Consultation Paper –
Department Head and Faculty Governance

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Background

Academic departments are central to HKUST's organization structure in carrying out its core mission of teaching, research and public service. As Departments are where academic staff, who are a primary source of the institution's intellectual vitality and vigor, are affiliated with, they are at the forefront of carrying out the academic endeavor towards achieving HKUST's vision and mission.

As the university continues to develop and expand in response to numerous changes, such as 334 and internationalization, the sheer volume and complexity of the affairs in the academic departments are bound to increase. Such changes, coupled with the keen competition in the broader arena and the determination to excel to the next level of excellence, drive the need for a more robust governance and management structure inside academic departments to deliver the University's core mission.

Faculty Governance and its Objectives

A survey in late 2007 showed that it has already been a common culture in HKUST that academic departments adopt working committees and ad hoc task forces to deal with departmental affairs. While the university treasures the spirit of collegiality in decision-making and administration, it is essential to further build on this practice and develop a more clearly-defined structure and build a framework for effective governance.

As mentioned at the outset, as academic staff are the single most important part of the university in its pursuit of the University's mission, university governance should be faculty-driven. While executive authority and accountability are the basis in governance, we also endeavor to build a governance structure which is (i) founded on collective wisdom, (ii) open and transparent to enhance communication, (iii) accountable with checks and balances, and (iv) conducive to faculty participation in department and university matters, through which a sense of belonging will be fostered and a next generation leadership will be nurtured.

This following serves to define the structure of the faculty governance, clarify roles and expectations and set out the good governance practices. It is hoped that such governance structure can help HKUST to excel to the next level of excellence.

Framework of the Faculty Governance

I. Department Head – Roles and Expectations

The academic department is led by the Department Head, who
- is appointed by the President on the recommendations of VP-AA(DP), Dean and the Search Committee for the Department Head through internal search or external recruitment
- serves on a 3-year term, normally renewable for 2 terms at the most

Reporting to the Dean, Department Head is an executive assuming overall responsibility for the academic, student, human resources and financial matters of the Department. In providing effective leadership for the department, the Department Head, working with colleagues both inside and outside of the department, is expected to:

1. *Be the Champion of Student Interests by:*

(a)   recruiting top students
(b)   establishing clear intended learning outcomes for educational programs
(c)   striving for continued improvement in the quality of education
(d)   fostering student diversity in the department
(e)   soliciting student feedback regarding teaching and learning
(f)   responding to student concerns regarding department courses, programs and co-curricula activities
(g)   assuring faculty commitment to teaching and student counseling
(h)   assuring an effective advising system within the department
(i)   encouraging student participation in student competitions, student organizations and alumni organizations
(j)   placing students

2. *Be the Champion of Faculty Interests by:*

(a)   providing leadership and serving as champion of the departmental strategic plan
(b)   bringing faculty concerns to the attention of the Dean and the University, and explaining the University's strategy and policies to the faculty
(c)   setting standards and expectations for faculty in teaching, research and service
(d)   helping faculty develop plans for effective teaching and supporting good practice
(e)   leading and encouraging research program development
(f)   providing faculty with meaningful feedback on their performance
(g)   explaining to faculty the basis for promotions and annual evaluation
(h)   assuming the primary responsibility for recruiting outstanding faculty
(i)   maintaining equity in faculty work loads (i.e., teaching, research and services)
(j)   managing an effective recruiting system for graduate students
(k)   participating in fund raising activities with the Dean and the University
(l)   nurturing junior faculty
(m)   developing senior faculty for a succession plan
(n)   developing an open and transparent faculty governance system

3. *Be the Effective Manager of Resources by:*

(a)   organizing and maintaining an effective support structure in, instructional, clerical and technical areas
(b)   motivating non- academic staff performance and providing direction and feedback on the performance
(c)   providing staff training and continuing education to assure organization performance
(d)   managing fiscal matters for the department according to the budget provision
(e)   striving for continuous improvement in quality of programs and value for money within available resources (i.e. budget, human resources, and facilities)
(f)   self evaluation of the department by external visiting committees and other means

4. *Ensure Accountability and Performance by:*

Developing a long range strategic plan and submitting a departmental annual evaluation to the Dean on the four basic objective areas of the University, namely,

- Educating Students
- Conducting Research
- Transferring Knowledge
- Serving the Society

II. Departmental Standing Committee System

The above shows that the Department Head's role and responsibilities are enormous. In championing the cause, delegation to and involvement of other faculty members to assist in the departmental affairs become important. Committee system will therefore provide an effective mechanism to pool together faculty members' engagement and different areas of expertise in handling the core responsibilities of a department, whilst ensuring a participatory, consensual and open process.

In the interest of clarity, it should be defined that like other University central committees, the role of the Departmental Standing Committees is essentially advisory in nature. Department Heads will continue to assume an executive role. In this governance model, an executive-led system emphasizing authority and accountability will be integrated within a governance structure which fosters collegiality, consensus and collective purpose. Executives are expected to exercise their authority and make decisions after careful consideration of views and recommendations from various parties. Towards this end, committee system in departments will serve as a valuable platform for communication, consultation and advice.

