Caritas Institute of Community Education
of
Caritas Community & Higher Education Service

Quality Assurance System
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Quality Assurance Unit
1. Introduction

1.1 The success of a learning programme is attributed to many factors, and quality is undoubtedly placed on the top of the list. The upholding of such quality requires a well-developed system to ensure the programme and its pertinent provision can benchmark against similar programmes offered by other course providers.

1.2 Quality has always been the focus of attention of Caritas Institute of Community Education (CICE) of Caritas Community & Higher Education Service (CCHES). In the year of 2009, the quality assurance system (QAS) developed by CICE has gained the recognition of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications, which signals CICE’s unequivocal commitment to the continuous improvement in the quality of our learning programmes.

1.3 The QAS of CICE is a structured manifestation of good academic practice, which clearly describes the quality assurance processes. It ensures that feedback loops, which are cyclic processes for enhancement with a collective self-critical and self-reflective attitude, link with the stakeholders to effect improvement in teaching and learning.

2. Principles of the Quality Assurance System

2.1 It is recognized that quality enhancement often aims at goals which are not easily described and measured. In this regard, the QAS imposes, where appropriate, a reasonable degree of impartiality and objectivity by referring directly to specific goals and whether or not they have been achieved, with a view to fostering accountability to CCHES and the community.

2.2 To this end, the QAS is developed on the basis of the following guiding principles:

- **fitness for purpose**;
- **enrichment of students’ learning experience**;
- **accountability to CCHES and the community**;
- **alignment with local and international QA practices**; and
- **self-review mechanism for the purpose of continuous improvement**
Fitness for purpose – Central to this principle is the question of “Are we doing what we claimed we would?” Having said that, the QAS should be generic as far as possible, and should allow variations to address different characteristics and needs of different disciplines, programmes, areas of study and other practices.

Enrichment of students’ learning experience – Students are able to receive non-formal learning by participating in a wide range of activities and eventually become transformed. The transformation is represented in different ways and in different discourses: ‘value adding’ is one representation, and ‘empowerment’ is another which is interpreted in such a way that students are eventually turned to be responsible citizens in the community.

Accountability to CCHES and the community – CCHES formulates its mission and vision to address what it identifies as community needs. The QAS will ensure the educational programmes are devised and implemented in tandem with the mission and vision of CCHES.

Alignment with local and international QA practices – The QAS implemented within CICE strives to continuously improve its processes and practices so as to align with the local and international practices. This will be realized through continuous consultation with external QA specialists and the introduction of awareness enhancement programmes related to quality assurance to all staff.

Self-review mechanism for the purpose of continuous improvement – The QAS must be able to devise self-evaluative mechanisms for the sake of continuous improvement, under which the components can uphold and share good and effective practices.

3. Structure of the Quality Assurance System

3.1 In the light of the above principles, CICE implements the QAS which is composed of the following components to quality assure the programmes:

- Programme Development and Approval
- Teaching Venue Vetting
- Teacher Appointment
- Programme Management
3.2 The governance structure of CICE is composed of the Council and the Board of Senior Management. The Council functions as a governing body to endorse the strategic initiatives of CICE and determine key governance issues in tandem with the mission and vision of Caritas-Hong Kong. The Council comprises an appropriate mix of representatives from the higher/community education sector, the business/professional sector, as well as senior executives of Caritas-Hong Kong and school supervisors/managers of CICE member institutes. Please refer to Appendix 1 for the details of its terms of reference and membership composition.

3.3 The executive body of CICE, the Board of Senior Management (BSM), executes the academic and administrative operation of CICE according to the strategic initiatives as laid down by the Council. The BSM basically comprises Head of CCHES, Principal Officers (Academic Affairs Office, Quality Assurance Unit and Administration Office) (AAO, QAU & AO), Deputy Principal Officer (AAO), Regional Principals and Heads of service support units of CICE. Please refer to Appendix 2 for the details of its terms of reference and membership composition.

3.4 The execution of the continuous quality assurance process and improvement among programmes is primarily the task of the Academic Affairs Office (AAO) and Quality Assurance Unit (QAU). The roles and responsibilities between AAO and QAU are clearly demarcated. Whilst QAU, acting independently of the member schools and coordinating the quality-related activities, is responsible for developing quality assurance policies and procedures, AAO is to ensure that the policies and procedures are implemented accordingly. Please refer to Appendix 3 and Appendix 4 for the functions of AAO and QAU respectively.

Programme Development and Approval

3.5 The development of programmes is centrally organised and managed by the AAO. Programme proposals can be developed either by the programme planning team of schools/colleges/centres led by a programme leader or by the AAO. If the proposal originates from the schools/colleges/centres, the Deputy Principal Officer (Academic) will conduct preliminary vetting before passing it to the Principal Officers (AAO, QAU & AO) for further examination. The aspects examined by these three units and the
programme approval process are stated in the flow chart at Appendix 5. If the proposal is successfully approved by the three units, it will be brought up to the Head of CCHES for further approval and then to BSM for final endorsement. If queries as to the said programme remain unresolved at BSM, the proposal will be re-routed back to AAO, QAU & AO for further review of the programme feasibility, suitability of the QF level and financial viability before the proposal is re-considered.

