

## Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review: III. Sub-degree Programmes (QF Level 4)

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## Part A Overview

### 1. Preamble

#### 1.1 Background

1.1.1 All programmes (sub-degree (SD), undergraduate and postgraduate) of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) regard teaching and learning (T&L) as a core function; the University places great importance on explicit systems and procedures to assure and enhance the quality of the educational experience for students.

1.1.2 The development of CUHK's 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 its SD sector.

#### 1.2 Principles

1.2.1 The following principles were used to guide the formulation of the *Integrated framework (IF) for curriculum development and review* for SD programmes:

- The importance of reflection upon the achievement of desired learning outcomes 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.
- The importance of developing a framework which is effective in improving the quality of T&L, while minimizing bureaucracy and paperwork.
- 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 on practice.

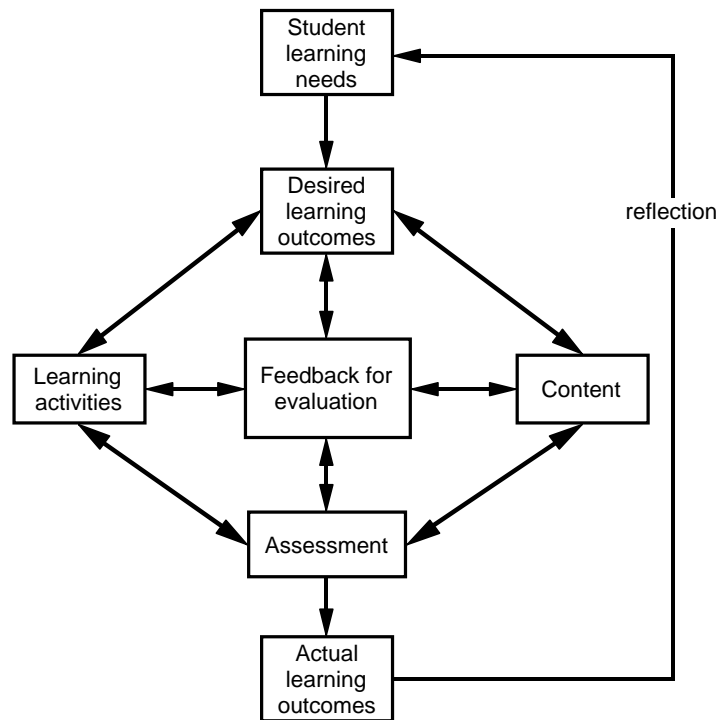


Figure 1. A model of an aligned curriculum

### 1.3 Principles specific to SD programmes

1.3.1 Among others, the following principles specific to SD programmes were used to guide the formulation of this part of the framework so as to make it suitable for the nature of SD programmes and their students:

- All SD programmes are self-financed, and student choice imposes an implicit quality-assurance mechanism.
- The framework for SD programmes 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.
- The expected learning outcomes are likely to be quite specific and often professional in nature.
- The students enrolling in part-time SD programmes are more mature and so teaching should be consistent with the principles of adult learning.
- The students enrolling in part-time SD programmes are likely to be active in the field or profession and possess relevant experience and knowledge. Students' experience should be utilised in the programme.
- Many SD programmes are offered to meet demands resulting from technological developments or societal changes. They therefore need to be launched with a short lead-time and phased out as demands are satisfied.

### 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 the following, the term *course* also means *module* (which is used in some disciplines); the term *Self-financed SD Programme Unit (SSPU)* includes *programme committee* and any other unit that might be responsible for academic programmes; the term *head* includes *programme director*; and the term *teacher* includes *instructor*. The term *governing board* includes *Academic/ Management Board of the SSPU* and/or *Department/ Faculty Boards with which the SSPU is affiliated*. (Decisions about governance may vary across faculties/ SSPUs and need to be specified for each programme.)
- 1.5.2 All guides and associated documents are to be used flexibly and adapted to suit practices and terminology within the SSPU.

