

**Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review:  
III. Sub-degree, Professional and Continuing  
Education Programmes (SPCEPs)**

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# 1. Preamble

## 1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) regards teaching and learning (T&L) as a core function; the University places great importance on the culture embedded in the institution and its history, and also on explicit systems and procedures to assure and enhance the quality of the educational experience for students. The development of the system and procedures has gone through several stages as the University has grown in size and complexity, and the measured pace of changes has won acceptance and ownership among teachers and students. This document constitutes the current status of the University's evolving quality-assurance framework for T&L as it applies to Sub-degree, Professional and Continuing Education Programmes (SPCEPs) with reference to the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) (Website: <https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/en/home/index.html>).

## 1.2 Principles

1.2.1 Among others, the following principles have been used to guide the formulation of the integrated framework:

- The importance of developing a framework which is effective in improving the quality of T&L, while minimizing bureaucracy and paperwork.
- The importance of reflection upon the process of student learning experience for the achievement of desired learning outcomes, which will also serve as a stimulus to curriculum refinement.
- The value of periodic peer review as a spur to self-reflection and the provision of wider insights.
- The importance of diagnostic feedback in providing evidence to inform the process of reflection.
- The appropriateness of taking an outcomes-based approach (OBA) to T&L by focusing on student learning outcomes.
- The importance of achieving alignment between desired learning outcomes and the curriculum.
- The value of deriving principles of excellent teaching at CUHK from the principles and practices of those judged to be the best teachers at the University. These principles are consistent with the extensive international literature in the area of excellent university teaching.

These principles have been incorporated into a curriculum development model, shown in Figure 1. The model commences with student learning needs which are utilised to formulate desired learning outcomes. These lead to five elements of the curriculum which are incorporated into the integrated curriculum framework: desired learning outcomes, content, learning activities, assessment and feedback for evaluation. These five elements are incorporated into procedures for programme development, programme review, course development and course review. Feedback for evaluation is central to the model as it informs reflection upon practice.

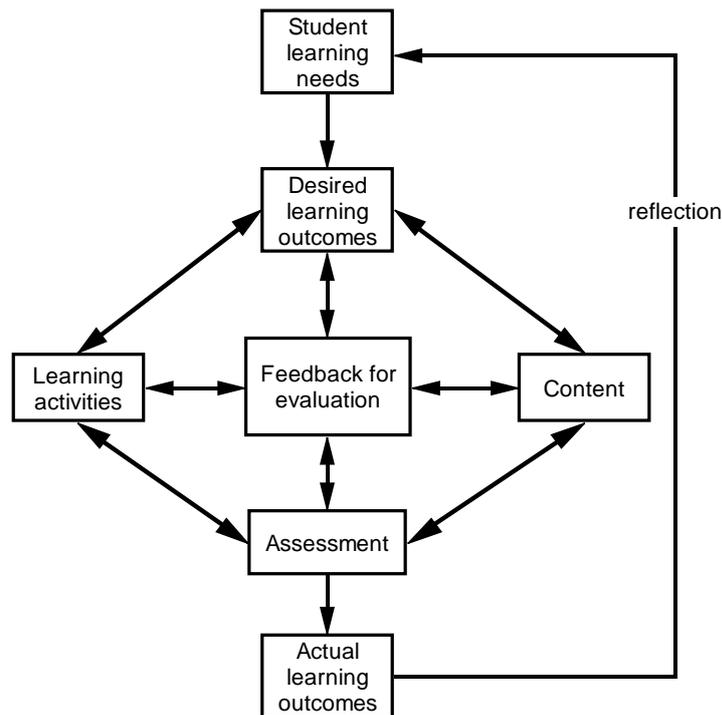


Figure 1. A model of an aligned curriculum

### 1.3 Principles specific to SPCEPs

1.3.1 Among others, the following principles specific to SPCEPs have been used to guide the formulation of the integrated framework so as to make it suitable for the nature of SPCEPs and their students:

- The students enrolling in full-time Higher Diploma/ Associate Degree programmes are mainly school leavers and so teaching should be consistent with the principles of lifelong learning. Higher Diploma and Associate Degree are worthwhile standalone sub-degree qualifications, i.e. HKQF Level 4, and their curricula are characterized by different proportions of generic and specialized content that prepares students for further studies and initial employment at the para-professional level.
- The students enrolling in part-time SPCEPs are usually more mature and so teaching should be consistent with the principles of adult learning. They are likely to be active in a field or profession and possess relevant experience and knowledge. Students' experience should be utilised in the programme design and delivery. The expected learning outcomes are likely to be quite specific and often professional in nature.
- All SPCEPs are self-financed, and student choice imposes an implicit quality-assurance mechanism.
- All SPCEPs are offered to meet the demand resulting from technological development or societal changes. They therefore are usually launched with a short lead-time and phased out as demands are satisfied.
- The framework for SPCEPs, therefore, needs to be flexible. Embedded quality-assurance procedures need to be formulated so as to ensure a high standard of T&L while not imposing a bureaucracy which discourages enterprise.

## 1.4 Objective

- 1.4.1 The main objective of the present framework is to ensure that teachers and programmes engage in *reflection* about T&L, that such reflection is rooted in *evidence* and leads to *action* for improvement, and that *incentives* are provided for such efforts.

## 1.5 Nomenclature

- 1.5.1 In this framework, the term *course* also means *module* (which is used in some disciplines); the term *Programme Offering Unit (POU)* replacing the former term *Self-financed Sub-degree Programme Unit (SSPU)*<sup>1</sup> is the academic unit that is responsible for SPCEP(s); the term *head* includes *programme director*; and the term *teacher* includes *instructor*. A *programme committee* or its equivalent such as *Department Board* should be established to oversee the programme. The term *governing board* includes *Academic/ Management Board of the POU* and/or *Department/ Faculty Board(s) with which the POU is affiliated*. (Decisions about governance may vary across faculties/ POU's and need to be specified for each programme.) The term *Sub-degree Providing Units (SDPUs)* refers to the Academic Faculties and the School of Continuing and Professional Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- 1.5.2 All guides and associated documents are to be used flexibly and adapted to suit practices and terminology within the POU.

## 1.6 Coverage

- 1.6.1 The *integrated framework* applies on a mandatory basis to all taught programmes. For reference, quality-assurance procedures for undergraduate (Ug) programmes are dealt with in the *Integrated framework for curriculum development and review: I. Undergraduate programmes* and those for self-financed taught postgraduate (TPg) programmes are dealt with in the *Integrated framework for curriculum development and review: II. Taught postgraduate programmes*.
- 1.6.2 SPCEPs come under the Senate Committee on Sub-degree, Professional and Continuing Education Programmes (Senate Committee on SPCEP) established in August 2017 with an expanded remit to SPCEPs up to HKQF Level 6. SPCEPs follow this quality-assurance framework which was formulated from the same set of principles derived from the Ug and self-financing TPg, with minor adjustments made to the processes that account for differences in regulations.

## 2. Programme and Course Planning

### 2.1 Frequency

- 2.1.1 A course/ programme planning document should be prepared whenever a new course/

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<sup>1</sup> "SSPU" is a term formerly adopted by the then Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC) in its last Institutional Review in 2008.

programme is launched, or when there are major changes.

## **2.2 Programme planning**

- 2.2.1 POU's planning new SPCEPs are requested to use the template *Proposal for Introduction of New Self-financed Sub-degree, Professional and Continuing Education Programme (SPCEP)* for the formal submission documents for programme proposals and budgets. This document is available on the website of the Senate Committee on SPCEP.
- 2.2.2 Proposals need first to be approved by the respective governing board or equivalent and the Faculty Board. They are then forwarded to the Senate Committee on SPCEP and Senate for approval.

## **2.3 Course planning**

- 2.3.1 Course planning should include a specification of (a) expected learning outcomes, (b) subject content, (c) intended distribution of learning activities, (d) the assessment scheme, (e) intended channels to collect feedback for evaluation, and (f) QF credits. POU's submitting new course proposals are required to use the template *Course Description Form*. This *Form* is available on the website of the Senate Committee on SPCEP.

## **2.4 Dissemination**

- 2.4.1 Relevant sections of the course-planning document, with minor modifications, could become the course outline to be provided to students at the beginning of each course. It is recommended that course outlines be posted on the programme's website, so as to be available to prospective students.