3.6 In addition, specialists in relevant fields are invited as external advisors to give advice on the programme development and/or the programme content to ensure that the proposed programmes are able to meet the community needs. Please refer to Appendix 6 for policy on external advisors.

Teaching Venue Vetting

3.7 When a programme is endorsed by BSM, individual school/college/centre which has indicated interest in launching the programme is required to apply for being a teaching venue for the programme. The Teaching Venue Vetting Committee will look into the fulfillment of criteria including staffing, physical resources, workplace attachment and comparative advantage within Region/CICE before making a recommendation for the endorsement of Head of CCHES. Please refer to Appendix 7 for the Teaching Venue Vetting Policy.

Teacher Appointment

3.8 The Teacher Appointment Policy (Appendix 8) outlines the criteria and procedures for appointing the most suitable teachers to staff the programmes. For qualifications other than those stipulated, special approval is required.

Programme Management

3.9 If a programme is solely operated by one single school, a programme leader is assigned to oversee the management of the programme. If a programme is offered across two centres or more, a lead school is nominated to take up the leading role and a relevant academic staff member of the lead school is assigned to be the programme leader. Please refer to Appendix 9(a) for the roles and responsibilities of a programme leader. Matters related to the delivery of the programme, teaching and learning, assessment etc. are discussed in teachers’ meetings and the Programme Management Team will monitor the programme provision and delivery. The member composition and functions of each team are delineated in the table at Appendix 9(b).
3.10 Teachers’ meetings are held regularly to ensure that:
- programmes are delivered in a relatively controlled and uniform manner;
- teachers are well informed of the procedures of how the programmes should be managed;
- teaching and learning are consistent with course aims and learning outcomes;
- good practice is shared and the pace of teaching and learning takes into account learners’ varied abilities and the specific needs of the very able and weak learners; and
- course work and the assessment tasks are well-coordinated and discussed.

3.11 Class visits are conducted minimum once a year for each teacher of award-bearing programmes by Vice Principals/Senior Officers. Teachers will be interviewed shortly after the class observation and class observation records will be reviewed by the Regional Principals.

Assessment and Evaluation
3.12 All forms of assessment are subject to human judgement and thus require some form of moderation. While the AAO monitors and coordinates moderation activities in order to verify that assessments are fair, valid and consistent, external examiners are invited to give comments on assessment strategies, and to monitor the standard and consistency of assessment. Please refer to Appendix 10 for the policy on external examiners.

3.13 Upon completion of the programme, two different kinds of meetings will be conducted, namely teachers’ meeting and programme management team meeting. The former is to moderate the students’ results so as to ensure consistency across markers, while the latter is to review the programme by taking students’ evaluation and external examiners’ comments into consideration. A programme annual report will be prepared for improvement in the forthcoming year.

Continuing Professional Development
3.14 As an advocate of lifelong learning, CICE is committed to professional development for staff. Central to this are raising the professional awareness and enhancing their work-specific competence. Apart from encouraging staff to enroll in relevant courses available in the market, in-house induction/seminars are also organised and conducted to help both teaching and supporting staff to strengthen their teaching skills and technical competencies respectively. Please refer to Appendix 11 for details of the CPD policy.
Learner Support

3.15 A wide range of non-formal learning activities is organised so as to provide learners with more opportunities for integrating what they have learnt in the formal setting.

3.16 Feedback on learning progress in the form of counseling is conducted by class/subject teachers from time to time to ensure that any possible barriers to learning are identified and appropriate remedial actions can be taken.

Feedback Mechanism

3.17 Student Evaluation Exercises
Student evaluation exercise, in the form of a structured questionnaire, is conducted at the end of each term to collect learners’ views. This exercise provides evaluation with regard to specific parts of a programme. The feedback is also collected through informal interviews and discussions on an individual and group basis. The views collected are then collated and included in a programme annual report as the basis of improvement.

3.18 Teacher Surveys
Teacher survey is conducted to collect feedback from teachers upon completion of each course/programme. This exercise provides evaluation with regard to specific parts of a programme. The views collected are then collated and included in a programme annual report as the basis of improvement.

3.19 Graduate Surveys
Graduate survey is conducted to collect data on the rates of attrition, completion, employment and continuing education. The survey provides an overview of the graduates’ destination after graduation. The views collected are then collated and included in a programme annual report as the basis of improvement.

3.20 Employer Surveys
Employer survey is conducted, if applicable, to collect employers’ opinions on graduates’ performance and usefulness of the relevant programmes. The views collected are then collated and included in a programme annual report as the basis of improvement.
4. Concluding Remarks

4.1 Quality assurance and enhancement is a journey, not a destination, and should be a collaborative exercise by all concerned. It is a continuous improvement process, the key to which is quality improvement launched by a good evaluation. The quality assurance system should thus be an overall guiding device that needs to be periodically reviewed and progressively refined from time to time.

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