## 1.6 Coverage

- 1.6.1 The integrated framework applies on a mandatory basis to all SD programmes. For reference, quality-assurance procedures for undergraduate (Ug) programmes are dealt with in the document *Integrated framework for curriculum development and review: I. Undergraduate programmes* and those for taught postgraduate (TPg) programmes are dealt with in the document *Integrated framework for curriculum development and review: II. Taught postgraduate programmes*. The same set of principles adopted by Ug and TPg programmes apply to the quality-assurance framework for SD programmes overseen by the University Extension Board (UExB), though some adjustments to processes have been made to account for differences in regulations.

## 1.7 Evaluation evidence

- 1.7.1 The present framework is premised on the assumption that strategies must not be simply propelled by enthusiasm, compliance with administrative directives or change for change's sake; rather, strategies must be firmly rooted in evidence. Such evidence may be gathered by a variety of means, including student focus groups and discussion forums (either face-to-face or on the web), and informal feedback from employers or professional groups. The format chosen for evaluation needs to be appropriate for the nature of the course or programme and student numbers.
- 1.7.2 All SD programmes are expected to conduct evaluation for each course and to have programme-level evaluation administered on graduation.

## 2. Main Elements

- 2.1 The integrated framework consists of the following main elements:

(a) The *planning* of courses and programmes should be documented in broad conformity with the standard template, at programme launch and upon major changes.

(b) The programme should engage students in *course evaluation* each time a course is offered. The evaluation results should be taken into consideration in the process of course review to be conducted by the programme committee.

(c) The programme committee for each SD programme, together with the responsible teacher(s), should conduct and document its own *course reviews* at least once every two years. This could be in the form of review by an external examiner together with the responses taken on the comments. Programmes that have not been reviewed under the external-examiner system should conduct an internal course review against the original course plan and, where appropriate, revised course plans should be formulated.

(d) The SD programme should conduct an annual programme meeting leading to a brief *annual progress report* on T&L, showing evidence of reflection on available data and focusing on progress with respect to the action plan once it has been formulated. This report should be submitted to the governing board for comments or noting.

(e) Each SD programme should conduct its own *programme self-evaluation* and a formal *external programme review* at least once every four years. The programme self-evaluation should be conducted and documented against the original programme plan and, where appropriate, revised programme plans should be formulated. This self-evaluation forms the basis for external programme review. An appropriate review panel appointed by the governing board and approved by UExB considers the substance of the T&L processes, and also monitors the effort and effectiveness of the self-evaluation.

(f) The programme-review report consists of both the self-evaluation and external-review components, and should be submitted to the governing board for discussion of follow-up actions and formulation of an *action plan* to address any issues for which there is potential for improvement. Documents, including the programme-review report and action plan, should then be forwarded to UExB for submission to the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (SCTL). The Chair of the governing board is responsible for ensuring that the action plan is implemented.

(g) *Training and ongoing professional development* for new teachers are available through SSPUs. Programmes are also expected to have a plan to ensure the quality of teaching by part-time staff.

(h) *Incentives* are provided by the head of SSPUs to ensure there are high levels of commitment.

2.2 The following timetable (Table 1) shows the steps in a normal four-year review cycle\*. A flowchart for the programme-review process is in Figure 2 and the documents to be used are on the UExB website. Figure 2 also indicates the range of data that can be used in programme self-evaluation.

