



# **ACADEMIC PROCEDURES HANDBOOK** for **Sri Lankan Universities**

## **PART I** **CODE OF PRACTICE ON** **ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS**

**Committee of Vice-Chancellors & Directors  
and  
University Grants Commission**

**Edited & Printed**

**by**

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## **PURPOSE OF THE HANDBOOK**

This handbook is complementary to the Quality Assurance Handbook published by the CVCD and UGC in July 2002. Both handbooks are the result of collaborative work undertaken between the CVCD/UGC, universities and professional bodies in 2002 and 2003. This work builds on the successful project begun in 2001 to develop and implement a comprehensive quality assurance system for Sri Lankan higher education.

The Academic Procedures Handbook is made up of following six parts:

- Part I: Code of Practice on Assessment of Students;
- Part II: Code of Practice on Career Guidance;
- Part III: Code of Practice on External Assessors;
- Part IV: Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Programmes;
- Part V: Code of Practice on Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review;
- Part VI: Code of Practice on Student Support and Guidance

The purpose of the Academic Procedures Handbook is to provide a reference point for all universities, covering the main aspects of academic standards and the quality of education. The six Codes reflect consensus amongst universities and other groups on the key elements of good practice, which support the student learning experience.

The Codes may be added to over time, to reflect developments in Universities and Nationally.

The existence of an Academic Procedures Handbook providing guidance on good practice at National level greatly facilitates the implementation of Quality Assurance mechanisms and the sustenance and enhancement of quality in the Universities within the overarching quality framework described at the end of the book. Individual universities will be expected to use the Academic Procedures Handbook to guide their own developing practice and to supplement it with local handbooks that reflect particular context and requirements of individual institutions.

# **PART I: CODE OF PRACTICE ON ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS**

## **Foreword**

As part of its programme of work, the CVCD/UGC Quality Assurance Committee has developed Codes of Practice covering key aspects of quality assurance in higher education.

This is one of six Codes, all of which have been developed in consultation with university staff through workshops and seminars during 2002 and 2003.

## ***Purpose***

The Codes are intended to be used:

- to guide and inform institutional activity;
- to promote and disseminate good practice;
- to encourage a commitment to continuous improvement.

## ***Structure***

Each Code is divided into three sections, covering general principles, institutional by-laws and regulations and specific guidance. Some have additional appendices, where more detail is required.

## ***Development***

The Codes are intended to be dynamic documents, which continue to develop over time. This will enable them to take account of national developments and to capture changing university practice.

Feedback is therefore invited on any aspect of the Codes.

## **Introduction**

Assessment processes have a fundamental influence on the student learning experience. They measure the outcomes of student learning, including:

- the knowledge acquired;
- the understanding developed;
- the skills (personal and practical) gained.

Assessment results determine the decisions taken on whether students progress to the next stage of a programme, whether they pass or fail, and what grades they are awarded. They also enable students to show whether they have achieved the intended learning outcomes or objectives for the module or programme.

Assessment is also linked to the maintenance of academic standards and is normally tested or moderated by an individual external to the university in which the student is studying.

There are three broad types of assessment, as follows:

### **Diagnostic**

This provides information to the assessor on the student's aptitude and preparedness for a module or programme of study. Diagnostic assessment can be used to identify gaps in the student's knowledge, understanding or skills and to identify additional support needed by the student.

### **Formative**

This provides learners with feedback on their performance and progress. It should inform learners about how they can improve their performance. Formative assessment results do not always contribute to the final assessment marks.

### **Summative**

This measures achievement or failure of the learner to fulfill stated learning outcomes.

Any assessment can be used for any or all of the above purposes. For example, much coursework assessment is formative because it enables tutors to give students feedback on their performance; it might also be summative because the results might contribute to the credit collected by students that contributes to the final award. End of programme or end of module formal examinations are normally used to provide summative judgments on the student's ability (knowledge and understanding) at a certain point. Diagnostic assessment is closely linked with formative assessment, but would normally not contribute to summative results.

This code should be read in conjunction with the Codes of Practice on External Assessors and Postgraduate Research Programmes.

The guidance it contains is outlined in three sections:

- A. General Principles
- B. Institutional By-Laws and Regulations
- C. Specific Guidance

The Code sets out a framework within which institutions are expected to develop their own procedures and practice, consistent with the overall guidance in the Code.

## **A. General Principles**

As bodies responsible for academic standards, institutions should have effective procedures for:

1. Designing, approving, monitoring and reviewing the assessment methods for programmes and awards;

2. Implementing rigorous assessment practices which ensure that the academic and/or professional standard for each award and award element is set and maintained at the appropriate level;
3. Ensuring that the principles, procedures and processes of all assessment are explicit, valid, and reliable;
4. Ensuring that assessment regulations are applied and that there are suitable procedures for dealing with student complaints and grievances and breaches of assessment regulations by students, for example absenting oneself from an examination;
5. Evaluating uniformity and comparability of standards across the institution.

## **B. Institutional By-Laws and Regulations**

It is suggested that the following areas should be covered in institutional by-laws and regulations and standing orders.

