Caritas Institute of Community Education

of

Caritas Community & Higher Education Service

Quality Assurance System

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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 that the programme and its pertinent provision are comparable to those of similar programmes offered by other course providers, while having their own special features that are in line with our mission and vision.

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 CCHES has gained the recognition of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), which signals our unequivocal commitment to continuous improvement in the quality of our learning programmes.

1.3 The QAS of CICE is a structured manifestation of good academic practices, 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 our sponsoring body, Caritas – Hong Kong 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 Caritas – Hong Kong 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 of these representations, and ‘empowerment’ is another which is interpreted in such a way that students are eventually turned into responsible citizens in the community.

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

**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. Governance Structure of CICE

3.1 The governance structure of CICE is composed of the Council and the Board of Senior Management (BSM). **The Council functions as an advisory body to endorse the strategic initiatives of CICE and give advice on 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. Please refer to *Appendix 1* for the
3.2 As the executive body of CICE, the BSM executes the academic and administrative operations of the Institute according to the strategic initiatives as advised by the Council. The BSM basically comprises the Principal of CICE, the Associate Head (Academic), the Associate Head (Finance and Administration), the Associate Head (Community Relations and Business Development), the Associate Head (Operations System and Quality Management), as well as the Heads of various academic departments and the managers of various administrative and service units of CICE. Please refer to Appendix 2 for the details of its terms of reference and membership composition. The organizational structure of CICE is shown in Appendix 3.

3.3 In its operation, the BSM is informed by three committees, namely the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), the Promotion and Public Affairs Committee (PPAC) and the Staff Development Organizing Committee (SDOC), in relevant matters related to quality assurance, promotion and publicity, as well as staff development.

3.4 Each academic department holds regular Department Meetings to discuss major academic and operational issues of the department. All full-time academic staff and administrative staff at the rank of Assistant Manager or above will attend these meetings.

4. Structure of the Quality Assurance System for Credit-bearing Programmes

4.1 The execution of the continuous quality assurance process and improvement among the credit-bearing programmes is primarily the task of the Associate Head (Academic) and the Associate Head (Operations System and Quality Management). Their roles and responsibilities (Appendix 4 and Appendix 5) are clearly demarcated. While the Associate Head (Operations System and Quality Management), serving as the chairman of the QAC, is responsible for assuming a leadership role in the development of quality assurance policies and procedures, the Associate Head (Academic) is to ensure that the policies and procedures are implemented accordingly.
4.2 In the light of the guiding principles as mentioned above, CICE implements the QAS which is composed of the following components to quality assure the programmes:

- Programme Development and Approval
- Academic Staff Appointment
- Programme Management
- Assessment
- Continuing Professional Development
- Learner Support
- Feedback Mechanism

**Programme Development and Approval**

4.3 The development of programmes is initiated, organized and managed by the academic departments. New programmes are developed by the Programme Development Team which comprises relevant academic staff, and external course developers if necessary. The programme proposal, which is the programme definitive document, is submitted to the Department Meeting for preliminary approval. The programme development and approval process is manifested in the flow chart at Appendix 6.

4.4 When the proposal is successfully approved by the Department Meeting, it is forwarded to the QAC, together with sample teaching materials and the draft final written and/or practical assessments, for arranging a meeting of the Internal Programme Validation Panel (IPVP). The IPVP is chaired by the Principal and comprises the Associate Head (Academic), the External Advisors (EAs) and, if possible, the External Examiners (EEs) of the programme. Specialists in relevant fields are invited as EAs and EEs. Please refer to Appendix 7 and Appendix 8 for policies on EAs and EEs respectively. The Head of Department and the Programme Development Team or a representative of the Team will be invited to attend the IPVP Meeting.

4.5 Major scrutiny of the newly developed programme is carried out in the IPVP Meeting. The IPVP will give advice on all aspects of the programme, including but not limited to financial viability, programme feasibility and provision, programme structure and content, learning outcomes, facilities, equipment and staffing resources, as well as teaching, learning and assessment materials, to ensure that the proposed programme is able to meet the community needs and the standard.
of the claimed level. If major revision to the programme is required, a second IPVP Meeting will be held to review the revised programme.

4.6 When the proposal is successfully approved by the IPVP, it will be brought up to the BSM for final endorsement. If queries on the proposed programme are unresolved in the BSM Meeting, the proposal will be re-routed back to the Programme Development Team. The revised programme is submitted to the Associate Head (Academic) for re-approval and then to the BSM for final endorsement.

4.7 **The new programme proposal, sample teaching materials and sample assessments should be forwarded to the QAC for arranging the IPVP Meeting at least two months prior to submission of accreditation documents to the HKCAAVQ.** Scrutiny of the programme by the IPVP and revision of the programme by the Programme Development Team will be completed within **one month.** The programme is then forwarded to the BSM for endorsement. Accreditation documents are submitted to the HKCAAVQ for accreditation afterwards.

