

Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review: I. Undergraduate Programmes

Contents

Section		Page
1.	Preamble	2
	<i>1.1 Background</i>	2
	<i>1.2 Principles</i>	2
	<i>1.3 Objective</i>	3
	<i>1.4 Nomenclature</i>	3
	<i>1.5 Coverage</i>	3
2.	Course and Programme Planning	4
	<i>2.1 Frequency</i>	4
	<i>2.2 Format and content</i>	4
	<i>2.3 Dissemination</i>	4
	<i>2.4 Relationship with course and programme proposals</i>	4
	<i>2.5 Procedures for introduction and revision of programmes</i>	4
	<i>2.6 Multi-section courses</i>	4
3.	Course Reviews	5
	<i>3.1 Frequency</i>	5
	<i>3.2 Format and content</i>	5
	<i>3.3 Dissemination</i>	5
	<i>3.4 Multi-section courses</i>	5
4.	Programme Self-evaluation	5
	<i>4.1 Frequency</i>	5
	<i>4.2 Format and content</i>	5
5.	Programme Reviews	6
	<i>5.1 Nature and frequency</i>	6
	<i>5.2 Reporting procedure and action plan</i>	6
	<i>5.3 Consideration by SCTL</i>	7
	<i>5.4 Dissemination</i>	7
6.	Summary	7
7.	Professional Development	9
8.	Incentives	9
	<i>8.1 Department level</i>	9
	<i>8.2 Individual level</i>	9

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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.

1.2 Principles

1.2.1 Among others, the following principles were used to guide the formulation of the framework:

- The importance of developing a framework which is effective in improving the overall 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: aims/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.

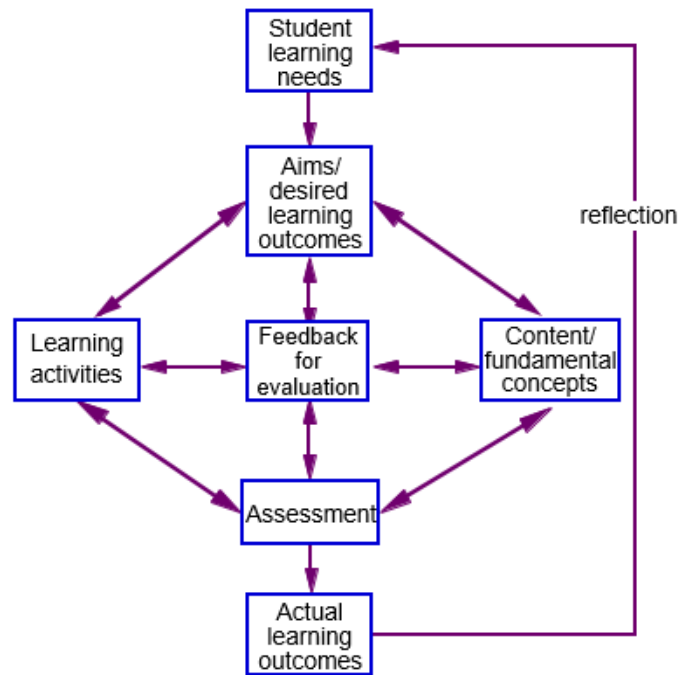


Figure 1. A model of an aligned curriculum

1.3 Objective

- 1.3.1 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.

1.4 Nomenclature

- 1.4.1 In this framework, the term *course* also means *module* (which is used in some disciplines); the term *programme committee* may mean *department/ school* or *departmental curriculum committee* and any other unit that might be responsible for academic programmes; and the term *programme director* may mean *department chair*.
- 1.4.2 All guides and associated documents are to be used flexibly and adapted to suit practices and terminology within departments and faculties.

1.5 Coverage

- 1.5.1 The *Integrated Framework* applies on a mandatory basis to all taught programmes. For reference, quality-assurance procedures for taught postgraduate (TPg) programmes are dealt with in the *Integrated framework for curriculum development and review: II Taught postgraduate programmes*, and the *Integrated framework for curriculum development and review: III. Sub-degree, Professional and Continuing Education Programmes* refers to the sub-degree sector.

2. Course and Programme Planning

2.1 Frequency

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

2.2 Format and content

- 2.2.1 Both the course-planning and the programme-planning documents should include a specification of (a) expected learning outcomes, (b) subject content, (c) intended distribution of learning activities, (d) assessment scheme, and (e) intended channels to collect feedback for evaluation.
- 2.2.2 Suggested guides and templates are on the T&L website. These provide guidance on the topics that might usefully be covered and the level of details expected. They should be adapted to suit the circumstances of each discipline rather than followed rigidly.
- 2.2.3 Departments/ programmes submitting new course proposals are requested to input course information in CUSIS and submit the Course Catalog Report for approval by the respective Faculty Boards.

2.3 Dissemination

- 2.3.1 Programme-design documents should be accessible by staff and students (in principle also to prospective students). It is recommended that they be posted on the departmental website.
- 2.3.2 The course-planning document, with minor modifications, could become the course outline to be provided to students at the beginning of each course offering.

