

GOOD PRACTICES IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

Good Practices in Quality Assurance

A Handbook for the
Sub-degree Sector

A publication by the
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Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of
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~ Tripartite Liaison Committee ~
Hong Kong

*Good Practices in Quality Assurance:
A Handbook for the Sub-degree Sector*

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Foreword

I am very happy to introduce this publication, *Good Practices in Quality Assurance: A Handbook for the Sub-degree Sector*.

The self-financing sub-degree (SFSD) sector has undergone a massive expansion over the past few years. Hong Kong has moved away from an essentially elitist higher education system to one which espouses inclusivity and the provision of study opportunities to all those who wish to take advantage of them.

This huge expansion of post-secondary education, with an associated increase in the number of students and the number of institutions providing sub-degree programmes, has raised concerns in society about the maintenance of standards and the overall quality of provision. Providing affordable programmes to large numbers of students in a self-financing environment requires institutions to find an appropriate balance between quality and cost-effectiveness.

In response to these concerns, the Tripartite Liaison Committee, formed by the Education Bureau (EDB), the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) and the Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC), set up an Expert Group on Good Practices for the Sub-degree Sector. The Expert Group has been tasked with collecting and disseminating examples of good practice in quality assurance in the sub-degree sector in Hong Kong. The *Handbook* you are now reading is the outcome of our efforts.

The Expert Group has spent a year gathering examples of good practice in quality assurance in all aspects of the delivery of sub-degree programmes in the self-financing sector. These examples have been taken from a number of sources. Some have been provided by the institutions themselves, some have been identified during Institutional Review exercise and yet others have been provided by the Quality Assurance Agencies.

It is not our intention to suggest that the examples of good practices that appear in the *Handbook* are applicable in all institutions. Nor do we believe that the list is exhaustive. The sub-degree sector is so wide and diverse that ‘one size’ cannot possibly ‘fit all’. Our purpose is to disseminate the good practices we have identified as widely as possible and to stimulate discussion on how they might be integrated or adapted for use in another institutional setting. We also hope that the publication of the *Handbook* will foster greater collaboration and cooperation between institutions on quality issues. The development and delivery of high-quality programmes is in the interest of all stakeholders in the educational enterprise: institutions, individual teaching staff, administrators, students, parents and employers.

We are confident that this *Handbook* will help all of us involved in the SFSD sector to strive towards best practice in quality assurance and promote the development of a quality culture in every institution.

It has been our pleasure to be involved in the development of this valuable resource. We hope it will prove useful to all those who read and use it.

Professor Danny Wong

Chairman

Expert Group on Good Practices for the Sub-degree Sector

Message from the Education Bureau

We believe that post-secondary education in Hong Kong is rightly characterised by its excellent quality. Its upholding must be guarded and sustained by a professional and independent quality assurance system. This system is underpinned by reputable external quality assurance agencies which have the trust of the community. In supplement, local post-secondary education institutions themselves have put in place internal quality assurance processes that are responsible, transparent and effective.

This *Handbook* rightly makes the point that one size does not fit all. There is no one single quality assurance process that befits each and every post-secondary education institution in Hong Kong. However, there are universal basic principles and practical ways of assuring teaching and learning quality that the institutions can share among themselves and learn from each other.

I commend the Expert Group under the aegis of the EDB/HKCAAVQ/JQRC Tripartite Liaison Committee for compiling this important work: *Good Practices in Quality Assurance: A Handbook for the Sub-degree Sector*. The publication of this *Handbook* demonstrates the commitment of the post-secondary education sector in Hong Kong to safeguard and enhance the quality of education. I trust that this *Handbook* will become a useful and practical reference for our post-secondary education institutions as well as quality assurance agencies.

Michael SUEN, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Message from the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications

As a member of the Tripartite Liaison Committee, the HKCAAVQ is happy to see the fruition of the *Good Practices in Quality Assurance: A Handbook for the Sub-degree Sector* after embarking on its preparation one and a half years ago. The principles and practices shared in this *Handbook* are intended to serve as a reference for providers to establish processes which ensure that the sub-degree programmes offered in Hong Kong meet international standards and provide quality outcomes for the learners.

Quality assurance rests on the notion of constant improvement, improvement that fits the purpose of the individual operators as there is no one size that fits all. Therefore, users of this *Handbook* are invited to critically review, assess and apply good practices that best suit their respective operations and make necessary adaptation and refinement as their cases may warrant. This *Good Practices Handbook* should also be a living document and be constantly reviewed and revised to reflect the latest developments and practices across the sub-degree sector.

So in other words the success and effectiveness of the *Handbook* depends on the users of the *Handbook*, how they use it and how they contribute to its perfection. The HKCAAVQ trusts that this *Handbook* will be a valuable tool for the further development of quality assurance practices in Hong Kong.

Dr York Liao, SBS, JP

Chairman

Hong Kong Council for Accreditation
of Academic and Vocational Qualifications

Message from the Joint Quality Review Committee

On behalf of the JQRC, I am delighted to introduce *Good Practices in Quality Assurance: A Handbook for the Sub-degree Sector*. ‘Quality Assurance’ in higher education has become increasingly prominent throughout the world. In recent years, the diversified and rapid expansion of the self-financed sub-degree (SFSD) education sector in Hong Kong has given rise to a need for greater consistency and transparency of programme quality. This *Handbook* aims to share within the sub-degree sector the essential quality assurance principles and key elements of good practices. This aligns well with one of the key objectives of the JQRC: the sharing of good practices among institutions for the mutual enhancement of quality.

With JQRC member institutions providing the bulk of the SFSD programmes in Hong Kong, we strongly believe that appropriate and rigorous internal quality assurance mechanisms at our member institutions are key drivers of long-term success and the guarantee of quality. Thus, it is befitting that this *Handbook* focuses on internal good practices in Quality Assurance at both the institutional and programme levels. In fact, the Institutional Reviews of member institutions conducted by the JQRC have provided a substantial number of the examples cited in the *Handbook*.

The JQRC has worked closely with the Expert Group formed under the Tripartite Liaison Committee (TLC). The TLC, comprising the Education Bureau, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications and the JQRC, has been the driving force behind this project and the emphasis it places on quality in the SFSD sector has contributed to the assurance of sector-wide quality standards.

This *Handbook* will encourage all higher education and post-secondary institutions to view quality assurance as an integral part of internal management, inspire them to devise and enhance their quality assurance practices, and to develop a professional sharing culture and continuous commitment to excellence.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all those who have contributed to the production of this *Handbook*, particularly members of the Expert Group as well as all contributing institutions for their efforts, willingness to participate, and sharing of good practices.

Professor T S Chan

Chairman

Joint Quality Review Committee

**Good Practices in Quality Assurance:
A Handbook for the Sub-degree Sector**

CHAPTER

1

Introduction



Background

The development of Hong Kong's higher education system over the past twenty years reflects the changing economic realities during that period. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the Hong Kong economy transformed from a manufacturing-based to a service-based structure. In order to meet the expectations of an increasingly affluent society for adequate provision of tertiary education and to respond to the increased demand for highly skilled workers, the Government initiated a major expansion of full-time and part-time degree places.

The Development of Higher Education in Hong Kong 1983–1999

Between 1983 and 1994, the Government increased the number of post-secondary institutions funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) and its predecessor, the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC), from three (The University of Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong and The Hong Kong Polytechnic) to eight. It achieved this by establishing two new institutions (The Hong Kong City Polytechnic and The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology), by amalgamating the five existing Teacher Training Colleges into a single degree-awarding institution (The Hong Kong Institute of Education) and by taking over the funding of two former private colleges (the Hong Kong Baptist College and Lingnan College). The number of degree places was increased through the accreditation of the two Polytechnics, the Hong Kong Baptist College, Lingnan College and the Hong Kong Institute of Education for degree-awarding status. The Government also established a degree-awarding open and distance education institution (the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong) in 1989 and The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts in 1984, which is also degree-awarding.

By 1997 the number of degree-awarding institutions had increased to ten and the number of universities had risen to eight. The two Polytechnics, the two Colleges and the Open Learning Institute had attained self-accrediting status and university title and were focusing their efforts on establishing their reputation for teaching and research at undergraduate and postgraduate level. At the end of the 1990s, the participation rate of the 17–20 age group in post-secondary education was about 30%, comprising around 17% in undergraduate programmes, around 11% in subsidised sub-degree programmes and the rest studying overseas.¹

By the turn of the millennium, in the face of a globalised economy fuelled by rapid technological advances, an ever-changing and expanding knowledge base and the Mainland's robust economic growth, it was clear that a further shift to a knowledge-based economy was required. In order to sustain the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's competitiveness, the Government would have to

¹ Information provided by the Education Bureau.

foster further the development of a well-educated, capable and versatile workforce, committed to lifelong learning.

The Chief Executive's Policy Address 2000

In his policy speech in 2000, the then Chief Executive of the HKSAR set in motion a series of initiatives that have transformed the post-secondary sector in Hong Kong. The policy objectives included enabling 60% of senior secondary school leavers of the 17-20 age group to receive full-time post-secondary education by 2010,² and supporting learning throughout the working life until 60 years of age. It was clear that there was room for the self-financing sub-degree (SFSD) sector to take the lead in responding to society's demand for lifelong learning opportunities. The Government would provide incentives and assistance for providers through land grants, start-up loans and accreditation grants to institutions and financial assistance for needy students.

Prior to 2000, sub-degree programmes consisted mainly of publicly-funded Higher Diploma and Professional Diploma programmes, such as those offered by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU), City University of Hong Kong (CityU), The Vocational Training Council (VTC) and The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (APA). They were typically designed to meet the manpower requirements of specific industries. Although not universally recognised for advanced standing towards degree programmes in local universities, the diplomas were widely accepted for entry to non-local degree programmes and advanced standing entry to overseas universities and postgraduate studies after a top-up programme of one to two years.

In 2000, the SFSD sector consisted of the continuing and professional education (CPE) units of the publicly-funded institutions under the UGC, The Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) and a number of self-financed continuing education providers. The SFSD providers offered programmes of all kinds and at all levels including degree programmes leading to awards of overseas universities. The Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions (FCE), a self-funded, not-for-profit organisation, was established by a number of continuing education providers in 1994 to promote lifelong learning in Hong Kong. The Government consulted closely with the FCE in determining the new shape of full-time sub-degree education in Hong Kong.

In 2001, the Executive Council accepted the recommendation that taught postgraduate and sub-degree programmes should gradually move to a self-financing basis, subject to specified exceptions. Since funding support was removed, many providers have continued to offer Higher Diploma (HD) programmes on a self-financing basis whereby their graduates enjoy good brand recognition for

² Education Bureau (2008). *Report of the Phase Two Review of the Post Secondary Education Sector*. Para 1.1 p. 1.

employment in the relevant industries. In fact, the provision of Higher Diploma places has increased dramatically since 2000. In 2001, twenty-two full-time accredited self-financing Higher Diploma programmes were offered in Hong Kong. By 2008, there were 128 programmes.³

Institutions currently offering self-financing sub-degree programmes are listed in the Appendix.

Development of Associate Degree Programmes

One of the major initiatives to have made a significant contribution to the achievement of the 60% participation rate in post-secondary education targeted by the Chief Executive in 2000 is the introduction of Associate Degree (AD) programmes.

The AD offers a second chance to senior secondary leavers who have not achieved the necessary results in HKCEE and HKAL examinations to reach the benchmark for university entry and gain a recognised terminal qualification to enter trained or skilled work. The AD is a two-year full-time programme for S7 leavers designed to slot into Year 2 of a three-year degree programme or Year 3 of a four-year university programme. S5 leavers have the opportunity to start with a one-year pre-Associate Degree (pre-AD) before taking the Associate Degree, or to enrol in a three-year Associate Degree programme.

The first AD programmes were launched in September 2000 by HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE), City University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Baptist University. Since the announcement of the Common Descriptors proposed by the Education and Manpower Bureau⁴, the FCE and the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA)⁵ in 2001,⁶ self-financing AD programmes have developed rapidly. The total supply of self-financing sub-degree places increased nine-fold during the period from the 2000/01 to 2005/06 academic years, and the participation rate of the 17-20 age group in post-secondary education over the same period increased from 33% to 66%. A period of consolidation started in 2005/06, with the number of providers of sub-degree programmes stabilising at 20 and the participation rate at 60%.⁷ In 2001 there were sixteen full-time accredited self-financing Associate Degree programmes. By 2008, the number of programmes had risen to 161.⁸

3 Available at http://www.ipass.gov.hk/eng/stat_pg_index.aspx

4 Since July 2007 renamed the Education Bureau (EDB).

5 Renamed as Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) in October 2007.

6 Available at http://www.ipass.gov.hk/eng/reg_sd.aspx

7 Education Bureau (2008). *Report of the Phase Two Review of the Post Secondary Education Sector*. Executive Summary Para 6 p. 2.

8 Statistical information available on i-PASS The Information Portal for Accredited Self-financing Post-secondary Programmes (<http://www.ipass.gov.hk>).

Articulation for AD graduates into degree programmes has succeeded with greater ease and in larger numbers than expected, with up to 50% of AD graduates regularly articulating to local or overseas universities. Nevertheless, the Government has recognised that the lack of additional funded Year 2 places for AD graduates in the three-year degree programmes of local universities is creating a bottleneck. It has therefore brought forward the creation of committed funded senior year degree places at intake level, resulting in 1,927 Year 2 places for AD graduates in local universities in the 2008/09 academic year.⁹

In respect of employment opportunities for AD graduates, many professional bodies from across all sectors offer exemptions from parts of professional examinations for appropriate accredited ADs.¹⁰ There are a number of civil service grades that accept accredited AD qualifications for appointment purposes, including: Ambulance Officer, Analyst / Programmer II, Assistant Information Officer (Stream: Photo), Assistant Leisure Services Manager II, Health Inspector II, Immigration Officer, Industrial Officer (Correctional Services), Inspector of Customs and Excise, Inspector of Police, Occupational Safety Officer II, Officer (Correctional Services), Police Translator II and Station Officer (Operational).

Nevertheless the HD continues to fare better than the AD in terms of recognition by employers. The Phase Two Review of the Post Secondary Education Sector completed in 2008 recognised that the co-existence of the AD and HD had created some confusion amongst the public and employers that led some people to doubt the value of the AD as a standalone qualification. It therefore recommended that the two should be better defined and differentiated to provide better guidance to institutions in curriculum planning and students on choosing programmes.¹¹

The Common Descriptors for Associate Degree and Higher Diploma programmes were finalised in 2008 and will be used from 2009/10 as the basis of external programme review and validation exercises by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) and the Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC). Although both qualifications are benchmarked at Level 4 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework and their graduates can articulate into Year 3 of a four-year degree programme or Year 2 of a three-year degree programme, the descriptors emphasise the difference between the purposes of the two qualifications. The AD is described as ‘a valuable standalone exit qualification for further studies and employment in administrative and managerial positions at entry level’. The HD is described as ‘a valuable standalone exit qualification for employment at the para-professional level’. To this end, from 2010/11, at least 60% of the AD curriculum is expected to consist of generic

9 Education Bureau (2008). *Report of the Phase Two Review of the Post Secondary Education Sector*. Executive Summary Para 20 p.8.

10 For a full list of exemptions see http://www.ipass.gov.hk/eng/reg_pb_all.aspx

11 Education Bureau (2008). *Report of the Phase Two Review of the Post Secondary Education Sector*. Executive Summary Para 8 p.3.

contents such as language, IT, and general education, whereas at least 60% of the HD curriculum should consist of specialised contents such as learning related to concentrations in specific disciplines and/or professional/ vocational skills.

The Hong Kong Qualifications Framework

The Chief Executive's Policy Address in 2000 also heralded another major new initiative in continuing and higher education in Hong Kong: the development of a qualifications framework. He described it as 'a lifelong learning ladder' that would help to maintain the confidence of employers and professional bodies in the qualifications awarded by the training providers.

After extensive consultation and the enactment of enabling legislation, the seven-level Qualifications Framework (QF) was officially launched on 5 May 2008. The QF is a cross-sectoral hierarchy covering the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors. It seeks to enable people to set clear goals and direction for obtaining quality-assured qualifications on their lifelong learning pathway. The QF is designed to be applicable to all sectors to facilitate the interface between academic, vocational and continuing education. Each of the seven levels is characterised by outcome-based Generic Level Descriptors¹² which describe the common features of qualifications at the same level. Associate Degrees and Higher Diplomas are situated at Level 4 of the hierarchy.

Government Support for the SFSD Sector since 2000

The Education and Manpower Bureau estimated that 480,000m² of additional classroom space would be required to accommodate the 83,000 students who would be involved in full-time post-secondary education by 2010 if the 60% target participation rate were to be achieved. In 2001, the Government provided HK\$5 billion funding for support measures to enable accredited (including self-accrediting) institutions to launch Associate Degree programmes. They offered interest-free short-term loans for rental or medium-term loans repayable in ten years to improve or expand existing campuses and purchase or build new premises on Government land. Fourteen sites of 2,000m² to 7,000m² were identified and of eight made available five were allocated. Sixteen institutions secured 25 loans totalling \$4.1 billion.¹³

This support for institutions enabled them to pursue the establishment of Community Colleges. This vision of a dedicated institution for the delivery of sub-degree programmes was first articulated in 'Learning for Life – Learning through Life', the reform proposals for the education system in Hong Kong proposed

12 Available at http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/HKQF_GLD.asp

13 Education Bureau (2008). *Report of the Phase Two Review of the Post Secondary Education Sector*. Para 5.3 p. 21.

by the Education Commission (EC) in September 2000. The EC Report defined Community Colleges as education institutions that:

provide learners with an alternative route to higher education which, to a certain extent, articulates with university programmes; provide a second opportunity to learners who have yet to attain qualifications at secondary level through formal education; and provide a variety of learning opportunities to assist individual learners to acquire skills and qualifications to enhance their employability.¹⁴

It specified that they should operate according to the principle of lenient entry, stringent exit and should offer flexibility to learners in terms of learning mode and course duration. The Report clearly indicated that Community Colleges would not receive recurrent funding from Government but could seek funding from various sources to ‘allow a wider spectrum of the society to contribute to education in Hong Kong’.¹⁵

The Government recognised that it would not be sufficient to offer start-up assistance to the institutions alone. To succeed in its objective of retaining 60% of senior secondary school leavers in full-time education, and to ensure that no person aspiring to higher education would be deprived of the opportunity through lack of means, it pledged to offer financial incentives to learners as well. Through the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) it extended the Non-means-tested Loan Scheme for Post-secondary Students (NLSPS) to cover full-time students on accredited programmes, and launched a Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students (FASP) covering fees of full-time accredited self-financing programmes.

Financial Support for Quality Assurance

Since all of the financial incentives to participate in the expansion of post-secondary education offered by the Government that have been described above were only available to accredited institutions and programmes, non-self-accrediting providers wishing to benefit from the schemes therefore had to seek institutional accreditation and programme validation by the HKCAAVQ. To lessen the burden of external accreditation and to encourage more providers to step forward, the Government has introduced a number of schemes since 2001. The Accreditation Grant for Self-financing Programmes covers 100% of the fees for initial evaluation and 50% to 75% of Programme Validation fees for self-financing programmes offered by non-profit making organisations subject to successful accreditation by the HKCAAVQ and registration of the qualification on the Qualifications Register (QR), up to a ceiling

14 Education Commission (September 2000) *‘Learning for Life – Learning through Life’ Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong*. p.126–127.

15 Education Commission (September 2000) *‘Learning for Life – Learning through Life’ Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong*. p.127–128.

of HK\$2 million per organisation. Providers may also apply for a grant of 50% of Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) fees, subject to successful accreditation by the HKCAAVQ, up to a ceiling of HK\$1 million per organisation and a subsidy of 50% of QR registration and hosting fees for registering programmes on the QR.¹⁶

Financial Support for Quality Enhancement

In April 2008, the Secretary for Education announced the introduction of a HK\$100 million Quality Enhancement Grant Scheme for projects/initiatives of institutions in the sub-degree sector to improve students' learning, teaching methods, course quality and career guidance.

Accreditation and Review of SFSD Programmes

In an expanded self-financing educational system in which both publicly-funded and private providers participate, quality is of paramount importance to the institutions, the Government and the public. The Government sees quality as 'the cornerstone of the development of (the) post-secondary sector'¹⁷ and acknowledges that it is an area of major public concern following the robust development of the sector since 2000.

Although seeking external accreditation is a voluntary process in the SFSD sector, providers recognise that the sustainability of their self-funding programmes depends on their ability to demonstrate that the qualifications they award deliver the expected learning outcomes to their graduates in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies. With the introduction of Government financial support for the SFSD sector, programmes at the AD/HD level must also obtain accreditation status to enable the providers to apply for Government loans and the students to apply for financial assistance. Since the launch of the QF, accreditation of sub-degree programmes offered by non-self-accrediting institutions has become a prerequisite for their registration on the QR.

Responsibility for external quality assurance in the sub-degree sector is vested in two bodies: the HKCAAVQ and the JQRC. The HKCAAVQ is responsible for the accreditation of all SFSD programmes offered by providers who are not affiliated with self-accrediting institutions, whereas the JQRC is responsible for the external review of SFSD provision in self-accrediting UGC-funded institutions.

¹⁶ Education Bureau notes on Support Scheme for Qualifications Framework, May 2008.

¹⁷ Education Bureau (2008). *Report of the Phase Two Review of the Post Secondary Education Sector*. Executive Summary Para 9 p.4.

Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ)

The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is a statutory body established under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (CAP 1150) which came into effect on 1 October 2007. Effective from the same date, the HKCAAVQ has replaced the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA).

The new Council is appointed by the Secretary for Education as the Accreditation Authority and QR (Qualifications Register) Authority under the Qualifications Framework. In this capacity, it is responsible for safeguarding the quality of the qualifications entered into the Qualifications Register and hence recognised under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF). In addition to these statutory roles, the HKCAAVQ continues to perform other functions of the former HKCAA in connection with accreditation, qualifications assessment and other relevant professional services. The HKCAAVQ accredits academic and vocational learning programmes not operated and quality-assured by self-accrediting operators, at all QF Levels including but not limited to the accreditation of all non-self-accrediting institutions offering sub-degree and degree level programmes in Hong Kong. It is responsible for the validation of all academic and vocational programmes offered by the institutions under its remit.

The HKCAAVQ operates a Four-stage Quality Assurance Process¹⁸ to underpin the QF. As the accreditation authority of QF, the HKCAAVQ assesses: (1) if the operators are able to achieve their claimed objectives and to operate learning programmes that meet QF standards; and (2) if the learning programmes achieve the claimed objectives and meet the required standards to deliver their stated learning outcomes with reference to the Generic Level Descriptors of QF. The process will also identify deficiencies that need to be addressed by operators to improve the quality of their institutional structure and their learning programmes.

Operators with a track record in the area of validated programmes who have normally completed at least two cycles of programme revalidation in relevant programme area(s) can be considered for Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) in the same area of study. Successful PAA confers programme area accreditation status on operators. Operators with PAA status can, within the PAA validity period, develop and offer new learning programmes within a defined scope of programme area and at specified QF level(s) and enter the qualifications of those learning programmes into the QR without being subject to external quality assurance by the HKCAAVQ. Operators with PAA status are subject to periodic review at regular intervals after the PAA.

18 http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services_fourstage.asp

Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC)

Quality assurance of degree level provision at the eight publicly-funded institutions under the aegis of the University Grants Committee (UGC) in Hong Kong is the responsibility of the UGC through its Quality Assurance Council (QAC). Until 2005, neither the CPE units of the self-accrediting institutions under the UGC, nor their programmes, were subject to external accreditation or review, except for professional accreditation of some programmes. The eight institutions are self-accrediting and each has internal quality assurance mechanisms for ensuring the quality of its programmes. The expansion of the SFSD sector in recent years and new developments such as the establishment of a Qualifications Framework in Hong Kong led the Heads of Universities Committee to establish a joint body for the review of the quality assurance processes for self-financing sub-degree programmes.

