavour.

The Panel recommends:

- that HKU SPACE´s central aspiration to be a world-class centre of excellence for professional and continuing education be communicated more clearly to internal and external stakeholders and the Higher Education community.
- that suitable, direct, high-level communication channels exceeding the format in place to deal with the upcoming challenges mentioned in this report be established, while acknowledging the remarkable accomplishments of HKU SPACE management in a more pronounced way.
- that HKU SPACE leadership continuously examines and calibrates how the tension between market needs, the drive for excellence and service to the community can best be resolved and managed.

- that support and training to establish proactive training for distance learning, teaching in a hybrid mode and how to engage students to become active learners and critical thinkers, be reinforced.

- that the learning experience of students in HKU SPACE´s International College be improved by providing a real international learning environment for its students.

- that a greater proportion of full-time staff members be hired.

- that research opportunities for HKU SPACE staff be provided along the lines described in this report.

- that an increase in the financial support for the tuition/enrolment costs for Bachelor, Master and Ph.D. degrees of its employees be considered.

- that a more robust peer mentorship and regular showcasing of good practice for the further development of teachers competences be established.

- that systematic attention be devoted to modern pedagogical research and informed pedagogical training.

- that the "Learning Experience Surveys" instrument be complemented by qualitative supplementary measures such as regular and structured dialogues with students, peers and managers, triangulating comments and findings from these LES as a contribution to the enhancement of teaching quality.

- that the issue of exchange programmes for teaching staff with international partners be looked into.

- that renewed attention be devoted to the smooth operationalization of the SOUL 2.0 system, which will move to a cloud based support basis in early 2022.

In terms of upgrading its already mature Internal and External QA systems, the Panel recommends:

- Looking into the new and heightened possibilities of real time QA measure in the virtual world.

In terms of International Benchmarking the Panel recommends:

- Developing a comprehensive, long-term benchmarking strategy along the five dimensions identified in this report.

Appendix: Virtual Visit Programme (11 – 15 October 2021)

International Quality Review - HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education

Session	Time		Meeting	Participants [Capacity/Committee Memberships/Other information]	
	Europe	Hong Kong			
Day 1 (11 October 2021, Monday)					
1	0900	1500	Panel Private Meeting		
2	1015	1615	Meet Director	Professor William LEE	Director
3	1045	1645	Meet Members of Board of Directors (9)	Professor Edward CHEN	Board of Directors Chairman
				Professor Paul CHEUNG	Board of Directors Member
				Professor Norman TIEN	Board of Directors Member
				Dr Gordon CHIU	Board of Directors Member
				Professor Alice WONG	Board of Directors Member
				Ms Wendy GAN	Board of Directors Member
				Mr Andrew WU	Board of Directors Member
				Mr Sunny YEUNG	Board of Directors Member
				Dr John YEUNG	Senior Advisor to the Board of Directors
4	1115	1715	Break		
5	1130	1730	Meet HKU SPACE Senior Management (7)	Professor William LEE	Director
				Dr Dorothy CHAN	Deputy Director (Administration and Resources)
				Professor LS CHAN	Deputy Director and College Principal
				Dr John CRIBBIN	Deputy Director (Academic Services)
				Professor NR LIU	Deputy Director (Business and China)

Session	Time		Meeting	Participants [Capacity/Committee Memberships/Other information]	
	Europe	Hong Kong			
				Professor Sonny LO	Deputy Director (Arts and Sciences)
				Dr CL CHAN	Chief Information Officer
6	1215	1815	Meet HKU Members of CPELL, QAC, JCC (7)	Professor Ian HOLLIDAY	Vice-President and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), HKU [Board for CPE&LL and JCC Chairman]
				Ms Kaye BRODIE	Senior Assistant Registrar, HKU [Board for CPE&LL Secretary]
				Professor John CARROLL	Associate Dean (Global), Faculty of Arts, HKU [Board for CPE&LL Member]
				Dr Francis LING	Associate Professor, Department of Physics, Faculty of Science, HKU [Board for CPE&LL Member]
				Professor Rainbow HO	Associate Dean (Postgraduate Education), Faculty of Social Sciences, HKU [JCC Member]
				Dr Susan BRIDGES	Associate Professor, Director of Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, HKU [QAC Member]
				Dr Lucy JORDAN	Associate Dean (Undergraduate Education), Faculty of Social Sciences, HKU [QAC Member]
7	1300	1900	Panel Private Meeting		

