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CVCD

ACADEMIC PROCEDURES HANDBOOK
for
Sri Lankan Universities

PART V

CODE OF PRACTICE ON PROGRAMME APPROVAL, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Committee of Vice-Chancellors & Directors
and
University Grants Commission

Edited & Printed

by

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PURPOSE OF THE HANDBOOK

This handbook is complementary to the Quality Assurance Handbook published by the CVCD and UGC in July 2002. Both handbooks are the result of collaborative work undertaken between the CVCD/UGC, universities and professional bodies in 2002 and 2003. This work builds on the successful project begun in 2001 to develop and implement a comprehensive quality assurance system for Sri Lankan higher education.

The Academic Procedures Handbook is made up of following six parts:

- Part I: Code of Practice on Assessment of Students;
- Part II: Code of Practice on Career Guidance;
- Part III: Code of Practice on External Assessors;
- Part IV: Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Programmes;
- Part V: Code of Practice on Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review;
- Part VI: Code of Practice on Student Support and Guidance

The purpose of the Academic Procedures Handbook is to provide a reference point for all universities, covering the main aspects of academic standards and the quality of education. The six Codes reflect consensus amongst universities and other groups on the key elements of good practice, which support the student learning experience.

The Codes may be added to over time, to reflect developments in Universities and Nationally.

The existence of an Academic Procedures Handbook providing guidance on good practice at National level greatly facilitates the implementation of Quality Assurance mechanisms and the sustenance and enhancement of quality in the Universities within the overarching quality framework described at the end of the book. Individual universities will be expected to use the Academic Procedures Handbook to guide their own developing practice and to supplement it with local handbooks that reflect particular context and requirements of individual institutions.

PART V: CODE OF PRACTICE ON PROGRAMME APPROVAL, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Foreword

As part of its programme of work, the CVCD/UGC Quality Assurance Committee has developed Codes of Practice covering key aspects of quality assurance in higher education.

This is one of six Codes, all of which have been developed in consultation with university staff through workshops and seminars during 2002 and 2003.

Purpose

The Codes are intended to be used:

- to guide and inform institutional activity;
- to promote and disseminate good practice;
- to encourage a commitment to continuous improvement.

Structure

Each Code is divided into three sections, covering general principles, institutional by-laws and regulations and specific guidance. Some have additional appendices, where more detail is required.

Development

The Codes are intended to be dynamic documents, which continue to develop over time. This will enable them to take account of national developments and to capture changing university practice.

Feedback is therefore invited on any aspect of the Codes.

Introduction

This code of practice draws on the wide experience and developing procedures in many universities aimed at ensuring that all courses are well conceived and designed, are subject to rigorous scrutiny and approval before they are actually offered to students, are regularly monitored and reviewed by teaching staff and are responsive to student feedback.

The code covers a range of procedures and processes, which in practice may be described

differently in different universities. How these processes are labeled and managed inside each university is not as important as adherence to certain basic principles. Important amongst these are: openness to peer scrutiny; commitment to explicit course approval supported by academic and resource planning; acceptance of the discipline of defining course aims, objectives and expected student learning outcomes; and a commitment to improvement through learning from practice.

The broad coverage of the code of practice reflects the view that course design, approval and review are all closely linked and inform each other. Effective course- design should lead to good and attractive courses, which enable students to achieve expected learning outcomes, and help them to maximize their potential and meet required standards. These are important dimensions of a course approval process and they apply equally to a review of a course's effectiveness in operation. Annual monitoring of a well designed course should be relatively straightforward, while a review of course objectives and actual student performance at regular intervals offers the opportunity to reflect more deeply on changes affecting student and employment markets, subject developments and innovations in teaching and learning.

There is a direct connection between the good and recommended practice described in this code and the external quality review procedures of the UGC. Universities with clear procedures for course approval, monitoring and review should be well placed to demonstrate their commitment to high standards and to maintaining the quality of students' learning by presenting evidence in their self-evaluation documents of these processes in operation and of action taken as a consequence.