In August 2005, the Joint Quality Review Committee Ltd (JQRC) was incorporated by the eight UGC-funded institutions as a limited company to provide for enhanced quality and greater public accountability in respect of their self-financing sub-degree programmes, which are offered through continuing education units and community colleges or other departments of the institutions. JQRC advocates the achievement of public accountability through self-regulation. It conducts periodic peer reviews of the SFSD units of the eight institutions through a process of Institutional Review. It is not involved in the planning of courses or accreditation but its reviews are designed to ensure that effective quality assurance (QA) systems are in place. It advises member institutions on the appropriate placement of their sub-degree programmes on the QR, and, if requested by a member institution, may validate any self-financing programme which the member intends to offer. JQRC also facilitates the promotion and exchange of good practices among its member institutions.

To improve cooperation between the private and UGC-funded providers and the Government and to facilitate a more structured dialogue between the QA agencies, the Government set up a Tripartite Liaison Committee (TLC) in 2006. The TLC provides a forum for the three major stakeholders in quality assurance in the sub-degree sector (the EDB, the HKCAAVQ and the JQRC) to meet and share views.

The Handbook on Good Practices in Quality Assurance for the Sub-degree Sector

In order to allay public concerns about the consistency of quality of sub-degree provision in such a diversified and rapidly developing sector, the Government encouraged the HKCAAVQ and the JQRC to step up their publicity efforts so as to increase public understanding of their QA work and achievements. In response, the TLC set up an Expert Group consisting of representatives of providers, QA experts and the QA agencies, to develop a handbook on good practices in quality assurance

for the sub-degree sector. The *Handbook* would combine general principles and institutional experience and could serve as a reference for both providers and QA agencies. At the same time it could demonstrate to the wider community the sector's commitment to excellence and the safeguards provided by the external quality assurance system. The JQRC was appointed by the Education Bureau as the Professional Consultant to compile the *Handbook*.

The objectives of the *Handbook* are to:

- provide a reference document for the sub-degree sector on the essential quality assurance principles and key elements of good practice;
- promote and share good practice among institutions doing similar work;
- enhance the consistency of quality assurance across the sector;
- improve the overall quality of the sector;
- generate further discussion of QA principles and methods; and
- encourage variation and innovation in the design and implementation of QA.

The examples of good practice described in this *Handbook* have been collected from several sources. At the start of the project, the Expert Group invited all SFSD institutions to provide instances of good practice in quality assurance for possible inclusion. In addition, for those institutions subject to Institutional Review, items of good practice identified by the Review Panel in the course of the review exercises were considered for inclusion. The QA agencies were also invited to supply examples. The final choice of examples was made by the Expert Group.

The range of good practices described in this *Handbook* bears witness to the fact that there is no such thing as 'one size fits all' when it comes to the quality assurance of educational provision. Nevertheless the examples demonstrate that it is possible for each institution to establish processes that ensure that the sub-degree programmes offered in Hong Kong by accredited and self-accrediting providers meet international standards and provide quality outcomes for learners, enabling them to succeed in the globalised knowledge economy of the twenty-first century.

Part I

Principles

CHAPTER

2

Quality Assurance Principles



Introduction

This *Handbook* is divided into two main parts. Part II will detail instances of good practice in quality assurance for sub-degree programmes identified in various institutions in Hong Kong. All good practice, however, is underpinned by certain principles and it is these principles which will be detailed in this chapter (Part I).

The principles extend beyond the quality assurance processes adopted by an institution in relation to ensuring the quality of programmes and include the institution itself, its culture, management, facilities, staff and systems. Their purpose is to provide a common frame of reference which can be used by institutions, agencies, Government and the public alike to inform and raise the expectations of all stakeholders about the processes and outcomes of higher education. At the same time they must help individual post-secondary education institutions to develop their own quality assurance systems for sub-degree programmes.

The principles are not prescriptive or unchangeable, nor are they intended to dictate practice or stifle diversity and innovation. An awareness of and commitment to these key principles, however, will help an institution to reassure itself that it has developed and is applying good practice in its quality assurance activities.

The Principles are grouped into eight sections.

1. Institutional Structure and Culture

Providers of post-secondary education have the primary responsibility for ensuring the quality of the programmes they offer. Quality should be part of the institutional ethos underpinning all activities of teaching, learning and management. This can be achieved as follows:

- 1.1 senior management must be seen to be supportive of all quality procedures and processes;
- 1.2 quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of post-secondary education institutions;
- 1.3 quality objectives should be clearly stated and the governance and institutional structure should provide for a systematic approach to achieving them;
- 1.4 quality assurance should be a cooperative process across all levels and include extensive involvement of staff, students and stakeholders;
- 1.5 all activities should be supported by efficient and effective organisational structures;
- 1.6 quality assurance should be afforded a formal status within the organisation and quality assurance responsibilities clearly identified;

- 1.7 the roles, duties and terms of reference of the different parties involved in quality assurance should be clearly defined; and
- 1.8 opportunities should be provided for bottom-up and self-led initiatives as well as those originating from management.

2. Institutional Autonomy and Public Accountability

Quality assurance in education includes achieving defined standards of education and meeting the needs of stakeholders. External quality assurance agencies respect the autonomy, identity, diversity and integrity of sub-degree providers. For their part, institutions need to recognise their educational and social responsibilities and public accountability. The rapid expansion of the sub-degree sector, together with international competition, student transfer and graduate mobility, has given rise to a need for greater transparency. These principles assist sub-degree providers to manage and enhance the quality of their programmes and thereby to justify their institutional autonomy.

Quality assurance enables providers to achieve a healthy balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability, thereby:

- 2.1 safeguarding the interests of society in the quality and standards of sub-degree education;
- 2.2 developing and improving the quality of academic programmes for students and other beneficiaries of sub-degree education;
- 2.3 demonstrating accountability for the investment of public and private money by informing and reporting openly on external review decisions; and
- 2.4 applying standards which have been subject to benchmarking and consultation with stakeholders and contribute to both quality improvement and accountability.

3. Mission and Resources

Quality assurance in post-secondary education needs to consider not only outcomes but also the context and interaction of the various players involved. The quality assurance policies and procedures of an institution should reflect its mission and values. The linking of quality assurance and mission helps to determine 'fitness for purpose'. Additionally, it is important that fulfilling quality assurance requirements should not become so onerous a task that it jeopardises the smooth operation of the institution. Quality assurance systems and structures should be built on the basis of optimal sufficiency and economy of effort. In summary:

- 3.1 quality assurance systems should reflect the mission of the provider;

- 3.2 a provider's quality assurance systems should complement, clarify and support its core activities and be in keeping with its context and capacity;
- 3.3 although all providers must develop and implement quality assurance procedures based on the common principles, there will be variations in procedure and content, reflecting the diversity of mission and context among providers; and
- 3.4 resource implications (staff, financial and physical) of establishing and maintaining effective quality management systems within an institution must be considered.

4. Consultation and Interaction for Continuous Improvement

The sub-degree scene reflects changing societal demands. Continuous improvement and development are therefore crucial to the long-term prosperity and survival of providers. It follows that quality assurance criteria and processes will need to evolve and adapt to remain current and effective. Development of quality assurance systems should be accomplished with input from and in consultation with stakeholders.

- 4.1 providers should aim for continuous improvement of programmes and courses;
- 4.2 providers should aim for continuous improvement of quality assurance systems and processes; and
- 4.3 applying principles and policies which have been subject to consultation with stakeholders (students, student bodies, staff representatives, advisors and external agencies) will contribute to both quality improvement and accountability.

5. Quantitative and Qualitative Indicators

Most quality assurance systems use quantitative data combined with qualitative judgement to assess the quality of educational outcomes. Quantitative ratings are designed to gather verifiable and evaluative data and facilitate performance comparability, especially on a longitudinal basis. It is expected that common and practical quantitative criteria can be established and adopted across institutions. It is equally important, however, that attention be given to other aspects of provision and delivery which are less amenable to quantifiable monitoring. Qualitative data often provide a rich source of information which can readily inform decision-making for quality enhancement purposes.

- 5.1 institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities;

- 5.2 collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data will provide a basis for performance indicators in aspects of student achievement, staff quality, financial viability and educational outcomes; and
- 5.3 quality assurance systems should employ a suitable mixture of quantitative and qualitative input.

6. Self-Evaluation and Peer Review

Effective quality assurance systems combine the elements of self-evaluation and peer review. Most quality assurance exercises begin with a self-evaluation exercise which may take place at institutional, departmental or programme level and allow for an examination of objectives and an analysis of how far those objectives are being met. The self-evaluation also looks at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Peer review brings an independent and objective element to the process.

- 6.1 self-evaluation should be an ongoing process built into all activities to foster continuous improvement;
- 6.2 self-evaluation contributes to self-learning about quality processes and practices;
- 6.3 a self-evaluation document should be subject to peer review;
- 6.4 there should be agreement on the qualifications and background of those involved in peer review and briefing and training on the process should be provided;
- 6.5 a peer review report should comment on strengths, suggest areas for improvement and make recommendations for further action; and
- 6.6 academic programmes and institutions should be subject to periodic review on a cyclical basis to provide an element of independence and objectivity.

7. Involvement of External Parties

Quality assurance policies should provide for the involvement of external parties. Externality of the quality assurance process enhances transparency, independence, objectivity and international benchmarking. For example, external parties can act as advisors on issues such as programme design and give weight to review and validation panels. The use of external persons is particularly important in establishing whether the standards set for a provider's awards, or parts thereof, are appropriate. The general principles for the use of external parties are as follows:

- 7.1 appointment of external parties should be based on agreed criteria for qualifications, experience, expertise or other special considerations;

- 7.2 there should be guidelines governing the selection and participation of external experts in different stages and for different areas of the quality assurance process;
- 7.3 external examiners should comment on the extent to which an institution's assessment processes are rigorous, ensure equity of treatment for students and have been fairly conducted; and
- 7.4 an assessment should be made of the standards of student performance in the programme and these standards should be compared with standards achieved in comparable programmes / institutions or with local or internationally recognised standards.

8. Transparency of Quality Assurance Processes

Institutions should make quality assurance policies available as public information which is accessible to stakeholders. The information should be up-to-date, impartial and objective. Both quantitative and qualitative data on programme and institutional quality are of interest to the public.

- 8.1 quality assurance handbooks should be made publicly available;
- 8.2 institutions have a responsibility to provide information about the programmes they are offering; and
- 8.3 institutions should encourage feedback from stakeholders on quality assurance processes.

Conclusion

The Principles outlined in this chapter should underpin the practice in institutions. This will be seen in many of the examples of good practice which appear in shaded boxes in the remaining chapters of this *Handbook*. The principles are overarching and can be applied to practices in several areas. For example, the principles of externality feature in good practice on institutional governance, strategic planning, assessment, programme development, programme approval, programme review and so on. The principles relating to institutional mission apply not only to mission and vision but also to areas such as programmes of study and the way students are supported, the way resources are deployed and general educational ethos.

Institutions are encouraged to keep these principles in mind when reviewing or devising new quality assurance procedures or when they are developing new programme areas. Practices will vary between institutions because they should be fit for purpose, but it would be advisable for institutions to give consideration to these principles at all times.

It should also be noted that although there is much general consensus regarding the overarching principles governing quality assurance in education around the world, there are also some local differences in these principles owing to different cultural, educational, or political contexts. The principles as elucidated in this chapter have taken reference from international norms but have also taken note of the local context and traditions in Hong Kong and we believe they should serve as useful reference for the SFSD sector.

Part II

Practices in

Quality Assurance

CHAPTER

3

Vision, Mission and Planning



Introduction

The Chief Executive's policy speech in 2000, in which he pledged to enable 60% of senior secondary school leavers of the 17–20 age group to receive full-time post-secondary education by 2010, acted as a catalyst in the transformation of the landscape of post-secondary provision in Hong Kong that has taken place during the past eight years.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the positive response to this initiative by educational institutions in both the public and private sector and the introduction of self-financing Associate Degree and Higher Diploma programmes have greatly increased the provision of opportunities for learning at sub-degree level. The Government recognises that Hong Kong now has 'a dynamic and responsive post-secondary sector that offers a wide range of education opportunities meeting the unique aspirations, interests and abilities of our students'.¹

Collectively, the post-secondary sector has made a major contribution to achieving the Government's vision of turning Hong Kong into a knowledge society, equipped to meet the economic and social challenges of the twenty-first century and to attaining its policy objectives to:²

- further develop Hong Kong as a regional education hub;
- support the progressive increase in post-secondary education;
- facilitate tertiary institutions, private enterprises and other organisations to provide option(s) other than traditional sixth form education, such as professional diploma courses, and allocate more resources by providing land and loans to those institutions interested in offering such courses;
- ensure that no qualified students are denied access to higher and post-secondary education due to a lack of financial means.

Vision, Mission and Values

In order to focus their efforts on contributing to achieving the Government's vision, the providers in the SFSD sector have aligned their institutional mission with Government's lifelong learning goals as illustrated in the following extracts from the Mission Statements of five different institutions:

to promote and provide high-quality lifelong learning opportunities to the public

1 EDB website <http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=225&langno=1>

2 EDB website <http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=7002&langno=1>

to promote lifelong learning for the realisation of a learning society and the community's pursuit of quality of life

to provide quality further education opportunities, including both full-time and part-time programmes to meet the different aspirations and needs of learners, and to provide progression ladders in their lifelong educational pursuits

to facilitate the growth of the knowledge society through promoting and realising the concept of lifelong learning

to foster a lifelong learning culture, using innovative teaching and learning methods, to meet the needs of working people in a changing world

This alignment with Government objectives means that, at the broadest level, the Mission Statements of all providers espouse the same overarching goals. In order to build on their individual areas of strength, however, and to maintain and expand their market share in the face of the fierce competition for students that has characterised the rapid development of the SFSD sector in recent years, it has become vital for institutions to differentiate themselves from one another in order to promote their programmes. The Vision, Mission and Values Statements that appear in their prospectuses and on their websites provide an excellent opportunity for them to achieve this.

The Vision Statement

The Vision Statement is designed to depict the long-term aim of the institution in a succinct way. In the case of the SFSD units of publicly-funded universities, the Vision Statement may also reflect the overall aspirations of the parent university.

One institution refers specifically to its obligation to align its planning with its parent university as follows:

In line with its status as an integral part of the University, the Unit has ensured that its Mission, Vision and Values are consonant with the university's mission to develop and extend 'lifelong learning opportunities for the community' and 'to produce graduates of distinction committed to lifelong learning, integrity and professionalism'.

Its Vision is:

To become a world-class centre of excellence for the provision of professional and continuing education serving Hong Kong, Mainland China and the Region.

The Community College of another university echoes its parent body's Vision to become a "preferred university" offering "preferred programmes" and producing "preferred graduates" in the following terms:

Our Vision is to become the most preferred community college offering preferred sub-degree programmes that provide a solid foundation for further study and career development.

Standalone institutions also seek to differentiate themselves from the rest of the market by publishing Vision Statements that reflect their specific institutional mandate and values and intended market niche as in the following three examples:

- to be the leading provider of vocational education and training in the region
- to be a Caring Community Education Leader
- to become an institution which can enhance the education opportunities of under-privileged students and help academically less-inclined students to achieve a minimum level of educational attainment

Institutional values may also be listed separately alongside the Vision and Mission Statements to provide an overview of the institution's guiding principles, as shown in the examples from different institutions below:

Core Values

- Integrity
- Client-focused
- Excellence
- Entrepreneurship

Guiding Values

- We believe in providing students with quality programmes. Students come to us to reach their personal and professional goals. Students expect, and deserve, quality academic offerings and student services.
- We believe that student success is primary, and excellence is achieved through teamwork, partnerships and effective communication amongst all stakeholders.
- We believe that a college should immerse into the community through collaboration, outreach and programmes for local area schools, business, industries and Government agencies.
- We believe that education is open access to learning. We are committed to provide learning opportunities for everyone with a desire to further their studies.

- We value honesty, integrity, and clarity in our faculty and staff. We also encourage similar quality development for all our students.
- We encourage creative and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. We believe that learning is a dynamic process where the role of teachers and students interchanges.

The Mission Statement

Mission Statements generally articulate a set of long-term, high-level principles for the direction of the institution and the characteristics it will display. Determining the Mission Statement is a vital activity that requires input from a wide range of stakeholders and, although the views of staff, students, employers and the wider community should be sought, ultimate responsibility for setting the Mission and purpose of the institution is normally vested at Board of Governors level.

In order to facilitate the input of key stakeholders in the planning process, a number of institutions organise retreats, which take key staff off-site to focus on long-range strategic planning. One provider describes the institutional planning process in the following terms:

Our Vision and Mission were developed by involving every faculty staff in a retreat. We came up with the shared vision: to be the best provider of Associate Degrees and other courses in business in Hong Kong. In the past few years our School has invited every faculty staff to review our Vision and Mission annually and to draw up pledge of performance, annual goals and objectives which are in line with the Vision and Mission. The Vision, Mission, pledge of performance, annual goals and objectives were then communicated to the public through annual report and School Website.

Differences in style and presentation of Mission Statements are healthy and welcome in a diverse sector. What matters is what works for the institution, taking account of its culture, needs and organisation.

One institution clearly spells out its priorities in its Mission Statement:

Our Mission is to support academic and career development of aspiring individuals through:

- Offering quality sub-degree programmes that meet the changing needs of society and prepare graduates for working in Hong Kong and the Chinese Mainland;
- Providing all-round development to nurture such desirable attributes as creativity, active learning, critical thinking, self-confidence, positive attitude, sense of responsibility, just to name a few;

- Promoting sub-degree qualifications as widely recognised qualifications in their own right and a springboard for further studies or career advancement; and
- Working closely with Government agencies, professional bodies, institutions, businesses and industries to ensure the relevance of the programmes.

Another institution, whose mission is to facilitate the growth of the knowledge society through promoting and realising the concept of lifelong learning, provides further information in its Mission Statement about the key features of its educational provision that it believes will enable it to achieve its goals:

The system is grounded in the notion of lifelong learning and operated with the following features:

- Lifewide learning
(i.e. learning be extended to all aspects of life and operated in formal, non-formal and informal settings.)
- Open access and participation
(i.e. learning be accessible to all with maximum possible flexibility within the system.)
- Coherence in and articulations between levels/fields of studies
- Partnerships within and beyond the system
(i.e. partnership among member institutions and partnership with other social sectors/groups.)

A third institution details the scope of the activities it undertakes under the umbrella of its Mission Statement as follows:

The mission . . . is to nurture and develop the talents of students, and in so doing support social and economic advancement. The Institution:

- offers professionally oriented sub-degree programmes to provide students with quality higher education of international standing in preparation for degree studies and careers.
- strives to create a learning ambience to enhance students' acquisition of useful knowledge, communicative skills and analytical abilities through innovative pedagogy and a holistic learning environment. It values the development of both an international outlook and a familiarity with Chinese culture among students.
- anticipates and responds to the needs of industry, commerce and the community for new academic programmes to directly benefit Hong Kong and beyond.
- offers short programmes, particularly at Associate Degree level, for career advancement and personal development in response to lifelong learning needs of the community.

- enhances its strength through pursuing collaboration with other institutions of higher education.
- encourages staff and students to contribute to community services through strong partnership with the Government, business, industry, professional and other sectors of the community.

Strategic Planning

Vision and Mission Statements provide the starting-point for the Strategic Planning process which is an essential tool for effective institutional management and a useful reference point in determining how to allocate resources and measure achievement.

Unless time is invested to analyse the institution and its environment, and to consider its medium and long-term direction and goals, it is unlikely that action will be focused or goals achieved. Effective planning helps higher education institutions to identify what makes them distinctive and what they have in common with other institutions, and therefore to maintain their individuality.³

Strategic Planning is a continuous, cyclical activity with three main phases:

- **planning** – researching and analysing strategy and plans, generating ideas and choices;
- **documentation** – documenting the plans and communicating them to the relevant stakeholders;
- **implementation and monitoring** – taking action to achieve the agreed goals and monitoring progress or non-achievement in order to adapt the future strategy.

Most institutions develop a collectively agreed Strategic Plan, aligned with their Mission Statement, and based on a detailed analysis of the institution's own strengths and weaknesses and of the opportunities and threats presented by the environment (SWOT analysis). The analysis provides an explicit sense of the direction of travel over the medium to long term and enables them to make a coherent response to changing circumstances as risks and opportunities arise. To accommodate the need for rapid response to market conditions and the changing environment of post-secondary education, institutions supplement the Strategic Plan with a series of more specific and detailed strategies that are aligned with key mission goals. These subsidiary strategies are designed to complement and help to implement the institutional strategic plan. They therefore need to be integrated with the strategic plan and, ideally, with one another.

To ensure appropriate external input to the planning process, the SFSD Units of

³ Higher Education Funding Council for England (June 2000). *Strategic Planning in Higher Education: A Guide for Heads of Institutions, Senior Managers and Members of Governing Bodies.*

one self-accrediting institution prepare their three-year rolling business plans on an annual basis. While being forward looking, the business plans are also reflective. Student populations will be projected for the next three years and new programmes will be considered. The business plans incorporate feedback from the Unit Advisory Committee together with market intelligence that is collected regularly.

The membership of the Advisory Committee consists of senior academic staff of the parent university; senior academic staff of other tertiary institutions and senior industrial managers. The role of the Advisory Committee is to provide a platform for sharing valuable feedback and as an interface between the CE Units and relevant areas of industry, commerce, public organisations, professional bodies, other tertiary institutions and the community in general. It also advises the CE Unit on:

- the scope and nature of its academic programmes;
- articulation pathways and career opportunities for its graduates;
- student development;
- placement/training and other activities.

The Plan should set out how the institution intends to operate to achieve its strategic goals, the key milestones and the intermediate practical steps for their attainment. In order to make the Strategic Plan operational, the institution needs to devise a concrete implementation plan that demonstrates how its strategic objectives can be achieved through specific activities in a defined timeframe within the constraints of the self-financing imperative.

As noted in Chapter 2 (Principle 3.2), it is important that, in order to determine ‘fitness for purpose’, a provider’s quality assurance systems should complement, clarify and support its core activities and be in keeping with its context and capacity. One institution describes how quality assurance policies and procedures are taken into account in translating its Strategic Plan to the operational level as part of a regular planning cycle in the following terms:

The Strategic Plan, core values and quality assurance policies and procedures form the backdrop for the Annual Development Plan which sets the scene in which various units operate from year to year. In 2007, the School expanded the single year planning system to a three-year rolling planning system. This is a development of the School’s planning cycle based on the experience gained in the past years, aiming for improved planning quality.

In the academic area, specific strategies with action plans, appropriate timelines, designated responsibility and performance indicators may be developed for academic programme development, learning and teaching, lifelong learning, and partnerships. In the area of resources they may include financial strategy, marketing strategy, human resources strategy and IT strategy, etc.

The following example is extracted from the seven-year Strategic Plan of one SFSD provider. It demonstrates effective alignment in the area of teaching and learning between mission, strategic objectives, operational goals and implementation plan:

Mission goal:

To promote innovativeness and excellence in teaching and learning

Strategic Objective:

To promote quality teaching and learning

Operational goals:

- To set up formalised and streamlined QA processes and procedures
- To provide academic related resources and facilities in support of effective teaching and efficient learning
- To further develop IT in support of e-teaching and e-learning
- To set up an effective feedback system from students, parents, employers and school sectors
- To provide an articulation ladder to local or off-shore top-up programmes
- To admit students with qualifications and encourage applications from those who support the special ethos of the Unit
- To recruit and appoint high calibre staff and build up a committed faculty team
- To enhance quality in curriculum design and instructional delivery

Implementation Plan (with reference to the first operational goal on QA):

- Implementation of academic policy and procedures
- Wide representation of University and Unit staff on Unit committees
- Programme reports and guidelines based on established University requirements with appropriate adjustments
- Appointment of Academic Advisors and External Examiners
- Formation of working groups on specific programme management

To support the strategic planning of its academic programmes, another institution has identified a set of criteria that provides the common parameters against which all proposals for academic developments and student numbers are judged:

- Community Needs – As expressed by Government, by employers, professional associations, and through the institution's own contacts with the wider community.
- Strategic Considerations – As set out in academic development proposals which may be adopted by the Academic Board.
- Student Demand – The demand by new applicants as measured by applicant-to-place ratio, the quality of applicants and intakes, and internal demand for courses where students are able to exercise choice.
- Academic Merit – consistency with the professional priorities of staff and contribution to the institution's ability to enter emerging academic areas.