2.4 Relationship with course and programme proposals

- 2.4.1 Extracts from these planning documents can also serve the purpose of submission to the Faculty Board and/ or the Senate for approval of new courses or programmes (or to the Faculty Board in the case of major revision of courses or programmes). New write-ups should be avoided, both to ensure consistency and to minimize paperwork.

2.5 Procedures for introduction and revision of programmes

- 2.5.1 A guide on procedures which should be observed when new programmes (major, minor, double degrees, etc.) are introduced or revised can be found on the T&L website.

2.6 Multi-section courses

- 2.6.1 For a course offered in multiple sections, a single course-planning document should specify the overall framework and latitude (e.g. final examination covering 40%–50% of the assessment), within which each teacher can exercise discretion.

3. Course Reviews

3.1 Frequency

- 3.1.1 Each of the courses, including those offered for non-major students, 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.
- 3.2.2 A suggested guide for course review can be found on the T&L website. These should be adapted to suit the circumstances of each faculty.

3.3 Dissemination

- 3.3.1 The course review is an internal departmental document.

3.4 Multi-section courses

- 3.4.1 Either a single review is made for all sections, or individual reviews for each section should be supplemented by an overall report by the coordinator. In the latter case, any significant variations across sections should be reported, commented upon and where necessary justified.

4. Programme Self-evaluation

4.1 Frequency

- 4.1.1 Each department should conduct self-evaluations of its programmes on a regular cycle, ahead of the programme reviews (below).

4.2 Format and content

- 4.2.1 The self-evaluation, performed against the programme-planning document as the reference, should cover (a) aims and desired learning outcomes, (b) subject content, (c) learning activities, (d) assessment scheme, (e) effectiveness of procedures for programme management and quality assurance, (f) procedures for the provision of professional development for all teaching staff in curriculum design and teaching effectiveness, (g) in particular, the training and evaluation of teaching assistants, (h) a summary of changes and improvements previously decided and/ or implemented since the last review. A provisional action plan in the light of the reflection on (a)–(h)

should be included, in each case supported by relevant sources of feedback evidence. The self-evaluation should also address the focused areas, if any, selected by SCTL for a particular cycle of programme reviews.

- 4.2.2 T&L 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. In the case of professional programmes, the input of the profession is often provided by accreditation processes or professional associations. However, all programmes should consider the range of graduate employment destinations frequently used by their graduates and bear the needs of these professions in mind during programme planning and programme self-evaluation.
- 4.2.3 In addition, there needs to be formal survey questionnaires, constructed upon a sound theoretical base and professionally validated. For Ug programmes, the University mandates Course and Teaching Evaluation (CTE) each time a course is offered; programme-level feedback such as Student Experience Questionnaire, usually at the end of the second year and final year of the programme; and surveying of alumni one year and five years post-graduation, such as Graduate Capabilities Questionnaire and Alumni Questionnaire.
- 4.2.4 Guidelines and explanatory material are provided on the T&L website. The guidelines should be adapted to suit the circumstances of each faculty.

5. Programme Reviews

5.1 Nature and frequency

- 5.1.1 Programme reviews are conducted on a regular cycle as determined by the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (SCTL) and will be coordinated as far as possible with the deliberations of the Visiting Committees as parties external to the programmes. Each programme review will be conducted by a panel, appointed by SCTL, a short time before the visit of the Visiting Committee. The programme review panel will contain at least one SCTL member and its membership will encompass relevant discipline and pedagogical expertise.
- 5.1.2 Undergraduate (Ug) programme reviews include all major programmes, minors, elective courses and University Core Requirements. The aim is to provide collegial feedback to programmes and departments on all aspects of Ug students' learning experiences.
- 5.1.3 The SCTL has decided that Ug programmes awarded positive units of adjustment in both the first cycle and the second cycle 'light' reviews be given an option to opt out from review in the next cycle. Nevertheless, departments will still be required to reflect on these teaching programmes in the review by their Visiting Committees.

5.2 Reporting procedure and action plan

- 5.2.1 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.

5.2.2 The review outcome (including self-evaluation document and panel report) will be presented to the Visiting Committee for scrutiny and comment before it is submitted to SCTL. Visiting Committees will consider the quality of all Ug and TPg programmes under the purview of the department together. The process and especially timing for programme reviews will need to be developed in alignment with the role of Visiting Committees as far and practicable as possible.

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

5.2.4 The programme self-evaluation document requires departments to identify strengths and challenges within a programme. In addition the panel makes its own assessment of these and provides recommendations to departments. Identification of strengths provides useful information on best practice for other programmes. Identification of challenges should lead to an action plan for improvement. The action plan should be formulated by the department and endorsed by the Faculty Board concerned.

5.3 Consideration by SCTL

5.3.1 SCTL considers the review documentation, including judgements on progress and on T&L quality, before making final recommendations for RAC consideration.

5.3.2 RAC allocates up to 5% of the one-line budget teaching allocation for the programmes on the basis of SCTL's recommendations. Funding re-allocations are only applicable to programmes funded by block grant.