Session	Time		Meeting	Participants [Capacity/Committee Memberships/Other information]	
	Europe	Hong Kong			
Day 2 (12 October 2021, Tuesday)					
8	0900	1500	Panel Private Meeting		
9	0915	1515	Meet College Heads/Associate Heads of Academic Units (7)	Mr Kevin YEUNG	Acting Head of CBF and Director of Studies (Academic Affairs) of ICB
				Dr Ringo CHAN	Associate Head of CBF
				Dr TM KWONG	Head of CHL
				Mr KY LEUNG	Associate Head of CHL
				Dr Bruce CHEUNG	Head of CLST
				Dr SM LAM	Associate Head of CLST
				Dr Joey LAM	Director of Studies (Institute Affairs) of ICB
10	1000	1600	Meet Heads of Administrative Units (11)	Mrs Amy CHAN	Assistant Registrar, Registry Affairs
				Dr CL CHAN	Chief Information Officer
				Mr Patrick CHAN	Director of Human Resources
				Ms Blanche CHEUNG	Programme Director, Maisy Ho Centre for Teaching and Learning
				Dr Bruce CHEUNG	Advisor, E-Learning
				Ms Dorothy CHEUNG	Assistant Head of Research and E-Learning
				Dr Wills LEUNG	Director of Finance
				Mr SM LI	Director of Accommodation and Facilities
				Ms Susanna MOK	Director of Institutional Advancement
				Ms Deborah NG	Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement
				Ms Jo TAI	Assistant Registrar, Registry Affairs

Session	Time		Meeting	Participants [Capacity/Committee Memberships/Other information]	
	Europe	Hong Kong			
11	1030	1630	Meet Senior Staff in Programme Management (Part-time Programmes) (8)	Mr Jonathan HO	Associate Head, Subject Group Leader of Management, and Senior Programme Director, CBF
				Dr Solange LEUNG	Associate Head, Subject Group Leader of Hospitality, Tourism and Events, and Senior Programme Director, CBF
				Mr TK TAN	Subject Group Leader of Oriental Studies, and Senior Programme Director, CHL
				Dr Simon NG	Programme Leader, and Senior Programme Director, CHL
				Dr Kian TAN-UN	Subject Group Leader of Applied Biomedical and General Sciences and Food Nutrition and Healthcare, and Principal Programme Director, CLST
				Dr Edgar LIU	Subject Group Leader of Smart Wellness and Sustainability, and Senior Programme Director, CLST
				Mr Ray YUEN	Centre Leader of Centre for Marketing Management, and Senior Programme Director, ICB
				Mr Jonathan SUM	Centre Leader of Centre for Financial Management, and Senior Programme Director, ICB
12	1130	1730	Break		
13	1145	1745	Meet Senior Staff in Programme Management (Full-time programmes) (8)	Community College (sub-degree programmes)	
				Ms Currie TSANG	College Vice Principal (Administration)
				Dr Shirley CHOW	Head of Admissions and Academic Liaison
				Dr Esther CHEUNG	College Associate Vice Principal (Academic Affairs)

Session	Time		Meeting	Participants [Capacity/Committee Memberships/Other information]	
	Europe	Hong Kong			
				Ms Susanne CHAN	Division Head of Social Sciences, and College Principal Lecturer
				Mrs Faye CHAN	Division Head of Mathematics & Science, and College Senior Lecturer
				International College (top-up degree programmes)	
				Ms Karen CHAN	Subject Group Leader of Culture, Arts and Design, and Senior Programme Director, CHL
				Dr Gigi SO	Subject Group Leader of Food, Nutrition and Healthcare, and Programme Director, CLST
				Ms Ronnie SIT	Subject Group Leader of Marketing, and Senior Programme Director, CBF
14	1245	1845	Panel Private Meeting		