4.8 The programme development and approval process of Government-subvented credit-bearing programmes is governed by the validation mechanism of individual funding bodies and will be subject to the external requirements concerned.

**Academic Staff Appointment**

4.9 The Academic Staff Appointment Policy *(Appendix 9)* outlines the criteria and procedures for appointing the academic staff. For qualifications other than those stipulated, special approval from the Principal of CICE is required.

**Programme Management**

4.10 The Programme Leader manages and oversees the operation of the programme. Please refer to *(Appendix 10)* for the roles and responsibilities of a Programme Leader. Issues of importance related to the programme are brought up to the Department Meeting, which is accountable to the Associate Head (Academic), for discussion.

4.11 At the programme level, Programme Management Meetings, which is chaired by the Programme Leader and reports to the Head of Department, are held twice a year – before commencement and by end of an academic year. Matters related to programme delivery as well as teaching, learning and assessment are discussed in these meetings to ensure that:
teachers are well informed of how the programme is managed;

- teaching and learning are consistent with the programme objectives (PO) and programme intended learning outcomes (PILO);
- good practices are shared among teachers and the pace of teaching and learning are scrutinized;
- areas of concern are addressed; and
- a holistic review of the programme is conducted by taking the students’ evaluation, the teachers’ survey and comments of the EAs and the EEs into consideration.

Academic staff concerned is required to attend the meetings, with the Head of Department and the Associate Head (Academic) as the ex-officio members. The EAs and the EEs are invited to attend the meetings to share their insights related to relevant aspects of the programme. If they cannot attend the meetings, they will be invited to forward their advice in writing to the Programme Leader for discussion in the meetings.

4.12 The Programme Leader completes the Programme Annual Report (Appendix II) after the Programme Management Meeting by end of an academic year. The Report presents a review of the programme, taking the comments collected from all stakeholders, including students, teachers, graduates, employers, external advisors and external examiners, into consideration. The Report is submitted to the Head of Department for approval. The Report is then copied to the Associate Head (Academic) and the QAC for further review two months after the end of the reporting period.

4.13 Teachers teaching the same module will hold discussions on need basis to ensure that:

- the module is delivered in a relatively controlled and uniform manner;
- teaching and learning are consistent with the module objectives (MO) and the module intended learning outcomes (MILO);
- good practices are shared and the pace of teaching and learning takes into account learners’ varied abilities; and
- course work and the assessment tasks are well-coordinated, discussed and implemented.

4.14 For new programmes or new teachers, class visits are conducted for each teacher within the first half of an academic year, or first half of the programme provision if
the programme duration is shorter than an academic year. For the rest of the academic staff, class visits will be conducted once an academic year. The Programme Leader or his/her designate at a rank higher than the teacher being observed will pay the visit. The observer will discuss with the teachers shortly after the class observation and class observation records will be reviewed by the Head of Department. Please refer to Appendix 12 for the Class Observation Record Form. The record will be filed in the respective teacher’s personnel file. If the Programme Leader is himself/herself a teacher, the class visit is to be conducted by the Head of Department and the record be reviewed by the Associate Head (Academic).

4.15 If the performance of a teacher in the first class visit is unsatisfactory, a second class visit jointly conducted by the Programme Leader and the Head of Department is arranged within a month after the first visit. If the performance of the teacher is still found to be unsatisfactory, the case will be referred to the Associate Head (Academic).

4.16 Peer visits are encouraged to promote sharing of good practices among teachers of the same programme/department and enhance the teaching quality.

4.17 For an existing programme, a special Programme Management Meeting is held at least six months prior to the programme revalidation exercise in order to review the programme in a more drastic manner. The EAs are invited to offer advice on all aspects of the programme to ensure that the programme constantly meets the fast-changing community needs.

Assessment

4.18 Assessment schemes of modules are provided to students and teachers in the Programme Handbooks. All forms of assessments are subject to human judgement and thus require some form of moderation. While the academic departments monitor and coordinate the assessment activities and verify that the assessments are fair, valid and consistent, EEs are invited to monitor the standard and consistency of assessments to ensure that the learners are fairly assessed for the intended learning outcomes. For each module, the respective EEs will review and comment on the following assessments before their implementation:

- the written assessment which carries the heaviest weighting among all written assessments; and
- where appropriate, the practical assessment which carries the heaviest
weighting among all practical assessments.

If two or more assessments are of the same weighting, the Programme Leader will determine which assessment is the most dominant, i.e. fulfilling the major learning outcome(s). For written assessments, the EEs will comment on the question paper, the marking scheme, the markers’ assessment and the students’ performance. For practical assessments, the EEs will review the assessment task and the marking scheme. The Programme Leader will collect the EEs’ advice, convey it to the respective teachers and ensure a review of the assessments with the EEs’ advice taken into consideration.