5.4 Dissemination

5.4.1 The programme review reports and the programme's response are made available to the programme concerned, SCTL, the relevant Visiting Committee, RAC and the University administration.

6. Summary

6.1 The following table (Table 1) shows the steps in a regular review cycle. A flowchart for the programme review process is 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 course offering)	Summary of course evaluation results	Department [for record]
Regularly	(ii) Course review	Course review report (an internal review report by programme)	Annual Programme Meeting [to discuss and follow up]
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) external programme review (review panel to be appointed by SCTL)	Programme review report , including self-evaluation of the programme and comments from review panel leading to an action plan .	Visiting Committee and then to SCTL. A recommendation is made to RAC.

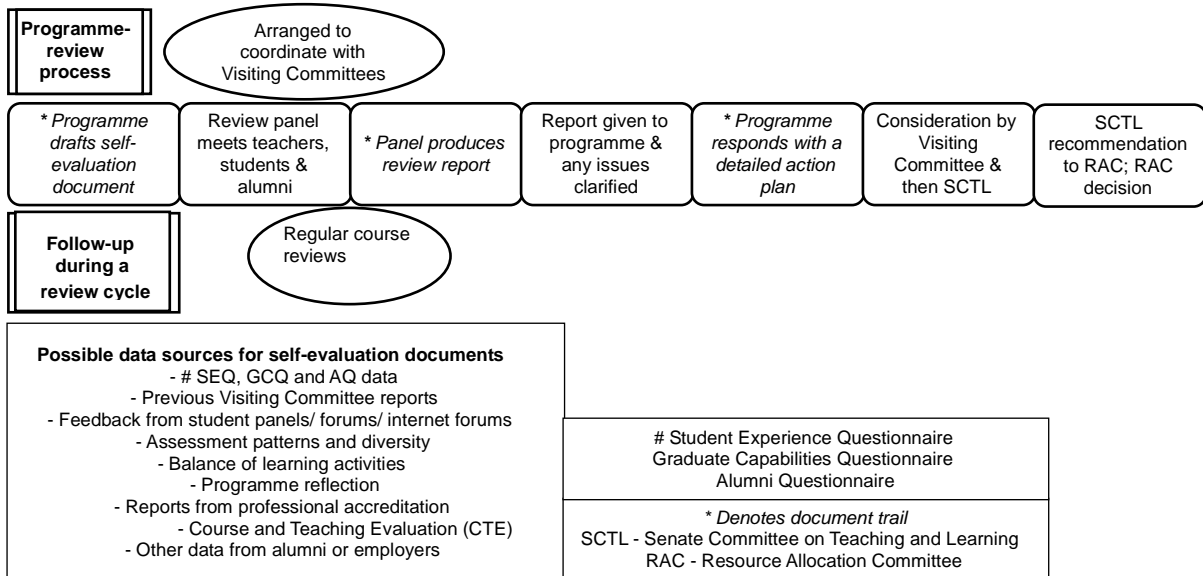


Figure 2. Flowchart for the programme review process

7. Professional Development

- 7.1 A programme of professional development for all new teaching staff at the level of Assistant Professor or below, including Teaching Assistants is mandatory in most cases. Evidence of satisfactory completion is required for consideration of contract renewal, substantiation and promotion. New teachers in other ranks are also encouraged to take the course. Programmes are also expected to have a plan to ensure the quality of teaching by part-time staff.
- 7.2 Each department which makes significant use of postgraduate students as teaching assistants is required to support annual courses offered in conjunction with CLEAR, for the benefit of new graduate assistants, tutors, and others in teaching support roles.
- 7.3 Evidence of the provision of satisfactory training for teaching assistants should be included in the self-evaluation and review of the T&L of each relevant department. The evidence should include an evaluation of the training provided.

8. Incentives

Incentives, at both the individual and the department level, are built in to promote attention to the matters contained in this *Integrated Framework*.

8.1 Department level

- 8.1.1 RAC has approved that starting from 2006–07, up to 5% of the total allocation to all teaching units will be distributed in a manner that is informed by the actual performance and the efforts at improvement in matters related to T&L, as assessed through the programme reviews on regular cycles.

8.2 Individual level

- 8.2.1 The Course and Teaching Evaluation conducted on a mandatory basis since 1993 contains summative elements on the satisfaction with the course and the teacher, which are routinely summarized (and augmented by comments from department chairs) and can then be used in personnel decisions. This element of incentive for excellence in classroom teaching is well understood by all staff.
- 8.2.2 However, the contribution of academic staff to T&L goes beyond classroom teaching (even if broadly defined to include project and fieldwork supervision, and in the case of clinical staff, also bedside teaching). The policy of the University explicitly considers teaching performance in the three areas: (a) classroom teaching, (b) RPg student supervision, and (c) other contributions, where the last includes contributions related to teaching in a broad sense, e.g. curriculum development, programme leadership or management, use of innovative pedagogy, pedagogical research, counselling of students, mentoring of junior teachers/ professionals, etc. The inclusion of these elements gives adequate recognition to individual teachers who make significant contributions to the matters relevant to the present framework.