Session	Time		Meeting	Participants	
	Europe	Hong Kong		[Capacity/Committee Memberships/Other information]	
Day 3 (13 October 2021, Wednesday)					
15	0900	1500	Meet Full-time Teachers (8)	Ms Cherry CHEUNG	Programme Director, CBF
				Ms Christine TAM	College Lecturer and Programme Manager, CBF
				Mr Sejoon PARK	College Lecturer, CHL
				Dr Frankie CHEUNG	Programme Director and College Senior Lecturer, CHL
				Ms Sara WONG	College Lecturer, CLST
				Dr Tim CHENG	Senior Programme Director and College Principal Lecturer, Centre for Innovation & Management, ICB
				Dr Andy LOCK	Senior Programme Director and College Principal Lecturer, Centre for Human Capital Management, ICB
				Ms Winnie CHEUNG	Programme Coordinator and College Lecturer, CC
16	1000	1600	Meet Part-time Teachers (8 incl 3 via Zoom)	Dr Zenki KWAN^	Finance Subject Group, CBF
				Mr Wyn LI	Hospitality, Tourism and Events Subject Group, CBF
				Mr Maxwell CHIU	Housing, Transport and Built Environment Subject Group, CHL
				Ms Pontonnier KIM	Oriental Studies Subject Group, CHL
				Mr Calvin LAU^	Aviation, Computing, Technology and Data Science Subject Group, CLST
				Dr Mimi SHAM	Sport, Exercise and Recreation Management Subject Group, CLST
				Mr Michael TONG^	Centre for Innovation & Management, ICB
				Ms Ardis NG	English Division, CC

^ attend meeting via Zoom

Session	Time		Meeting	Participants [Capacity/Committee Memberships/Other information]	
	Europe	Hong Kong			
17	1100	1700	Break (to advise if any call back sessions needed)		
18	1115	1715	Meet Full-time Students/Graduates (7)	College of Business and Finance	
				Ms Lavinia CHENG	BSc Banking and Finance (University of London) (2019 Graduate)
				College of Humanities and Law	
				Ms AU Hoi Lam	BA (Hons) Contemporary Media Cultures (University of the Arts London) (Year 2 Student)
				College of Life Sciences and Technology	
				Ms Joyce WONG	- Bachelor of Aviation Management (Swinburne University of Technology) (2021 Graduate) - Higher Diploma in Airline and Airport Services (2019 Graduate) - Certificate in Aviation Studies (Senior Secondary Applied Learning (2017 Graduate)
				Community College	
				Ms Karen CHUNG	Associate of Engineering (Year 2 Student)
				Mr Freddie LEE	Associate of Arts in English Language and Literature (Year 2 Student)
				Mr Jason LAM	Associate of Social Sciences – Sociology (2021 Graduate)
				Ms Priscilla TANG	Associate of Arts in Media, Cultural and Creative Studies (2012 Graduate)
19	1200	1800	Meet Part-time Students/Graduates	College of Business and Finance	

^ attend meeting via Zoom

35

Session	Time		Meeting	Participants	
	Europe	Hong Kong		[Capacity/Committee Memberships/Other information]	
			(6 incl 3 via Zoom)	Mr CHOW Shing Kuen	Advanced Diploma in Marketing and Public Relations (Admitted in 2020 July Intake)
				Ms Tracy LEUNG	- Master of Tourism and Hospitality Management (University of Plymouth) (Admitted in 2020) - Bachelor of Science (Hons) Hospitality Management (University of Plymouth) (2018 Graduate) - Advanced Diploma in Hospitality Management (2016 Graduate)
				College of Humanities and Law	
				Mr WONG Chun Fai^	BA (Hons) Social Sciences (Edinburgh Napier University) (2019 Graduate)
				College of Life Sciences and Technology	
				Ms TUNG Suet Ping^	- BSc (Hons) Computer and Information Security (University of Plymouth) (2020 Graduate) - Advanced Diploma in Computer and Information Security (2018 Graduate)
				Institute for China Business	
				Ms WU Yaohua	Postgraduate Diploma in Healthcare Management (2021 Graduate)
				Ms LOU Jin^	Postgraduate Diploma in Corporate Coaching and Leadership Development (Admitted in 2019/20)
20	1245	1845	Panel Private Meeting		

