

Quality Assurance Council releases Audit Report on sub-degree operations of City University of Hong Kong

The following is issued on behalf of the University Grants Committee:

The Quality Assurance Council (QAC) today (March 6) released the Audit Report on the sub-degree operations of City University of Hong Kong (CityU).

The Audit Report presents the findings on the quality of learning at the sub-degree providing units (SDPUs) of CityU. The Chairman of the QAC, Mr Lincoln Leong, said, "The QAC is pleased that the Audit Panel concludes that the University's strategic plan makes clear its overall commitment to the pursuit of excellence in research and professional education. Oversight of sub-degree provision by senior University committees, particularly the Senate, is at a high level, providing assurance about academic standards and compliance with University requirements. Despite differences in the structure and organisation of the SDPUs and variations in the application of University policies and procedures, the sub-degree programmes are fit for purpose and are meeting the expectations of students, employers and other stakeholders. Students studying for sub-degree qualifications are also appreciative of the support they receive from teaching staff and from the academic support services."

The QAC is pleased with the quality of educational provision at the SDPUs of CityU. The University's efforts in various areas are commended as positive features in the Audit Report. These include the close working relationship between the external advisors and the SDPUs, the University's approach to following up on cases of low Teaching and Learning Questionnaire scores and monitoring the subsequent progress of staff, and the University and its employer partners' management of student placements and internships.

The full report (with CityU's Institutional Response attached) has been uploaded to the website of the University Grants Committee (UGC) (www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/about/term/publications/report.html).

CityU has agreed to submit a progress report within 18 months on its follow-up actions.

Background of the quality audit on sub-degree operations of CityU

The quality audit on the sub-degree operations of CityU was undertaken by an Audit Panel appointed by the QAC. The Audit Panel was chaired by Professor Jeremy Bradshaw, and members included Professor Martí Casadesús Fa, Dr Vicky Lee, Professor Isabella Poon and Dr Stephanie Wilson. The Panel reviewed the Institutional Submission, which was prepared by CityU following

a period of self-study, and visited CityU from May 29 to 31, 2018, to meet with its staff and students. It also met with a number of external stakeholders, such as local employers and graduates of CityU sub-degree programmes.

Background of the QAC and its auditing activities

The QAC was established in April 2007 as a semi-autonomous non-statutory body under the aegis of the UGC. The UGC is committed to safeguarding and promoting the quality of the UGC-funded universities and their activities. In view of the institutional expansion of university activities and a growing public interest in quality issues, the QAC was established to assist the UGC in providing third-party oversight of the quality of the universities' educational provision. The QAC assists the UGC in assuring the quality of all programmes at the levels of sub-degree, first degree and above (however funded) offered in UGC-funded universities. The QAC fulfils this task primarily by undertaking periodic quality audits of the universities.

Auditing is an external quality assurance process that involves independent peer review by senior academics in the higher education sector. Its principal aims are to confirm that existing arrangements for quality assurance are fit for purpose, that the quality of provision is comparable to international best practices, that universities are committed to continuously improving the quality of their academic programmes, and that students are well taught and well supported so that they are able to achieve the expected academic standards.

Prior to 2016, the QAC's audit activities covered only first degree programmes and above. The first and second QAC audit cycles were completed in 2011 and 2016 respectively. In 2016, the UGC assumed the role of the overseeing body of the quality audits on the sub-degree operations of UGC-funded universities, with the involvement of the QAC as the audit operator. The audit visits to universities in this cycle were conducted from late 2017 to early 2019.

FEHD releases Rodent Infestation Rate for 2018

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) announced today (March 6) that the overall Rodent Infestation Rate (RIR) for 2018 was 3.4 per cent, slightly lower than the figure recorded in 2017 (3.5 per cent). Rodent infestation in public areas in the territory was generally stable.

An FEHD spokesman said, "Rodent infestation was not extensive in the

areas surveyed as the overall RIRs of all districts were below 10 per cent for 2018.

"In view of relatively high RIRs in individual districts for the second half of 2018, such as Kowloon City District (11.1 per cent), apart from regular anti-rodent work, the FEHD has also enhanced rodent prevention and control measures, including filling up holes and cracks on floor surfaces, adjusting the location of baiting points and rodent traps, providing advice on rodent prevention and control to property management companies of private buildings, and arranging health talks and promotional activities, in areas where rodent activity was detected during the survey period."

There is no internationally adopted RIR. When devising the RIR, the FEHD made reference to overseas practices and the actual situation of Hong Kong. The overall RIR is the average infestation rate of the districts during the period. The district RIR assesses the distribution of the rodent problem in public places covered during the surveillance period. The district RIR is divided into three levels. Level 1 (less than 10 per cent) indicates that rodent infestation is not extensive in the area surveyed. Level 2 (between 10 per cent and 19 per cent) indicates that rodent infestation is slightly extensive in the area surveyed, and the FEHD will strengthen rodent disinfestation operations there. Level 3 (20 per cent or above) indicates that rodent infestation is extensive. The relevant government departments will form a joint task force and launch special rodent prevention and control operations to strengthen rodent disinfestation, environmental improvement and cleaning services comprehensively, and promote messages of rodent prevention and control in the community.

