Quality Assurance Policy

University of Ruhuna

Contents

1. POLICY CONTEXT

1.1 Quality in Higher Education

Quality is a universally acknowledged dimension in higher education. The purpose of higher education is to respond to societal demands. In this context Quality Assurance essentially means a set of measures, taken by an institution to satisfy itself and demonstrate to its clients that it has the constant capacity to keep its promise to deliver services reaching the desired standard.

The quality assurance policy alignment with the vision and mission of the University of Ruhuna and in compliance with the Commission Circular No. 04/2015 issued by the University Grants Commission (UGC) on 05th May 2015.

1.2 Changing Perceptions and New Demands

Universities were perceived as honest, self-steering, self-censoring and quality conscious centers of learning. However, questions began to be raisedas to whether this traditional trust was well founded and still valid. In the context of this questioning that it was made for the establishment of external mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the soundness of what was happening inside universities. Hence, external evaluations have been introduced because of the perception that traditional academic controls were inadequate to the challenges of a modern education and that more explicit assurances about quality were needed. This change of perception began to gain largely because of four important developments:

- Demand for greater accountability and efficiency in respect of public financing;
- Trends towards mass participation in higher education even in the face of shrinking resources;
- Greater stakeholder scrutiny of education and training processes and outcomes;
- Lack of trust in the efficiency and effectiveness of internal quality assurance mechanisms;

1.3 Quality Assurance at University of Ruhuna

According to By-Law approved by the Council of the University of Ruhuna under subsection (1) of Section 135 of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978 in respect of Internal Quality Assurance under the Circular No. 04/2015 of the University Grants Commission, CQA, UoR is committed for continual improvement regarding the quality of the University.

1.3.1 Mandate for CQA and IQACs

CQA and IQACs shall function according to the By-Law approved by the Council of the University of Ruhuna under subsection (1) of Section 135 of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978 in respect of Internal Quality Assurance under the Circular No. 04/2015 of the University Grants Commission.

1.3.1.1 Mandate for CQA

In terms of scope, the mandates and responsibilities of the Center for Quality Assurance (CQA), the following have featured:

- To assist and support the University's internal/external quality assurance activities in order to improve the quality of its output;
- To assess or evaluate and monitor the University against a set of standards, or intended outcomes;

Thus, external agencies evaluate not only the curriculum contents and examination system but also the capacity of the units to deliver the intended products. The focus is on the institution's policies, systems, strategies and resources for quality management of the core functions of teaching, research, and public service.

1.3.1.2 Composition

According to the CQA By-Law Composition of the CQA shall be

> a. Director of the CQA(Deputy Vice Chancellor /Senior Academic)
>
> b. Deans of all faculties
>
> c. Registrar
>
> d. Bursar
>
> e. Librarian
>
> f. Director, Staff Development Center
>
> g. Director, Distance and Continuing Education Unit
>
> h. Chairpersons of IQACs
>
> g. Convener/ Secretary to the CQA (SAR/AR)

However considering the requirement Senate shall appoint any other officer.

Further, the Senate Standing Committee for the Quality Assurance shall invite any officer to present or give comments to the activities of interest.

1.3.1.2 Responsibilities of CQA

The responsibilities are defined in the Council approved By-Laws.

1.3.1.3 Mandate for IQACs

1.3.1.3.1 Composition

According to the CQA By-Law Composition of the IQAC shall be

    a. Faculty Representative of the CQA (Chairperson)

    b. One senior academic staff member who has a keen interest in maintaining quality, from each Department

    c. Deputy Senior Student Counsellor

    d. Any other member/s appointed by the Senate on the recommendation of Faculty Board

    d. SAR/AR of the Faculty (Member and the Secretary)

The composition of the IQAC of the Faculty of Graduate studies shall be

    a. Chairpersons of Boards of Studies (one person to be selected as the Chairperson of the IQAC),

    b. Postgraduate Course Coordinators

    c. Any other member/s appointed by the Senate on the recommendation of the Faculty Board of Graduate Studies

    d. SAR/AR of the Faculty (Member and the Secretary)

The flexibility allowed inviting following members as required by individual IQACs

      Ex: Heads of UGC approved Units

         Chairperson, Curriculum Revision Committee

         Chairperson/Convener, Curriculum Development and Evaluation Committee

         Clinical coordinator

         Head/ IT Unit

         Senior Assistant Bursar

         Senior Assistant Librarian

         Academic warden

         University Medical Officer Designate

         Supervisor/ Maintenance Unit

The policy strongly encourages IQACs to have student representation.