- Quality of Teaching and Learning – Ability of units to facilitate sound learning outcomes and to encourage the whole person development of students.
- Adjustment Issues – contribution to maintaining minimum effective size and full use of the existing staff establishment.

Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

Once the Plan has been formulated and approved, there needs to be a commitment to ensure that it is not just another document, but a basis for collectively agreed, carefully prioritised and appropriately resourced action. To achieve this, it is essential that regular monitoring and evaluation are included as part of the planning process. Opportunities for regular periodic review and updating should also be included to ensure that both the Mission and the Plan remain relevant and useful.

Most institutions are required to present an annual report to their Board of Governors.

In the case of one institution, the report not only provides factual information on numbers and types of programmes, student populations, progress and awards, collaborative partnerships, staffing, etc., but also includes discussion and analysis of critical issues and proposed ways forward that can lead to adjustments in the overall plan.

The requirements for periodic institutional review and programme validation and revalidation by external quality assurance agencies can also act as a stimulus to self-reflection on achievements against plan based on the analysis of objective data.

One institution took the initiative to commission a comprehensive external review by an external Academic Consultation Panel, six years after its establishment. The purpose of the exercise was to:

ascertain its overall academic and management strength, and to strengthen its future development.

The Panel commented favourably on how the institution had aligned its practices with the commitment to ‘whole person education’ expressed in its Mission Statement, by developing:

a broad-based curriculum, small class size policy, full campus-life provision and emphasis on re-building students’ self-confidence.

The experience of another institution further highlights the crucial role played by an effective planning, review and evaluation cycle. At the request of its Audit

Committee, the parent university appointed a Task Force to review the provision of continuing and professional education programmes two years after the establishment of its dedicated CE Unit. The Task Force found that:

In the absence of a clearly defined strategic plan for the conduct of continuing education . . . (it was) difficult to evaluate the work of the Unit. In addition, while the market situation had changed significantly, the objectives of the Unit had not been reviewed until now.

As a result of the review, the institution developed a clear strategic statement for its overall role in the provision of continuing and professional education programmes and unambiguously assigned specific and well-differentiated roles and targets to the Units engaged in their delivery. This enabled the dedicated CE Unit to develop a Strategic Plan with clear milestones for its operation over the next three years, which could be used by the institution for an ongoing evaluation of the Unit's performance. It also put in place an appropriate governance and management structure for the Unit to assure and monitor its operation and programmes offered and to provide directions.

Conclusion

Many institutions have aligned their missions with the Government's goals for lifelong learning. In turn, Vision and Mission Statements provide the starting-point for the strategic planning process which in itself is a continuous cyclical activity. The Strategic Plan should be aligned with the Vision and Mission Statements of the institution and be based on an analysis of the institution's strengths and weaknesses.

Taking a strategic and planned approach to the development and maintenance of their activities enables institutions to confront difficult issues and to think ahead. The planning process improves communication between different stakeholders and creates confidence in what is happening. Importantly, the Strategic Plan should be translated into operation reality by the setting of concrete operational goals. By subjecting the plan to regular review in a continuous cycle of analysis, design, development, implementation, evaluation and revision, the institution is able to remain true to its vision and values and to adapt its mission and strategies to remain responsive to stakeholder needs in a rapidly changing environment.

CHAPTER

4

Governance and Management



Introduction

Governance and management are the twin key drivers of institutional quality in post-secondary education. Every institution should be headed by an effective governing body, which is unambiguously and collectively responsible for overseeing the institution. The management team, led by the designated chief executive officer (CEO), should have clearly defined responsibility and delegated executive authority for the day-to-day management of the institution and be accountable to the governing body.

In March 2002, the University Grants Committee published a report written by Lord Sutherland on the future developments of *Higher Education in Hong Kong* (The Sutherland Report). It underlined the key importance of governance in the following terms:

Probity, efficiency and effectiveness in universities derive from, and are driven by, good governance processes and structures.¹

One of the recommendations of the report was that the governing body of each university should carry out a review of the fitness for purpose of its governance and management structures. It emphasised that a one-size-fits-all approach is not applicable to the governance of higher education institutions and that there is accordingly no single model which can be adopted by all the universities in Hong Kong. Such an observation is equally pertinent to the institutions in the SFSD sector, where the origins, affiliations and legislative and regulatory frameworks differ even more widely than in the publicly-funded universities.

The report of a study of Good Practice in six areas of governance of higher education institutions in the UK, conducted for the Committee of University Chairmen in 2004,² found, when seeking to define good practice in governance, that the key indicator of quality is whether the governance structures and processes fit with the institution's mission and objectives. In other words governance structures should reflect the size and complexity of the institution and be able to respond to the demand for speedy, efficient decision-making in a competitive environment.

The Impact of Legislative Framework on Institutional Governance

The governance structures of providers of post-secondary education in Hong Kong are dictated to a significant extent by the requirements of the ordinance under which they are registered. The institutions fall into three main categories: the Continuing Education (CE) units of the publicly-funded universities that are subject to the requirements of the relevant individual university ordinance; institutions registered

1 Sutherland, S.R., (2002). *Higher Education in Hong Kong: Report of the University Grants Committee*. Hong Kong: UGC.

2 Available at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2004/04_40/

under the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (CAP 320); and institutions registered under the Education Ordinance (CAP 279), which have received authorisation from the Permanent Secretary for Education to offer post-secondary education. In the case of the first two, governance structures are closely specified by the Ordinance. Although the Education Ordinance, for its part, makes no stipulations about governance structures, the post-secondary providers under its aegis have generally adopted governance structures based on established practice in the tertiary education sector, with a Board of Governors, consisting of a majority of members external to the institution, as the supreme governing authority, and an Academic Board, chaired by the CEO and consisting of senior academics and staff and student representatives, as the primary academic decision-making body.

Governance Structures of SFSD Providers

The university ordinances that govern the Continuing Education units of the publicly-funded universities generally assign supreme governing authority to the University Council. As self-financing entities, the units have also established governance structures at Community College and institute level that are subject to the ultimate authority of the University Council.

For example, one Community College describes the relationship between its governance structures and those of the university in the following terms:

Overall College governance is divided into the administrative and academic realms. Administrative matters including budget arrangement and personnel matters of the College are monitored by its own Board of Governors, which is accountable to the University Council. For academic matters and issues relating to programme implementation, the College has established its own Academic Committee (AC) under the Board of Governors. The AC is responsible to the University Senate on all academic matters.

The Board of Governors, being the supreme governing body, oversees the direction, budget and personnel matters of the College, under which the Management Committee is responsible for making recommendations on financial and personnel policy matters, while the Personnel Committee is charged with the responsibility to consider staff appointment issues.

A similar division of administrative and academic authority deriving respectively from the parent university's Council and Senate is found in the other university-based institutions.

Thus the Terms of Reference of the Board of Directors of another College state that:

The fundamental statutory duty of the Board of Directors is to supervise the management of the business and affairs of the College. The Board of Directors determines the main directions of the College as well as makes decisions on matters concerning major developments. It ensures that the College operates within its remit – its programmes and related activities are in line with the mission and objectives of the University. The Board is also the body responsible for providing timely direction for the College. It helps the College determine management issues including but not limited to those concerning staffing, resource, space, financial reports and related matters, partnership issues that involve major organisations, and other major developments.

The oversight by the Senate of the parent institution of the academic activities of its CE Unit reflects the Institution's concerns on issues of quality, overlap and potential competition, which could impact on the reputation and standing of the parent body. One large institution has sought to resolve these issues by establishing a University Extension Board under the Senate to oversee academic programmes leading to qualifications offered below the first degree by any unit of the university.

Its Terms of Reference are:

1. to vet and recommend proposals for the introduction of sub-degree programmes leading to university qualifications . . . for consideration of the Academic Planning Committee/Senate;
2. to approve the examination results of all sub-degree programmes leading to university qualifications on behalf of the Senate;
3. to approve the examination results of all sub-degree programmes of the Community College;
4. to provide certification service for students of all sub-degree programmes leading to the university's qualifications;
5. to formulate and review strategies for the offering of sub-degree programmes;
6. to take on any duty related to the offering of sub-degree programmes as assigned by the Vice Chancellor.

The establishment of a single committee consisting of senior university officers and Faculty representatives as well as the senior managers of the CE units creates a clearing-house for the vetting of proposals spanning a wide range of disciplines, which also focuses on broader consideration of quality issues and acts as a coordinating body for the development of SFSD education in line with university priorities.

In another large university, a similar coordinating role is played by the Board for Continuing and Professional Education under the University Senate, whose broad mandate is:

To advise the Senate, through the Academic Development Committee as appropriate, on the strategic direction of development as well as policy issues and all other matters relating to continuing and professional education and lifelong learning.

Its specific responsibilities in relation to programmes leading to Diplomas, Certificates and other awards which are not listed in Statute III (of the University Ordinance which specifies the titles of all awards of the University) are:

1. to approve the introduction of new programmes and the regulations and syllabuses of such new programmes;
2. to approve amendments to regulations and syllabuses;
3. to resolve, on the recommendation of the Boards of Examiners, that successful candidates be awarded diplomas, certificates and other awards;
4. to appoint internal examiners; and
5. to perform any other related duties as requested by the Senate from time to time.

In respect of programmes offered in partnership with other universities or institutions leading to the awards of these universities or institutions, it is tasked:

1. to approve the introduction of new programmes and the regulations and syllabuses of such new programmes;
2. to consider for recommendation and comment to the partner institutions amendments to regulations and syllabuses; and
3. to receive from the Boards of Examiners reports on the programmes and examinations.

The importance of the Board of CE and the commitment of the parent university to the quality of the continuing education offered in its name is underscored by the fact that the Board of CE is chaired by the university's Vice-Chancellor. Its membership structure, consisting of equal numbers of senior representatives from university faculties and the CE unit, including the Director and Deputy Director, ensures that the Board is in a position to make decisions in relation to the academic programmes offered by the CE unit that are in the best interests of both the university and the CE unit and their respective stakeholders.

In large institutions, concerns about competition and overlap may exist between different units dedicated to the delivery of continuing education. One university, in which three separate units offer continuing education, has established a College of Professional and Continuing Education, led by a Dean, to oversee the day-to-day operations of the three units and coordinate their activities within the context of the College Development Plan. The primary aims of this umbrella arrangement are to ensure the quality of the programmes offered, to achieve synergy between the units and optimum deployment of resources. The main organ of governance is the College Council. The relationship between the College and the parent university is succinctly described below:

The College operates autonomously, but maintains a strong affiliation with the University, particularly on academic quality assurance matters. The College Council, which is chaired by the University President and has three University Senate members, governs the College. Implementation approval from the University Senate is required for all programmes leading to awards offered by individual units within the College, including those programmes accredited by the University. This facilitates programme quality and ensures that the rigorous university quality assurance mechanism is adhered to.

Although a clear separation of roles for committees reporting to the University Council and Senate on Continuing Education matters is appropriate in the case of large and complex institutions, smaller institutions may opt for a more simplified structure. This happens in the case of one university which has established a Board of Continuing Education, chaired by the University President and Vice-Chancellor and composed of senior members from various Faculties/Schools and administrative offices. Its Terms of Reference include both administrative and academic matters and clearly define its authority and responsibility for decision-making and referral to higher authority:

1. To review regularly the objectives of the School and to advise the School on policy issues relating to its on-going operations including inter alia
 - (a) staff matters
 - (b) opening of new teaching/study centres
 - (c) signing of academic agreements or joint ventures with external bodies;
2. To review regularly the effectiveness of the work of the School in meeting its objectives and to identify areas requiring improvement;
3. To approve all academic programmes at the sub-degree level offered by the School; and all academic programmes offered in conjunction with external bodies, including those at the degree and postgraduate degree levels, providing that the awards of the programme shall be conferred by the external bodies concerned;

4. To endorse, for approval of the University Senate via the appropriate standing committee(s) under it all academic programmes at the degree and postgraduate degree level offered by the school, the awards of which shall be conferred by the University;
5. To endorse for approval of the University Council via the Finance Committee of the Council the annual budget and any long-term financial proposals of the School, including capital budget proposals, and to approve other financial matters of the School, including the following:
 - (a) virement of account and budget variations
 - (b) levels of fees and other charges levied
 - (c) remuneration of its full-time and part-time staff;
6. To endorse for approval of the University Council capital development proposals of the School including the purchase of properties, and to approve the leasing of premises by the School that have significant financial implications for the School.

Within the individual university SFSD units themselves, the Academic Board, chaired by the Unit Head, is normally the senior academic committee. The role of each Academic Board is determined by the extent of delegated power it holds from the University Senate. In the case of one Community College, the levels of responsibility and delegated authority of the Academic Board are clearly specified in its Terms of Reference:

1. planning, developing and maintaining the AD programmes of the University run by the College and deciding on the awards for students studying these programmes;
2. planning, developing and maintaining all credit-bearing programmes leading to College awards and deciding on the awards for students studying these programmes;
3. directing and regulating the teaching at the College;
4. regulating the admission of persons to the approved programmes run by the College;
5. regulating the examinations leading to the awards of the university and to College awards.

It also has delegated responsibility from the University Senate for the academic management of the University award-bearing AD programmes offered by the College. Specifically, the Senate delegates the following authority to the Academic Board:

1. approving academic plans, student intakes and enrolments, and discontinuation of programmes;

2. approving entrance requirements and maintaining an appropriate academic standard at entry;
3. approving the curriculum of new programmes;
4. approving changes to programmes;
5. approving academic regulations for student progress through programmes of study, assessment of students, and requirements for graduation;
6. establishing principles and policies for the assurance of the academic standards and quality of programmes of study;
7. deciding, on behalf of Senate, awards of Associate Degree for students successfully completing the programmes.

When authority has not been delegated to it, the Academic Board will need to seek the final approval of the University Senate or the Board of Continuing Education before implementing programmes of study, as in the case below:

The Academic Board oversees all academic matters including:

- planning of new programmes
- vetting of initial programme proposals and their quality assurance
- validating programme proposals for final approval by the University Senate before implementation
- approving the conferment of College awards.

The Academic Board is normally chaired by the Principal/Director of the Unit and the Heads of all academic sub-units would be *ex-officio* members. In addition, Academic Board membership would normally include elected representatives of academic staff below Head of Department level and elected student representatives. In the case of the SFSD units of the universities, the University Senate would also be represented on the Academic Board.

In one institution, to reflect the parent university's primary concern for quality, transparency and due process, the designated Senate representatives on the Academic Board of one Community College are the Secretary to the Senate and the Secretary to the University Quality Assurance Committee.

For institutions registered under the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (CAP 320) the minimum requirements for registration in terms of both governance and management structure are clearly stated in the Ordinance:

The constitution of every College shall include the following provisions –

- (a) the following college bodies shall be constituted –
- (i) a Board of Governors which shall be the supreme governing body of the College;
 - (ii) a College Council which shall be the executive body of the College administering the property and managing the general affairs of the College subject to the directions of the Board of Governors;
 - (iii) an Academic Board which shall regulate the academic affairs of the College subject to the financial control of the College Council; and
 - (iv) a Faculty Board for each faculty in the College which shall be responsible to the Academic Board for the teaching and general organisation of the courses assigned to that faculty reporting thereon from time to time to the Academic Board;
- (b) the College bodies specified in paragraph (a) shall be subject to the provisions in Table A relating to composition and standing orders –

TABLE A

College body	Composition	Statutory meetings	Convened meetings	Quorum
Board of Governors	Not less than 10 nor more than 40	Once in each academic year	The Chairman may convene at any time and shall do so on written request of 5 members	One half of the members
College Council	Not less than 10 members nor more than 25	Four times a year	The Chairman may convene at any time and shall do so on written request of 5 members	One half of the members
Academic Board	—	Once in every term	The Chairman may convene at any time	One half of the members
Faculty Board	The Dean of each Faculty to be Chairman of the Board of that Faculty	Once in every term	—	—

- (c) no act or resolution of any College body shall be invalid by reason only of any vacancy in, or any want of qualifications by or validity in the election or appointment of any member of such body;
- (d) (i) the College bodies specified in paragraph (a) may establish such committees as they see fit;
- (ii) a committee established under sub-paragraph (i) may be constituted partly of persons who are not members of the particular College body establishing it;

- (e) there shall be the following officers-
- (i) a President who shall be the principal academic and administrative officer, and who shall be appointed and dismissed by the Board of Governors on the advice of the College Council subject to the approval of the Permanent Secretary;
 - (ii) a Vice-President;
 - (iii) a Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Board of Governors;
 - (iv) a Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the College Council;
 - (v) a Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Academic Board;
 - (vi) a Dean for each Faculty in the College;
- and either
- (vii) an Academic Registrar;
 - (viii) a Bursar;
 - (ix) a Librarian;
- or
- (x) a Dean of Studies;
 - (xi) a Registrar;
 - (xii) a Librarian;
 - (xiii) a Comptroller;
 - (xiv) a Dean of Students;
- (f) all the officers specified in sub-paragraphs (vi) to (xiv) in paragraph (e) shall be appointed and dismissed by the College Council subject to the approval of the Board of Governors.

In the case of private SFSD providers, the role of the Board of Governors most closely resembles that of the Board of Trustees of Colleges in the US. The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges³ defines the role of the independent board as to:

1. set and clarify institutional mission and purpose;
2. support the President;
3. assess Board performance (by regular 3-4 year reviews);
4. participate in fund-raising;
5. ensure good management by reviewing performance data;
6. preserve institutional independence;
7. relate campus to community and community to campus.

Within the constraints imposed by its governing ordinance, it is up to each institution to develop its governance structures and processes in a way that reflects the size

³ Available at <http://www.agb.org/wmspage.cfm?parm1=1052>

and complexity of the institution. Since the publication of the Sutherland Report, governing bodies of many academic institutions in Hong Kong have become smaller and more focused on engaging in the strategic planning process. This means that the choice of members of the governing body is even more important. A key feature of successful performance of individual governors is that they are 'engaged' with the institution and committed to it.

The Relationship between Governance and Management

The overall effectiveness of the governing body is significantly affected by the composition of its membership; as well as by its relationship with the senior management, including how the Chair of the Governing Board works with the President and his/her Senior Management Team and, in the case of CE units within large institution, how Senior Management of the CE unit relates to the parent institution.

For an effective governing body, the aim should be to appoint to the Board of Governors an appropriate mix of stakeholders in the form of representatives of key employment sectors, institutional alumni, community leaders and representatives of sponsoring organisations, who possess specific expertise in the vital areas of finance, human resources and infrastructure development and can fulfil their prescribed role in ensuring an appropriate balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability.

The active involvement of notable local figures, alumni and members of the institution's staff on the Board of Governors and Council provides reassurance to stakeholders that the institution is run in a transparent and accountable way. Board and Council members are also well-placed to initiate fund-raising activities that may make a significant difference in terms of the quality of the learning environment. The principles of externality that lend credibility to institutional academic quality assurance procedures relating to course and programme development, delivery and review are equally relevant to an institution's quest for good reputation as a financially sound, ethically managed institution.

One non-self-accrediting institution describes the evolution of the composition of its Board of Governors and Management Committee to support its changing mission focus in the following terms:

The Governance and Management of the institution have been reviewed and improved continuously. The membership of the Board of Governors will be increased to ten, including people with experience in governance of UGC-funded universities and representatives from the sponsoring body and the commercial sector. The institution's Management Committee has representatives from the Education Bureau, the Labour Department, academics from the tertiary sector, alumni and a teacher representative.

Further, effective governance is ensured by a close and appropriate working relationship between the governing body and the senior management. In the case of CE units within a parent institution, cross-membership between the supervisory bodies helps to ensure oversight of the CE units. In addition, appropriate reporting lines to the parent institution are crucial to proper governance. The review report on the CE unit of one self-accrediting Institution describes this relationship as follows:

The governing authority is the Board of Governors chaired by the President . . . which ultimately reports to the University Council. There is also substantial representation from the University Proper on both the Board and the Management Committee, and additionally, the Board includes external members from outside the University.

The existence of a reporting mechanism from the CE unit to the parent institution, including the Senate which is the highest academic authority of the institution, is described in another review report as follows:

There is regular reporting from the CE Unit to the governing bodies. As mentioned, it submits annual reports to the Continuing Education Board, which in turn reports on an annual basis to Senate. It is also required to submit reports to the University Council via the Board of Directors. In future, it is also expected to submit reports on teaching and learning to the Committee on Teaching and Learning, in line with the practice for other Schools of the University.

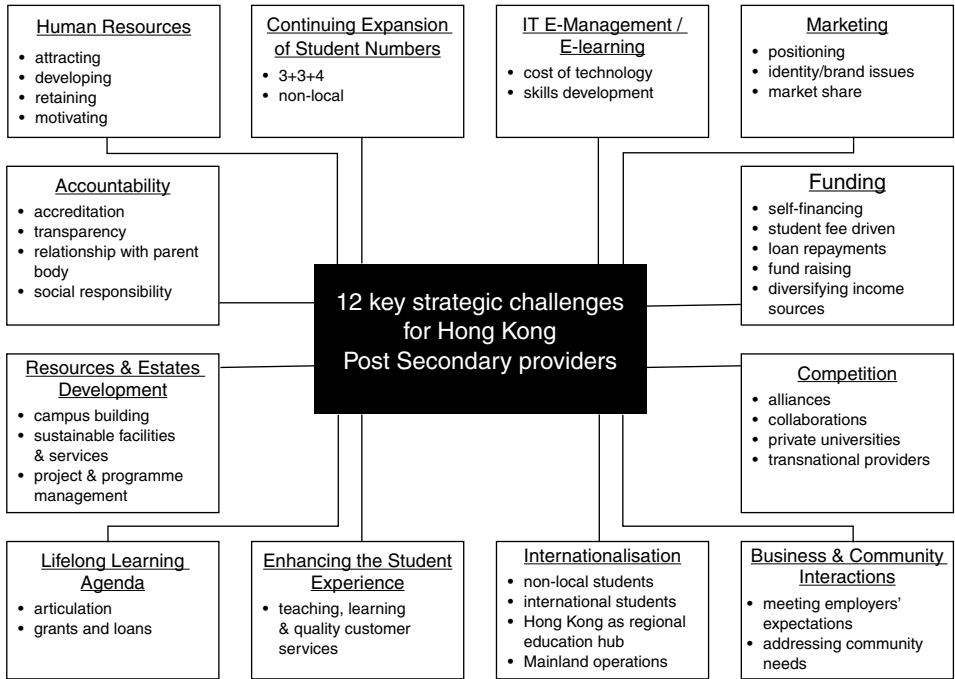
Approaches to Institutional Management

Whereas institutional leaders are supported in their functions by the instruments of governance, the challenges facing managers in the sub-degree sector are many. Managements have to make difficult choices, allocating scarce resources among competing claimants, responding to internal and external pressures, keeping the overall goals and the shape of the organisation in view, balancing continuity and change, the short-term and the long-term, and managing the resulting tensions as best they can. Figure 1⁴ provides an overview of some of the key strategic management challenges facing Hong Kong post-secondary providers.

The review of university governance at HKU in 2003 noted that the corollary of introducing a more streamlined governing body that is focused on steering the strategic directions of the university, is that the CEO needs to be supported by a professional team of full-time academic managers with clear reporting lines showing where

4 Hope, A. (April 2008). Quality management: Striving for institutional excellence in the self-financing sub-degree sector in Hong Kong. Presentation delivered at the FCE Seminar on QA: *Sub-degree Education in Hong Kong: From Quality Assurance to Quality Enhancement*.

Figure 1:
Key Strategic Challenges



responsibility, authority and accountability lie.⁵ Managerialist approaches to institutional governance, in which academic managers assume many of the responsibilities hitherto assigned to committees, may therefore seem to be the most efficient practice in a self-financing environment.

Nevertheless, the reputation of academic institutions ultimately depends on the quality of the programmes they offer. In order to maintain the morale and commitment of the academic staff who must deliver academic quality, it is important for all academic institutions to retain the spirit of collegiality. This takes the form of shared decision-making, upholding of integrity and commitment to knowledge, and establishing functions and processes to assist information flows and encourage collective discussion and critical reflection on all aspects of the institution's activities. Most institutions achieve this by defining an internal committee structure with appropriate stakeholder representation and associated processes to ensure that the programmes of study are both market-oriented and academically rigorous, that quality standards are maintained and that learner support is maintained at the highest level.