4.19 Before the implementation of the above written and practical assessments, teachers teaching the same module will hold discussions to ensure that the assessment tasks are uniformly conducted and marked.

4.20 After the implementation of the assessments, the teachers meet again to moderate the students’ results. For the written assessment, two answer scripts each of the high, middle and low score bands are sent to the respective EEs for review.

4.21 A meeting of the Board of Examiners (BOE) chaired by the Head of Department is held at the end of an academic term to discuss relevant matters of all programmes of the department. Please refer to Appendix 13 for details of the terms of reference and membership composition of the BOE.

Continuing Professional Development

4.22 As an advocate of lifelong learning, CICE is committed to professional development of staff. Central to this are raising the staff members’ professional awareness and enhancing their work-specific competence. Information about external seminars, workshops and courses is disseminated to the relevant staff, both full-time and part-time. Apart from encouraging staff to take part in professional development activities available in the market, in-house inductions/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 14 for details of the CPD policy.

Learner Support

4.23 Student activities are organised by the Student and Academic Services Office. A wide range of non-formal learning activities are organised so as to provide learners with more opportunities for integrating what they have learnt in the formal setting.
4.24 CICE places importance on pastoral care. Feedback on learning progress in the form of counselling is conducted by class/subject teachers from time to time to ensure that possible barriers to learning are identified and appropriate remedial actions can be taken. The Programme Leader will also meet with learners in small groups once a semester to provide academic advice in respect of their study in general.

4.25 Learners in special education and psychological needs are referred to counsellors who will meet with the learners and provide professional advice and assistance.

Feedback Mechanism

4.26 Student Evaluation

Student evaluation, in the form of a structured questionnaire, is conducted in class at the end of each module to collect learners’ views (Appendix 15). This exercise provides evaluation with regard to specific aspects of a module. Teachers will be informed of the results and comments collated by the Student and Academic Services Unit. Feedback is also collected through informal interviews and discussion on individual and group basis. The views collected are then included in the Programme Annual Report as the basis of improvement.

4.27 Teacher Survey

Teacher survey is conducted online to collect feedback from teachers upon completion of each module (Appendix 16). This exercise provides evaluation with regard to specific parts of a programme. The views collected are then collated and included in the Programme Annual Report as the basis of improvement.

4.28 Graduate Survey

Graduate survey (Appendix 17) is conducted by the Student and Academic Services Unit to collect data on the rates of employment and continuing education. The survey provides an overview of the graduates’ destination after graduation, the usefulness and practicality of the programmes and the future programme development to meet the market needs. The views collected are then collated and forwarded to the Associate Head (Academic) and the respective Heads of Department.
4.29 Employer Survey

Employer survey (Appendix 18) is conducted, if applicable, by the Student and Academic Services Unit to collect employers’ opinions on graduates’ performance and usefulness of the programmes in terms of whether the core competencies and skills of the graduates match well with the attributes considered important by the employers. The views collected are then collated and forwarded to the Associate Head (Academic) and the respective Heads of Department.

5. Quality Assurance for Non-credit-bearing Programmes

5.1 The Development Team of a non-credit-bearing programme or the respective teacher initiates and designs the courses of the programme concerned for the approval of the Head of Department. The Head of Department will review the programme feasibility, provision and financial viability in accordance with the internal operational guidelines. Special approval from the Associate Head (Academic) and/or the Associate Head (Operations System and Quality Management) is required if any aspect of the programme deviates from the guidelines. In cases involving external partner(s), clearance with the Finance Unit is required prior to the approval of the Head of Department. If the programme proposal is successfully approved, the programme will be launched. The programme development and approval process is manifested in the flow chart at Appendix 19.

5.2 For the Academic Staff Appointment Policy for non-credit-bearing programmes, please refer to Appendix 9.

5.3 The programme is managed by a programme management officer. For new programmes or new teachers, class visits are conducted minimum once for each teacher by the programme management officer during the provision of the programme. The observer will discuss with the teachers shortly after the class observation. Class observation records will be filed in the respective teacher’s personnel file and be taken into consideration at the time of appointment renewal.

5.4 Student evaluation, in the form of a structured questionnaire, is conducted in class at the end of each programme to collect learners’ views. This exercise provides evaluation with regard to specific aspects of a programme. Feedback is also collected through informal interviews and discussion on individual and group basis.
5.5 Teacher survey is conducted online to collect feedback from teachers upon completion of each programme. This exercise provides evaluation with regard to specific aspects of a programme.

5.6 Continuous review of the programmes is carried out in the Department Meetings. For Government-subvented non-credit-bearing programmes, the programme management and review mechanism should comply with the requirements of the funding bodies.

6. Concluding Remarks

6.1 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 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.