1.3.1.3.2 IQAC office space and dedicated demonstrator / management assistant to IQAC

Each IQAC shall have an office space where minutes, reports, records, evaluations and other documents are kept either as soft copies or hard copies. In order to manage documents properly a

dedicated demonstrator/Management Assistant shall be employed under the supervision of IQAC chair until permanent carders are created.

1.3.1.3.3 Documents expected to be kept at IQAC office

The important documents are expected to be kept at IQAC office. They include,

> Minutes of the IQAC and meetings organized by IQAC
>
> Minutes of the committees where curriculum, teaching/learning and assessments are discussed
>
> Documents related to curriculum and assessments
>
> Survey reports (Student satisfaction, Disability screening, Course evaluation, Staff feedback etc.)
>
> Monitoring of students performances at the examinations
>
> Records of students and peer evaluations of teaching
>
> Any other relevant document for the Faculty or Branch

3.3.2 Policies expected to develop by the University

As per the direction by the UGC, the University shall develop the following policies / regulations through expert committees. Each IQAC shall adapt the policies according to the requirement and the facilities available.

> Students with special needs/differently abled students
>
> Gender equity and equality (GEE)
>
> Anti-ragging/harassment
>
> Human resource development
>
> Curriculum development and revision
>
> ICT policy (ICT-based platform (i.e.VLE/ LMS) to facilitate multi-mode teaching and student-centered learning; uses the ICT-enabled tools and techniques sensibly for delivery of learning material, learner support services and conducting/administering students' assignments and assessments)
>
> Fall back options
>
> Appointing external examiners
>
> Use of open educational resources
>
> Research and development
>
> Guidelines/regulations regarding credit transfer

Income generating activities

Encouraging and rewarding student participation at innovation/ sports/ general knowledge / IQ competitions at regional/national levels without adversely affecting their progression in the academic programme

Career development of newly recruited staff

Role and responsibilities of staff

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

2.1 Main Objectives

The main goal of the quality assurance policy is to ensure that relevant and appropriate academic standards are achieved and good quality education is provided to students by encouraging and supporting continuous quality improvement in institutional activities, in study programmes and in research management. In particular, the quality assurance (QA) policy aims to achieve the following objectives:

(a) To assure the quality of the provision of education at the UoR while upholding creativeness, diversity and ethical standards in accomplishing the task

(b) To support sustainable quality enhancement within the University leading to a quality culture

(c) To present a clear and comprehensive profile for quality assurance, based on self-reviews and, thus enabling continuous self-improvement. As prescribed in the Quality Assurance Manual for Sri Lankan Universities, the areas of particular importance for CQA and internal quality assurance cells (IQAC) in UoR include the following:

- Policy and procedures of providing quality higher education
- Periodic review of core functions
- Maintaining quality and standards in teaching, learning and assessment of undergraduate students
- Maintaining and monitoring continuing education and continuous professional development of the academic staff
- Monitoring continuous staff development of administrative, academic supportive and non- academic staff
- Monitoring learning resources and student support

- Maintaining quality aspects of Management Information Systems (MIS), Research and service functions*, and Information given to the public*

*The areas that shall be included, when permanent carder for CQA/ IQACs are available.

2.2 Scope of the QA Policy

Quality is the outcome of interactions of many elements. All such factors are within the scope of this Policy. However, certain factors tend to stand out conspicuously as major determinants of quality in higher education processes. The policy therefore embraces, applies and is of particular interest and relevance to the following:

(i)   All faculties, academic/administrative branches/units and other institutional structures operating under the umbrella of the University of Ruhuna;

(ii)   All staff, temporary and permanent, who are active in teaching, research and providing any form of support service to the core functions of the University;

(iii)   All students registered with the University of Ruhuna;

(iv)   All infrastructure, learning resources, governance/ institutional setup, information dissemination structure and social amenities belonging to the University of Ruhuna

Ultimately attention to quality has to become an embedded feature of the University culture.The entire University has to view quality as an overarching principle of all its operations.