The spokesman added, "The district RIRs may not fully reflect the actual situation of rodent infestation in the individual locations of the district. When conducting rodent prevention and control operations, the FEHD makes appropriate adjustments to the work in individual districts from time to time, taking into account reports from front-line staff and the views of the relevant District Councils and the local community, as well as the district RIR."

The FEHD is continuing to roll out the territory-wide anti-rodent campaign in two phases this year. The first phase was launched in early January and will run until March 15. The second phase, to last for 10 weeks, will be launched in July. During the campaign period, the FEHD will enhance its inspections and rodent prevention and control measures in target areas including markets, municipal services buildings, hawker bazaars, typhoon shelters, lanes adjacent to food premises and other problematic spots and their peripheries.

In view of the fruitful results of the anti-rodent operations in designated target areas, the FEHD also plans to conduct two rounds of the special operation between the two phases of the territory-wide anti-rodent campaign this year, during which multi-pronged strategies, including improving environmental hygiene and stepping up rodent disinfestation and enforcement actions, will continue to be adopted to strengthen rodent prevention and control at the district level.

In addition, the FEHD is strengthening co-operation with other government departments and provides them with technical assistance in implementation of effective rodent prevention and control measures in areas under their purview, which includes the anti-rodent operations in designated target areas being conducted by the Housing Department, with the support of the FEHD, on a trial basis in two public housing estates to intensify the rodent prevention and control work. The FEHD will also continue to conduct studies and tests on various technologies, such as night vision cameras, thermal imaging cameras and rodent trapping devices driven by pressurised gas, with the aim of enhancing the surveillance of rodent activity and the effectiveness of rodent control.

The spokesman stressed that effective rodent prevention and control hinges on sustained co-operation between the community and the Government. Apart from enhancing the rodent prevention and control work in all districts, the FEHD will also step up public education and publicity targeting different sectors of the community, including co-organising promotional activities with District Councils, to encourage the public to actively participate in the anti-rodent campaigns, and to prevent rodent infestation by eliminating the three survival conditions of rodents, namely food, harbourage and passages, meaning the elimination of the food sources and hiding places of rodents, as well as blockage of their dispersal routes.

For more information on rodent prevention and control measures and the RIR, please visit the FEHD website at www.fehd.gov.hk.

Selection of sites for sale under Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme 2019

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Housing Authority:

The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) has decided to convert two public rental housing (PRH) developments for use and sale under the Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme (GSH) 2019.

A spokesman for the HA said today (March 6) that the conversion was approved by the Strategic Planning Committee of the HA at its meeting on March 4. The two developments are located respectively at Chai Wan Road, Chai Wan and Tsing Hung Road, Tsing Yi.

The Chai Wan site, providing 828 flats is expected to be ready for occupation by the fourth quarter of 2022. The Tsing Yi site will provide 2 868 flats and is expected to be ready for occupation by the third quarter of

2023. The HA plans to launch the pre-sale of these flats by the end of this year.

"The Subsidised Housing Committee of the HA agreed to regularise the GSH in January 2018. The Committee also decided that it should be prudent to implement GSH at a more modest pace to gather experience, reduce the risk of unsold flats and minimise impact on the waiting time for PRH applicants," the spokesman said.

"In line with this incremental approach and in the light of the positive response to the pilot GSH in 2016 and GSH 2018, the Strategic Planning Committee decided to convert the two PRH developments mentioned above for use of GSH 2019.

"Given the incremental approach, we will continue to take account of operational experience and sales response, and consider the suitability of PRH projects for conversion to GSH projects each year," the spokesman said.

In considering the suitability of PRH projects for conversion to GSH, HA will make reference to the following established principles:

1. While a site may include certain public facilities, it should not contain public facilities that will incur very high management and/or maintenance fees;
2. The conversion of a PRH site to GSH development should not result in substantive changes to the original planning;
3. The site should preferably be a standalone one, or can be easily carved out from a PRH development; and
4. Any PRH development that will be completed shortly is not suitable.

Details of the two GSH 2019 sites are set out in the HA paper (paper no: HA 06/19) which has been uploaded onto HA website:

www.housingauthority.gov.hk/en/about-us/housing-authority/ha-paper-library/index.html.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, March 6, 2019 is 103.4 (up 0.2 against yesterday's index).

Gazettal of Inland Revenue (Amendment) (Tax Concessions) Bill 2019

The Inland Revenue (Amendment) (Tax Concessions) Bill 2019 will be gazetted on March 8. The Bill seeks to implement concessionary tax measures proposed in the 2019-20 Budget.

The 2019-20 Budget has proposed one-off reductions of salaries tax, tax under personal assessment and profits tax for the year of assessment 2018/19 by 75 per cent, subject to a ceiling of \$20,000 per case. The reductions will be reflected in taxpayers' final tax payable for the year of assessment 2018/19. The proposed one-off reductions will benefit 1.91 million taxpayers of salaries tax and tax under personal assessment as well as 145 000 tax-paying corporations and unincorporated businesses. The total revenue forgone in 2019-20 will amount to \$18.9 billion.

The Bill will be introduced into the Legislative Council on March 20.