The guidance this Code contains is outlined in three sections:

A. General Principles
B. Institutional By-Laws and Regulations
C. Specific Guidance

The Code sets out a framework within which institutions are expected to develop their own procedures and practice, consistent with the overall guidance in the Code. It covers arrangements for approving programmes to lead to university awards and for monitoring and reviewing programmes as they are offered to students. Programme monitoring and review should operate at regular intervals to ensure that programmes continue to meet defined academic standards and provide a good learning experience for students, taking account of curriculum change and innovation, feedback from students and other external bodies and changes in student employment prospects and markets. This Code is applicable to undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes.

A. General Principles

Programme Approval

1. Universities set academic standards and signal the quality of their teaching and learning

through programmes offered in their name to lead to university degrees and other awards. The formal act of programme approval is therefore a key point in setting and maintaining academic standards. Programme approval procedures should therefore:

- be binding and precise, and open to scrutiny within the university;
- incorporate approval of resources, learning infrastructure and related matters affecting the feasibility and sustainability of the programme;
- incorporate clear guidance on curriculum design and development to assist staff in preparing programmes for formal scrutiny and approval;
- require that a programme be approved in accordance with the stated procedures before student recruitment commences;
- involve detailed scrutiny of proposed curricula, teaching and learning arrangements and assessment;
- match the proposed curricula and learning objectives with the appropriate national subject benchmarks;
- include provision for rejecting proposed programmes and arrangements for resubmission of amended proposals.

Programme Monitoring and Review

2. All programmes, once approved, should be monitored and reviewed at regular, defined intervals. Such monitoring and review should:

- be of an appropriate depth and range to reflect the content and length of the programme;
- take into account the number of student groups admitted each year;
- take into account the nature and requirements of the intended employment markets where appropriate;
- be documented, including agreed actions and follow-up;
- be open to scrutiny within the university and by external subject or university reviewers.

B. Institutional By-Laws and Regulations

3. It is suggested that university regulations, and by laws as appropriate, should specify the following.

- The authority and formal procedures for programme approval. The power to approve new programmes should belong to the Senate, perhaps assisted by the Internal Quality Assurance Unit reporting directly to the Senate. Where the Senate delegates any tasks related to programme approval to a committee, the scope and limits of the delegated power should be precisely stated.

- The procedures for approving entry requirements to the programme. The boundaries of

faculty and departmental authority. Any procedures, which enable faculties or departments to approve their own programmes without reference to, or without explicit approval from, the Senate would not meet the expectations of this code of practice.

- Formal procedures for regular (normally annual) monitoring of programmes once they have been approved and are offered to students. These should provide guidance for departments on the timing, scope and process for monitoring and they should specify reporting procedures so that monitoring outcomes are declared at departmental and university levels.

- Formal procedures for more substantial review of programmes at periodic intervals (normally every four to five years). These should state the purpose of periodic reviews, the role of peers from outside the department in the review process and the requirements for reporting review outcomes at departmental and university levels.

- Arrangements and procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review should, where appropriate, take account of requirements of professional bodies that accredit or recognize university programmes for professional employment. They should enable departments to synchronize their documentation and reporting so that it addresses the requirements of the university and of the relevant professional bodies, avoiding duplication and building on effective internal quality assurance.

4. Regulations for programme approval, monitoring and review should be widely communicated across the institution.

C. Specific Guidance

5. It is recommended that university regulations should be supplemented by specific guidelines covering the topics below. Departments or faculties may supplement university guidelines with additional advice and guidance on local practice.

Curriculum Design and Programme Development

6. Design Criteria

Curriculum and programme design should be consistent with the academic standards set for the programme, reflect clear aims and objectives and facilitate student progression. They should incorporate:

- identification of students' learning objectives and reasons for changes proposed;
- specification of teaching, learning and assessment strategies;
- key study skills appropriate to the subject and transferable to employment;
- evidence of consultation with students, including alumni (where possible).