Table 1. Activities in the four-year review cycle\*

Cycle	Action	Documents required	Submit to
Once every year	i) Course evaluation (per course offering)	Summary of course evaluation results	Department/ Division of SSPU [for record and action for improvement]
	ii) Annual Programme Meeting	Brief one-page <i>annual progress report</i> on T&L	Governing board [to comment or to note]
Once every two years	iii) Course review (External examiners' reports can be accepted as equivalence)	<i>Course-review report</i> from the external examiner/ internal review	Annual Programme Meeting [to comment or to note]
Once every four years	In addition to i), ii) and iii) mentioned above, the following should also be conducted: iv) Self-evaluation as a basis for v) external programme review (external examiner(s)/ review panel to be appointed by the governing board and approved by the UExB)	<i>Programme-review report</i> , including self-evaluation of the programme and comments from external examiner(s)/ review panel	Governing board [for discussion of follow-up and actions], then an <i>action plan</i> to UExB for submission to SCTL

\*The four-year cycle is subject to review after the completion of its first cycle.

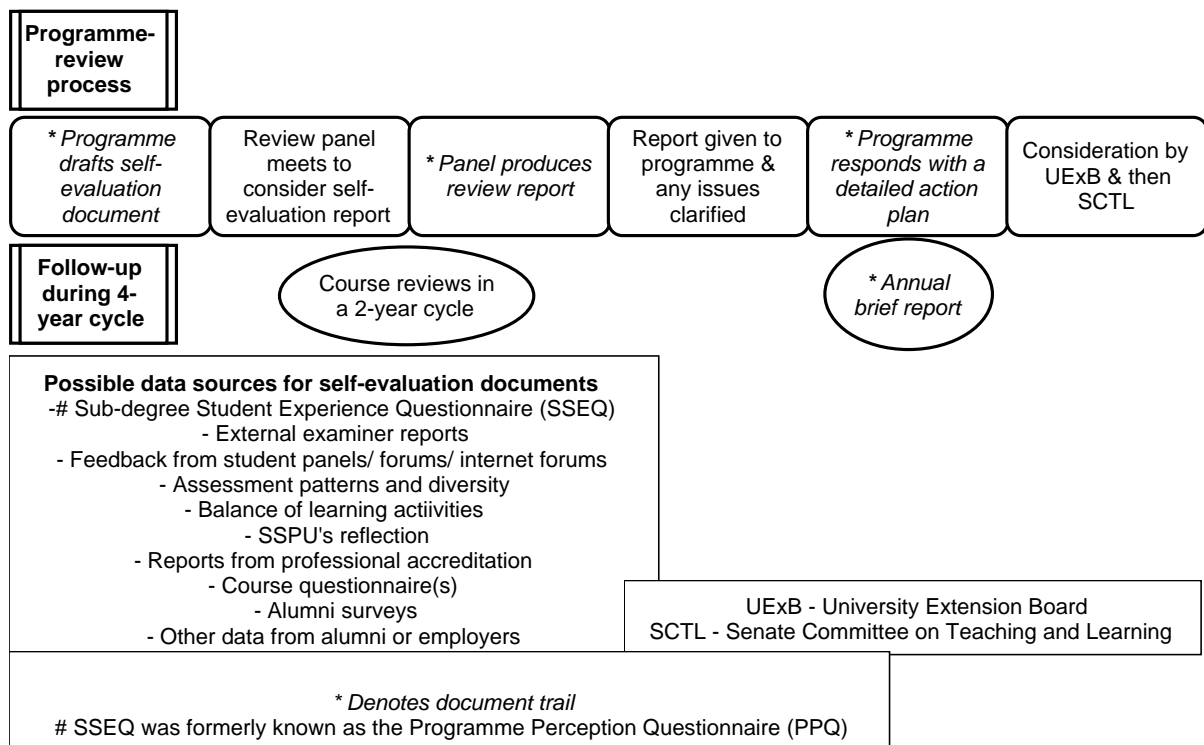


Figure 2. Flowchart for the programme-review process

## **Part B Additional Detail**

### **3. Course and Programme Planning**

#### **3.1 Frequency**

- 3.1.1 A course/ programme planning document should be prepared whenever a new course/ programme is launched, or when there are major changes.

