



# **ACADEMIC PROCEDURES HANDBOOK**

**for**

## **Sri Lankan Universities**

### **PART VI**

### **CODE OF PRACTICE ON STUDENT SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE**

Committee of Vice-Chancellors & Directors  
and  
University Grants Commission

Edited & Printed

by

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## THE PURPOSE OF THE HANDBOOK

This handbook is intended to provide a framework for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in India. It is based on the model of quality assurance developed by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) in the United States. It is designed to help universities and other higher educational institutions to improve their quality of education and research. It is also intended to encourage the development of successful programmes and to promote the exchange of best practices among universities.

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The Code may be revised from time to time, to reflect the developments in the field of quality assurance.

The existence of an Academic Procedures Handbook, providing guidance on good practices at the institutional level greatly facilitates the implementation of Quality Assurance mechanisms and the enhancement and enhancement of quality in the Universities within the overarching quality framework described in the Code. The Code will be revised from time to time, to reflect the developments in the field of Quality Assurance.

# 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.

1. Academic Procedures Handbook: A handbook providing guidance on good practice in the delivery of higher education, including the development of programmes, teaching and learning, assessment, research, and support, and may also include codes of practice for the protection of students and staff.

## PART VI: CODE OF PRACTICE ON STUDENT SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

### Foreword

As part of its programme of work, the CVCD/UGC Quality Assurance Committee has developed six 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

Provision for student support and guidance is likely to vary across universities, reflecting differences in the requirements and the cultures of subjects and departments, and the characteristics of the student population in different institutions. This code of practice is intended to inform and guide students about what to expect when they begin their studies, how and from whom they will receive support for their learning and their personal development, and how to seek help if things go wrong. The code of practice is also intended to support staff and

universities by providing a benchmark for university procedures and to assist staff responsible for academic support and guidance to develop and share good practice.

The code will be kept under review and will take account of changes and developments as these evolve across universities and as expectations of students themselves and of staff in relation to their own roles as guiders and mentors also develop. The code offers a broad framework for conceiving student support and guidance as an integral whole, aiming to cover the academic, pastoral and social needs of all students as individuals and in their life together in the student community.

The code emphasizes the value and importance within universities of establishing and being attentive to timely, clear and accessible means of communication between staff and students so that confidence and trust are encouraged and both staff and students can see evidence that formal and informal processes do work and are seen to work.

The section on student complaints and grievances deliberately places emphasis upon general principles rather than detailed procedures in the knowledge that formal procedures and processes are still evolving in many institutions. The code aims to suggest how these might become more formalized over time whilst still remaining simple, straightforward and readily communicated to staff and students.

The guidance this Code contains is outlined in four sections:

- A. General Principles
- B. Institutional By-Laws and Regulations
- C. Specific Guidance and Examples of Good Practice
- D. Student Complaints and Grievances

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

1. Students will have high expectations of their university education. Support and guidance from university staff is essential to enable them to make a successful transition from school to university, to develop sound learning skills and to manage the demands and challenges of student life. Students may not be attending the university of their first choice; many will be experiencing living away from home for the first time; and many will find that they have to devote much more time to studying in English.
2. Support and guidance arrangements should anticipate and offer help with some of the more challenging aspects of student life, including:
  - information and support for students in finding suitable residential accommodation;
  - the possibility of harassment, in particular its effect on first year students;

- the possibility of disruption to studies from student unrest on campus;
- awareness and understanding of the demands and expectations of the teacher/student relationship and of the formal requirements of university and academic organization;
- awareness and understanding of gender, social and community issues, including support for female students making the transition from home to university life;
- provision for the learning and pastoral needs of students studying off-campus through distance learning.

3. Arrangements for effective student support and guidance should aim to cover the academic, pastoral and social needs of all students as individuals and in their life together in the student community. At a minimum, these should give students ready access to information, guidance and support on:

- financial matters;
- psychosocial matters, including access to counseling on pastoral and personal issues;
- help and support for second language study.

## B. Institutional By-Laws and Regulations

4. The regulatory framework for student support and guidance should cover both formal and informal communication channels and be straightforward and accessible for students. It should define responsibilities at university and departmental levels and guide staff and students on how particular matters are dealt with at each level.

5. At university level, the framework should include:

- role and responsibilities of
  - the Deputy Vice Chancellor for student affairs;
  - the Registrar for student welfare;
  - the University Student Counselor;
  - the University Medical Officer;
  - academic staff as academic counselors;
- role and structure of the learning services (library, IT, laboratory support and practice) and how students are inducted and supported in their use of these services.