5 Available at http://www.hku.hk/about/purpose_report.html

Academic Quality Assurance Structures

Many institutions have set up elaborate committee structures to oversee academic quality assurance. In one large institution, the committee structure provides support for an academic manager with designated responsibility for the quality of the CE unit's provision:

The appointment of a full-time Associate Dean (Quality Assurance), who also chairs the Academic Planning and Quality Assurance Committee of Academic Board, provides a much stronger impetus along this important direction.

In another large institution, responsibility for overseeing and guiding all quality assurance activities, including chairing the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), has been delegated to one of the Deputy Directors. The work of initial design of relevant policies and mechanisms is delegated to the Quality Assurance Working Group, consisting of academic staff and chaired by the Deputy Director responsible for quality assurance.

The Quality Assurance Working Group carries out vetting and consideration of draft QA policies and procedures and consults colleagues on those issues before the issues are presented to the QAC for consideration and approval. The Working Group also decides on operational procedures in relation to QA.

Support for the work of academic colleagues on quality assurance is provided by the Quality Assurance (QA) Team, a group of academic administrators reporting directly to the Deputy Director.

The QA Team assists the Quality Assurance Committee in overseeing and monitoring the implementation of quality assurance policies and mechanisms. Working closely with academic colleagues, the QA Team serves as a facilitator to all quality assurance activities. Its work includes drafting policies and guidelines for incorporation into the QA Manual, providing secretarial support to the QAC, its Working Group and all programme validation panels, as well as conducting the Learning Experience Survey and providing assistance in handling complaints.

Not all providers are large or complex enough to support such a comprehensive and well-staffed structure for the management of academic quality. One smaller institution relies on the commitment of individual academics to the CE unit's ethos, thorough and well-documented procedures and the checks and balances provided by its governance structure to maintain the quality of its provision. It describes its commitment to a holistic quality culture in the following terms:

The Unit believes that education quality and quality assurance are an institutional and collective responsibility. This responsibility is carried out through developing and maintaining a **quality culture** among staff, instructors and students, and through the Institute's governance system.

Quality culture refers to a collective commitment to academic and professional excellence. Briefly, we believe that responsibility for quality lies with each individual and group within the Unit, even though our systems are capable of operating independently of particular individuals.

Quality Assurance Manuals

Procedures should be transparent and made known to all stakeholders in the process. To this end, many institutions have compiled a Quality Assurance Handbook. The Table of Contents of one institution's Quality Assurance Manual is as follows:

- Introduction
- The Structure of the Quality Assurance System
- Academic Collaboration
- Programme Development and Approval
- Programme Monitoring
- Programme Modification
- Programme Review
- Quality Process Review
- Teaching Quality
- Teaching and Learning Support
- Glossary of Terms
- List of Forms and Templates
- List of Relevant Websites

Another institution has a separate document for each major aspect of the quality assurance process. For instance, its documentation for the process of preparation and moderation of examination papers contains the following information:

- Process name
- Process type
- Purpose
- Person-in-charge

- Parties Involved and their Responsibilities (this involves a detailed description of each step of the process, e.g. preparation of examination paper, moderation of examination paper, formatting and so on)
- Commencement date
- Completion date

In addition the document gives samples of the following:

- Templates used (e.g. examination paper, marking scheme, learning outcomes matrix, moderation report and so on)
- Deliverable samples (e.g. endorsed examination paper, marking scheme, examination work schedule, list of internal moderators and so on)

The document also lists certain reference materials:

- Guidelines for Preparation of Examination Paper
- Examination Paper Style Book

A process flow is also included in the document which shows, on a week-by-week basis, what tasks should be completed and by whom.

Similar documents are produced for all major processes such as staff recruitment, supervision of part-time teaching staff, moderation of teaching plans, etc.

Management Structure and Practices

In self-financing institutions, academic issues cannot be considered in isolation from management issues including the financial bottomline and thus the cooperation of academic and non-academic colleagues is a crucial component of successful institutional management. A number of institutions achieve transparency and improved communication among the different members of their management team by establishing a Management Board or Committee which brings together all functional Heads of academic and administrative units on a regular basis. In one CE unit of a university the membership of the Management Committee consists of all Directorate members, all Associate Heads, all Centre Heads, College Vice-Principals, and senior administrative team leaders. The Committee meets at least four times per year. Its Terms of Reference are as follows:

- to advise the Director on management and policy matters raised by members;
- to review existing management and policy matters either referred by members or by the Director;
- to receive reports on current activities as determined by the meeting;
- to receive reports from the Director.

One smaller institution has formally designated its senior management group, chaired by the Director, as its Executive Committee. The committee consists of the Director, the Programme Managers and senior administrative officers of the institution. It meets monthly to discuss and make decisions on issues relating to the administration, management and development of the institution.

One non-self-accrediting institution striving for business excellence adopts a Total Quality Management (TQM) approach, with the aim of achieving total participation by staff, continuous improvement in quality, meeting the need of stakeholders and achieving stakeholder satisfaction. It received ISO 9001:2000 certification in 2006 and has recently met the requirements for ISO 9001:2008 certification. Adopting the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model,⁶ it won an Asia Pacific Business Excellence Standard (APBEST) award in 2006.

Conclusion

Institutional governance and management are important aspects in the operation of SFSD providers. The governing bodies determine the overall direction and development of the institution and are ultimately responsible for the quality of their educational provision. A further link in the effective operation of the institution is the adoption of appropriate and effective management structures to support the governing bodies and to implement quality assurance systems for upholding academic standards.

The involvement of external stakeholders in the governing and management bodies is as important an asset as the involvement and participation of internal members in the internal management and quality assurance structures.

Every institution is different. Deming (1986), one of the original gurus of the quality movement, identified the hope of 'instant pudding' as an obstacle to quality improvement.⁷ He indicates that there is no formula for improvement that can replace the need for management to 'study and go to work' on an organisation's own particular issues and challenges as the first step on the journey towards excellence. As noted in Chapter 3, the critical starting-point is to identify, understand and anticipate current and future needs of internal and external stakeholders. This ensures that the future direction is clearly based on a set of results as determined by stakeholder requirements rather than solely on internal drivers for change. A well-constituted, fully functioning Board of Governors provides a formal platform for the articulation of key stakeholder interests and ensures that an appropriate balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability is maintained.

⁶ The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model. [http:// www.efqm.org](http://www.efqm.org)

⁷ Deming, W. Edwards (1986). *Out of the Crisis*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, p. 126.

It is also crucial that there are appropriate channels of communication and reporting lines between governing bodies and the management level; and in the case of the CE units within larger institutions, between the CE unit and the governing bodies and/or the highest academic authority such as Senate. Internal accountability within the institution is as important as external accountability.

Lastly, no matter how complex the structures and processes for institutional governance and management, it is essential for effective management that they should be fully documented to ensure that all procedures are understood and complied with, and regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain effective and relevant in the face of a changing external environment.

CHAPTER

5

**Programme Design, Approval,
Monitoring and Review**



Introduction

Formal procedures for programme design, approval, monitoring and review form the backbone of institutional quality assurance processes throughout the higher education sector in Hong Kong. They represent the four linked stages of an integrated and holistic process that, if well-designed and clearly documented, can foster, rather than stifle, creativity in course offerings, enable timely delivery of quality programmes and encourage a culture of continuous quality enhancement.

The importance of effective programme design, approval, monitoring and review processes to the overall quality of an institution's academic provision is reflected in the prominence accorded to it by the quality assurance bodies in their accreditation and review activities. The agencies seek evidence that learning programmes have been developed to address stakeholder needs, that the outcomes are aligned with the Generic Level Descriptors at the appropriate level of the Qualifications Framework and that they are systematically monitored and reviewed to ensure that they remain current and valid.

Alignment of Programmes with the Qualifications Framework

The Qualifications Framework (QF) development in Hong Kong involved consultation with representatives of the sub-degree sector both as individual institutions and through their membership of the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions (FCE). One institution had already developed an internal Qualifications Framework system in advance of the launch of the QF. The system defines a vetting procedure to ensure that the QF level of a programme is appropriately assigned, and has designed a series of forms which Programme Teams must use to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes, entry qualifications, articulation routes and credit requirements are consistent with the proposed programme title and QF level.

Both new and existing programmes are required to go through the vetting process for the classification of awards. In particular, the learning outcomes, QF level proposed and how the assessment system can demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes are subject to scrutiny. Programme Teams are required to submit the Qualifications Framework Level and Credit Assignment Form Proforma for each programme for vetting purposes.

Programme Planning

Programme planning is a major challenge for the self-financing sub-degree sector in Hong Kong. Long-term strategic planning is necessary to determine institutional direction in line with mission goals and available resources. Nevertheless, where institutional viability depends on attracting and sustaining student numbers and

competition is fierce, institutions must be able to move quickly to offer programmes to meet emerging needs without compromising the quality of their provision.

The development of new programmes can be a time-consuming and expensive process and many institutions have a system whereby approval is needed prior to the commencement of design and development. Usually the process will look at an outline proposal and consider issues such as potential student demand, viability and ensuring that developments are aligned with an institution's overall development plans.

In one institution, for all new SFSD programmes, Initial Planning Proposals (IPP) are prepared at unit level and endorsed by the Academic Planning and Quality Assurance Committee prior to 'planning approval' being given by the Academic Board.

Another institution takes a two-pronged approach depending on whether the proposed programme will be award-bearing or not:

For short professional development programmes, planning approval is given by the Board of Directors. For award-bearing programmes, Programme Development Committees are formed and their proposals scrutinised by a Business Development and Strategic Management Committee before endorsement by the Academic Committee and the Board of Directors. The plans are then scrutinised further at institutional level by the Academic Planning and Development Committee and final approval is given by the Academic Board of the institution.

Programme Design

One of the aims of the QF is:

to facilitate articulation among academic, vocational and continuing education through the establishment of a comprehensive and voluntary network of learning pathways. By encouraging and promoting lifelong learning, the framework will enable individuals to pursue their goals according to their own roadmaps.¹

In designing sub-degree programmes, providers have consistently tried to meet the goals of their learners in terms of opportunities both for employment and for articulation to further study upon graduation. It is standard procedure in all institutions to conduct market research before conceptualising a new programme proposal and to include representatives of potential employers and relevant professional bodies on advisory committees in support of curriculum development. Where possible,

¹ Introduction to the Qualifications Framework. http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/HKQF_intro.asp

placement and internship opportunities are also ‘designed in’ to programme curricula to enhance the relevance of the learning outcomes to learners’ graduation goals.

One institution requires the establishment of a Programme Division Advisory Committee, chaired by the Associate Director, for each of its six programme divisions. Membership includes relevant internal academics and external experts. The committee’s role in relation to the initial development of programmes is:

To advise the Programme Division on the initial development of the programmes in order that the Programme Division can aim to produce programmes of high and comparable academic and/or professional standards. In particular to advise on the academic standard, curriculum and assessment strategy.

In order to align the outcomes of sub-degree programmes that articulate to degree-level study with the admissions requirements and expectations of its parent university, one SFSD unit also has a requirement for formal university faculty consultation as part of its programme approval procedures:

Formal Faculty consultation is regarded as one of the essential QA mechanisms during the Programme Approval Process.

Programme proposals are sent by the Unit’s Board to the relevant Faculty for consideration using an approved proforma format, and all feedback must be formally considered before the proposal is resubmitted to the Board for approval.

The proforma captures the following information about the proposed programme:

1. The proposed award titles and programme titles
2. The QA bodies involved and to be involved
3. Programme background, objectives and expected learning outcomes
4. Programme particulars and structure
5. Teaching facilities including the sources of teaching staff
6. Assessment and graduation requirements
7. Proposed programme fees
8. Programme monitoring processes including the involvement of external examiners/expertise or programme level evaluation
9. The proposed QF level
10. Information required by JQRC for the classification of the programme onto QR

One institution uses a consultancy system to ensure that the programmes it proposes will meet local and international standards:

As a normal practice, at least two consultants, one from the local higher education sector and one from an overseas university, are invited to give advice on both the modules of the programme and the programme as a whole. Comments from the consultants are passed to the Programme Development Committee for appropriate modification and improvement of the programme proposal.

Programme Approval

The reputation of an institution depends on the quality of its programmes, and it is therefore imperative that clear procedures should be in place to ensure that proper internal institutional level approval is obtained before a programme is offered or, in the case of non-self-accrediting providers, submitted for external validation by the HKCAAVQ. It is important that the arrangements for programme approval, validation and review are systematic and orderly and that the respective roles, responsibilities and authority of different bodies are clearly defined.

For programmes leading to awards at QF Level 4 or above, programme approval quite often involves a process of validation which includes external peer review. In one institution this task is undertaken by a specially convened Programme Validation Panel with the following membership and Terms of Reference:

Membership:

- Chair of the University Quality Assurance Committee
- Academic from a different Department
- University Faculty member from a cognate discipline
- Two external specialists (academic and/or prospective employers)
- Panel Secretary

Terms of Reference:

1. to undertake a detailed and rigorous scrutiny of the course proposal submitted by a Programme Planning Team;
2. to provide, through formal and informal consultation with the Programme Planning Team, advice and assistance in the development of the course proposal;
3. to recommend a programme proposal to the Academic Board with the advice of the College Validation and Monitoring Committee.

Recommendations for programme approval depend upon the Programme Team (representatives of the academic unit(s) responsible for delivering the programme)

being able to satisfy the Panel, through the submission of a detailed programme proposal and in the course of a validation exercise, that:

- The rationale for the programme and its aims and learning outcomes are appropriate for the needs of students and employers;
- The academic standard proposed is appropriate for the level of the award;
- The structure and content of the curriculum are satisfactory;
- The proposed academic and administrative staffing arrangements are satisfactory;
- The teaching and learning approach is appropriate, with adequate learner support appropriate for the programme;
- There is a coherent assessment strategy, with the weighting of different assessment tasks, and the method and timing of assessment made explicit;
- There are clear regulations for admission, progression and assessment;
- The necessary library, IT and any specialist facilities are in place;
- The management, monitoring and quality assurance arrangements are clearly stated.

For the SFSD units of self-accrediting institutions, programme validation is often the second part of a two-stage programme approval process, wherein Stage 1 is internal to the unit and Stage 2 requires the endorsement of the supreme academic decision-making body of the parent university. In the example given above, the institution ensures that benchmarking with university standards is carried out at the programme approval stage by including Senate-appointed members on the Academic Board of its Community College, which has delegated authority from the University Senate for programme approval.

Formative feedback is given during the process (of programme approval) to ensure comparability of the self-financed programmes to the ones funded by the UGC. Information on the proposed programmes, such as programme proposals and reports of the Programme Validation Panels, is also made available to the Senate and the University's Quality Assurance Committee through the Senate-appointed members.

Programme approval procedures in the SFSD sector are formalised and explained in detail in the Quality Assurance Handbooks of individual institutions, thus ensuring consistency and transparency across programmes.

Programme Monitoring and Review

Once programmes have been launched, institutions conduct routine monitoring to ensure that they remain current and valid in the light of developing knowledge in

the discipline area, and to ascertain that the teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks are effective in enabling students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. In the SFSD sector there is usually a requirement for such routine monitoring to be conducted annually by the Programme Committee on the basis of statistical data on applications and admissions, student progress, feedback from staff, students and External Examiners and a report submitted to the Academic Board with recommendations for improvement.

While not prescribing a particular format for the presentation of Annual Programme Reports, the Academic Board of one institution invites Programme Committees to consider in their assessment of the programme the extent to which:

- the aims and objectives of the programmes remain relevant;
- teaching and learning strategies are working;
- assessment methods are appropriate;
- resources are adequate to deliver the programme;
- the management of the programme is effective; and
- the academic standard of the final award is being maintained.

At another institution, weekly Programme Team meetings on programme operation are also conducted, where suggestions for programme improvement, based on feedback from students and staff are considered. This enables fine-tuning to take place during the delivery of the programme rather than waiting for the next presentation.

In order to get valuable feedback from teachers, many of whom are part-time, one institution holds a post-course review meeting with all its teachers immediately after the completion of a course so that issues with course delivery can be promptly addressed.

In addition to regular monitoring activities, all institutions conduct broader periodic programme review exercises. Their purpose is to assess the continuing validity and relevance of the programme in the light of changes in the programme structure and content since validation. Student demand, employer expectations and professional requirements, as well as the continuing availability of staff and resources may all change. Programme Review includes a detailed analysis of student applications, admissions, assessment, progression and graduation as well as staffing and teaching quality. The timing of such reviews differs between institutions. It may take place at the completion of each cycle of programme delivery, or on a longer timescale such as four or five years, so that graduate employment statistics and employer feedback on graduate performance may be included in the data under consideration.

One institution has implemented a four-year programme review which involves

a panel consisting of university and external members. The review considers the following issues:

- whether the programme has been successfully implemented and attained the appropriate standard;
- whether the programme has met its identified aims;
- how the views/problems raised by relevant parties/reflected by the feedback statistics have been addressed/solved;
- whether the programme has been managed appropriately; and
- whether the proposed modification/development is appropriate and can be effectively implemented.

Another institution implements a quinquennial review mechanism for all programmes unless a shorter or longer timeframe has been specified at the programme validation phase. Although the annual monitoring and review process is an internal procedure, the outcome of the quinquennial review must be endorsed by the Board of Continuing Education (with delegated authority for the University Senate) and will include the decision on whether the programme continues or not. The institution notes that:

The procedures for programme review are similar to those for programme validation. The major difference is that during programme review the experience in offering the programme and the comments received from various stakeholders play an important role.

Specifically, the institution requires evidence of follow-up actions taken based on:

- comments received from teachers, students and/or employers;
- reports from External Examiners/Assessors;
- advice and comments from Academic Committee and teaching staff ;
- significant developments in the subject area in the profession or industry that may affect the programme;
- critical appraisal of the programme, its syllabuses, significant issues and developments.

As the purpose of all quality assurance is quality enhancement, the institution also requires the submission of a development plan for further quality enhancement including proposals for modification.

To ensure objectivity, the members of the Programme Review Panel will be external to the institution and will not have been involved in any capacity in the design and delivery of the programme.

Student Feedback

A key element of all annual programme reports is student feedback on courses and teaching. All institutions administer an anonymous questionnaire to students upon completion of each course and the results are distributed to the academic units for action and follow-up. Such feedback is also useful to institutions for determining the staff development needs of their teaching staff.

One institution takes the process one step further and conducts student evaluations in the middle of courses that are taught by new instructors in addition to administering the mandatory end-of-course evaluations. The institution maintains a database of all teaching evaluations, using the information to compile annual reports to the Board and for instructor reappointment and salary review purposes.

One institution mirrors its parent university's long tradition of nurturing a close staff-student relationship. Staff-student communication is fostered through the requirement for staff to hold scheduled consultation sessions outside timetabled classroom sessions and through the establishment of a Staff-Student Consultation Committee for each programme with the following Terms of Reference:

- to provide a communication channel between students, teachers and the College Management;
- to receive feedback from students regarding teaching, learning, curriculum or other issues with relevance to teachers and students;
- to promote good relationships between students and teaching staff;
- to serve as part of the quality assurance procedure and mechanism;
- to formulate strategies to enrich learning effectiveness of students;
- to update students on improvements made subsequent to previous meetings.

Graduate Feedback

As we noted earlier, the key imperatives underpinning programme design, development and review in the SFSD sector are that the programmes should address stakeholder needs and that the outcomes should be aligned with the Generic Level Descriptors at the appropriate level of the Qualifications Framework. Feedback from employers and graduates about the extent to which the programme has equipped them with the necessary skills and competencies to perform to the expected standard should therefore be a key component of the programme review process.

One institution defines the purpose of its systematic process for the collection of

feedback from the graduates of its programmes by means of a questionnaire in the following terms:

- to sustain the quality of programmes through regular and systematic review;
- to evaluate ratings of graduates on various aspects of the programme, teaching and assessment and student development;
- to identify room for improvement through feedback from graduates;
- to provide a channel for graduates to express their views on the quality of the programmes.

The questionnaire seeks graduates' feedback on the following aspects of the programme they have completed at the institution:

- Organisation and Coherence
- Relevance
- Breadth of Coverage
- Depth of Coverage
- Individual Advice and Care
- Student Development
- Resources
- Open Ended Questions

Conclusion

The processes for programme development, approval and review described in this chapter are a vital component of academic quality assurance. They may vary in complexity according to the size of the institution and the scope and level of the programmes it offers, to avoid the excessive creation of committees and staff overload while ensuring proper oversight and review. For all SFSO providers, however, their primary purpose should be to develop programmes and improve their quality in line with stakeholder needs, and to determine and apply standards which are comparable with local and international standards.

CHAPTER

6

**Teaching, Learning
and Learner Support**



Introduction

The effectiveness of teaching and learning in the tertiary education sector depends on the structure and relevance of the curriculum and the provision of optimal conditions for the acquisition of knowledge and the mastery of skills. The previous chapter has talked about the need to keep the curriculum up to date and relevant to the needs of students and society. This chapter will focus on the delivery of teaching and how students can best be supported to ensure effective learning and to help them achieve their goals. In other words, how can an institution create and maintain an effective learning environment?

Outcome-based Teaching and Learning

One of the most important factors in teaching and learning in a face-to-face education system is the quality of the instructor. The instructor, whether full-time or part-time, is at the front line of the entire educational system. A good instructor can stimulate a student and make learning exciting and enjoyable. A bad instructor can ruin a student's learning experience and possibly put a student off learning for life.

Over the past decade, the perceived role of instructors has changed. No longer are they expected to be the 'sage on the stage' but rather to perform the role of 'guide on the side'. In other words, rather than simply delivering information, the instructor should assist the student in becoming an active learner. Instructors must help students attain a state of understanding whereby they can make sense of the new information using what they already know and their prior experience. We have entered a new paradigm of student-centred learning and Outcome-based education.

So what is Outcome-based Teaching and Learning (sometimes known as Outcome-based Education [OBE]) and why is it so important? One institution describes the process as follows:

What is Outcome-based Teaching and Learning?

Outcome-based Teaching and Learning (OBTL) is an approach where teaching and learning activities are developed to support the learning outcomes. There are three components in OBTL. The very first component is the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of a course or programme. Teaching activities are then designed to create a learning environment that is likely to bring about the ILOs. At the same time, appropriate assessment tasks that align with the ILOs are to be used to evaluate students' performances.

How does OBTL work?

In OBTL, ILOs are designed to describe what the students are expected to do at the end of a course or programme. To facilitate the achievement of ILOs, teaching activities and assessments are designed to align with the ILOs. In

OBTL, student learning is supported by classroom teaching that stimulates the learners' efforts, provides feedback, helps attain required standards, and guides progress to independence as a learner.

What happens to the instructors?

In OBTL, the design of instructional materials and assessments depends upon the ILOs of the course being taught. The instructors should first define the ILOs that specify what students should be able to do at the end of the course. They should specify criteria in these ILOs that help to judge how adequately the ILOs have been achieved. They should plan their teaching in order to facilitate the achievement of the ILOs. They should also select appropriate assessment methods to align with the ILOs. Subsequently, they should judge and grade student achievement of the ILOs based on the evidence provided in the assessment tasks. To encourage progressive improvement, the instructors should encourage their students to reflect upon their learning process and to provide continuous and constructive feedback to the students.

What are the benefits of OBTL?

OBTL promises a high level of learning for all students as it facilitates the achievement of the outcomes, characterised by its appropriateness to individual learners' development level and active and experience-based learning. In the course of learning, students have the opportunities to reflect upon their learning process and make subsequent improvements. By fostering the construction of functioning knowledge, OBTL prepares students for life and work in the 21st century.