While departments may at their own discretion set up additional or ad hoc committees or working groups (e.g. *Industrial Liaison Committee, Outreach Committee*) to accomplish special purposes, formation of the following **Standing Committees** in each academic department is considered crucial and should be adopted as a good faculty governance practice. The following sets out the terms of reference of the Standing Committees in a department:

1. *Full Faculty Meeting*

Terms of reference:
Regular meetings with a full faculty membership (faculty members on joint appointments, adjunct faculty, and part-time faculty could be non-voting members) should be conducted to:
- make recommendation on major decisions for the Department
- discuss matters to provide guidance to the various Standing Committees
- receive periodic reports from the various Standing Committees except confidential personnel matters such as results of academic reviews conducted by the *Substantiation and Promotion Committee* and results of the *Merit Salary Review Committee*
- provide a forum to foster communication with internal staff and external parties
Minutes of departmental meetings should be made available to Dean and VPAA(DP) for better communication.

2. *Executive Committee*

Terms of reference:
- To act as an executive group of the Department and assist the Department Head in the formulation of new policies and new initiatives
- To draw up the budget plan (staffing and non-staffing) of the Department

- To provide advice and assist the Department Head in making and implementing decisions on the day-to-day departmental affairs, including assignment of teaching load for faculty members and HR issues of non-academic staff

3. *Resource Committee*

Terms of reference:
- To consider and recommend requests relating to the deployment of funds (e.g. purchase of equipment), the allocation of space (e.g. lab space), and the assignment of staff and other resources (e.g. technicians, PGS, and visitors)

4. *Planning Committee*

Terms of reference:
- To formulate the long-term and short-term strategic direction and plans of the Department, to be aligned with the overall strategic objectives of the School and the University at large
- To conduct periodic evaluation to identify opportunities and threats for the readjustment of the plans, and to set priorities
- To monitor effective implementation of plans by developing targets, milestones and performance indicators

5. *Substantiation and Promotion Committee*

This is a committee combining the existing *Departmental Academic Review Committee* and the *Departmental Substantiation Review Committee*. Its functions are to review and make recommendations on substantiation, promotion, contract renewals, and any other matters related to departmental academic reviews except review on faculty performance for the annual merit salary review which will be conducted by the *Merit Salary Review Committee* (proposed in item 6).

Terms of reference:
- to review and make recommendations for substantiation, promotion and contract renewal
- to review and make recommendations on further attempt for promotion and substantiation
- to draw up criteria, procedures and guidelines in addition to but not in conflict with those of the School and the University, and to advise the Department Head on any other matters related to academic reviews

[Note: The terms of reference proposed above are based on the existing policies. However, the composition of the existing departmental committees for substantiation varies amongst the departments. A uniform composition for this combined committee across the departments will be proposed for consultation later.]

6. *Merit Salary Review Committee*

Terms of reference:
- to review and rate the performance of faculty members of the Department for the annual merit salary review

[Note: The composition of this committee will be proposed for consultation later.]

7. ***Faculty Search Committee***

This committee is renamed from the existing *Departmental Search Committee* to handle all faculty recruitment matters in accordance with the existing policy on academic appointment (AP10.0)

Terms of reference:

- To conduct departmental faculty search and make recommendations on the appointment of all academic titles in the department, in accordance with the procedures as listed in the Manual
- To advise the Department Head on practices related to academic appointments

8. ***Postgraduate Committee***

Terms of reference:

- To develop programs taking into account international benchmarks and input from students and other stakeholders, and meeting professional recognition requirements, wherever applicable
- To recruit and admit students, provide induction, and appoint advisers / research supervisors
- To review and monitor the curriculum and co-curriculum, the delivery of the programs, the assessment of students, and student advising and mentoring, and to follow-up with action and plans for improvement
- To handle student appeals and grievances
- To provide a channel of communication for student participation

Sub-Committees, including Student Liaison Committee or equivalent, have to be formed to administer and oversee the above matters

9. ***Undergraduate Committee***

Terms of reference:

- To develop programs and courses taking into account international benchmarks and input from students and other stakeholders, meeting professional recognition requirements, wherever applicable
- To recruit and admit students, provide induction, and appoint advisers to give academic counseling and guidance
- To review and monitor the curriculum and co-curriculum, the delivery of programs, the assessment of students, and student advising and mentoring, and to follow up with action and plans for improvement
- To handle student appeals and grievances
- To provide a channel of communication for student participation

Sub-Committees, including Student Liaison Committee or equivalent, have to be formed to monitor and oversee the above matters.

III. Appointment of Associate Department Head

The Associate Department Head can be appointed by the Dean on the recommendation of the Department Head, to assist the Department Head in carrying out his/her roles and responsibilities.

The Associate Department Head appointment shall be submitted to VPAA(DP) for record once the appointment has been made.

IV. Good Governance Practices

1. *Committee Membership*
   - The composition of the *Substantiation and Promotion Committee* and *Merit Salary Review Committee* will be proposed for consultation later whereas the composition of *Faculty Search Committee* is defined in AP 10.0.   For the rest of the Standing Committees, Department Heads can, at their discretion, decide whether the members should be appointed by themselves in consultation with the *Executive Committee* or elected by the faculty members at the beginning of the academic year.
   - The *Executive Committee* shall normally be chaired by the Department Head and comprise the Chairmen of all Standing Committees.
   - Members shall normally be appointed on a 2-year term for 2 terms at the most, with staggering membership for continuity.
   - Student representatives and non-faculty members should be co-opted in the Standing Committees, where applicable.
   - The Standing Committees shall comprise members representing various teams / groups in a department.
   - The list of Committee member appointments shall be submitted to the Dean and VPAA(DP) for record on or before the starting date of each academic year.

2. *Meeting Rules:*
   - The Department can determine quorum rules for meetings and voting, voting methods, and other rules of order for conducting meetings by the various Committees.

   - Minutes of Standing Committees' meetings should be properly maintained and follow-up actions recorded.   Documentation is essential to facilitate sharing of good practices and to meet external requirements such as quality assurance.