# Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review: II. Taught Postgraduate Programmes

**Contents**

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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 taught postgraduate (TPg) programmes.

## 1.2     Principles

1.2.1     Among others, the following principles were 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.
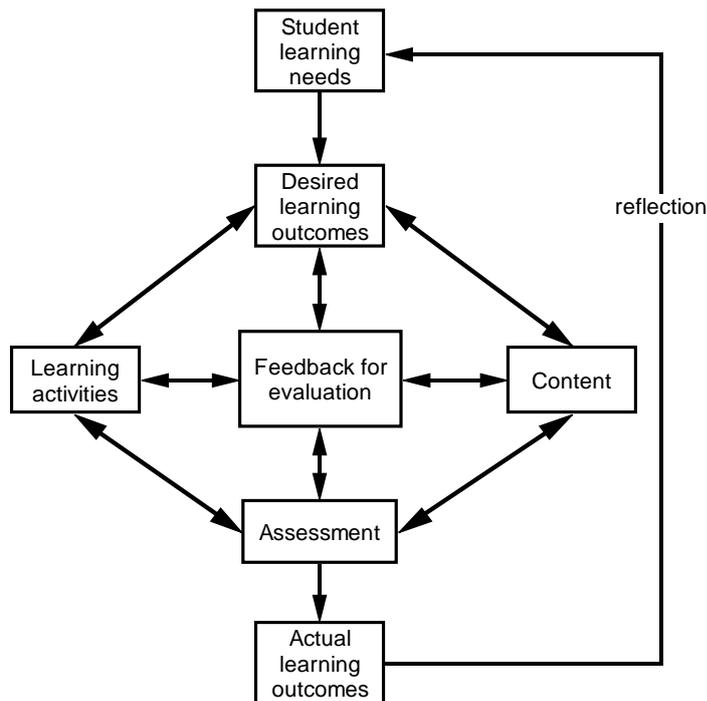
Student learning needs

Desired learning outcomes

reflection

Learning activities  ←→  Feedback for evaluation  ←→  Content

Assessment

Actual learning outcomes

Figure 1. A model of an aligned curriculum

## 1.3 Principles specific to TPg programmes

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

- The students enrolling in TPg programmes are more mature and so teaching should be consistent with the principles of adult learning.
- The students are likely to be active in the field or profession and possess relevant experience and knowledge. Students' experience should be utilised in the programme.
- The expected learning outcomes are likely to be quite specific and often professional in nature.
- Most TPg programmes are self-financed, and student choice imposes an implicit quality-assurance mechanism.
- Many TPg 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.
- The framework for TPg programmes, 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.

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**1.5 Nomenclature**

1.5.1 In this framework, the term *course* also means *module* (which is used in some disciplines); the term G*raduate Division* includes *programme committee* and any other unit that might be responsible for academic programmes.

1.5.2 All guides and associated documents are to be used flexibly and adapted to suit practices and terminology within departments and faculties.

**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 the *Integrated framework for curriculum development and review: III. Sub-degree programmes (QF Level 4)* refers to the sub-degree sector.

1.6.2 TPg programmes come under the Graduate School (GS) and operate under a different set of regulations. They, therefore, follow this quality-assurance framework which is somewhat different from the Ug one, but nevertheless was formulated from the same set of principles.

1.6.3 Research postgraduate (RPg) programmes are fundamentally different, and are subject to other systems managed by the GS.


**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 Programme planning**

2.2.1 Graduate Divisions planning new TPg programmes are requested to use the template *Proposal for Introduction of New Self-financed Taught Postgraduate Programme* for the formal submission document for programme proposals and budgets. This document is available on the GS website.

2.2.2 Proposals need first to be approved by Departmental Board or equivalent and the Faculty Board. They are then forwarded to the Graduate Council and Senate for consideration.

**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, and (e) intended channels to collect feedback for evaluation. Graduate Divisions submitting new course proposals are requested to input course information in CUSIS and submit the Course Catalog Report together with the *Request Form for Creating New Courses/Updating Information for Existing Courses*, available from the GS website.