## **3. Course Reviews**

### **3.1 Frequency**

- 3.1.1 Each of the courses offered by a programme should be regularly reviewed by the teacher(s) concerned and the programme committee (e.g. when first launched or upon major changes).

### **3.2 Format and content**

- 3.2.1 The course review, performed against the course-planning document as the reference, should cover (a) learning outcomes, (b) subject content, (c) learning activities, (d) the assessment scheme, and (e) an action plan in the light of the reflection on (a)–(d), which in each case should be supported by relevant sources of feedback evidence. In cases where the action calls for major changes, this initiates a new cycle of course planning.

### **3.3 Dissemination**

- 3.3.1 The course review is internal to the programme committee but should be presented at the Annual Programme Meeting for discussion and follow-up.

## **4. Programme Self-evaluation**

### **4.1 Dissemination**

- 4.1.1 The programme self-evaluation is an internal programme committee procedure, and should form the basis of any formal programme review by the panel appointed by the governing board and approved by the Senate Committee on SPCEP.

### **4.2 Frequency**

- 4.2.1 Each POU should conduct self-evaluations of its SPCEP(s) pitched at HKQF Levels 4-6 on a regular cycle, ahead of the programme reviews.
- 4.2.2 For SPCEPs below HKQF Level 4, the governing board(s) are responsible for deciding when the programmes should conduct self-evaluations and programme reviews.

### **4.3 Format and content**

- 4.3.1 The self-evaluation should refer to relevant sections from the programme-planning document, and should cover (a) aims and desired learning outcomes, (b) subject content, (c) learning activities, (d) the assessment scheme, (e) the effectiveness of procedures for programme management and quality assurance, (f) procedures for ensuring the quality of teaching and providing professional development for all teaching staff, (g) the training and evaluation of teaching assistants and/or part-time teachers, if applicable, and (h) a summary of changes and improvements previously decided and/or implemented since the last review; these may include responses to recommendations in the report of the visiting/ external examiner if applicable. All items (a)–(h) should be supported by relevant sources of feedback evidence. A draft action plan in the light of the reflection on (a)–(h) should be included. If the draft action plan calls for major changes, a new cycle of programme planning should be initiated. The self-evaluation report will serve as a basis for programme review.
- 4.3.2 A suggested guide for sections (a) to (e) is available on the website of the Senate Committee on SPCEP. These guidelines should be adapted to suit the circumstances of each POU.

## **5. Flexibility in Implementation**

The details of the internal review mechanism mentioned in sections 2 to 4 above are broad outline suggestions. Each POU is encouraged to reflect and decide on such adaptations as may be appropriate for its particular circumstances. There should also

be flexibility with respect to the nature of individual programmes, the background of the students and the level of enrolment. However, significant differences from the direction of this framework should be reported to and endorsed by the governing board and the Senate Committee on SPCEP.

## **6. Programme Reviews**

### **6.1 Nature and frequency**

- 6.1.1 Programme reviews are important to ensure that teachers and programmes are engaged in evidence-based reflection about T&L, which in turn support the SPCEP sector of the University as well as programmes to develop and enact improvement plans related to the quality of T&L.
- 6.1.2 Programme reviews for HKQF Levels 4-6 programmes are conducted on a regular cycle as determined by the Senate Committee on SPCEP, which involve parties external to the programme and POU.
- 6.1.3 The primary responsibility for conducting reviews for HKQF Levels 4-6 programmes lies with the POU's and their respective governing boards. The POU's in consultation with the respective SDPU's are responsible for arranging a timetable for the regular review cycle, and should inform the Senate Committee on SPCEP of the arrangements.
- 6.1.4 The governing board(s) are responsible for deciding when the SPCEP(s) below HKQF Level 4 should conduct programme reviews.

### **6.2 Review panel**

- 6.2.1 The review panel is appointed by the governing board and approved by the Senate Committee on SPCEP. The panel which should consist of at least 3 members may include the visiting/ external examiner of the programme. All members must be external to the POU under review and at least one external member not employed by the University. Expertise, both in the subject and in pedagogy, should be represented in the review panel. A resource person from the POU may be called upon to provide the review panel with a better understanding of the context of the programme under review if all panel members are non-CUHK members. However, the resource person should not take part in the making of recommendations or drafting of the review report.
- 6.2.2 The responsibility of the review panel is to review the programme's self-evaluation report, to ensure adequate feedback and information have been sought from teachers, students or stakeholders, and to note areas of good practice and make recommendations on specific areas for future improvement.