6. Mandate and composition of boards of examiners and assessment panels: guidance should cover membership, operating procedures, powers and accountability. Where more than one such body contributes to the assessment of a cohort of students, the relative powers of each should be defined.
7. Criteria for the conduct of assessment, covering rigour, fairness, confidentiality and security.
8. Guidance on the timing of the examination period, for the treatment of the results, and the release of grades/marks and degree results to students.
9. Institutional requirements for the recruitment, appointment and role of external examiners, including their involvement in the assessment process and the maintenance of academic standards (see also the Part III: Code of Practice for External Assessors).
10. The procedures to be followed in cases of student complaints and grievances (covered in detail in the Part VI: Code of Practice on Student Support and Guidance).
11. Guidance for staff on examination regulations should be provided to all staff, and to all new staff upon arrival. Junior staff should receive training in appropriate assessment methods as part of their induction process.
12. Criteria on what constitutes a conflict of interest in assessment, to be used by staff and external assessors. These should be made available to all those involved in the assessment process.
13. The procedures to be followed in incidences of cheating or other breaches of assessment regulations by students, including a description of what action should be taken.

## **C. Specific Guidance**

It is recommended that formal institutional regulations be supplemented by more specific guidelines on the matters below. Individual faculties or schools may in turn wish to provide additional advice for students and staff that directly relates to the subject being studied, e.g. the conduct of the oral examination in a Performing Arts discipline, or the assessment of scientific research projects carried out by more than one student.

14. Guidance on the amount and weighting of assessment, taking account of level of study, intended learning outcomes of the programme. The amount of student time contributing to the assessment should be considered in relation to the total amount of student input required for the credit obtained on successful completion of the module or programme.
15. Students should be given adequate notice of examination periods and scheduling, i.e. as early as possible in each year/semester of their programme.

### **Setting, Marking and Grading**

16. Staff should be provided with guidance on the design of assessments (e.g. what types of assessment are appropriate for testing different forms of learning and learning outcomes), and the setting of examinations. Institutions should consider establishing scrutiny boards for checking and vetting examination questions.
17. Institutions should ensure that there are robust mechanisms for marking and for the moderation of marks by internal examiners and external assessors.
18. Institutions should evaluate periodically the maintenance and development of their academic standards, normally by reference to external assessors' comments and, if relevant, their written reports, and by benchmarking student achievement against other universities' results.
19. There should be clear criteria for the aggregation of marks and grades and the rules and regulations for progression, final awards and classifications. These should be understood by staff and students.
20. Institutions should ensure that rules for compensation and standardization of marks are clear and consistent and that applying them does not undermine academic standards.
21. Coursework should be returned to students in a timely manner, normally within four working weeks.

### **Feedback to Students on Performance**

22. Students should receive constructive feedback on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement. Particular care should be taken to support weaker students by providing full feedback on their work in a way that gives them every encouragement to improve their performance.

## **Staff Development and Training**

23. Institutions should ensure that all staff involved in the assessment of students is competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities. Where training is required, it should be provided.

## **Language of Assessment**

24. The languages of assessment and teaching will normally be the same. If, for any reason, this cannot be achieved, institutions must ensure that their academic standards are not consequently put at risk. Some institutions offer students the option of being assessed in a different language from the one in which they are taught.

## **Professional and Accreditation Requirements**

25. Where a programme forms part of the qualifications regime of a professional or statutory body, clear information should be made available to staff and students about specific assessment requirements that must be met for the award of the professional qualification.

## **Review of Regulations**

26. Institutions should have effective mechanisms for the review and development of assessment regulations. This might be done as part of an annual programme review procedure, through periodic department review, or by internal quality assurance units as a result of feedback from internal examiners or external assessors.

## **Recording, Documentation and Publication of Assessment Decisions**

27. Institutions should ensure that assessment decisions are recorded and documented accurately and systematically. Before releasing marks to students, they should be checked carefully by staff before being submitted to results boards. If results are made available to students in advance of approval of examination/results boards, it must be made clear that these are provisional.
28. Institutions should ensure that the decisions of relevant examination/results boards are published as quickly as possible, consistent with rigour of assessment and accuracy.
29. Institutions should implement clear guidance on the conduct of examination/results boards and on the way final assessment decisions should be arrived at. The role of the external assessor should be clearly articulated.
30. Institutions should make available to students and staff the procedures for student complaints and grievances in relation to assessment decisions.



## APPENDIX TO CODE OF PRACTICE ON ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

### Further guidance on assessment information, which might be published/ provided for students and/or examiners

The following list is illustrative of the type of information that institutions should consider including in their published documentation for students and/or examiners:

- the purpose, methods and schedule of assessment tasks during, and at the end of, a module or programme of study;
- provision for exemptions based on previous experience, and the processes involved in evaluating it;
- the criteria for assessment including, where appropriate, descriptors of expected standards of student attainment: what is expected in order to pass or to gain a particular grade or classification;
- what assessment events will, and which will not, count towards interim or final assessment and with what weighting or exemption procedures;
- the marking and grading conventions that will be used;
- the consequences of assessment, such as decisions about progression to the next level, and final awards;
- what is expected of students in terms of attendance at examinations and the implications of non-attendance;
- how and when assessment judgments are published;
- any opportunities for re-assessment;
- the mechanisms provided by the university for enabling graduates to access their results at a later date, including requests for transcripts;
- the length of time the university expects students' examination scripts to be stored post-examination, for example, for five years.