2.3 Anticipated benefits of the QA Policy

It is anticipated that successful implementation of this policy will result in:

(i)   Improved student performance and success in learning;

(ii)   Improved work performance of academic and other staff;

(iii)   Fuller satisfaction of society's and stakeholders' interests, expectations and needs;

(iv)   Enhanced transparency, society's confidence, and thus internal and external material support;

(v)   Improved institutional and public image, and thus enhances relations with stakeholders and the wider society;

(vi)   Enhanced capacity to compete with other higher learning institutions nationally, regionally and globally; and

(vii)   More focused approach to the implementation of the university's mission activities.

3. POLICY STATEMENTS AND ASSUMPTIONS

3.1 Policy statements

In the effort to realize its vision and mission, UoR shall consistently monitor and systematically evaluate the implementation of all its existing policies, regulations and procedures and, where such instruments are lacking, shall develop appropriate ones, so as to ensure that all these guides are in line with its vision and mission. In addition, the University shall ensure that at all times it has in place a well stipulated and widely understood criteria for evaluating performance standards in all its core mission activities. In line with these guides, UoR shall constantly monitor and evaluate all its day to day activities in the core mission areas of teaching/learning, research, service to the public and support services to students and staff.

In order to have efficient and effective activities of IQACs of the Faculties, the policy extends the directives to each IQACs in par with the CQA By-Laws.

3.4 Teaching/ Learning

To ensure quality in the area of teaching and learning, University / IQAC shall:

- According to the programme / course development and review policy of the University, periodically review teaching programmes in order to confirm the extent to which Programmes are meaningfully structured and organized;
- The programme learning outcomes are achieved;
- Programmes not only meet student needs but actually provide an experience that lives up to their expectations;
- Programmes help in the attainment of the university's academic vision and mission;
- Teaching and learning constantly address critical national human resources requirements;
- The quality and quantity of available human, material and financial resources meet the programme requirements;
- Programmes are both viable and relevant;
- Ensure that establishment and running of teaching programmes/ units proceed on the principle of rational use of resources and cost effectiveness;
- Comply with external evaluation of the quality of the teaching programmes offered by its units in terms of their contents, delivery methods, and assessment processes

mandated by the UGC. This will entail a reconsideration of the suitability and effectiveness of existing practices, such as an external examination system and academic audits, with a view to improving their efficacy or/and introducing new appropriate procedures;

- Involve all stakeholders such as professional bodies, potential employers and other relevant sections of the society in reviewing and evaluating academic programmes through curriculum review workshops, tracer studies and other appropriate mechanisms;

- Ensure that all major curriculum reviews or introductionof new programmes are improved through stakeholder inputs; and

- Every programme shall undergo at least one review within a span of five years (for the five years degree programmes it shall be done according to the University policy on Programme/course development and revision).

3.5 Input resources

The major inputs into the teaching/ learning process are academic and technical staff, students, teaching programmes and materials, and an efficient administrative structure. UoR is committed to ensuring that its inputs are of the highest possible quality, and to this end, it shall:

- Recruit and engage the best available academic and technical personnel, selected on the basis of established and regularly updated quality criteria, and through an absolutely transparent procedure;

- Offer academic programmes that are relevant locally and internationally, in terms of both academic content and planned professional training;

- Seek adequate financing of the university's core mission activities: teaching/learning, research, public service and provision of internal support services; and

- Strive to provide the necessary learning materials and teaching/learning infrastructure for effective delivery of all teaching programmes it offers.

3.6 Implementation Processes

In carrying out its core function of facilitation of learning, UoR shall ensure that:

- Its teaching programmes are effectively delivered through the use of appropriate

technologies and pedagogic skills;

- Delivery of its teaching programmes emphasizes practical/industrial training where necessary,and therefore, provides a good balance between academic knowledge, practical skills, and hands-on experience; and
- Its academic and technical staff is sufficiently motivated to effectively fulfill their leadership obligations in the teaching/learning process

3.7 Outputs and outcomes

The ultimate goal of the university through its engagement in core activities of teaching and learning is the production of knowledgeable, skilled, and quality graduates and, their positive and notable impact on the society. Therefore, UoR always anticipates that its graduates shall demonstrate excellent knowledge, skill, creativity, and values in their post-graduation engagements and that they shall therefore,make significant contributions towards improving the quality of life inthe society.