## 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 offering. It is recommended that course outlines be posted on the departmental website, so as to be available to prospective students.


# 3. Course Reviews

## 3.1 Frequency

3.1.1 Each of the courses 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 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, but should form the basis of any formal programme review.

## 4.2 Frequency

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

**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 external programme review.

4.3.2   A suggested guide for sections (a) to (e) is available on the GS website. These guidelines should be adapted to suit the circumstances of each faculty.


# 5.    Flexibility in Implementation

5.1    The details of the internal review mechanism mentioned in sections 2 to 4 above are broad outline suggestions. Each faculty 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 Faculty Board and Graduate Council.

5.2    A baseline of data has been collected from all TPg programmes through a stocktaking template. This aids the identification of areas of good practice, which is helpful to review panels in formulating recommendations.


# 6.    Programme Reviews

**6.1    Nature and frequency**

6.1.1   Programme reviews involve parties external to the programme and Graduate Division, and are conducted on a regular cycle as determined by SCTL.

6.1.2   The primary responsibility for conducting reviews lies with the Faculty. The GS is responsible for arranging a timetable for the regular review cycle, and should inform the SCTL of the arrangements. Programme reviews will be coordinated as far as possible with the deliberations of the Visiting Committees, which has a more holistic brief, within which the teaching and learning component (including both the Ug and TPg programmes under the purview of the department) should largely rely on

information elicited in the programme reviews.

## 6.2 Review panel

6.2.1 The Review Panel is appointed by the Graduate Council, upon the recommendation of the Faculty Board. Expertise, both in the subject and in pedagogy, should be represented in the Review Panel. The composition of the Review Panel should include the following members:
- one member to be nominated by the Chairman of the Faculty Board;
- one member from outside the Faculty, who might be from within or outside CUHK;
- one member who is an expert in that discipline, who might be from within or outside the Faculty and from within or outside CUHK;
- the chair of the Review Panel should be a senior member of the Faculty;
- other members as appointed by the Graduate Council if deemed appropriate.

## 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 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 may meet with teaching staff, students or alumni of the department.

## 6.4 Reporting procedure and action plan

6.4.1 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.

6.4.2 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.

6.4.3 The programme-review documentation produced by the panel and the programme committee is forwarded to the Faculty Board for approval and discussion of follow-up actions. The report together with the action plan will then be forwarded to the GS for submission to SCTL and to the Visiting Committee concerned by the Faculty Board. Faculty Board might also align the programme review with the review required by the 're-approval' requirement.

6.4.4 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 departments. 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 Faculty Board concerned.

**6.5 Consideration by the Faculty Board**

6.5.1 The Faculty Board considers the review panel's report, including its judgement on progress and on the quality in T&L before making 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 Graduate Division, the Faculty Board, Graduate Council and SCTL.

6.6.2 The Faculty Board reviews documentation, including judgements on progress and on T&L quality which will be available for consideration by the Committee on Re-approval of Self-financed Taught Postgraduate Programmes.

**6.7 Review by a Panel of SCTL**

6.7.1 Each year a small number of the programmes reviewed by the Review Panel may be selected for further review by a panel appointed by SCTL. The composition of the panel and the review procedure shall follow the respective rules for Ug programmes.

**6.8 Review by the Committee on Re-approval of Self-financed Taught Postgraduate Programmes**

6.8.1 All self-financed programmes approved by Senate will have a validity 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. Block Grant programmes augmented with self-financed intake (i.e., partially self-financed programmes) will not be subject to such arrangement, since these programmes will be reviewed together with all regular Block Grant programmes every triennium.