7. Level

Consideration should be given to the level of a programme and to the level of the stated intended learning outcomes at different points in the programmes. The level is an indicator of the intellectual/skills demand, complexity, depth of study and learner autonomy involved in a programme of study. The introduction of a national qualifications framework will assist institutions to define the level of their programmes.

8. Progression

Consideration should be given to the way in which the curriculum promotes an organized progression through a programme so that the demands on the learner in respect of intellectual challenge, skills, knowledge, conceptualization and learning autonomy increase over time.

9. Balance

Consideration should be given to achieving a good balance of elements, within a programme, for example balancing: academic with practical elements; opportunities for personal development with academic outcomes; and of breadth with depth of subject material.

10. Flexibility

Programme design should take account of the full range of requirements of learners likely to be admitted.

11. Coherence and Integrity

Consideration should be given to the overall coherence and intellectual integrity of programmes. It should be designed to ensure that the student's experience has a logic and integrity that are clearly linked to the programme's aims and purpose. The expectations given to students and others about the intended learning outcomes of the programme should be honest and deliverable.

Programme Approval

12. Programmes should be subject to explicit and systematic scrutiny before they are approved by the Senate. Such scrutiny is often described as 'validation', that is the testing of the validity of a programme's aims, curriculum and arrangements for teaching and assessment with reference to clear criteria and subject benchmarks.

13. Programme validation and recommendations for approval should be undertaken by an authoritative and expert panel, drawing on appropriate expertise within and outside the university.

14. The panel should consist of staff drawn mainly from outside the department responsible for teaching the programme, but including at least one member of staff from the department responsible for the programme. Staff should be selected for panel membership in such a

way that will promote confidence that the standards and quality of programmes are appropriate to the level of the award and to the university's objectives.

15. Programme approval panels should include external peers from outside the institution, selected to provide an independent view of the proposed programme, and informed by academic and (where appropriate) professional standards as recognized nationally in Sri Lanka and, as appropriate, internationally.

Programme Monitoring and Review

16. Institutions should establish procedures requiring each programme to be monitored at least once a year to check that programme aims, management of programme delivery, intended student learning and progression, and assessment outcomes match planned objectives.

17. Departments should be encouraged to use a common template for programme monitoring so that consistent information is gathered and considered for all programmes and to encourage consistent written reports for consideration by the subject/programme team.

18. Regular monitoring of programmes should aim to gather information about the programme in operation, as experienced by students and staff. It should address matters-such as:

- programme organization and administration;
- delivery of teaching and its evaluation by peers;
- support for students' learning;
- availability of facilities and resources;
- assessment and examining processes;
- external examiners' comments on the programme and conduct of assessment;
- student feedback obtained during and at the end of the monitoring period, including student evaluation of teaching;
- any staff development issues arising.

19. Departmental consideration of programme monitoring reports should always lead to agree action plans to remedy any deficiencies identified and promote improvement.

20. Monitoring reports should identify matters, which can be addressed and resolved at departmental level and matters needing consideration/resolution at a higher level within the university.

21. Monitoring reports and action plans should be received and considered by the university's quality assurance unit/committee and the responsibilities and timescales for responses and actions agreed.

22. In addition to annual monitoring, programmes should be reviewed in greater depth at

periodic intervals, normally not exceeding five years. Periodic programme reviews encourage programme teams to stand back and reflect on programme objectives, on the scope and depth of student learning and 'market' /employment requirements.

23. Periodic programme review should be undertaken by a panel drawn from staff representing the department offering the programme, staff outside the department and independent peers from outside the university, drawing in representatives of professional and other external bodies with an interest in the standards and quality of graduates. Such reviews should aim to:

- stand back from the immediacy of the programme delivery and management;
- consider whether the curriculum and teaching and learning styles remain valid and appropriate in the light of developing knowledge in the discipline;
- consider changes affecting the application of knowledge to practice and employment;
- consider any changes affecting student entry patterns and demand, including the specified entry requirements to the programme;
- consider student feedback obtained from students at different points on the programme.