In order to assist staff members in designing and delivering subjects and programmes based on the underlying principles of Outcome-based Education, one institution provides a handout which offers an interpretation of the policies and practical guidelines on OBE and Criteria-referenced Assessment (CRA). The handout is structured as follows:

Outcome-based Education

- Overview
- A change in perspective
- Learning outcomes vs. teaching content
- The design of an outcome-oriented programme/subject

Intended Learning Outcomes

- Outcome Statements
- Expected Qualities
- Action Verbs

- Programme outcomes and subject outcomes
- Principles for effective outcomes statements
- Matching learning outcomes to teaching and learning activities

Criteria-referenced Assessment

- The Relations between CRA and Outcomes
- Norm-referenced Assessment vs. Criterion-referenced Assessment
- Transparency of Criteria
- CRA- regardless of rank and relativity

Apart from being important in its own right, OBTL is also important with reference to the Qualifications Framework (QF) which was launched in Hong Kong in May 2008. We have seen in Chapter 5 how one institution maps its programmes onto the QF. The QF is underpinned by a philosophy that promotes **outcome-based qualifications rather than a traditional focus on educational inputs** (extract from the HKCAAVQ website).¹ In other words, in order to comply with the requirements for placing qualifications on the Qualifications Register, institutions must be able to demonstrate a process for determining that the outcomes of their programmes, in terms of what their graduates are expected to be able to do, are consistent with the relevant QF Generic Level Descriptors.

The details of OBTL and the QF are, however, beyond the scope of this document. Readers who are interested in these vital areas are advised to visit the websites of the various UGC institutions and the HKCAAVQ for more detailed information on recent developments.

This section concentrates on how teaching staff can be encouraged to play their role effectively in the new teaching and learning paradigm, how we ensure that what is occurring in the classroom meets the required standard and how we prepare students for effective study and development. As indicated, the instructor is at the core of the whole teaching and learning process and, in order to get that process off to a good start, it is good practice to provide good-quality induction and orientation for instructors and students alike. This chapter will discuss student induction and orientation. The recruitment, induction and ongoing professional development of instructors will be covered in Chapter 9.

Student Admissions

The Education Bureau has set guidelines (usually referred to as the Common Descriptors)² for minimum entrance requirements for Associate Degree and Higher

¹ <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>

² http://www.ipass.gov.hk/eng/reg_sd.aspx

Diploma programmes, noting that both types of qualification should generally adopt the principle of 'lenient entry, stringent exit'. The Bureau has also set guidelines whereby students falling short of the minimum entrance requirements or other acceptable equivalent qualifications can be admitted on special consideration, but they should not account for more than 5% of the total intake on a programme basis, and not more than 3% on an institutional basis.

Some institutions have set up Special Admissions Committees to ensure equitable treatment of applications from students seeking entry under the non-standard quota. The Terms of Reference and Membership of one such Committee are as follows:

Terms of Reference:

- To monitor and implement admissions standards, policies and procedures of the College;
- To assess the suitability and to make decisions on admission of applicants with non-standard qualifications in consideration of the recommendations by the admissions interviewers;
- To present admissions data and have them endorsed at the AD and Pre-AD programme Board meeting;
- To conduct annual review for further quality assurance enhancement in terms of admissions.

Membership:

- Head of College
- 2 Associate Heads (Academic)
- College Administrator
- 1 Representative from the Quality Assurance Committee
- 1 Academic Representative from the AD Programme
- 1 Academic Representative from the Pre-AD Programme
- Recording Secretary

The Special Admissions Committee of another institution describes its work as follows:

The Committee's work is mainly focused on the following areas:

- Establishing Equivalent English Qualifications
- Establishing acceptable equivalent qualifications for applicants with non-local academic qualifications on a case-by-case basis
- Establishing acceptable equivalent qualifications for applicants with local academic qualifications other than HKCEE and HKAL on a case-by-case basis

- Establishing criteria for special admissions and to assure that the overall proportion of such applicants remains low
- Setting conditions for special admissions such as admission on academic probation (whereby the applicant must attain a GPA score of 1.0 or above in the first term of their study)

Above all, institutions should be mindful that they need to tread a fine line between making SFSD programmes accessible to as wide a range of students as possible and admitting only those students who have a fair chance of successful completion.

Student Induction and Orientation

In order to engage effectively with the academic content of their programme of study, students need to acquire generic and study skills. These are the keys to both successful study and future employability. They also need to be introduced to their new academic environment, which may be quite different from any they have previously encountered. One institution provides an induction session for all new and continuing students as follows:

Student induction sessions include talks on time management. Sessions are organised for improvement of presentation skills and examination writing skills and a booklet is given to students containing the key points on academic writing. Mentoring by successful final-year students is also often included in these sessions. In addition, all SFSD programmes contain generic skills courses such as language skills (English, Chinese and Putonghua), Quantitative Skills and Information Technology.

Another institution provides an annual orientation session for all SFSD students which covers the following topics:

- Rules and regulations
- Emphasis on quality assurance
- Becoming a successful lifelong learner
- The institution learning environment
- Group sharing
- Campus tour

Plagiarism

One aspect of study at post-secondary level with which students need particular help is in understanding and avoiding plagiarism. Before coming to study in tertiary education it is unlikely that many students will have been given much guidance about plagiarism in its true sense (as opposed to ‘copying’). Most institutions produce a plagiarism guide for students and many provide workshops on the subject (often combined with the wider area of academic writing). This is one area where the SFSD units in universities can and do collaborate often with the institution proper as the issues involved in plagiarism are common to programmes at all levels.

One institution allows students access to their parent university’s web-based resources on plagiarism in an academic context. As well as giving definitions of plagiarism, the resources give tips on paraphrasing, acknowledging sources, further references and a self-test on how to recognise and avoid plagiarism.

Development of Generic Skills

As stated in Chapter 1, the Common Descriptors for Associate Degree and Higher Diploma programmes issued by the Education Bureau include the following statements about learning outcomes, including generic skills:

For the AD:

Programme Objectives – the AD should equip students with generic skills as well as some specialised knowledge/skills that are sufficient to enable them to perform effectively at para-professional level, to further their studies in universities, to pursue professional studies and employment in an administrative/managerial position at entry level.

Learning Outcomes – a solid foundation of generic skills, including languages, IT, interpersonal, communication, quantitative and analytical skills, as well as the ability to learn how to learn. A broad theoretical understanding of the chosen discipline and its application. A theoretical foundation upon which further study in the discipline at degree level, or professional level, can be built. An appreciation and basic understanding of other disciplines/areas of study including liberal arts/general education, and the sciences. A better understanding of their own interests, inclinations and aptitudes. An appreciation of the major socio-political, cultural and economic issues in the local, national, regional and international contexts. A strong sense of social responsibility and civic values, a passion in pursuing creativity and innovativeness, and spirit of lifelong learning.

Curriculum – at least 60% of the curriculum should consist of generic contents (e.g. language, IT, general education, etc).

For the HD:

Programme Objectives – the HD should provide students with industry/profession specific knowledge and skills together with the necessary language, IT, interpersonal and other generic skills for employment, further study and active citizenship. It should also cultivate a spirit of lifelong learning and develop the student's ability to learn how to learn. Specifically, HD will equip students with the necessary technical and professional knowledge and skills, initially at the para-professional level, via the blending of theoretical knowledge and practical application, to enable them to pursue a career in a specific field.

Learning Outcomes – a solid foundation of generic skills, including languages, IT, interpersonal, communication, quantitative and analytical skills, and the ability to learn how to learn. An understanding of the theoretical knowledge and practical skills at the para-professional level of a certain discipline, and integration of theory with practice, so as to apply these principles more widely especially in an employment context. An ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study or employment; and to propose a solution. Skills of presenting and evaluating information, for planning and investigational purposes. A theoretical foundation upon which further study in the discipline at the degree level can be built. The ability to perform skilled tasks, requiring some discretion and judgement, and undertaking a supervisory role. An appreciation of the major socio-political, cultural and economic issues in the local, national, regional and international contexts. A strong sense of social responsibility and civic values, a passion in pursuing creativity and innovativeness, and spirit of lifelong learning.

Curriculum – at least 60% of the curriculum should consist of specialised contents (e.g. learning related to concentrations, disciplines and professions, vocational skills, etc).

The provision of training in generic skills is therefore particularly important in the SFSD sector where the students may find difficulty in coping with the academic requirements of the programmes if they do not receive a thorough grounding in the supporting skills needed for successful study. The use of student mentors helps to give encouragement to new students, many of whom may have struggled academically in their secondary schooling, by providing opportunities to mix with students who have come from similar backgrounds but who have achieved academic success in their post-secondary studies.

One institution has a peer mentoring scheme in place whereby former Associate Degree Foundation programme graduates who are now studying in the AD programme serve as peer mentors for an assigned group of students to provide advice and support.

Whole Person Development

A number of institutions complement the provision of academic knowledge and generic skills with opportunities for whole person development and life enhancement and appreciation. One institution describes its philosophy of whole person development as follows:

The institution has always articulated its commitment to facilitate the all-round development of students so as to enhance their academic competence and to develop personal attributes important for graduates. In order to realise this, the formal curriculum includes a mandatory requirement of general education and language enhancement, which is complemented by a wide range of optional activities in the informal curriculum. Together they enrich students' learning experience and widen their vision.

This same institution provides a Life Enrichment and Appreciation Programme (LEAP) as part of this concept of whole person development.

The LEAP serves to offer an inclusive integrated learning programme with seminars and workshops to broaden students' development, to enhance their communication skills and to increase awareness of different issues in society. At the same time, the Institution values the development of students' physical strength for being leaders in the future and students are required to take one Physical Education course per year to enhance their physical health.

Further to these initiatives, some institutions seek to broaden students' horizons by providing the experience of studying for up to a term at an institution on the Mainland.

Through the exchange programme, students will gain the invaluable experience of witnessing speedy development on the Mainland and have the opportunity to engage in cultural exchange and interaction with university students in China. A subsidy scheme is in place to support students who may need financial assistance to help them participate in this scheme.

Meeting Different Needs

A fundamental aspect of student-centred learning is providing for the diverse learning styles of different students. In order to help its instructors to meet students' learning needs, one institution provides student profiles to them in advance of the semester.

Information is extracted from the student application form and put into a student profile template. This template, which contains information such as age, qualifications, working experience and so on, is given to relevant instructors prior to the beginning of each course. Instructors use this information to fine-tune their teaching delivery according to student's background and experience.

One group of students who may require significant support are those with a disability. Most institutions operate a policy of equal opportunities and can usually cater for students' special needs if they receive prior warning of any special requirements. One institution has a particularly sophisticated system for supporting such students.

Our institution has a long history of supporting students with special needs. Specialist counselling is available to students with disabilities and technological support is also available to them. The institution has a disabled students centre located in its library with specially adapted computers and audio visual equipment. Course materials can be provided in large print and even Braille for blind students and specialist IT equipment is available on a loan basis to help students with their studies. The campus is fully accessible to students with a physical disability and equipment is available to help students with problems of manual dexterity.

Counselling Support and Mentorship

As well as support for academic and whole person development, students in the SFSD sector in Hong Kong benefit from various formal and informal pastoral and mentoring schemes. Most institutions which are aligned with universities arrange for their SFSD students to access the counselling services of the University proper. In other cases, specialist counselling services are set up to replace or supplement this arrangement. One institution describes the aims of its counselling service thus:

The counselling services aim to help students in a number of ways, e.g. to adjust to study at the tertiary level, to overcome difficulties in life and in learning, to gain a better understanding of themselves, to develop their personal potential, to set personal goals in their studies and life as well as to plan for their further education and career.

Counselling services can be particularly effective in helping to identify and help students who are 'at risk' academically. One institution describes its system for identifying and supporting such students as follows:

A sophisticated and comprehensive system is in place to identify and support students who are academically 'at risk'. Students whose GPA average drops below a certain point are contacted and offered individual academic counselling to help them succeed.

Students identified as experiencing academic difficulties will be classified as follows:

- Academic Warning is given to students with a semester GPA between 1.70 and 1.99 for a given semester.
- Academic Probation is given to students with a semester GPA below 1.70 for a given semester.
- Academic Dismissal is required by the institution when a student's GPA is below 1.70 for two consecutive semesters.

The institution also offers individual academic advisement interviews to follow up with students who do not meet the English language requirement each semester. English course lecturers will give appropriate advice to students as to how they could work to improve their academic performance. Students with poor performance are encouraged to take additional courses on a free of charge basis. These courses include remedial classes provided during the summer vacation period. In addition, students who submit a poor first assignment, or whose academic performance is generally unsatisfactory, will have their cases considered by the Student Progress Committee who will propose possible solutions to identified problems. In this way, the institution is able to offer additional support and counselling to students who may otherwise drop out of SFSD programmes.

Systems such as this can be very useful both in setting clear expectations for students and in the early identification of problems. Discussion with the student can help identify the cause of the problems so that solutions and additional support can be offered. In this way it is hoped that drop-outs can be kept to a minimum and students can be helped to succeed in their studies.

Another institution assigns a personal tutor to each student:

All students are assigned a personal tutor. This is done in the first year of study and the personal tutor remains the same throughout the student's study with the institution. Students are encouraged to contact their personal tutor if they encounter difficulties in their study in general, have personal problems or would like to seek advice on personal development.

As both AD and HD programmes are designed to equip students for employment and/or further study, it is also important that institutions acknowledge their

responsibilities with regard to counselling for careers and further study. One institution offers the following services with regard to these two important areas:

The Student Development and Counselling Team helps students to equip themselves for progression to University studies by organising the following events and functions:

- Further studies week
- Sharing in successful university applications
- Information talks on further studies opportunities
- Workshop on effective writing for university application
- Workshop on effective interview skills for university application
- Mock interview for university admission
- Information talk on scholarships

For career development, the counsellors provide a series of development activities to help enhance students' competitiveness in the career world and to better prepare them for their future career. These include:

- Career visit
- Career exploration and planning workshop
- Workshop on job application writing skills
- Workshop on job interview skills
- Mock interview for job application
- Career and recruitment talks
- China internship programme
- Job posting

Finally, some institutions operate a mentorship scheme whereby students are able to develop a mentoring relationship with prestigious members of society. This provides students with an opportunity to practise their interpersonal skills and enrich their character development, which can be helpful in their future careers.

One institution promotes the mentorship programme to its students in the following terms:

The purpose of the programme is to facilitate your all-round development. A series of activities such as workshops, company visits, outings, etc. are organised for you during the academic year. Through formal and informal interactions with mentors, your horizons are broadened and a more mature outlook for your future career, family, and social life can be formed.

Mentors are managers, senior executives and/or experts from different industries with five or more years of working experience. Their professions range

from directors, vice-presidents, CEOs, general managers, sales managers, IT managers, PR managers, senior inspectors, accountants, surveyors, lecturers, social workers, bank executives, accounting firms, trading firms and universities.

Monitoring Teaching

As part of the quality assurance process, there is a need to ensure that what is actually occurring in the classroom is of a satisfactory standard. One classic method of ensuring quality in the classroom is to use a system of peer observation. One institution employs a system of classroom visits as follows:

Staff in the institution regularly conduct formal classroom observation visits. These visits are conducted by Academic Advisors of the School each term. All newly-appointed part-time instructors are visited as well as existing instructors undertaking new teaching duties. Instructors are informed of the visit in advance and the observer shares their perception of the classroom process, as well as suggestions for improvement, with the instructor afterwards. A formal observation report is also produced. Various elements of the teaching/learning process are evaluated such as student participation, presentation skills, quality, relevance and currency of course materials and student-instructor rapport.

The observation report used by one institution contains the following categories, which are scored on a five-point scale from 1 – Excellent to 5 – Unacceptable (plus Not Observed):

Planning

- Aims clearly stated and understood
- Evidence of knowledge of subject
- Lesson well planned and balanced according to student ability
- Incorporation of texts and materials

General Observation

- Clarity of language
- Instructor's grasp of subject matter
- Pace of lesson and time allocation

Organisation

- An effective introduction to the topic
- An effective development of the topic
- An effective conclusion of the topic

Teaching Skills

- Use of media
- Effectiveness of media usage
- Student interest in topic
- Student participation in lesson development
- Balance between instructor's talk and students' activity
- Questioning techniques to involve students
- Teaching techniques to assess assimilation/application of content

Classroom Management

- Control of learning environment
- Teaching material readiness and organisation
- Record-keeping

Personal Characteristics

- Appearance
- Use of voice and gestures
- Enthusiasm
- Empathy with students
- Punctuality
- Sensitivity
- Confidence

This method of classroom observation is useful in that it acts both as a quality assurance check and as a form of staff development. It should be conducted in a collegial, non-threatening manner which ensures support and cooperation from all the parties involved in the process. Another institution states the purpose of class visits as follows:

- To facilitate reflection and generation of ideas as well as sharing of good practices and stimulate ideas for continuous improvement in learning and teaching quality;
- To encourage a developmental, rather than evaluative culture, aiming at fostering mutual improvement among teaching staff.

By publicly stating the developmental and collegial nature of the process, the institution can ensure that all parties concentrate on the important aspects of the peer review process and, at the same time, reduce the inevitable stress created for both parties.

Another institution takes this process a step further by involving External Examiners in the process. For this institution, when External Examiners are visiting the institution, they are, if possible, invited to observe classroom teaching sessions for the courses and programmes for which they are responsible. Not only does this allow an element of external input to the quality assurance process, but it also gives the external parties a greater insight into the operation and standards of the programme delivery.

Awards for Excellence

In order to encourage instructors to seek constant improvements in their teaching strategies, some institutions reward excellence in teaching by introducing outstanding teacher awards. The usual system for these awards is that instructors are nominated either by their students or by their peers. There is normally a requirement for them to produce a portfolio of evidence which will be examined by a jury of fellow academics.

The process for the Award of Outstanding Teacher in one institution is described below:

The objective of the scheme is to award College lecturers with outstanding contributions in teaching and administration, including but not limited to course delivery, curriculum design, course coordination and administrative duties.

There is a Selection Panel responsible for shortlisting, evaluating and selecting award winners. The Panel is chaired by the Chairperson of the Quality Assurance Committee, and consists of the College Principal, the College Deputy Principal, the College Vice Principals and an external member.

Teaching staff may be nominated either by means of the anonymous feedback collected through the Learning Experience Survey or via Peer or Self-nomination.

The Selection Panel may meet with shortlisted candidates to discuss teaching approach, vision, teaching and administrative contributions, future plans for continuous improvement and related topics. Shortlisted candidates may also opt for an additional supplementary evaluation which can include the submission of supporting documentation (such as sample teaching materials), class visits and/or other relevant work.

Selection is based on the overall performance and all available evidence. A cash prize is given to the award winners at an appropriate function.

More important than the award itself, however, is the clear communication of expectations in terms of what constitutes excellence in teaching. One institution sets very clear guidelines of what is expected of those who aspire to such recognition:

- Excellent teachers exceed the expectations for effective teachers in a number of ways.
- They are able to communicate their enthusiasm for the subject, and elicit hard work and develop enthusiasm for the subject among their students.
- They develop students' analytical and critical thinking skills by demonstrating these skills, and providing students with tasks appropriate to the development of these skills.
- They solicit student feedback on issues of students' concern and are responsive to this feedback.
- Typically, excellent teachers also demonstrate a strong student-centred approach in their teaching and show respect and consideration to their students.
- When possible, they draw on students' life and work experiences in teaching, make the subject relevant to students' career goals, and link theory with professional practice and societal concerns.
- They provide learning experiences that enable students to develop both individual initiative and the skills needed to work cooperatively with their peers.
- They provide students with opportunities to be involved in the structuring of their own learning experiences and encourage and enable students to evaluate their own and each other's work critically.
- They help students set challenging goals for their own learning and publicly call attention to excellent performance of students.
- They take proactive steps to approach students, particularly those with academic difficulties, and provide help.

Conclusion

This chapter has covered the essential quality assurance issues related to the most fundamental parts of the whole educational process – teaching, learning and learner support.

The introduction of Outcome-based Teaching and Learning has changed the role of the instructor and thus there is a need to train and inform staff about OBTL. There are also close linkages between OBTL and the Qualifications Framework. Those institutions seeking accreditation by the HKCAAVQ will be required to demonstrate that 'The content and structure of the learning programmes is coherent, integrated and effective in enabling students to achieve the stated learning outcomes

and the required standards. The learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and assessments must be coherent, balanced, enable progression and be pitched at the appropriate level in the QF’.

Effective induction and orientation sessions ensure that students get off to a good start in their new environment, but before students can be inducted and oriented, they must be selected and admitted. The Government has set guidelines for admission to some SFSD programmes, advising that ‘lenient entry’ should be combined with ‘stringent exit’. Institutions have the power to admit students who do not fall within these guidelines and many have set up special admissions committees to look after this process.

The development of generic skills and study skills is very important for students who may otherwise struggle with the academic demands of the programmes. Many institutions also take this one step further by emphasising the need to develop the ‘whole person’ to equip students better for work and further study.

The rapid increase in opportunities to study at post-secondary level has resulted in a more heterogeneous student body. Teaching staff will therefore need to be able to adapt their teaching to meet different needs. Classroom visits enable institutions to monitor the quality of teaching and learning activities and provide a basis for teaching development activities. The provision of teaching awards can also help to encourage constant improvement on the part of the instructors.

In a student-centred institution, learner support extends beyond the classroom. There is a need to provide ongoing administrative support for all students through effective technology and face-to-face communication. Counselling services should be provided to help solve the various study and non-study related problems which students may encounter. The counselling service can also offer advice for careers and further study. Chapter 9 will further examine the provision of student facilities and other resources to support the learning environment.

CHAPTER

7

Assessment of Learning Outcomes



Introduction

Assessment in education is used to :

- (i) evaluate knowledge, performance or skills;
- (ii) provide a grade or benchmark against which performance can be measured;
- (iii) show those external to the institution the level of achievement of a student;
- (iv) form part of the teaching and learning process itself.

In order to assure the quality of the qualifications awarded in their name, institutions must have in place effective and well-documented procedures for designing, approving, monitoring and reviewing the assessment strategies for their courses and programmes. One main purpose of assessment policies and strategies is to ensure that the standards for each programme and course are set and maintained at an appropriate level. At the same time, assessment plays an important role in enhancing teaching and learning. In this chapter, we shall look at measures employed by institutions to safeguard the standards of assessment.

The introduction of the QF and Outcome-based approaches to teaching and learning has led to an increasing diversity of assessment tasks. Institutions no longer rely so heavily on terminal examinations to test learners' mastery of the subject matter. Although in recent years institutions have increasingly adopted the use of continuous assessment in addition to examinations, the introduction of the Qualifications Framework has intensified this trend. Continuous assessment tasks are frequently embedded in learning activities to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of a range of intended learning outcomes and to receive structured feedback on their achievement to enable continuous improvement. Any policies and procedures adopted by the institution must therefore be flexible enough to cope with this range of assessment methodologies. Most importantly, institutions must maintain fairness, transparency and consistency when dealing with the assessment of students, and have due regard for the security of the process. These principles should apply to all forms of assessment.

Assessment Procedures, Regulations and Information

There are two major aspects to the quality assurance of student assessment. The first pertains to the adoption of clearly stipulated procedures and criteria for student assessment and progression. The second aspect pertains to the transparency and accessibility of such information for both students and staff and other stakeholders.

Institutions should have clearly formulated academic regulations for student assessment and progression, and it is of overriding importance that students, who are the subject of assessment, should be provided with clear and updated information on these academic regulations. The information should cover graduation requirements, rules for progression and award of grades, course prerequisites, rules of examination/

re-examination and appeals, amongst others. One institution includes academic regulations on its Sub-degree programmes in its Prospectus & Calendar, covering the following:

- Registration
- Course Requirements
- Course Assessment
- Suspension of studies and withdrawal
- Grading System
- Supplementary Assessment
- Academic Honours
- Graduation Requirements

In addition, there are Regulations governing College Examinations in the same Prospectus.

Students should not only have information on the academic regulations governing programmes of study, but should also be provided with information on the assessment criteria and requirements for the individual component courses.

Information access is equally important for staff who teach and/or assess the programmes and courses. Information on assessment procedures and criteria and academic regulations are sometimes included in the Quality Assurance Manuals, Examination Operational Guidelines, or in Programme Leader Handbooks. It is necessary to ensure that both full-time and part-time staff have the relevant information.

Outcome-based Assessment

Many institutions are moving towards the use of Outcome-based approaches in their teaching and learning. Course learning outcomes state what a student is expected to know and be able to do upon completion of a course. It is important that teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks are aligned with the intended learning outcomes. One local institution describes the process of alignment as follows:

Assessment tasks or activities are designed to align with the Course Learning Objectives to provide evidence on how well each student has achieved them. Such evidence could be provided by project work, case studies, assignments, examinations, laboratory work and reports, practicum, etc. Again, an 'examination' is a format: a place where students work individually under conditions of high security. An examination may be suitable as an assessment tool in certain situations but there are other ways as well such as responding to case studies, video-presentations, and so on, just so long as the verbs the students are required to address are contained in the Course Learning Objectives.