Session	Time		Meeting	Participants [Capacity/Committee Memberships/Other information]	
	Europe	Hong Kong			
Day 4 (14 October 2021, Thursday: public holiday in HK)					
			Panel Private Meeting		
Day 5 (15 October 2021, Friday)					
21	0900	1500	Panel Private Meeting		
22	0915	1515	Meet Stakeholders/Employers (9)	College of Business and Finance	
				Dr Paulina CHAN	Principal and CEO of Global Mutual Innovation Consortium; Chair of the Hong Kong Regional Board, Chartered Management Institute; Chair of IEEE Hong Kong Section [Professional Body]
				Mr Paulus CHAU	Associate Director, Hong Kong & Emerging Markets - The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants [Professional body]
				College of Humanities and Law	
				Mr Hayes WONG	Executive Committee Member of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, HK Branch [Professional body]
				Mr Alen LAI	Co-opted Member (Vice Chair, Education and Training Committee), Chartered Institute of Housing Asian Pacific Branch [Professional body]
				College of Life Sciences and Technology	
				Mr Alex LI	Owner, Bright Growth Medical Laboratory Limited; Chairman, The Hong Kong Association of Medical Laboratories Limited;

^ attend meeting via Zoom

					Member, the Committee on Standards of Practice and Conduct, Medical Laboratory Technologists Board [Employer and Professional body]
				Dr WONG Tak Nam	Adjunct Associate Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, HKU [External Examiner of Higher Diploma in Engineering]
				Dr Freons YEUNG	Solution Center Manager, Taiwan and Hong Kong of Waters China Limited [Employer]
				Institute for China Business	
				Dr Renfred WONG	Associate Professor, Lee Shau Kee School of Business & Administration, Hong Kong Metropolitan University [External Examiner of Postgraduate Diploma in Finance and Business Management]
				Community College	
				Mr Daniel WONG	Managing Director, Delphitech Solutions Limited [Member of HKU SPACE Advisory Committee on Innovation and Technology; CC Honorary Advisor; Mentor, CC Mentorship Programme]
23	1015	1615	Call Back Meetings, if needed		
24	1100	1700	Panel Private Meeting		
25	1230	1830	Exit Meeting with HKU SPACE Senior Management (7)	Professor William LEE	Director
				Dr Dorothy CHAN	Deputy Director (Administration and Resources)
				Professor LS CHAN	Deputy Director and College Principal

^ attend meeting via Zoom

				Dr John CRIBBIN	Deputy Director (Academic Services)
				Professor NR LIU	Deputy Director (Business and China)
				Professor Sonny LO	Deputy Director (Arts and Sciences)
				Dr CL CHAN	Chief Information Officer

Appendix: List of Abbreviations

AD	Associate Degree
CBF	College of Business and Finance
CC	HKU SPACE Community College
CE	Continuing Education
CHL	College of Humanities and Law
CLST	College of Life Sciences and Technology
CPE&LL	Board for Continuing and Professional Education and Lifelong Learning
CRA	Criterion-Referenced Assessment
EQA	External Quality Assurance
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
HD	Higher Diploma
HKU	The University of Hong Kong
HKU SPACE	HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education
HPSHCC	HKU SPACE Po Leung Kuk Stanley Ho Community College
HR	Human Resources
ICB	Institute for China Business
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
IT	Information Technology
JCC	Joint Consultative Committee
JQRC	Joint Quality Review Committee
LES	Learning Experience Surveys
LLL	Life Long Learning
LO	Learning Outcome
OBASL	Outcome-based Approaches to Student Learning
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QAC	Quality Assurance Committee
QF	Qualifications Framework
QM	Quality Management
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
TNE	Transnational Education
UGC	University Grants Committee