6. At faculty and departmental level, the framework should give guidance on:

- how students are expected to have access to and communication with teaching staff;
- assignment of students to academic/personal advisers;
- student access to and communication with administrative staff;
- student representation on faculty boards and the role of student representatives;
- the role of student support and advisory committees.

7. The framework should also refer to the student union organization in the university and its role and contribution to student support and guidance.

## **C. Specific Guidance and Examples of Good Practice**

8. It is recognized that provision for student support and guidance is uneven across universities and that students may not be aware of or choose to use formal channels and procedures. Much depends on the culture which is encouraged through day-to-day communication and feedback and on the confidence and trust of both staff and student that the processes work and are seen to work.
9. Examples of positive arrangements that are likely to increase awareness and understanding of students and promote mutual respect and confidence amongst students and teachers are:
  - attractive induction programmes for all new students, informed by student needs and to which student representatives contribute;
  - use of student mentoring, including drawing on the experience and interest of alumni representatives;
  - publication of a student calendar of events for each semester/academic year;
  - provision of training and support programmes for all staff responsible for student support and guidance. Basic support for staff should always include acquisition of listening skills; problem solving; record-keeping of student use of support services; tracking of resolution of issues raised and provision of feedback to students;
  - use of student handbooks to convey key information to all students. This might include contact numbers for key staff;
  - provision of facilities for psychological support.

## **D. Student Complaints and Grievances**

10. Universities are large and complex organizations. From time to time students may feel dissatisfied or aggrieved with some aspect of their academic work or their life in the university community. When this happens it is important to the student that the dissatisfaction is resolved or responded to within the university community as quickly as possible. It is also important for the university to demonstrate through its culture and procedures that student dissatisfaction is taken seriously, that responses are aimed at finding solutions and that students making complaints are not treated or assessed differently.
11. Information and clear statements by universities on complaints procedures can help to promote respect and trust between staff and students and guide the student community on their responsibilities and duties as well as their entitlement to a reasonable and fair hearing of their complaints.
12. Complaints and grievances may arise when arrangements for student support and guidance

have broken down, are ineffective or ignored, or where the complaint or grievance arises from a sense of injustice or unfairness causing students to challenge a formal rule or procedure. Complaints may be about:

- an aspect of the student's studies or assessment;
- the provision of a service;
- the way a student has been treated by other students or by members of staff;
- an aspect of University policy.

13. Both students and staff will benefit from arrangements for hearing and resolving complaints and grievances, which are open; accessible; timely; and operate as an integral part of the framework for student support and guidance.
14. This code of practice encourages universities to acknowledge that students may have cause to complain, that they need guidance on how to take their complaint forward responsibly, and that staff need support and to provide guidance in listening sympathetically, giving advice, taking action or referring the student to the appropriate source for more specialist assistance.
15. In developing and reviewing procedures for dealing with complaints and grievances, universities are encouraged to take account of the following principles:
  - to resolve student complaints **informally** whenever possible, and as close to the source of complaint as possible;
  - to facilitate **early** contact and informal discussion between the student and a member of staff;
  - to facilitate **student access** to specialist or senior staff, where procedures require, by listing staff responsibilities and how they might be contacted in student handbooks;
  - to institute a formal complaints procedure **quickly** if the dissatisfaction cannot be resolved by informal means;
  - to ensure that students are **supported** throughout the formal complaints procedure, and are kept informed of progress at each stage;
  - to ensure that all **necessary information** about submission of formal complaints or grievances, timescales, completion of forms, attendance at meetings, and how the outcome or resolution is communicated to the student is provided to students in an accessible manner, preferably through a student handbook.
16. Universities should describe any differences between general student complaints procedures and a formal procedure for appeal against examining board decisions. The latter are likely to be restricted to grounds where a failure to observe the university's stated assessment rules and regulations has had a material effect on the outcome of a student's assessment or examination result, or to consideration of medical evidence affecting a student's examination

performance. Where appeals against examination outcomes are permitted, they should be simply described, communicated in writing to all students on initial registration and a reminder given of deadlines and submission requirements to all students before they commence their examinations. It is particularly important that students are made aware of the specific grounds on which examination appeals are permitted and the permissible outcomes of examination appeals.

17. Formal procedures for student appeals against examination decisions should incorporate:

- an initial, impartial investigation of the claimed grounds for the appeal;
- referral of the appeal, if permitted, to an impartial panel, chaired by a Dean or senior member of staff from a faculty/department other than that involved in the appeal;
- a written record of the appeal hearing and written feedback to the student on its outcome;
- provision for the student to attend the panel hearing and to be accompanied if they wish;
- clear guidance to the panel on possible decisions open to it;
- reference back to the original examining board for reconsideration of the student's assessment if the appeal is upheld;
- review of examination arrangements, as necessary, to take account of appeal outcomes.