Assessment for Learning

While the role played by summative assessment in the certification of student achievement should not be understated, assessment should not be seen simply as a way of awarding marks or grades to students (assessment **of** learning). Continuous assessment tasks can also be embedded in teaching and learning activities to promote effective learning (assessment **for** learning). The key to the effective use of assessment for learning is the provision of feedback. Extended assessment tasks such as an individual or group project can be designed as a staged process, allowing instructors to comment on a draft or initial stage of the assignment. Students can then learn from these comments and improve the next version or stage of the work.

One institution insists that instructors give detailed written feedback on all continuous assessment assignments so that they form part of the learning process:

The institution provides training to all its instructors in the use of written feedback on assignments and has designed an assignment cover sheet specifically for the purpose. As the timing of feedback is also important, instructors are required to mark and comment on assignments within 10 days of receipt. This is particularly important as it gives students the opportunity to reflect on the feedback and make necessary adjustments before the next assignment or examination. The quality of the comments made by instructors will be monitored by the Course Coordinator. Turnaround time and quality of marking will be issues considered at contract renewal.

When designing the assessment strategy for a course, the course coordinator needs to consider how best to assess the intended learning outcomes for the course at the appropriate QF level. The outcomes will usually include not only subject knowledge but also generic skills mapped to the relevant QF Generic Level Descriptors. At QF Level 4, where AD and HD programmes are situated, those skills include presentation and evaluation, research and analysis, creativity, self-direction, leadership, teamwork, IT and numeracy.

It is important therefore to design assessment tasks that also test the achievement of desired generic outcomes. This may include assignments that develop research skills, such as literature review exercises, or keeping reflective journals or learning logs to promote self-reflection and the requirement for students to make presentations which are subject to peer assessment.

A well-designed course would normally include both summative and formative assessment tasks. Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam define formative assessment as:

those activities undertaken by the teachers, and by their students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such

assessment becomes ‘formative assessment’ when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet the needs.¹

The shift to Outcome-based approaches to teaching, learning and assessment has created new demands on academic staff and a significant need for staff development which are discussed in Chapter 9.

Standardisation of Marking

The expansion of the SFSD sector in Hong Kong and the growth in student numbers since 2000 has resulted in an associated increase in the size of many classes and year groups. This has inevitably led to very high enrolments in some individual courses. In order to maintain class size at a reasonable level, institutions respond by designating a number of staff to teach the same subject. This raises some serious concerns with regard to the maintenance of standards of assessment marking. Obviously, the provision of detailed marking guides will lessen the impact to some extent but there is also a need to reduce further the level of subjectivity in the marking process. One institution operates a sophisticated standardisation scheme which can be applied equally to continuous assessment and examinations:

Before any major marking of assessment is undertaken, staff will have a pre-marking meeting where they will discuss the assessment materials and how the marking should be done. In advance of this meeting each marker will have marked a sample of three scripts (each one marking the same three scripts) and they will bring these to the meeting. This initial marking will have been carried out in isolation to ensure independence and the results are discussed at the meeting. The markers, guided by the subject coordinator, will then have the opportunity to discuss how they came to the final mark they allocated and why and where any differences between them came about. In the case of severe problems of interpretation it will still be possible to amend the marking guide to ensure that misunderstandings are eliminated. If necessary, another sample batch of scripts can be selected and the exercise repeated.

Even when all due care is taken to ensure consistency of marking standards, variations may still occur and many institutions adopt a system of standardisation of assessment marks. The two commonest methods are norm-referencing (which is designed to compare students and distribute average student scores along a bell curve, with most students being deemed average, a few performing very well, and a few very poorly), and criterion-referencing, which measures how well a student has performed against a set of criteria. Criterion referencing is more appropriate in an Outcome-based environment as it is students’ achievement of the learning outcomes that is assessed and not their mastery of subject content relative to their peers. Some

¹ Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2001). *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment*. BERA.

institutions mix the two approaches. From a quality perspective, it is important that decisions on standardisation of assessment are not based on statistical data alone, as evidenced by the procedures adopted by one institution:

After all assessment has been marked, a Board of Examiners will examine the statistical data for large groups of students. Overall performance will be considered alongside the performance of students in each individual instructor's group. In addition to considering the statistical data, the Board will also have a written report on the monitoring undertaken by the Course Coordinator on each instructor's marking. If significant anomalies show up for one or more groups, and these are backed up by evidence from the monitoring of marking, the Board has the authority to add or deduct marks for that particular group of students. Thresholds will also be set for the various grade categories with this information in mind and, in certain circumstances, they may also be set with reference to institute norms for grade distribution.

Internal Moderation

It is important that assessment is subject to monitoring, not just for standardisation purposes, as referred to above, but also to ensure the maintenance and comparability of academic standards. Traditionally, monitoring can be internal and/or external. Internal monitoring usually takes the form of second marking, by a relevant departmental colleague, of assessment materials originally marked by the subject lecturer. This is usually done on a sampling basis and may lead to the identification of problems in the original marking which can then be rectified. For major pieces of work, such as projects and research reports, institutions may wish to consider the use of double marking where the work is independently marked by two separate subject experts.

One institution has a formal method of internal moderation of all assessment and the internal moderator must complete a form for each course which covers the following questions:

Exam Scripts

- (a) Exam scripts are marked in accordance with the marking scheme
- (b) The marking is fair and consistent
- (c) Marks are allocated to each part of the questions answered
- (d) Marks are allocated to each question answered (e.g. Q1 total 10/20)
- (e) Irregularities are found (if yes give details)
- (f) Other comments (if any)

Coursework (for subjects with 100% coursework assessment)

- (a) The number of assignments/projects is appropriate
- (b) At least one assignment is done on an individual basis
- (c) The marking of assignments/projects is fair and consistent
- (d) The assignments/projects are of an appropriate level of standards
- (e) The assignments/projects are relevant to the subject concerned
- (f) Other comments (if any)

Subject Assessment

- (a) The mean of subject grade point is acceptable
- (b) The grade distribution of the subject is acceptable
- (c) Other comments (if any)

In addition to internal moderation of assessment results, the same institution has a formal three-stage process for the internal moderation of examination papers:

Part A

Part A of the report is completed by the Subject Leader, who holds overall responsibility on the quality of the examination paper. This section covers such items as:

- The exam paper is written on the template provided
- The learning outcome matrices are written on the template provided
- The format of the examination paper follows the sample given in the 'Guidelines for Preparation of Exam Papers'

Part B

Part B is to be completed by the Internal Moderator, who holds the responsibility to review the examination paper, marking scheme and learning outcome matrices, and make suggested changes where appropriate. If so requested, the Subject Leader must make a written response to the Internal Moderator detailing action taken. Part B covers such items as:

- All the learning outcomes of the subject have been assessed in coursework and/or examination
- The instructions to candidates in the exam paper are clear
- The distribution of marks among questions is appropriate
- The exam paper is set to assess the selected learning outcomes as indicated in the learning outcome matrix for the examination
- The exam paper has an appropriate coverage of the subject

- The standard of the exam paper is appropriate
- The suggested solutions/answers in the marking scheme are correct and consistent with the questions

Part C

Part C is completed by the Programme Leader to endorse the examination paper. In the case when the Programme Leader is the Subject Leader or Internal Moderator of the subject, an alternative will be assigned.

External Examiners

Another way of ensuring this maintenance of standards is by the use of subject experts who are external to the institution. These experts, who can be referred to by a number of names, External Examiner, Course Moderator, Course Advisor, etc., act as independent and impartial advisors and provide institutions with comments on standards set and the achievements of students in relation to those standards.

One institution has designed a form on which External Examiners may provide feedback to the institutions (via the Chief Executive Officer) which covers the following areas:

- The overall performance of the students and any areas of strength and weaknesses that are evident.
- The appropriateness and suitability of the course's assessment arrangements, in view of the aims and curriculum content of the course.
- The Examiners' view on whether students have demonstrated their mastery of the subject matter at a level that is consistent with the level at which the course is offered.
- The Examiner may choose to make comments on other matters, such as course content and delivery methods, and give other recommendations that in his/her view will improve the next presentation of the course/programme.

The use of External Examiners may be at either the course or programme level and it is up to individual institutions to determine the range of duties and timing of advice. In any case the External Examiner should be given a formal contract which details the institution's expectations and the role and duties of the appointee. The External Examiner is usually asked to comment on examination question papers in advance of the examination and then to review a sample of marked scripts after the examination. The increasing importance of continuous assessment in overall assessment strategies means that institutions have had to review their procedures for involving the External Examiner so that s/he can comment meaningfully on overall

assessment strategy and student performance in both continuous assessment and examination.

One institution describes the work of the External Advisor as follows:

External Advisors should sample an appropriate range of students' work which may include examination scripts for any course under review, selected from the full range of student grades. Where coursework is a major component of assessment, a similar sample of coursework should be reviewed by prior co-ordination between the Advisor and the academic unit.

The same institution states that for any course selected for review (not all courses in any programme will be reviewed in any given year), the External Advisor should consider the following issues:

- Do the assessment arrangements validly address intended learning outcomes and allow for a reasonable judgement to be made about the performance of students?
- Are students required to achieve an appropriate academic level in the assessed coursework and examinations for the course?
- Does assessed work require students to marshal the range of information and its application, and display the technical and other skills identified as learning outcomes for a course?
- Does the assessed work relate to the course outcomes?
- Has student work been carefully and competently graded?

Another institution appoints External Advisors at two different levels as follows:

In general terms, an External Advisor is appointed by the School with special reference to a subject group (or, occasionally to a major award-bearing programme). He or she is expected to provide general academic advice on the subject group or programme and its development; in addition he or she may be asked for specific comment or advice on the examination and assessment process but not normally to the extent of vetting the marking of individual scripts.

An Academic Advisor is generally appointed with special reference to a component course or module of an award-bearing programme to provide specific comment or advice on the examination assessment process, particularly at the level of vetting the marking of individual scripts.

Whatever duties are assigned to the External Examiner, it is important that the institution considers and responds promptly to the comments made:

One institution makes it a requirement that the member of academic staff responds to all comments made by the External Examiner with an explanation of what action has been taken to address any issues raised. Alternatively, if the advice is not being acted upon, the academic must provide justification for this. Another institution uses a similar set of procedures and insists that the dialogue is summarised in the annual course report.

Award of Course Results

It is normal practice to constitute a formal Panel or Examination Board to approve the award of course and/or programme results and to make judgements on any individual cases that require special attention. Although the exact work and constitution of an award board may vary between institutions, each examination board should be made aware of its powers, responsibilities and reporting lines. Some items which are likely to be reviewed by the examination board are the decision on students whose results are borderline (particularly between pass and fail), the treatment of students whose performance has somehow been affected by unusual circumstances, the progression of students (where appropriate) and how, if at all, students may redeem any failure. The work of one institution's Award Board is detailed below:

All assessment results are considered by an Award Board consisting of an independent chair and all teaching staff associated with the course. In advance of the meeting, all examination scripts belonging to students with a borderline performance (defined as three marks below the passing mark) will have been re-marked by the relevant member of academic staff. The Award Board will make decisions on thresholds for various grades, students with special circumstances affecting their performance and borderline candidates. The External Examiner is not expected to attend the meeting but may be consulted by telephone. Once the results have been ratified by the Award Board, they may be further scrutinised at the faculty level before release to the students. In the case of programme awards, results will be formally approved by the supreme academic body of the institutions before being released.

The Terms of Reference of another institution's Board of Examiners are as follows:

- to ensure the overall academic standard of the programme for which the Board is responsible;
- to assure fair and consistent assessment of academic performance of students and to adjudicate cases with irregularities;
- to consider overall performance of students, and approve the assessment results of modules;

- in accordance with the General Academic Policies and Regulations, to determine the remedial work for problem/failure cases and cases extending to extenuating circumstances that need special consideration, and to determine cases for discontinuation of studies;
- to endorse the list of graduates of the award of certificate/ diploma and to report its decision to the Academic Board;
- to set up a Core Team to act on its behalf;
- to form a panel to hear discontinuation cases(s), if deemed necessary.

Appeals

All institutions should have in place a system which allows students to submit complaints and appeal against results awarded. The system should be transparent, fair and timely and include independent parties who were not involved in the original assessment and decision-making process. The appeal process for one institution is as follows:

If a student wishes to appeal against his/her final grade, the request must be made within one week after the posting of examination results. If a review is granted, the grading of the examination paper will be reviewed by the instructor and another member of academic staff, normally within three weeks of receipt of the appeal. The decision reached in this process is final and the final grade may be higher, lower or remain the same. Students are required to pay a fee when they lodge an appeal against their grade with a fee refund being made if the revised grade is higher than the original one.

The same institution also has a Student Grievance Committee which is set up to investigate, present findings on and make recommendations for action for any grievance of a more general nature raised by students. More serious complaints or repeat complaints are handled by the Student Complaints Committee which will give guidance and recommend solutions. No complaints are entertained if they are submitted anonymously but all complaints are handled confidentially.

Conclusion

Assessment is a fundamental part of the teaching and learning process. Its role extends beyond the traditional purposes of benchmarking, accountability and certification to the promotion of effective student learning through the provision of feedback.

It is essential that assessment is seen to be fair and that the processes are transparent. Assessment should be moderated and monitored internally and usually externally as

well. Externality of oversight helps give credibility to an institution's programmes and also helps an institution to ensure that its students are reaching a level of academic attainment which is equivalent to that achieved elsewhere. When considering the fitness for purpose of external input, however, institutions will need to reflect on whether they need to have external examiners for all levels of courses. For instance, some institutions restrict their appointment to award-bearing programmes or to programmes above a certain level in the Qualifications Framework.

Finally, the administration of assessment is a complex area where there is little room for error. Decisions usually need to be taken within a very tight timeframe. Given the need for unambiguous information, institutions are strongly advised to provide appropriate training for their staff and to produce a comprehensive Operations Manual for the assessment process which is made available for reference to all those involved.

CHAPTER

8

**Collaborative Arrangements,
Professional Programmes
and Professional Accreditation**



Introduction

In the extremely competitive environment of self-financing post-secondary education in Hong Kong, institutions must find creative solutions to the problem of providing specialist programmes in niche markets at the right time and at an affordable cost. The solution chosen by many is to collaborate with academic partners in either Hong Kong or overseas. Facilitated by the rapid development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), such collaborative efforts add breadth and depth to the range of programmes a provider can offer.

Partnerships are not limited to those with academic collaborators, however. For programmes in professional areas such as Accounting, Social Work, Marketing and Nursing, the academic credibility of a programme depends on close collaboration with the relevant professional organisation. Indeed, in the case of some programmes, unless external professional accreditation is granted, the qualification will not be recognised for employment purposes. This chapter will look at the various types of collaborative models that exist in the SFSD sector in Hong Kong.

Collaborative Arrangements

Collaborative programmes provide an important means of widening student access, strengthening links with local, regional and international education providers and creating a network of educational opportunities for learners.

The various categories of external partners engaged by one local institution include the following:

- Local and non-local universities and academic institutions
- Local and non-local professional bodies
- Departments of the HKSAR Government
- Other non-local organisations

Most SFSD units can only offer awards up to Associate Degree and Higher Diploma level. The expansion of provision at this level has created a great demand for top-up degree places by graduates of such programmes. Although there has been some expansion in the provision of funded and self-financing places in local degree programmes, most of this top-up provision is currently catered for by collaboration with non-local universities, whose programmes are registered and regulated under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (CAP 493).

Another variation on the collaborative model can help an institution expand its offerings without the need to expand significantly its physical and human resource facilities. For example, an institution may collaborate with another local institution

to provide a foundation programme (e.g. a pre-Associate Degree programme) which acts as a feeder for its own SFSD programme. Such programmes can provide a ready source of students for SFSD programmes as well as a progression pathway for graduates of the pre-Associate Degree programme. Collaborations can also be formed whereby SFSD graduates are guaranteed places in self-financing top-up degree programmes run by local universities. This type of collaboration occurs most frequently between an SFSD provider and its parent university.

Selecting Collaborative Partners

Collaborative arrangements raise significant issues with regard to the selection of partners. All institutions have a formal obligation to ensure the academic integrity of their awards and to ensure that academic standards are maintained. Most institutions select partners with some degree of caution and will subject potential new partners to a review to establish that there is a good match with regard to educational objectives, values and methods.

One institution undertakes a due diligence investigation to satisfy itself about the good standing of any prospective partner and its capacity to fulfil its expected role. The investigation may include the following:

- Public and legal standing of the prospective partner organisation
- The financial stability of the prospective partner organisation
- The ability of the prospective partner organisation to provide the necessary human and physical resources to operate the programme successfully
- The ability of the prospective partner organisation to provide an appropriate study environment for students
- In the case of overseas collaborative arrangements, the ability of the institution to operate within the legislative and cultural requirements of that overseas country

Another institution operates the following guiding principles for setting up collaborative partnerships:

- The collaboration is in line with the mission and academic activities of the institution
- The policies and regulations of the institution in academic, financial and related aspects will be followed
- There is a clear commitment by both partners to quality assurance of the academic standards of the programme
- There is academic input from the institution in the development and conduct of the programme

- The collaboration brings about academic enhancement of the institution
- The collaboration agreement is formulated in comprehensive and documented detail
- The collaboration abides by the laws of Hong Kong, of the home country, of the partner, and of the location where the programme is to be conducted

One institution has a formal quality assurance system for assessing an intended collaborative arrangement with a new partner:

A Collaborative Approval Panel (CAP) is established by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), and reviews the prospective partner's mission, history, academic and professional standing, financial status and quality assurance arrangements.

Written Agreements

Because of the often complex nature of collaborative partnerships, and in order to safeguard the rights and reputation of both institutions and the students, it is good practice to have a written and legally binding agreement signed by the authorised representatives of both parties. It is commonly understood that collaborations are more likely to succeed when both parties fully understand their rights and responsibilities. One institution considers the following issues when drafting a written agreement:

- Management and administrative arrangements
- Role, status, responsibilities and delegated powers
- Institutional review and re-approval
- Programme validation and revalidation
- Student status
- Assessment and examinations including the role of External Examiners
- Arrangements for academic monitoring and quality assurance
- Student support and welfare
- Copyright and intellectual property
- Appeals, complaints and discipline
- Academic liaison
- Maintenance of records
- Reporting
- Financial provisions
- Termination and mediation

- Residual obligations to students in the event of termination
- Liability and insurance
- Personal data and confidentiality
- Law and jurisdiction

It is necessary for the institutions and the collaborative partner to agree the administrative, financial and resource arrangements for any collaborative agreements before the programme commences operation. In particular, it is wise to specify the precise rights of students with regard to the use of institutional facilities and services such as library, leisure facilities, counselling services, etc. One institution sets up a separate agreement for financial arrangements covering the following issues:

- Procedures for determining tuition fees
- Agreement regarding minimum and maximum numbers of students for operation
- Apportionment of tuition and other fees and collection and payment arrangements

For programmes offered with a non-local partner, it is necessary for institutions to ensure that they comply with the requirements of the Non-Local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (CAP 493). It may also be necessary to introduce additional teaching materials to ensure that the programme curriculum fits the local (Hong Kong) context and this should also form part of any written agreement.

Registration of Non-Local Programmes

Non-local academic and professional programmes offered in Hong Kong leading to post-secondary and professional qualifications should register, or seek exemption from registration, under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance. The HKCAAVQ is the designated advisor to the Registrar of Non-local Higher and Professional Education Courses.

The HKCAAVQ assesses each application for registration against the registration criteria stipulated in the Ordinance and gives its recommendation to the Registrar, who makes the final decision. The HKCAAVQ also assesses the annual returns submitted for registered programmes to advise the Registrar about their eligibility for continued registration.

Certain specified local institutions of higher education (the UGC-funded institutions, The Open University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Shue Yan University and The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts) can apply for exemption under the Ordinance,

provided the executive head of the local institution certifies that the programme meets the criteria for registration.

Further information in respect of the registration matters can be found on the website of the Non-local Courses Registry of the Education Bureau.¹

Non-local programmes registered or exempted under CAP 493 are not required to undergo accreditation by the HKCAAVQ in order to operate in Hong Kong. All regulated non-local programmes, however, need to be successfully accredited by the HKCAAVQ and be entered into the QR before they are recognised under the QF.

One institution has obtained HKCAAVQ validation for the non-local programmes it offers in order to reassure its students that the quality of the programme is consistent with that of other locally accredited programmes at the same QF level, and to enable them to benefit from access to Government grants and loans that are only available to students registered on locally accredited programmes.

The quality of non-local educational programmes (often called cross-border education) is a constant concern in different parts of the world which have allowed this form of educational provision. In addition to the legal regulatory framework in Hong Kong, the HKCAAVQ has developed a Code of Practice for Non-local Courses which can be downloaded from the HKCAAVQ website.² The HKCAAVQ is also conducting a pilot exercise in the Computing and Information Technology discipline to ascertain the effect of the accreditation of non-local programmes underpinning the QF. It plans to make the service of non-local programme accreditation available in phases, starting from 2010. Issues affecting the quality of cross-border education programmes are also discussed in detail in the UNESCO/APQN publication *Regulating the Quality of Cross-Border Education*.³

Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review

Institutions have responsibility for all academic awards granted in their name. Therefore, for local collaborative programmes, most institutions will make such programmes subject to their normal quality assurance processes. One institution sums up its policy in this area as follows:

1 <http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeid=226&langno=1>

2 <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>

3 Wong, W. S., & Davies, T. (2006). *UNESCO-APQN Toolkit: Regulating the Quality of Cross-Border Education*. UNESCO. Available at http://www2.unescobkk.org/elib/publications/087/APQN_Toolkit.pdf

The Institution is responsible for ensuring that the quality of the learning opportunities offered through a collaborative arrangement is adequate to enable a student to achieve the academic standards required for its award. All collaborative arrangements will be subject to the institution's quality assurance procedures. The Senate will be responsible for ensuring that all collaborative programmes of study are subject to all stages of the institution's quality assurance system, namely programme approval and review, monitoring and evaluation and external examination.

The Institution may choose to delegate operational responsibility for some of these aspects to the partner organisation where it is confident that such organisation has the capacity to accept and discharge that responsibility. The Institution needs to consider carefully the distinction between responsibility for some aspects of quality assurance, which it may delegate, and responsibility for the academic integrity and standard of the award, which it retains at all times.

One area where practice may vary is with regard to programmes operated in collaboration with a non-local partner. As indicated earlier, the demand for top-up degree places has increased significantly in the past few years. Many institutions have sought to satisfy this demand by collaborating with non-local institutions which can provide programmes which allow direct advanced entry for Associate Degree and Higher Diploma graduates.

In the case of non-local programmes, it is common practice for local institutions to adopt the quality assurance model operated by the non-local institutions. This is a logical step, as the award is usually made by the non-local partner and will be subject to their own requirements (often overseen by their own national quality assurance agencies).

The adoption of such a quality assurance process does not, however, excuse the local institution from all of its obligations with regard to quality assurance of collaborative programmes. In addition to the need to localise programme content, institutions still have a responsibility to ensure that students are receiving a quality educational experience.

One institution is very active in the delivery of a top-up degree programme offered by a non-local university to students in Hong Kong. The programme has been audited by an overseas quality assurance agency and one area of good practice identified by the audit team was the 'widespread commitment and support given to partners in the design, development and delivery of programmes'. This is achieved as follows:

Members of the institution's staff participate in the Board of Studies for the top-up programme. In addition to allowing local staff to have an input into the design and monitoring of the top-up degree, it also allows input into the design and

operation of the local sub-degree programme which articulates with the top-up degree. The institution concerned has monitored the performance of the sub-degree graduates in the top-up programme. Since close collaboration and detailed input have been established, there has been a marked improvement in the performance of the graduates.

This is a good example of how close collaboration between a local institution and a non-local partner can positively impact on the performance of students.