### **6.3 Review procedure**

- 6.3.1 The programme committee offering the programme conducts a self-evaluation (see Section 4) and produces related documentation and supporting evidence in accordance

with the guidelines for programme review.

- 6.3.2 The programme self-evaluation document will be sent to the review panel. The review panel may seek additional information, e.g. in regard to particular courses specified by the review panel. The review panel may meet with teaching staff, students or alumni of the programme as deemed necessary. In the case of 2-year full-time programmes at HKQF Level 4, the review panel is required to meet with teaching staff, students or alumni during the review process.

#### **6.4 Reporting procedure and action plan**

- 6.4.1 Following a review, the panel prepares a report on the findings and recommendations and sends it to the POU. The POU will then respond to the report. Key elements of the report of the review panel include:

- Evaluation of the progress and improvements made, especially in relation to goals set in previous action plans; and
- Evaluation of T&L quality, as well as the processes for T&L enhancement.

- 6.4.2 One key component of the programme committee's self-evaluation and response documentation should be a detailed proposed action plan to deal with challenges and to improve the quality of T&L within the programme.

- 6.4.3 The documentation produced by the review panel and the programme committee respectively is forwarded to the governing board for approval and discussion of follow-up actions. The report of the review panel together with the action plan will then be considered by the Senate Committee on SPCEP. The governing board might also align the programme review with the review required by the 're-approval' requirement in consultation with the Senate Committee on SPCEP.

- 6.4.4 The programme self-evaluation document requires the programme committee to identify strengths and challenges within a programme. In addition, the review panel makes its own assessment of these and provides recommendations to POU, its governing board or affiliated SDPU. Identification of strengths provides useful information on best practice for other programmes. Identification of challenges should lead to a detailed action plan for improvement. The action plan should be formulated by the programme committee and endorsed by the governing board concerned.

#### **6.5 Consideration by the governing board**

- 6.5.1 The governing board considers the review panel's report, including its evaluation of the progress and improvements made and of the quality of T&L and then makes final recommendations to the programme committee for action.

#### **6.6 Dissemination**

- 6.6.1 The programme-review documentation and the programme committee's response are made available to the POUs and their respective governing boards, and the Senate Committee on SPCEP.

6.6.2 The governing board reviews documentation, including evaluation of progress and of T&L quality, which will be available for the consideration of the Committee on Re-approval of Sub-degree, Professional and Continuing Education Programmes.

## 6.7 Review by the Committee on Re-approval of Sub-degree, Professional and Continuing Education Programmes

6.7.1 All self-financed programmes approved by the Senate and pitched at HKQF Levels 4-6 will have a validity of a maximum of six years, irrespective of the number of cohorts admitted in the interim. Re-approval has to be sought, without which the programme may be put on probation or be directed by the Senate to cease admission.

## 7. Summary

7.1 Table 1 shows the steps in a regular review cycle as determined by the Senate Committee on SPCEP. A flowchart for the programme-review process is illustrated in Figure 2, which also indicates the range of data that can be used in programme self-evaluation.

Table 1. Activities in a regular review cycle

Frequency	Action	Documents required	Submit to
Once every year	(i) Course evaluation (per offering)	Summary of course evaluation results	Programme Committee/POU [for record]
Regularly	(ii) Course review (External examiners' reports can be accepted as equivalence)	<b>Course-review report</b> , either from the external examiner or as an internal review report by programme	Programme Committee for discussion and follow-up at Annual Programme Meeting
Once every four to six years	In addition to (i) and (ii) mentioned above, the following should also be conducted:  (iii) Self-evaluation as a basis for (iv) programme review (review panel to be appointed by the governing board and approved by the Senate Committee on SPCEP)	<b>Programme-review report</b> , including self-evaluation of the programme and comments from review panel leading to an <b>action plan</b>	Governing board and the affiliated SDPU [for approval and discussion of follow-up and actions]  Senate Committee on SPCEP [for consideration]  Governing board might also align the programme review with the review required by the 're-approval' requirement.

