

Guidelines for External Academic Advisors

With the rise in the University's academic quality and the parallel development of the University's Quality Assurance (QA) system, the role of CityUHK's External Academic Advisors (EAAs) is evolving. While the primary role of our EAAs is advising on programmes/majors and their quality, increasingly the University intends EAAs to add value in areas such as recruiting of high quality faculty and students, faculty mentoring, global networking, and strengthening of the CityUHK brand. The selection of EAAs, as well as their scope of activities and reporting, should reflect this enhanced role. Thus, academic units (AUs) are encouraged to apply the following guidelines in the engagement of EAAs.

Principles

1. EAAs should contribute to the strategic growth of AUs and the University as a whole, rather than predominantly focusing on operational matters.
2. AUs are expected to ensure that their EAAs have substantial experience, expertise, and high academic standing relating to the assessment of the programme(s)/major(s) offered by the AU. They should be active, leading scholars in their disciplinary field. (See Guidance Note for the Selection of External Academic Advisors).
3. EAAs should collectively represent diversity across, for example, national origin/ethnicity, educational system, and gender.

Appointment

4. Deans will oversee the EAA appointments for their colleges or schools to ensure effectiveness of EAA selection.
5. From the funding available from PRVT, AUs may use the funds to appoint one EAA for the entire AU, one EAA for multiple programmes/majors, or one EAA for each programme/major. AUs may top-up with their own funds to enhance the number of EAAs and/or the amount received by the EAA(s).
6. Appointments shall normally last for three years. New EAAs should typically be chosen every three years so as to invite new perspectives. With strong justification, an EAA can serve a second consecutive three-year term for a maximum period of six years of service.

Role

7. While the principal role of EAAs is to assist AUs in maintaining the international standards of their programmes/majors, AUs are expected to seek their advice on matters related to research, as well.

7.1 Programme/major advising

EAAs should:

- Advise the AU on the design, content and organization of the programme/major and its ability to achieve the intended learning outcomes in terms of current knowledge and understanding, subject-specific skills, professional skills, and preparation for employment or further study. A specific focus should be placed on the alignment of the programme/major with CityUHK's Discovery-enriched Curriculum.
- Review evidence concerning students' achievements of intended learning outcomes and advise on strengths and weaknesses, based on the evidence.
- Advise on how to enhance the programme's/major's international competitiveness (e.g., uniqueness, standards of teaching and learning, innovativeness of delivery, academic staff qualifications) and its positioning relative to worldwide and regional developments in education and labor markets.
- Advise on the overall standard of student performance and learning accomplishments.

7.2 "Value added" advising

EAs should:

- Advise the Head of AU on potential faculty candidates.
- Recommend to the AU individuals for PhD study, Hong Kong Fellowships, and/or Graduate Teaching Assistantships.
- Advise the Head of AU on early career faculty, their international competitiveness, and professional development opportunities.
- Suggest strategies to the AU for strategic (re-)direction of the academic programme(s)/major(s), development of new programmes/majors, and mechanisms to increase the recognition and branding of the AU's academic offerings.

Work of External Academic Advisors

8. Work Plan. AUs should establish a plan of work for the EAs to cover: the scope of review over their period of appointment; arrangements for the review of the relevant materials, teaching and learning activities, and assessment tasks; and the timing and objectives of visits to the University.
9. Visits. EAs should normally visit the AUs once every three years, but Deans have the discretion to determine visiting cycles. AUs are strongly encouraged to invite EAs early in the relationship so as to familiarize the EAs with the University's teaching and learning environment and to help EAs contextualize academic activities. Visits will be even more important for EAs unfamiliar with Hong Kong. Visits should be carefully planned and allow the EAs to communicate with a broad range of AU stakeholders. Visits should end with a briefing to the Dean of the AU and the Associate Provost (Quality Assurance).
10. Data collection. AUs should provide EAs with the relevant information to enable a comprehensive, unbiased, and in-depth analysis of the relevant programme/major. This may include programme/major and course documents (e.g., annual programme report, programme document, Forms 2b), a range of assessment tasks and their results, and grade distributions. Evidence should include documentation of discoveries/inventions/creative projects/student awards and information that reflects international competitiveness and employability of students, including information on exchanges, internships, and employer feedback.
11. Context and briefing of EAs. EAs should be adequately briefed. AUs should make available
 - Senate policy and guidelines relating to the assessment of students;
 - University Academic Regulations;
 - Reports of previous EAs, with the responses to these reports.

Reporting

12. Sharing of findings. EAs will principally share their findings through annual written reports. AUs are encouraged to maintain an active dialog with EAs to seek advice on "value added" aspects of the advisory role. AUs are encouraged to capture and document EAA feedback through face-to-face communication with key AU stakeholders during the EAA's visit. AUs will determine whether the EAA feedback received is useful in assisting the AU in enhancing its performance, as outlined in paragraph 7 above, and in seeking additional feedback where appropriate. A frank and analytical tenor of discussions and reporting is expected.
13. Report. The annual written report of the EAs should consist of the EAs' qualitative assessments of the programme/major under advisement, focusing on the main areas outlined in paragraph 7 above. AUs are given the latitude to ask their EAs to provide a signed assurance that the academic standard of assessment in the area of their responsibility is being maintained if such assurance is deemed necessary, by, for example, professional bodies. This assurance may be unqualified, or qualified. When a qualified assurance is provided, EAs are asked to note these qualifications.
14. Distribution. AUs should arrange for the reports of EAs to be forwarded to the Head of AU as early as possible, but no later than at the end of each academic year. Since reports from EAs are essential inputs for staff seeking to maintain the quality and level of assessment of courses, they should be made widely available to academic staff, especially programme leaders. To close the reporting loop, reports should also be made available to the relevant Dean and the Associate Provost (Quality Assurance).

15. Feedback and response to recommendations. AUs should take actions in response to recommendations made by the EAAs. Action plans, actions, and outcomes should be reported back to the EAAs. Such information can be incorporated into the annual reports of AUs.