Another institution organises a formal system for the collection of feedback from collaborative partners on the performance of their graduates in an articulated programme. This feedback can then be used to identify issues which need addressing in the sub-degree programme in future programme review, revalidation and restructuring exercises. The institution defines the purpose of the process as follows:

- To provide a channel for feedback for local and non-local articulation partners to give feedback on the academic performance, language skills, problem solving skills and critical thinking of our graduates.
- To sustain the quality of the programme through regular and systematic review.
- Through partners' comments, to identify area(s) where attention is needed in future programme review, revalidation and restructuring.
- To understand the maturity of our graduates e.g. their integrity, sense of responsibility and communications skills, etc.

The institution regards this as part of their ongoing Quality Improvement which involves a four-stage process of Review, Distribution and Collection, Analysis and Response. In the first stage, the questionnaire to be distributed is considered by Programme Leaders and the Quality Assurance Committee. The major questions asked of articulation partners are as follows:

- To what extent do you think our graduates are able to meet the language requirements of your programme?
- To what extent do you think our graduates are able to exercise their creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking skills in dealing with problems encountered in tertiary level study?
- To what extent do you think our associate degree programme has prepared our students for further academic training in your programme?
- To what extent do you think our graduates can demonstrate a professional attitude in terms of sense of responsibility, integrity, self-confidence, learning attitude and teamwork?

Free text answers are also sought to the following questions:

- Areas needing attention
- Suggestions for follow-up actions
- Any other comments

The questionnaires are collected, the responses analysed and a report compiled which is then discussed at Programme Management Committees and the Quality Assurance Committee. Suggestions are made for recommended actions, which, once approved, become the responsibility of the individual Programme Leaders.

One area where this process could be improved is through closing the feedback loop by making a formal response to the collaborative partners on the actions taken.

The admission of students to collaborative programmes is a particularly important area and is one where agreement should be reached between the partners in advance of programme launch. Although part of the ethos for SFSD programmes is that they should have lenient entry and stringent exit requirements, it is still likely that partners will want to have some input in the selection of students. What form this input will take is likely to vary depending on the relationship between the awarding partner and the local partner. In any case, institutions should try to ensure that only students who stand a good chance of successfully completing the programme are granted admission and that admission requirements are unambiguously stated in the publicity provided to applicants and strictly observed.

Monitoring and Support of Teaching Staff

Many of the examples of good practice with regard to the monitoring and support of teaching staff, as detailed in Chapters 6 and 9, can equally be applied to collaborative programmes. For instance, responsible staff from the awarding institution should carry out classroom visits, where teaching services are being provided by a partner institution, and the same feedback systems should apply. These classroom visits would be in addition to those carried out by the partner institution.

In some cases Hong Kong institutions operate sub-degree programmes in Mainland China with partner institutions and send their own faculty members to undertake teaching. As this often requires Hong Kong staff to reside on the Mainland, the potential needs of these staff should be taken into account. One institution provides guidance notes for its own full-time teachers who are appointed to Mainland programmes covering the following issues that are important for their well-being while working away from home:

- Working visas and human resource issues
- Health care provision arrangements
- Mobile phone and internet access
- Foreign currency issues
- Housing support (suggested regions and price range)
- Use of electrical appliances
- Shopping
- Entertainment
- Tips for travelling and sightseeing

The appointment of local staff to teach on programmes operated with non-local partners is another area which requires careful attention. Once again, the level of input required by each partner will be something which depends on the relationship between the partners and may change over time as partnerships mature and more trust is placed in the local partner. As a minimum, it is likely that the awarding institution will wish to review the CVs of all staff who will be teaching on the programme. One institution has the following agreement with their non-local partner:

Ongoing staffing changes and staff development activity at Partner Institutions are monitored both formally through annual programme monitoring . . . and informally by University Linked Tutors. The University's Memorandum of Cooperation . . . requires Partner Institutions to inform the University immediately of any changes in staffing which might endanger the threshold quality of the programme.

Although the above requirement is subject to local interpretation, the non-local university involved was confident that their staff have 'sufficient awareness of developments within the Partner Institution to be able to act swiftly should such circumstances arise'.

For collaborative programmes operated in Hong Kong which employ 'visiting' teachers from overseas, the local institution should provide the necessary guidance and support and also undertake monitoring of teaching quality as appropriate. The support provided to non-local teachers may include an orientation on local issues and the opportunity to observe some local teaching. In this way, staff from the awarding institution can gain some understanding of the local culture and context. More importantly, the local partner institution should also have a responsibility to monitor the teaching undertaken by non-local staff, to satisfy itself that quality teaching is being delivered and that the awarding institution is discharging its responsibility appropriately.

Professional Accreditation

Many self-financing sub-degree programmes are also subject to accreditation by relevant professional bodies. These programmes are most likely to be in areas such as accounting, marketing, social work and nursing. Institutions will work closely with the professional bodies to ensure a smooth working relationship. The requirements for accreditation will vary depending on the profession but an example of the type of process undertaken by one professional body is outlined below:

The accreditation will comprise an Institutional Review and the evaluation of the individual programme in terms of its coverage of competency standards.

The Institutional Review is to assess the quality and standards of the institution awarding the qualification, with particular reference to the areas of the subject specialism and related disciplines on the following:

- The nature, relevance and clarity of the mission and objectives established by the post-secondary institution in relation to its programmes in the subject area.
- The resources and facilities which comprise both the academic and support staff and physical facilities, and the financial provision available for these and other needs.

The Programme Review is to assess the extent of coverage as compared with the graduate competency standards set out by the professional body. The main areas covered by the assessment team are as follows:

- Academic staff – qualifications and experience, the balance between senior and junior staff and student/teacher ratios.
- Admissions standards – the standards of entry should be at a level which supports a reasonable expectation that the student has the intellectual capacity to complete the programme successfully.
- Curriculum – this should provide a total education experience demonstrated by coherence, relevance to good professional practice, currency, the level of intellectual challenge, skills relevant to a career in the subject area and coverage of the required competency requirement. Attention will be paid to both specific and generic subjects.
- Learning, teaching and assessment – including the effectiveness of the learning process, the quality of teaching and the performance of students.
- Quality assurance – the monitoring, critical evaluation and maintenance of the standard of the programme.
- Staff development – the policies and practices for staff development, the professional activity of staff and the quality of programme leadership.
- Exemption policies and guidelines – the policy and guidelines adopted for determining the number of exemptions granted to eligible candidates.

Once accreditation has been approved, it is likely that providers will be required to provide annual updates and to go through a re-accreditation exercise every two to five years. The annual update exercise will seek information on any major changes which have occurred in the accredited programme which may affect its accreditation status.

As can be seen, most of these requirements mirror the examples of good practice outlined in various chapters of this book. It is good practice to build in the professional bodies' programme requirements from the very first stages of programme design and development. A good way of ensuring compliance in terms of curriculum coverage is to have professional representation on any programme development advisory board. Having such representation will ensure that lines of communication are maintained between the professional body and the institution. The same argument can be made for quality assurance processes, where it is helpful to build the necessary requirements into the institution's own quality assurance procedures. This not only helps to ensure compliance but also saves duplication of effort and unnecessary work on the part of the institution.

The issue of professional accreditation can become more complex when the programme is also subject to accreditation by one of the academic quality assurance agencies. In such circumstances, it is vital that there is clear communication and cooperation between the institution, the professional body and the quality assurance agency. One quality assurance agency describes its stance on the matter as follows:

In academic accreditation exercises where it is clear that the programme concerned will be subject to professional accreditation, the agency will consider requesting the operator to provide evidence or plans on how basic criteria prescribed by the relevant professional body, such as teachers' qualifications, students' entry requirements, etc., would be met. The operator could also be required to produce records of its consultation with the professional body and the opinions expressed by the body on the standard of the programme and the resources provided. The agency would, where appropriate, take such information into account when conducting the academic accreditation of the programme. The agency also maintains regular dialogues with professional bodies to further enhance its cooperation and communication with them.

The whole area of professional recognition and accreditation can be complex. Irrespective of the type of professional accreditation, it is the responsibility of institutions to ensure that any publicity information concerning recognition provided to students is accurate. One example of good practice in this area can be seen in the following extract from one institution's website which clearly states the recognition granted to one of its professional programmes:

This programme provides valid qualifications to satisfy the academic requirements for applying for registration as a safety officer under the 'Factories and Industrial Undertakings (Safety Officers and Safety Supervisors) Regulations' of the HKSAR Government.

Graduates of the (programme) are eligible to apply for Corporate Membership of the Hong Kong Institute of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene (HKIOEH).

Graduates of the (programme) are eligible to apply for Graduate Member status of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH).

The use of such unambiguous language ensures accurate information for the student and also ensures that the institution as well as the professional body are protected from any accusation of providing misleading information.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that entering into partnerships of an academic or professional nature enables institutions to expand the scope of the programmes they offer in terms of both discipline areas and levels and respond rapidly to market needs for high-quality programmes without incurring the costs of new programme development. Before any collaborative arrangement is commenced, however, it is important that institutions define the criteria they will consider when selecting a partner. It is also good practice to have a detailed written agreement in place which states the rights and responsibilities of each party.

Institutions need to be aware that their responsibility for quality assurance extends to all programmes which they deliver, including those covered by collaborative agreements. Indeed, collaborative programmes may require more, rather than less, attention to quality matters to ensure full compliance with the quality assurance requirements of both partners and the effectiveness of the learning experience for students on the programmes. A robust monitoring, review and feedback loop which ensures that the experience of local teachers and learners is effectively taken into account by the providing partner is vital for the long-term sustainability of the programme. Professional accreditation is a vital element in many professionally oriented programmes. Institutions are encouraged to work closely with representatives of the professional bodies from the early days of programme design. This will ensure that effort is not wasted and that professional requirements can be included from the earliest planning stages.

CHAPTER

9

Resources, Staffing and Infrastructure



Introduction

Much of what has been discussed so far in this *Handbook* revolves around the ‘nuts and bolts’ of the academic enterprise including programme design and delivery, student support, assessing learning outcomes, working with partners and so on. In order to support all of these processes, however, institutions must have in place sound management practices that ensure that they remain financially viable, that they recruit and develop high-quality staff and that they provide a physical environment in which effective teaching and learning can take place. This chapter will focus on the management of resources, the recruitment, development and appraisal of teaching staff and the provision of student facilities.

Resource Planning

Every institution has the responsibility to maintain financial viability through careful planning, monitoring and review. A key means of achieving this is through the strategic planning or business planning process referred to in Chapter 3. The SFSD sector is volatile and fast-changing, however, and institutions should have in place an annual budgeting exercise which is flexible enough to allow for changes in the local environment.

As self-financing organisations, for most institutions the primary source of income is student fees. This may be supplemented in other ways such as property rental income and investment returns. Nevertheless, there is a constant tension between maintaining a balanced budget, upholding the quality of programmes, and at the same time keeping fees low enough to make programmes affordable and attractive to students. Management must ensure that there is no skimping on the allocation of resources in areas where doing so would work to the detriment of academic quality.

Every SFSD provider will produce an annual budget which, after having been approved internally within the unit, will be subject to further scrutiny and approval by the governing body.

One institution describes its budgeting process as follows:

The annual budget is prepared in November of the previous financial year and unit heads must provide estimates of student numbers as well as any predicted increases or decreases in staffing requirements, major equipment needs and so on. After approval by the SFSD unit, the budget is then considered and approved by the institution's Finance Committee (FC) as part of the overall budget exercise. At this stage, requests may be made for increases or decreases in student fee income as the FC sees fit.

A budget review is carried out after the main enrolment exercise and the budget is amended to maintain a break-even operating income. This may result in an

upward adjustment, if student enrolments are better than initial estimates, or a reduction when student enrolments have failed to meet predicted targets.

This built-in review of the annual budget allows the institution to react to any unforeseen changes in the environment such as large fluctuations in student numbers. Institutions which have multiple student entry points in the year should consider creating additional opportunities to review the budget to ensure continued financial viability.

For all institutions, staffing represents the most significant expenditure in the budget and is also the area which offers the least flexibility in terms of making immediate savings when cost-cutting becomes necessary. Many institutions react to this dilemma by making staff appointments on short-term contracts and creating as short a lead time as possible between the identification of staffing needs and actual recruitment. This in turn can create tensions and challenges for institutions with regard to human resource planning.

One institution describes the difficulties of human resource planning created by the volatile and short-term nature of continuing education thus:

- It means that quite often new staff positions can be created only after a need is demonstrated, which implies that in the interim existing staff must take on the workload in these new areas alongside their other responsibilities.
- It makes it difficult for us to create permanent posts (as opposed to limited-term contract posts) in the staff establishment.
- This in turn may cause compromises in the quality of candidates who can be attracted to apply for such positions.

In order to help with resources planning, it is important to have a policy with regard to reasonable staff workloads. In addition to facilitating human resource management, this will also help to achieve a fair sharing of duties and responsibilities among institutional colleagues. One institution operates a Total Workload Model as follows:

The Total Workload Model assumes an average of no less than 42 workload hours per week over the year. It is however understood that colleagues should be prepared to work extra hours to get necessary tasks accomplished. To enhance transparency, the duties and responsibilities taken up by individual staff are posted on the Staff Intranet.

The policy is characterised by an Annual Work Cycle which recognises that there is an uneven distribution of workload over the year with much heavier workload undertaken during the 28 teaching weeks and 12 examination and result processing weeks. Hence it is understood that staff will need to work

longer hours as and when necessary to complete duties satisfactorily and may be less busy during semester or summer breaks.

If a staff member's workload (teaching and other duties taken together) is substantially more (or less) than an average load, s/he will be involved in less (or more) duties in the nearest opportunity as a compensating adjustment.

The 42 hour workload is assumed to consist of an average of 15 teaching hours (subject to a maximum of 18 hours) which is equivalent to 30 workload hours (preparation, teaching and marking), plus another 12 hours for the discharge of other duties such as student support, professional development, meetings, supervision of part-time staff and so on. Various reductions can be made to the calculation for various duties such as subject leadership, programme management, large group teaching, student development projects, etc.

Having a robust workload formula model is encouraged as it ensures transparent and equitable treatment of staff members and helps with this important aspect of resource planning.

Staffing

The people working for any organisation are the most valuable resource that the organisation possesses. This section looks at the various ways in which an institution can ensure that it recruits, inducts, develops, monitors and evaluates its staff using best practices identified from around the SFSD sector.

Appointment

With regard to teaching staff, in the SFSD sector there is an increasing trend to try and appoint staff who already possess a doctoral degree. Nonetheless, the usual minimum academic qualification for teaching staff is a master's degree.

One institution goes through the following process when appointing academic staff:

Job vacancies specifying relevant entry requirements and duties are announced through job advertisements or internal circulars. Short-listed candidates are assessed by a selection panel. Short-listing is carried out by the Division Heads and approved by the Head of Unit who also approves the membership of the selection panel. The composition of selection panels for appointment under different staff categories is well-defined and normally consists of three members. Recommendations made by selection panels will be submitted to the specified approving authority (usually the Head of Unit) for approval. The Human Resources Unit will verify the recommended terms of appointment in accordance with the Unit's policies. References are obtained

from appointees' current/previous employers and/or personal referees and pre-employment medical examinations are conducted prior to the confirmation of appointments. The qualifications and work experience of appointees are verified by the Human Resources Office based on original documentary evidence.

The interview process is a vital stage in the selection and recruitment of quality staff. Another institution offers the following advice to interviewers to help ensure that the best candidates are selected and that the interview is carried out in line with best managerial and legal practice:

The interview provides a good opportunity for the recruiting unit to assess the candidate's suitability for the job, as well as for the candidate to gain knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of the post and the working environment.

Interviewers are advised to adopt a set of consistent selection criteria in assessing the capabilities of each candidate to minimise bias and avoid discrimination. They should obtain information relevant to selection and pertaining to education and experience of the candidates that are essential to the actual performance of the job. Unnecessary questions, which may be perceived as discriminatory on the grounds of marital status, family status, pregnancy, should be avoided. Candidates' information is treated in a confidential manner to comply with the data protection principles of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance.

Induction

The effective induction of instructors is an important aspect of the teaching and learning process. A well-designed staff induction programme can help new instructors settle into a new job and a new institution more quickly and helps to ensure that instruction is effective. It also allows new staff to meet key personnel and interact with other newly-appointed staff so that they can share common concerns. One institution provides an orientation day for new staff which covers the following issues:

- Relationship between the SFSD unit and the university proper
- Vision and mission
- Organisational structure
- History and development of the SFSD unit
- Strategic direction
- Work practices and staff development
- Learning and teaching quality

- Policy on holistic education and student development
- The local environment
- Quality assurance system
- Key individuals and committees
- Marketing and branding
- Administrative issues

Another institution sums up the aims of its new employee induction programme thus:

The unit conducts formal induction programmes on a regular basis to welcome new staff, to communicate key organisational policies and procedures, and to foster positive attitude and team spirit among colleagues.

Although an induction session is a good start to helping new staff settle into their new roles, there will almost certainly be an ongoing need for training of new staff. One institution has developed a peer mentorship scheme for its new teaching staff:

There is a one-semester Peer Mentorship Scheme for new teaching staff where experienced teaching staff members serve as mentors to newly recruited staff. This process is designed to help new teaching staff become familiar with the culture and working practices at the institution and to help them become familiar with relevant rules and regulations as well as Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement processes. It also serves to facilitate existing teaching staff to share teaching experience with newly recruited teaching staff and enhances the sense of belonging of both mentors and mentees. This is perceived as an important measure to ensure quality teaching and to nurture good teaching practices.

Another institution emphasises the role of the staff member's supervisor in the process:

The supervisor has an important role to play in the induction process. He/She is expected to introduce, orient, and integrate a new colleague to his/her new work environment. The supervisor should introduce new colleagues to others with whom he/she will be working, and discuss job requirements and procedures with the new colleague, including performance and quality standards expected of him/her. On-the-job training and continuous feedback on job performance should also be provided. Team members can play a role in the induction process, in making the colleague feel at ease, providing support and assistance at work.

Although most of these examples of good practice apply to the induction of new full-time staff, it is a good idea to ensure that any part-time staff recruited to teach on SFSD programmes are also given a suitable induction. In fact, it can be argued that the process is even more vital for part-time staff as they have far fewer opportunities for on-the-job training than their full-time colleagues. If face-to-face induction sessions are not feasible, the provision of an induction pack or guidebook is recommended. One institution provides the following information in its handbook for part-time teaching staff:

- General information (such as mission, vision and so on)
- Arrangements for classes (printing, library, attendance registers, class discipline, emergencies, safety, severe weather arrangements, absence and make-up)
- Teaching tips (lesson planning, teaching techniques, handling coursework, setting assessment)
- Quality Assurance (induction and observation, student feedback, communication, self-reflection)
- Finance (payment procedures, MPF)
- Personnel matters (personal data, confidentiality, copyright, bribery, amenities)
- Examples of various forms used

Another institution provides an induction package for its part-time instructors each term informing them of certain academically related administrative tasks:

The institution provides part-time instructors with a welcoming induction pack. The aim of this pack is to ensure academic quality and to facilitate the instructor to have a rewarding work experience. The areas covered in the pack are:

- Subject outline
- Teaching plan
- Printing of notes
- Copyright issues
- Examination and grading policies
- Subject monitoring and evaluation
- Important dates and events
- Important contacts
- Classroom observations and surveys

Staff Development

The provision of ongoing staff development opportunities helps to ensure that staff have the skills and knowledge to support the institution's development and any new job requirements. Staff Development is the process of improving the skills and performance of the organisation's employees through a variety of formal and informal activities. Coaching, mentoring, constructive feedback, continuing education, interpersonal skills development and other types of professional development and training are typical methods used to enhance the quality of teaching, as well as achieve increased productivity and a higher level of employee engagement and commitment to the organisation and its mission.

One institution describes the objectives of its staff development policy as follows:

The primary objective of staff development is to equip staff members with the knowledge and skills to carry out both current and future job requirements efficiently and effectively. Staff development aims to enhance job satisfaction, encourage staff members to be well-informed, and facilitate forward planning. The institution strives to create and maintain a conducive learning environment where individual staff members are encouraged to suggest and try out new ideas to bring about continuous improvement in their work.

One institution classifies its staff development provision in two categories:

A College Directed Scheme, usually initiated by the Department Head. Under this scheme the staff member is required to attend direct job related training programmes which teach knowledge and skills that are newly required by the job. That is, without that knowledge and skills, the staff member cannot perform the job up to the required standard.

An Educational Assistance Scheme, usually initiated by the staff member. This scheme covers training programmes which teach concepts, knowledge and skills that support a staff member's personal development, and such personal development can help the staff member in his/her present job or future development.

Another institution divides its staff development policy into short-term and longer-term, each covering different types of training and development activities:

Short-Term Staff Development covers activities such as seminars, courses, workshops or other events which would help enhance the service quality of staff.

Longer-Term Staff Development includes activities such as undertaking further studies, taking professional examinations, undertaking learning and teaching-

related research projects and the like. These activities are expected to lead to improvement in the academic attainment and service quality of the staff involved.

It is good practice for institutions to provide both financial and non-financial support for staff development activities. For the institution running the College Directed Scheme and the Educational Assistance Scheme the subsidy is as follows:

The subsidy for training programmes under the College Directed Scheme and Educational Assistance Scheme is 100% and 50% of the course fees respectively. The annual subsidy for each staff member is up to an accumulated total of HK\$10,000.

For the other institution mentioned above, the subsidy is calculated as follows:

The annual subsidy for staff undertaking short-term staff development activities is \$5,000 per staff member. The annual subsidy ceiling for each long-term staff development programme (i.e. programmes leading to an academic award) is 75% of the tuition fee or \$30,000, whichever is lower. Staff members may apply for and be granted full-pay study leave up to a maximum of 14 days for attending each staff development programme. Staff members undertaking doctoral degree programmes may be granted full-pay study leave in excess of 14 days on a case-by-case basis. Having said that, it is understood that staff development is not an entitlement and that financial support will depend on such financial factors as the financial situation of the College.

In addition to these opportunities for formal staff development, most institutions will organise in-house training programmes on a regular basis, some of which may be open to part-time staff. Some examples of workshops organised by one institution are as follows:

- Sharing workshops for good practices
- Coaching skills
- Classroom management
- Putonghua classes
- English writing classes
- Training in IT facilities

Appraisal

Another important aspect of staffing is the need to monitor and give feedback on the performance of staff through a comprehensive and formal staff appraisal

system. The system should also help to identify training and development needs for individuals. In most institutions this is also linked to the re-appointment system whereby staff are employed on a contract basis.

The objectives of one institution's Performance Management System (PMS) are detailed below:

- to ensure an individual's performance is geared towards the institution's mission and objectives
- to identify the needs of individuals and to develop training and development plans for each staff member
- to ensure that staff members are compensated relative to their performance

The PMS system can be divided into three phases:

- Work planning and setting, and staff training and development planning
- Review
- Feedback

Work planning and setting, and staff training and development planning:

At the beginning of the appraisal period, the member of staff, in consultation with their appraiser, will produce a planning sheet which lists the key responsibilities to be achieved during the review period. For each key responsibility the appraiser and appraisee agree on the key activities to be assessed. In addition to work planning, this is also the time when training and development plans are formulated. This may include attendance at seminars, workshops and conferences, job rotation, training programmes, etc.

Review:

There are three types of review – interim, progress and annual. Interim reviews are used for all new staff in their first year of employment (usually two in the first twelve months). Progress reviews, though informal in nature, are an important part of the process and should be conducted as necessary to ensure that the appraisee is progressing well. Interim and annual reviews cover:

- the level of performance
- areas and plans for improvement
- the work plan for the next review period
- training and development needs

In preparing for the review process, the appraisee will provide the appraiser with a self-appraisal of their progress so far, making reference to the planning

sheet agreed at the beginning of the cycle. The levels of performance are categorised as follows:

- A – performance substantially exceeds the required standard for the job
- B – performance exceeds the required standard for the job
- C – performance meets the required standard for the job
- D – performance barely meets the required standard for the job
- E – performance fails to meet the required standard for the job

Feedback:

An appraiser should always provide timely performance feedback to an appraisee to recognise and encourage good performance as well as to rectify sub-standard performance. By the end of the appraisal review period, an appraiser should formally discuss with the appraisee his/her performance for the entire review period. A formal appraisal report will be written which, as well as being agreed by the appraisee, will be reviewed by a person one rank higher than the appraiser in order to provide a 'check-and-balance' in the system. The institution also has an element of performance-related pay and can award additional increments to staff with outstanding performance or hold back an increment for staff whose performance fails to meet the required standards for the job. All cases of outstanding or poor performance are reviewed by the institution's staffing committee.