#### **3.2 Programme planning**

- 3.2.1 SSPUs planning new SD programmes are requested to use the UExB templates, *Proposal for Introduction of New Programme* and *Budget Proposal for New Self-financed SD, Diploma, Certificate Programme*, for the formal submission documents for programme proposals and budgets. These documents together with the relevant *Guidelines* are available from the UExB website.
- 3.2.2 Proposals need first to be approved by the governing board before their submission to UExB and Senate for consideration.

#### **3.3 Course planning**

- 3.3.1 Course planning should include a specification of (a) expected learning outcomes, (b) subject content, (c) intended distribution of learning activities, (d) the assessment scheme, and (e) intended channels to collect feedback for evaluation. SSPUs submitting new course proposals are required to use the template *Course Description Form*. This *Form* and the *Reference Guide for Course Planning* are available from the UExB website.

#### **3.4 Dissemination**

- 3.4.1 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 offering. It is recommended that course outlines be posted on the programme's website, if applicable, so as to be available to prospective students.

### **4. Course Reviews**

#### **4.1 Frequency**

- 4.1.1 Each of the courses should be reviewed by the teacher(s) concerned and the programme committee at least once every two years, or more frequently as necessary (e.g. when first launched or upon major changes). Review by the external examiner is accepted as an appropriate mechanism for course review.

#### **4.2 Format and content**

- 4.2.1 The course review should refer to the course-planning document, and 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.

### **4.3 Dissemination**

- 4.3.1 The course review is internal to the programme committee but should be noted in the annual progress report.

## **5. Annual Progress Report**

### **5.1 Frequency**

- 5.1.1 Each SSPU should engage in at least one session of annual review on all matters related to the SD programme(s) it offers as a summary of the programme-review discussion. This can simply take the form of an item on the agenda of the governing board meeting or retreat to discuss and record issues, changes and improvements. The annual review will result in the formulation of the brief annual progress report designed to record key decisions about the programme's development.

### **5.2 Format and content**

- 5.2.1 In years other than that for the programme review, a brief annual progress report (typically one page) should be prepared on each SD programme. The report will be submitted to the governing board for comments or noting. The report need not contain evidence for reported progress and should highlight key current features of the programme's T&L activity. In the report the programme teams are expected to reflect upon the elements of T&L incorporated in the curriculum development model which underpins the integrated framework, namely:
- learning outcomes
  - content
  - learning activities
  - assessment.
- 5.2.2 In the annual progress report there should be reflection upon the following statistical data, where pertinent and applicable, though the data themselves do not need to be reported:
- number admitted
  - number of applications and some breakdown by quality
  - attrition figures
  - number of courses offered and who teaches them
  - grade distributions
  - external examiner's reports and action taken
  - financial side: income, payment rate for teachers.



### **5.3 Document control**

- 5.3.1 All programme-review reports will be archived into a Document Management System administered by UExB Office with restricted access control.

## **6. Programme Self-evaluation**

### **6.1 Dissemination**

- 6.1.1 The programme self-evaluation is an internal programme committee document, but should form the basis for a formal programme review by the panel appointed by the governing board and approved by UExB.

### **6.2 Frequency**

- 6.2.1 Each SSPU should conduct self-evaluations of its SD programmes at least once every four years, ahead of the programme reviews (below). For new programmes or those experiencing rapid changes, self-evaluations should be conducted earlier, say immediately after a cohort has graduated. The self-evaluation is in preparation for the programme review.

### **6.3 Format and content**

- 6.3.1 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 (and as reported in the annual progress reports); 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.
- 6.3.2 A suggested guide for sections (a) to (e) is available on the UExB website. These guidelines should be adapted to suit the circumstances of each SSPU.

## **7. Flexibility in Implementation**

- 7.1 The details of the internal review mechanism mentioned in sections 3 to 6 above are broad outline suggestions. Each SSPU 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 UExB.

- 7.2 A baseline of data will be collected from all SD programmes through a stocktaking template. This aids the identification of areas of good practice, which is helpful to review panels in formulating recommendations.