**7. Summary**

7.1 The following timetable (Table 1) shows the steps in a regular review cycle as determined by the SCTL. 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 offering) | Summary of course evaluation results | Department [for record] |
| Regularly | (ii) Course review (External examiners' reports, which would be read by the Dean of the GS and Division Head, can be accepted as equivalence) | ***Course-review report***, either from the external examiner or as an internal review report by programme | Annual Programme Meeting [for discussion 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 the Graduate Council) | ***Programme-review report***, including self-evaluation of the programme and comments from review panel leading to an ***action plan*** | Faculty Board [for approval and discussion of follow-up actions], together with the action plan, to the GS for submission to SCTL and the Visiting Committee concerned. Faculty Board might also align the programme review with the review required by the 're-approval' requirement. |
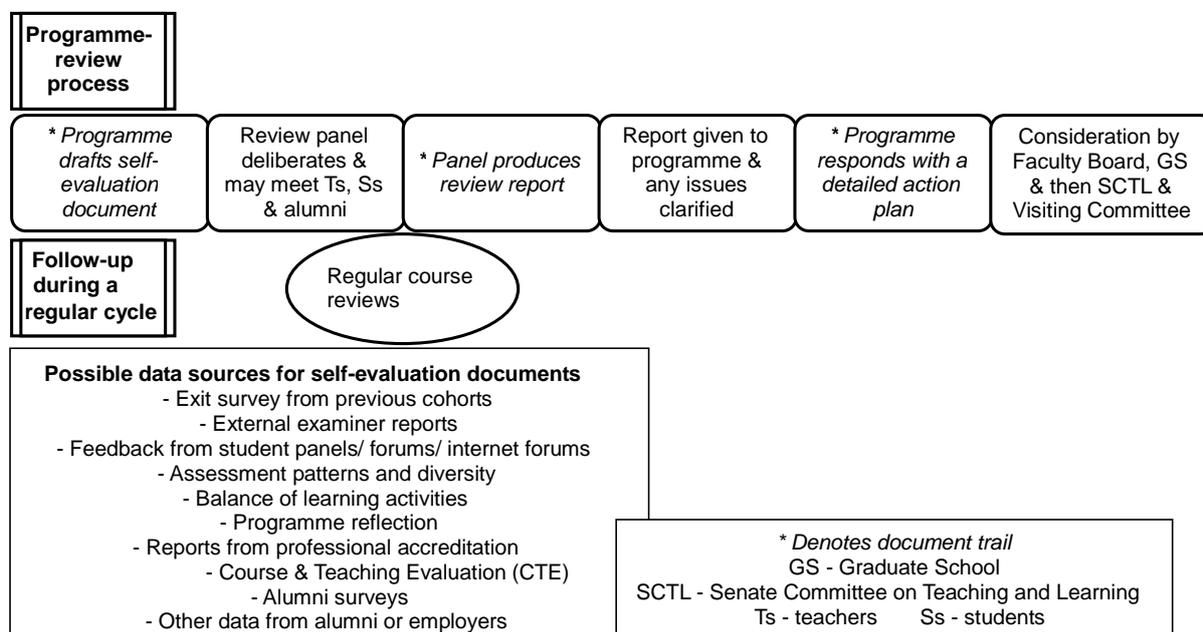


Figure 2. Flowchart for the programme-review process

# 8. Professional Development

8.1 A programme of professional development for all new teaching staff 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.

8.2 These measures should be reported in the programme self-evaluation document.

# 9. Incentives

## 9.1 Incentives

9.1.1 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*. Faculties are expected to ensure that there are high levels of commitment.

## 9.2 Programme level

9.2.1 The Dean of a Faculty is responsible for ensuring that programme committees take appropriate action in respect of the action plans they formulated in response to recommendations of review panels. The actions of the Dean are reinforced by the endorsement of action plans by Faculty Boards. The performance of programmes will be available to the Committee on Re-approval of Self-financed Taught Postgraduate Programmes in its consideration of granting re-approval to programmes. Where necessary, action will be reinforced by the Chair of the SCTL. In extreme cases the Faculty Dean and/or the SCTL may recommend to the Graduate Council that new enrolments may be suspended if specified steps in the action plan are not implemented.

## 9.3 Individual level

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