The results of student evaluations of teaching are commonly also taken into account in assessing the performance of academic staff. One institution takes this a step further by maintaining:

. . . a database for teaching evaluations, and (utilising) the information for consideration of staff re-appointment and salary review matters.

The primary purpose of evaluation and performance review is to achieve performance enhancement. The same institution also has in place a system for following up on poorly performing teachers:

The Academic Development Team, in consultation with the Programme Director and external advisors, advises teachers with low ratings on ways of improvement. If low ratings continue, the teacher will be put on probationary status, followed by class observation visits. If there is still insufficient improvement, the teacher will be removed from the list of approved teachers and no longer employed.

In order to manage the staff development and appraisal process, one institution has established a Staff Development and Appraisal Committee with the following Terms of Reference:

The Committee reports to the Academic Board and is responsible for developing longer-term Staff Development Plans and Staff Development Programmes for academic staff within the School. It is also responsible for the development and review of the Staff Appraisal procedures for academic staff.

The Committee will be responsible for the following in the area of staff development:

- Establishing a staff development policy and procedures for the approval of the Academic Board;
- Setting out a longer-term Staff Development Plan in line with the School academic development plans to respond to the needs of the School;
- Developing procedures for obtaining staff development bids from individual members of staff and for allocating money to this within budget and then passing the decisions to the Senior Management Team for endorsement. Where demand is greater than the available budget, the Committee is responsible for prioritising the bids and making recommendations to the Senior Management Team which will make final decisions;
- Setting out an Annual Staff Development Programme based on the needs of the School, of Departments and of individual members of staff and in line with the budget allocated for the relevant year;
- Obtaining feedback from members of staff on courses attended, and obtaining ideas from staff for future staff development and ensuring that due account is taken of these.

The Committee will be responsible for the following in the area of staff appraisal:

- The Committee will focus on establishing policies and procedures that incorporate self-evaluation, planning for the coming year, comments by the appropriate appraiser and suggestions for further improvement and development;
- The Committee will propose the domains in which appraisal will be carried out and the criteria against which performance should be judged;
- The Committee will ensure that the appraisal process:
 - is fair, objective and based on evidence;
 - is both formative in nature and able to provide reliable guidance to those who must make judgments regarding staff promotion and re-appointment;
 - is practical and not unduly time-consuming;

- encourages staff to pursue excellence in all aspects of their work.
- The Committee will obtain feedback from members of staff on the Staff Appraisal policies and procedures, and on issues concerning the implementation of the Staff Appraisal.

Having identified good performers and invested in their training and development, it is important to retain their services. The retention of high-quality staff is a constant challenge to institutions in the SFSD sector. In order to help address this issue, one institution has introduced a staff recognition scheme, the benefits of which include awarding a performance-based bonus to all staff and a team-building trip for all teaching staff.

Part-time Staff

Many institutions use a combination of full-time and part-time staff to undertake teaching duties. The employment of part-time staff has both advantages and disadvantages. As we saw in the first section of this chapter, some institutions react to the volatile and short-term nature of the sector by making short-term full-time staff appointments. Another means of coping with this volatility is through the use of part-time staff. Although this can give institutions flexibility and save costs, there is a down-side to such provision. Part-time staff may not demonstrate the same dedication to an institution that is shown by full-time faculty members. In addition, because of the very nature of their part-time employment, students can sometimes find it difficult to contact part-time staff outside class contact time. In a recent Institutional Review, one institution was commended for the way it used part-time staff:

The Panel . . . commended the fact that the number of part-time staff . . . is kept at a low level. This likely results in better coordination among staff, helps to facilitate teaching and learning and to enhance good student-teacher relationship.

Infrastructure

The provision of adequate facilities for students is an area of significant concern for most SFSD units. Unlike the funded universities, the SFSD units receive no public funding and they must balance their books. Thus any facilities made available to students must be paid for from student fees. SFSD units must therefore strike a delicate balance between providing an attractive and well-resourced environment and keeping fees affordable and competitive.

For SFSD units which are linked to publicly-funded institutions, specialist facilities may be provided by the unit or students may be allowed access to the facilities of the institution proper. Most SFSD units of universities tend to operate a mixture of

these two types of provision but care needs to be taken to avoid any cross-subsidy of students in the case of UGC-funded facilities. One institution arranges this as follows:

SFSD students are allowed to access the library of the University proper. A fair rate has been negotiated between the University proper and the unit to ensure that there can be no accusations of cross-subsidy. The Unit is charged for each visit that an SFSD student makes to the library facility.

This type of arrangement can be extended to many facilities. An alternative approach is for the SFSD unit to negotiate a 'flat rate' payment which will allow all SFSD students equal access to the facilities of the parent university.

Some of the larger SFSD providers have created quite sophisticated campus facilities which are specifically provided for their students. One institution was congratulated on its provision of purpose-built facilities for students in a recent Institutional Review Report as follows:

Two new campuses offer students a wide range of campus facilities, including classrooms, lecture theatres, IT laboratories, computer centres, sport facilities and libraries, etc. The students appear to make full use of facilities to support their all-round holistic development and thus develop a strong sense of belonging.

Funding for such large infrastructure projects can be obtained in a number of ways. For those units linked to publicly-funded institutions, some have obtained loans from the parent institution, or loans from Government which are guaranteed by the parent institution which are then repaid from student fee income over an agreed period of time. In other cases, support has been obtained in the form of donations from charities and philanthropists.

The HKSAR Government has also played a significant role in helping institutions set up and provide better facilities for their students. The following is an extract from the Progress Report on the Education Reform (4) from December 2006 (p. 49).¹

- Interest-free start-up loans have been approved to support non-profit-making education providers in providing accredited self-financed post-secondary programmes.
- Five pieces of land were allocated to non-profit-making post-secondary education providers for the construction of purpose-built premises through competitive land grant exercises in 2003 and 2004.

1 Available at [http://www.e-c.edu.hk/eng/reform/Progress Report \(Eng\) 2006.pdf](http://www.e-c.edu.hk/eng/reform/Progress Report (Eng) 2006.pdf)

In order to ensure a smooth operation of its purpose-built facilities, one institution has introduced an Accommodation and Facilities Team with the following remit:

The Accommodation and Facilities Team aims to create, maintain and deliver quality teaching and learning accommodation and facilities for students and teachers and the relevant training and operation systems for ensuring that these support services are delivered and reviewed consistently. The Team manages the following premises and facilities:

- Classrooms
- Computer Laboratory
- Part-time Tutors' Room
- College Theatre
- College Hall
- Library
- Consultation Area
- Student Development and Counselling Centre
- Student Common Room
- Student Lockers
- Cyber Station

To ensure that quality can be met consistently, daily cleaning and patrol on checking the condition of facilities, and regular maintenance and testing are carried out.

Another institution, rather than handling the management of its purpose-built facilities itself, contracts these out to the relevant unit of its parent university at a commercial rate.

SFSD students are becoming more demanding about the provision of student facilities. One area of current debate is the provision of student hostels. Although this is not an issue specifically related to the sub-degree sector, it is likely to become more pressing over the next few years. Although SFSD units can never be expected to provide facilities of the same standard as those provided in the subvented sector, it is still important to arrange for an adequate teaching, learning and social environment to be available to students to enhance their educational experience and assist in their whole person development. One independent SFSD institution does provide student hostel accommodation:

It currently has 206 hostel places as well as sports facilities including a swimming pool, tennis court, basketball court and indoor gymnasium. Hostel fees can be waived for students with special financial hardships.

Many institutions try to provide adequate facilities for their SFSD students to reduce the discrepancies between funded and non-funded students. Similarly, it is important to try and ensure that SFSD staff (both full-time and part-time) are also treated equitably and that they are provided with similar levels of facilities as staff on subvented programmes. An extract from one institution's Institutional Review Report is provided below and demonstrates the positive impact of good practice on the area of facilities provision for part-time teaching staff on SFSD programmes:

The Panel . . . was impressed with the quality consciousness of all the teaching colleagues it met . . . They were all very positive about teaching and about (the institution) and they appreciated the physical and psychological support provided to them. Some part-time staff had common room facilities available to them which were equipped with computers, lockers and refreshment facilities. They can gather informally before and between teaching sessions.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, institutions need to have sound resource planning and management structures in place in order to maintain a healthy balance between income and expenditure. Institutions should ensure that quality in the teaching and learning process is not sacrificed in the pursuit of a healthy budget sheet.

Expenditure on staffing is likely to be a major part of an institution's spending and it is thus important to plan workloads effectively and to ensure that adequate systems are in place for the recruitment, induction, training, development, monitoring and appraisal of staff.

Finally, institutions must provide an adequate environment in which the teaching and learning process can take place. This can be difficult in the SFSD sector, where there is no subvention. Those units aligned with UGC institutions can often, in addition to their own campus/facilities, make arrangements for students to use the facilities of the institution proper (provided that cross-subsidy is avoided). Although private institutions do not have similar support, they are nevertheless able to rely on Government loans and the generosity of private benefactors to create a suitable learning environment for students.

CHAPTER

10

Concluding Remarks



Quality Matters

This *Handbook* has listed many examples of good practice in the area of quality assurance and quality improvement for the self-financing sub-degree (SFSD) sector in Hong Kong. We have aimed to identify and describe instances of good practice which have been used by institutions to maintain and improve quality in all aspects of their operation, from setting the mission and strategic planning through programme planning and approval to the fundamental aspects of programme delivery, teaching, learning and assessment.

It is hoped that this publication will serve as a resource for all SFSD institutions in Hong Kong and individuals working in them, to enable them to share good practices and learn from each other as they seek continually to improve their operations.

Several of the SFSD institutions began life as Continuing Education or Extra Mural Studies units of universities in Hong Kong. Through this association, these units have been able to draw on the quality assurance experience gained in the university sector, much of which has been publicised and promulgated through the Teaching and Learning Quality Process Review (TLQPR) process conducted by the UGC. Non-UGC-funded institutions have been able to develop their internal quality assurance systems during a process of external accreditation and with advice from the accreditation body. Thus through the processes of validation or review, the external quality assurance bodies, HKCAA/ HKCAAVQ and JQRC, have played significant roles in assisting and encouraging the development of internal quality assurance systems of institutions.

One Size Does Not Fit All

Institutions should take care when trying to adopt instances of good practice in quality assurance from another institution. The SFSD institutions and the programmes they operate are very varied. They have different origins and missions, and they differ in size and culture. It therefore stands to reason that no single model can fit the needs of all institutions. No one size fits all. Good practice borrowed from another institution should be adapted as necessary to fit the local context.

The concept of ‘no one size fits all’ is equally pertinent at the programme level. The type and level of programmes delivered by the SFSD units can vary considerably and consideration needs to be given to the level of quality assurance which needs to be employed for programmes or courses of a particular type or level. There could be as much a tendency for quality assurance procedures to ‘creep’ upwards in terms of sophistication and complexity as there could be a tendency to become slack or inconsistent in quality assurance in certain areas of operation. Thus not everything in this *Handbook* is equally applicable to every institution and programme.

A good way forward may be to identify the quality assurance procedures most appropriate for particular Qualifications Framework (QF) levels. We may assume that Level 4 programmes may have the highest level of quality assurance associated with them and Level 1 the lowest. Thus, for example, it may be desirable to engage External Examiners for Level 4 programmes but not for Level 1. Institutions should identify appropriate quality assurance systems for different types/levels of programme and design systems which are flexible enough to cope with a variety of offerings. Continuing Education units (and later SFSD units) were established to provide flexible forms of education which were not available within the rigid confines of the traditional degree system. It is important that the sector retains its flexibility and does not become overly restricted by the imposition of inappropriate quality assurance processes. At the same time, the concern for quality should be the overriding principle. Fitness for purpose is thus the key to effective and efficient operation.

It is also important, in determining quality assurance procedures to bear in mind the quality assurance principles listed in Chapter 2. The examples of good practice quoted in this *Handbook* demonstrate that when the principles are put into action consistently, good-quality programmes and programme delivery result. As we noted in Chapter 2:

The principles are not prescriptive or unchangeable, nor are they intended to dictate practice or stifle diversity and innovation. An awareness of and commitment to these key principles, however, will help an institution to reassure itself that it has developed and is applying good practice in its quality assurance activities.

The individual examples of good practice will not necessarily work for every institution, but if institutions look at the examples in the light of the principles and apply or adapt them in their own context, we believe they can provide a useful reference for devising quality assurance procedures that are fit for their purpose.

Review and Quality Improvement

Quality assurance systems should not be static. Just as quality assurance systems are designed to achieve quality improvement, institutions should constantly strive to improve the quality assurance systems themselves through a process of regular review. Stakeholder feedback is a vital component of this process.

As well as regular and ongoing reviews of individual elements of the system, it is good practice to build in occasional overarching reviews of the entire system to ensure that the processes continue to meet evolving institutional needs. This can be done through regular external reviews.

Quality Culture

It is important to develop a quality culture within an institution. Everyone involved in the educational process should have a commitment to academic and professional excellence. It is also important that the senior management of the institution exhibits leadership in the area of quality. When the Chief Executive Officer and senior management of an institution show a clear and unambiguous commitment to quality assurance and quality improvement, it is much more likely that these issues will be treated seriously by all of the staff.

Quality really does matter. It is the responsibility of every institution to aim to deliver programmes of the highest possible quality. Applying the principle of ‘fitness for purpose’ in quality assurance will help to ensure that the needs and expectations of stakeholders are met and that the institution demonstrates accountability to the community. We believe that the sector as a whole, and the institutions in the sector, attach great importance to quality assurance and quality enhancement. The examples of good practices contained in this *Handbook* have been taken from the institutions and these attest to their commitment to quality and also their willingness to share good practices. The Tripartite Liaison Committee would like to acknowledge the generosity of the SFSD institutions in contributing and sharing many of their innovative systems and processes with the readers of this *Handbook*.

We hope this *Handbook* will contribute to quality enhancement in the SFSD sector so that it can continue to fulfil its mission to deliver world-class, high-quality sub-degree programmes for the people of Hong Kong.

Appendix

Institutions in the Self-financing Sub-degree (SFSD) Sector 2009/2010

The institutions offering self-financing sub-degree programmes are listed below:

Self-accrediting Institutions / Major Self-financed Sub-degree Programme Units (SSPUs) of Self-accrediting Institutions:

Community College of City University (CCCU)

School of Continuing and Professional Education,
City University of Hong Kong (CityU SCOPE)

Academy of Film, School of Communication,
Hong Kong Baptist University

Hong Kong Baptist University –
College of International Education (HKBU CIE)

School of Continuing Education,
Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU SCE)

Lingnan Institute of Further Education (LIFE)

The Community College at Lingnan University (CCLU)

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)

School of Continuing and Professional Studies,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK SCS)

The Chinese University of Hong Kong –
Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Community College (CUTW)

The Hong Kong Institute of Education – School of Continuing
and Professional Education (HKIED SCPE)

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University –
Hong Kong Community College (PolyU HKCC)

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University – School of Professional Education and
Executive Development (PolyU SPEED)

HKUST College of LifeLong Learning (HKUST CL3)

The Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK)

The Open University of Hong Kong – Li Ka Shing Institute
of Professional and Continuing Education (OUHK LiPACE)

HKU SPACE Community College

HKU SPACE Po Leung Kuk Community College (HPCC)

HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education
(HKU SPACE)

Post-secondary Institutions Subject to HKCAAVQ Accreditation

Caritas Bianchi College of Careers (CBCC)

Caritas Francis Hsu College (CFHC)

Chu Hai College of Higher Education (CHCHE)

Hang Seng School of Commerce (HSSC)

Hong Kong Art School (HKAS)

Hong Kong Central College (HK-CC)

Hong Kong College of Technology (HKCT)

Hong Kong Institute of Technology (HKIT)

Vocational Training Council –

Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE)

Vocational Training Council –

School of Business and Information Systems (SBI)

Yew Chung Community College (YCCC)

Glossary

Academic Board The supreme academic body of a post-secondary/ higher education institution, or that of the continuing education unit within a higher education institution.

Accreditation An external review process for the establishment of the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of an institution, programme or module of study.*

Assessment A general term that embraces all methods used to judge the performance of an individual, group or organisation.*

Board of Governors The supreme governing body of a college registered under the Post-Secondary Colleges Ordinance, or that of a community college.

Council The supreme governing body of a University. The highest executive body of a registered Post-secondary College is also called the Council.

Course An individual module or subject of study: can be stand-alone or as units within a programme of study.

Criteria-referenced Assessment (Criterion-referenced Assessment) The process of evaluating (and grading) the learning of students against a set of pre-specified criteria.

EDB The Education Bureau of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

External Advisor An individual, not affiliated with the institution, who provides expert advice from a particular perspective on the design and delivery of a course/programme or on the overall development and direction of the division or institution.

External Examiner An individual academic expert, not affiliated with the institution, who monitors the standard of assessment of a course/programme.

Fitness for Purpose A criterion for the assessment of the quality of an educational course, programme or institution where quality is equated with the fulfilment of a specification or stated outcomes.*

Governance Governance in educational institutions refers to the way they are organised and operated internally and their relationship with external bodies in order to achieve their stated objectives.*

HKCAAVQ The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications. Established by Ordinance, it is dedicated to providing quality assurance and assessment services to education and training institutions, continuing education providers and the general public. It is also the QR (Qualifications Register) Authority under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) The computing and communications facilities and features that variously support teaching, learning and a range of activities in education.

Institutional Review An evidence-based process by which an external person or team checks that appropriate procedures, infrastructure, resources, and quality assurance systems are in place across an institution to assure quality, integrity or standards of provision and outcomes.*

Instructor Any member of full-time or part-time staff responsible for the delivery of academic content.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) A description of what students should be able to do or demonstrate, in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes, by the end of a course.

JQRC The Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC) is an independent corporate quality assurance body established in August 2005 by the Heads of Universities Committee (HUCOM) of Hong Kong constituted by the eight institutions under the aegis of the University Grants Committee (UGC). Its major function is to provide for the peer review of the quality assurance processes of the self-financing sub-degree programmes of these institutions.

Lifelong Learning All learning activity undertaken throughout life, whether formal or informal.*

Outcome-based Teaching and Learning (OBTL) An approach in which teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks are developed to support student achievement of the intended learning outcomes of a course or programme.

Peer Review The process of evaluating the provision, work process, or output of an individual or collective who is operating in the same milieu as the reviewer(s).*

Post-secondary Education The non-compulsory education studies following the completion of a school-based secondary education.

Programme A programme of study or training defined by a curriculum which is offered by an institution, which may consist of one or more modules, units, subjects or courses.

Programme Validation The peer review process used to scrutinise a proposed programme of study in order to ensure that it meets expectations of standards and quality before formal approval to offer the programme is given. In self-accrediting

institutions, programme validation is an internal institutional process. All other providers must seek programme validation from the HKCAAVQ if they intend to place programmes on the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework. The external process is also referred to as ‘accreditation’.

Qualifications Framework (QF) A Government endorsed mechanism with a seven-level hierarchy to define the standards of different academic and vocational qualifications, ensure their quality and indicate articulation ladders between different levels.

Qualifications Register (QR) QR is a register established by the Secretary for Education under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance for entering qualifications recognised under the QF, including the learning programmes leading to these qualifications and the relevant operators.

Quality Assurance (QA) Quality Assurance in higher education is the collection of policies, procedures, systems and practices internal or external to the organisation designed to achieve, maintain and enhance quality.*

Self-accrediting Status The authority awarded to an institution to offer programmes of study as permitted under the relevant ordinance without external validation or accreditation. It is awarded to institutions that have satisfied the relevant authority, often through an institutional review process, that they are able to take responsibility for the quality and standards of their own programmes.

Self-financing Sub-degree An academic programme at the sub-degree level, awarded in the post-secondary education sector, for which the institution receives no recurrent Government funding.

Senate The supreme academic body of a University.

Strategic Plan The document or process by which an institution defines its strategy or direction, and makes decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy.

Sub-degree An academic qualification below degree level, for example, Associate Degree or Higher Diploma.

Tripartite Liaison Committee A Committee established by the Government, comprising the EDB, HKCAAVQ and JQRC, to provide a forum for discussing quality-related issues concerning the self-financed sub-degree sector and to enhance comparability of the QA mechanisms and the programmes offered by institutions with and without self-accrediting status.

* Definitions taken or adapted from the website of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education: <http://www.inqaahe.org>

Useful Links

Self-accrediting Institutions and Major SFSD Units of Self-accrediting Institutions

Community College of City University (CCCU)

<http://www.cityu.edu.hk/col/>

School of Continuing and Professional Education,

City University of Hong Kong (CityU SCOPE)

<http://www.scope.edu>

Academy of Film, School of Communication, Hong Kong Baptist University

<http://af.hkbu.edu.hk/en/index.php>

Hong Kong Baptist University – College of International Education (HKBU CIE)

<http://www.cie.hkbu.edu.hk/html/>

School of Continuing Education, Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU SCE)

<http://www.sce.hkbu.edu.hk>

Lingnan Institute of Further Education (LIFE)

<http://www.ln.edu.hk/life/>

The Community College at Lingnan University (CCLU)

<http://www.ln.edu.hk/cc/index.php>

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)

<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/v6/en/>

School of Continuing and Professional Studies,

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK SCS)

<http://www.scs.cuhk.edu.hk>

The Chinese University of Hong Kong –

Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Community College (CUTW)

<http://www.cutw.edu.hk>

The Hong Kong Institute of Education –

School of Continuing and Professional Education (HKIED SCPE)

<http://www.scpe.ied.edu.hk/version1/en/index.asp>

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University –
Hong Kong Community College (PolyU HKCC)
<http://www.hkcc-polyu.edu.hk>

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University –
School of Professional Education and Executive Development (PolyU SPEED)
<http://www.speed-polyu.edu.hk>

HKUST College of LifeLong Learning (HKUST CL3)
<http://www.cl3.ust.hk>

The Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK)
<http://www.ouhk.edu.hk>

The Open University of Hong Kong –
Li Ka Shing Institute of Professional and Continuing Education (OUHK LiPACE)
<http://www.ouhk.edu.hk/~lipace/>

HKU SPACE Community College
<http://hkuspace.hku.hk/cc/eng/index.php>

HKU SPACE Po Leung Kuk Community College (HPCC)
http://hkuspace.hku.hk/plk_cc/eng/

HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE)
<http://hkuspace.hku.hk/index2008.php>

Post-secondary Institutions Subject to HKCAAVQ Accreditation

Caritas Bianchi College of Careers (CBCC)
<http://www.cbcc.edu.hk>

Caritas Francis Hsu College (CFHC)
http://www.cfhc.caritas.edu.hk/college/main/en/index_eng.html

Chu Hai College of Higher Education (CHCHE)
<http://www.chuhai.edu.hk/en/>

Hang Seng School of Commerce (HSSC)
<http://www.hssc.edu.hk>

Hong Kong Art School (HKAS)
<http://www.hkas.edu.hk>

Hong Kong Central College (HK-CC)
<http://www.hk-cc.edu.hk/eng/home.asp>

Hong Kong College of Technology (HKCT)
<http://www.hkct.edu.hk>

Hong Kong Institute of Technology (HKIT)

<http://www.hkit.edu.hk/en/index.htm>

Vocational Training Council – Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE),
School of Business and Information Systems (SBI)

<http://www.vtc.edu.hk>

Yew Chung Community College (YCCC)

<http://www.yccc.hk/en/index.html>

Sites of HKSAR Government, QA Agencies and Related Organisations

Common Descriptors of Associate Degree and Higher Diploma / Information
Portal for Accredited Self-financing Post-secondary Programmes

http://www.ipass.gov.hk/eng/reg_sd.aspx

Education Bureau – Non-local Higher and Professional Education Courses

<http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeid=226&langno=1>

Education Bureau– Policy Objectives

<http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=7002&langno=1>

Education Bureau – Qualifications Framework

<http://www.hkqf.gov.hk>

Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications

<http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>

Hong Kong Qualifications Register

<http://www.hkqr.gov.hk>

Joint Quality Review Committee Ltd.

<http://www.jqrc.edu.hk>

University Grants Committee

<http://www.ugc.edu.hk>