3.8 Research

In fulfilling the obligation to ensure high quality in various research undertakings at its constituent units, UoR shall consistently monitor and evaluate the quality and quantity of the research activities conducted, with a specific focus on:

(i)   Relevance and appropriateness of the set priorities;

(ii)   Adequacy of financial allocations to research activities;

(iii)   Proper structuring of research projects/ programmes to ensure relevance in graduate teaching and training of junior staff;

(iv)   Adequacy in quality and quantity of research outputs;

(v)   Effectiveness of dissemination channels and impacts of research results;

(vi)   Adherence to existing UoR policies and procedures relating to research and publications; and

(vii)   Integration of research outputs into teaching/learning.

3.9 Public/Community services

UoR shall constantly monitor and frequently evaluate the quantity and quality of public services rendered by its staff and students, with a view to assuring the highest possible quality in terms of:

(i)   Relevance of the priorities set institutionally and by individual units;

(ii)   Adequacy and quality of outputs in public service provision; and

(iii)   The overall impact of UoR services to the public.

3.10 Student and Staff Support Services

A favorable general environment is needed for students and staff to effectively engage in a productive education process. UoR, therefore, takes the responsibility to continually strive to create and maintain this supportive environment. In this regard, the University shall ensure that:

(i)   Its physical infrastructure sufficiently supports the core mission activities of teaching/learning, research and provision of services;

(ii)   Reasonably good and accessible social services are made available to students and staff. These shall include cafeteria, healthcare, recreational, academic advising and mentoring, counseling and other services; and

(iii)   Students' learning is continually enhanced through the constant adaption of the latest innovations in educational media and technology and in the professional fields of pedagogy.

3.11 Institutional Set-up

To achieve its core mission goals, UoR shall operate on the basis of an effective governance structure, consists of administrative structures and participatory committees. It shall maintain clear lines of authority and accountability while maximizing transparency and legitimacy through the effective and efficient participation of stakeholders in major decision- making processes. In creating and constantly improving such a governance system, UoR shall abide by the provisions of its charter and the principles emanating there from.

3.12 QA Roles of Participatory Committees

Participatory committees include Faculty Boards and their sub committees, Senate and its sub committees, Administration branch, Finance branch, Legal branch, Examination branch, Student affairs branch, UGC approved Units and Centers etc. The core QA role of these shall be to oversee quality in their respective areas of jurisdiction, taking into account the concerns that gives rise to the promulgation of this policy. Among other roles, their specific functions shall include:

- Ensuring that their respective unit/operational area has in place appropriate quality

standards to guide the implementation of its mandated functions and that the standards are regularly reviewed for sustaining relevance;

- Regularly assessing the performance of implementers in the respective units/operational area in light of the set quality criteria and recommending improvement measures to implementers within or above the implementation units concerned; and
- Implementation of recommended improvements and directing corrective measures against inadequate implementation.

4. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

UoR shall utilize a variety of strategies and instruments to evaluate the implementation of its core mission activities. The main strategies include surveys of students', staff, alumni, employer and community satisfaction, as well as institutional audits and programme reviews. Each Faculty shall be responsible in conducting the surveys and report to CQA through its IQAC.

4.1 Improvement Plan
The evaluation reports shall be discussed at the IQAC of the faculty where strategies for addressing the shortfalls emanating from these reviews are drawn. The Faculty shall study the improvement strategies recommended by the participatory committee and it shall subsequently monitor the implementation of all approved improvement plans and evaluate the outcomes.

4.2 Programme Accreditation
Whenever applicable, UoR teaching programmes shall be accredited by qualified and legally competent agencies.

4.3 Policy Implementation, Review, and Amendments
Policy scope and implementation
This policy provides a general guide to the process of monitoring and evaluating quality in all aspects of UoR operations. Thepolicy assumes that the University shall continually set and review quality standards in all the major fields of operation. The task of the quality assurance process is to constantly determine the extent to which UoR achieves the standards it set for itself, and

to advice on ways of improving quality. The CQA / IQACs shall continually execute this task using appropriate evaluation instruments. It is the duty of the CQA / IQACs to constantly develop and review these instruments with a view to ensure that they are capable of capturing sufficient evidence to show the extent to which UoR is achieving its set quality standards in all major spheres of operation.

Validity of the Policy Provisions

The policy provisions shall become operational immediately upon approval by the Council of the UoR, and shall remain valid until when they are revoked by the same authority. However, given the changing circumstances under which the University operates, this document is subject to periodic reviews and alterations, and, whenever such alterations happen, the revised version of the document shall take precedence over the previous one.

Revision of the Policy Document

The entire document shall be reviewed every 5 year period.