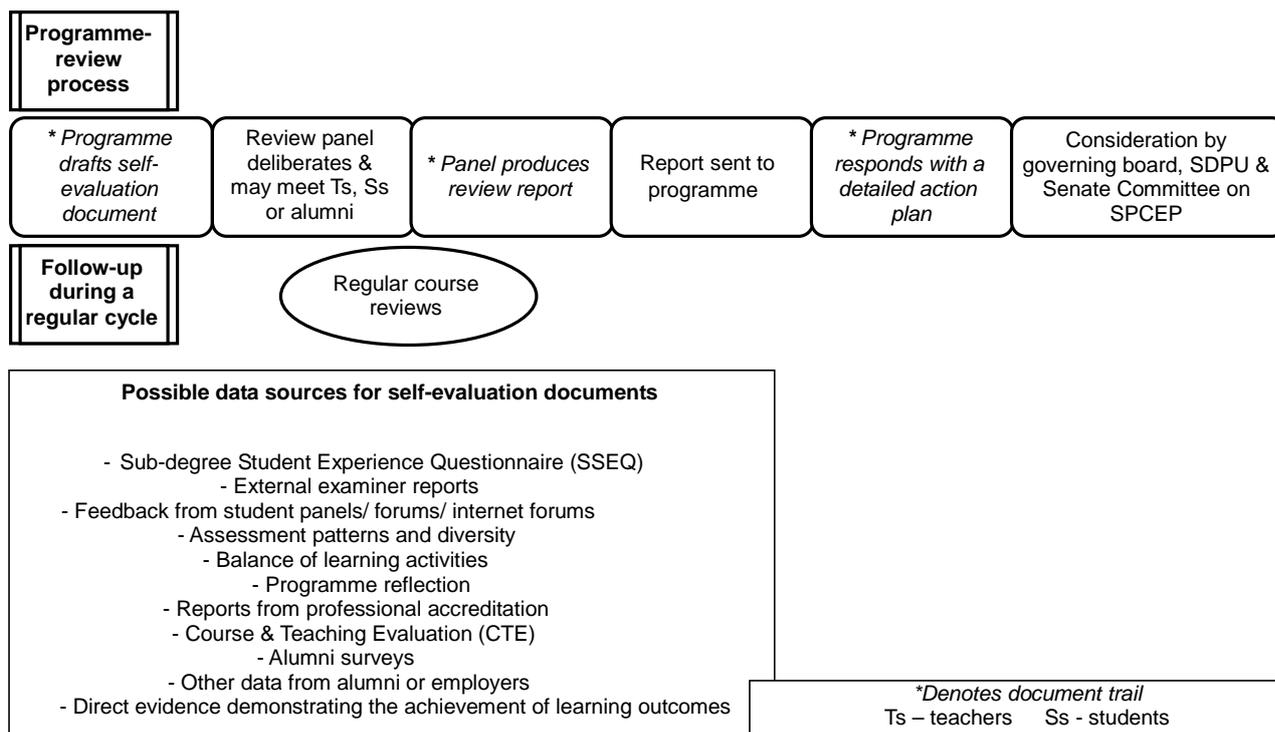


Figure 2. Flowchart for the programme-review process

## 8. Professional Development

- 8.1 A programme of professional development for all new teaching staff is mandatory in most cases. Evidence of satisfactory completion is required for consideration of contract renewal, substantiation and promotion.
- 8.2 These measures should be reported in the programme-self-evaluation document.

## 9. Incentives

Incentives, at both the individual and the programme level, are incorporated into University policies and procedures to promote attention to the matters contained in this *integrated framework*. POU, their respective governing boards and SDPUs are expected to ensure that there are high levels of commitment to T&L.

### 9.1 Programme level

- 9.1.1 The Chairs of the respective governing boards are responsible for ensuring that programme committees take appropriate action in respect of the action plans they have formulated in response to the recommendations of review panels. The performance of programmes will be available to the Committee on Re-approval of Sub-degree, Professional and Continuing Education Programmes in its consideration of granting re-approval to programmes. Where necessary, action will be reinforced by the Chair of the Senate Committee on SPCEP. In extreme cases the Chair of the governing board may recommend to the Senate Committee on SPCEP that new enrolments may be suspended if specified steps in the action plan are not

implemented.

## **9.2 Individual level**

9.2.1 The Course and Teaching Evaluation is used to ensure the quality of teaching of individual teachers.