24. Programme approval and review processes should be clearly described, documented and communicated to all staff who is involved with them, including external members of review panels.

25. Concise description of how programmes are approved, monitored and approved should also be available to students, including prospective and postgraduate students.

APPENDIX TO CODE OF PRACTICE ON PROGRAMME APPROVAL, MONITORING AND REVIEW

GUIDELINES FOR VALIDATION PANELS

The questions below are designed to help validation panels and departmental staff to prepare for the validation and approval of new programmes. They draw on the text of the Code of Practice for programme, approval and review and suggest questions to help validation panels and departmental staff teams to focus on a common set of issues. Institutions may wish to adapt or refine the questions to meet their own circumstances.

Evaluation of Intended Learning Outcomes

1. What are the intended learning outcomes for the programme?
2. How do they relate to external reference points? (The reference points are likely to include relevant subject benchmark statements, a national qualifications framework and relevant professional body requirements.)
3. How do any stated learning outcomes relate to the overall aims of the programme?
4. Are the intended learning outcomes appropriate for the aims of the programme?

Curriculum Design and Achievement of Intended Learning Outcomes

5. How does the curriculum content enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes?
6. How effective is the design and organization of the curriculum in promoting student learning and achievement?
7. How do the design and content of the curricula encourage development and demonstration of a variety of learning skills? (Examples of learning skills might be: subject knowledge and understanding; cognitive skills; practical/professional skills; skills transferable across different types of employment; preparation for postgraduate study; and personal development skills).
8. Is there evidence that curricular content and design are informed by recent developments in teaching and learning; by current research and scholarship of teaching staff; and by any changes in relevant occupational or professional requirements?

Communication of Intended Learning Outcomes to Students and External Assessors

9. How will students know what is expected of them in the programme? How and by whom are these expectations communicated to students?
10. How will the intended outcomes of a programme be communicated to external assessors to inform their moderating role?

Evaluation of the Assessment Process and the Standard It Demonstrates

11. Does the assessment process enable learners to demonstrate achievement of intended outcomes and encourage students to acquire good learning skills?
12. Are there criteria and marking schemes that enable internal examiners and external assessors to distinguish between different levels and qualities of student performance?
13. What safeguards and mechanisms exist to promote confidence in the security and integrity of assessment procedures?
14. What evidence is there that the standards achieved by learners meet the minimum expectations for the award, as measured against relevant subject benchmarks and the qualifications framework?

Reviewing and Improving Standards Achieved by Students

15. Are there departmental mechanisms in place to enable the standards actually achieved by students to be reviewed? How does the review process lead to improvement?

Quality of Teaching Provided and of Student Learning Opportunities

16. Are the proposed teaching strategies aligned with the curriculum content and programme aims?
17. Where and how in the programme design and teaching are staff encouraged to draw upon their research, scholarship or professional activity to inform their teaching?
18. How good are the materials provided to support learning?
19. Are students encouraged to engage actively with and participate in the structure and content of the programme?
20. Is the quality of teaching maintained and enhanced through effective staff development, peer review of teaching, integration of part-time and visiting staff, effective team teaching and induction and mentoring of new staff?
21. Are student workloads likely to support or inhibit effective learning?

Student Progression and Academic Support

22. Is the academic support available to students to assist them in their learning consistent with the student entry profile and the overall aims of the provision?
23. Are the arrangements for student admission and induction clear and understood by staff and applicants?
24. How effectively is student learning facilitated by academic guidance, feedback and supervisory arrangements?
25. Are the arrangements for academic guidance and support clear and generally understood by staff and students?

Learning Resources and their Deployment

26. Do staff have opportunities for staff development appropriate to the aims of the programmes they teach?
27. Is appropriate technical and administrative support available to teaching staff and to students?
28. Is there a departmental or university strategy for the creation, operation and improvement of library, laboratory and other learning resources?
29. Is suitable teaching and learning accommodation available to match the requirements of the programme?
30. Are book and periodical stocks appropriate and accessible?
31. Are suitable equipment and appropriate IT facilities available to learners?