## **8. Programme Reviews**

### **8.1 Nature and frequency**

- 8.1.1 Programme reviews involve parties external to the programme and SSPU, and are conducted once every four years.
- 8.1.2 The primary responsibility for conducting reviews lies with the SSPUs and their respective governing boards. The SSPU is responsible for arranging a timetable for the four-year review cycle, and should inform UExB and SCTL of the arrangements.

### **8.2 Review panel**

- 8.2.1 The review panel is appointed by the governing board and approved by UExB. The panel may include the visiting/ external examiner of the programme. It is expected that expertise both in the subject and in pedagogy should be represented.
- 8.2.2 The responsibility of the review panel is to review the programme's self-evaluation report, and to note areas of good practice and make recommendations on specific areas for future improvement.

### **8.3 Review procedure**

- 8.3.1 The programme committee offering the programme conducts a self-evaluation (see Section 6) and produces related documentation and supporting evidence in accordance with the guidelines for programme review.
- 8.3.2 The documentation for the programme review should be the same as that for programme self-evaluation, augmented as appropriate. The programme-review panel may seek additional information, e.g. in regard to particular courses specified by the panel. The review panel will not normally meet with teaching staff, students or alumni of the programme, but may do so if it feels that the information in the self-evaluation document is insufficient.

### **8.4 Reporting procedure**

- 8.4.1 Following a review, the panel prepares findings and recommendations to which the programme committee responds. Key elements of the review panel's report are:
- judgement on the progress and improvements made, especially in relation to goals set in previous action plans; and
  - judgement on T&L quality, as well as the processes for T&L enhancement.
- 8.4.2 One key component of the programme committee's self-evaluation and response documentation should be a recommended detailed action plan to deal with challenges

and to improve the quality of T&L within the programme.

- 8.4.3 The documentation produced by the panel and the programme committee is forwarded to the governing board for follow-up action and endorsement. UExB and SCTL will receive a copy of the report for record and will be informed of follow-up action taken.

## **8.5 Action plan**

- 8.5.1 The programme self-evaluation document requires the programme committee to identify strengths and challenges within a programme. In addition the panel makes its own assessment of these and provides recommendations to SSPU. 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.
- 8.5.2 In subsequent reviews, the panel assesses the progress against the original action plan. Progress on action plans can be tracked via the annual progress reports presented by programme committees to the governing board(s).

## **8.6 Consideration by the governing board**

- 8.6.1 The governing board considers the review panel's report, including its judgement on progress and on the quality in T&L. The governing board then makes final recommendations to the programme committee for action.

## **8.7 Dissemination**

- 8.7.1 The programme-review reports and the programme committee's response are made available to the SSPUs and their respective governing boards, and then to UExB and SCTL.

## **8.8 Review by a panel of SCTL**

- 8.8.1 Each year a small number of the programmes reviewed by SSPU panels may be selected for further review by a panel recommended by UExB and appointed by SCTL.

## **9. Professional Development**

- 9.1 Training and ongoing professional development for new teachers are available through SSPUs. Programmes are also expected to have a plan to ensure the quality of teaching by part-time staff. Details of training and professional development should be in the annual progress reports and the programme-self-evaluation document.

## **10. Incentives**

10.1 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. SSPUs and their respective governing boards are expected to ensure that there are high levels of commitment.

### **10.2 Programme level**

10.2.1 The Chair of the governing board is responsible for ensuring that programme committees take appropriate action in respect of the action plans they formulated in response to the recommendations of review panels. The actions of the Chair of the governing board are reinforced by the endorsement of action plans by the governing board. Where necessary, action will be reinforced by the Chair of SCTL. In extreme cases the Chair of the governing board may recommend to UExB that the programme committee be informed that new enrolments may be suspended if specified steps in the action plan are not implemented.

### **10.3 Individual level**

10.3.1 Course evaluation is used to ensure the quality of teaching of individual teachers.