



**CODES OF PRACTICE  
ON  
EXTERNAL DEGREES**

**Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council  
University Grants Commission  
Sri Lanka**

**December 2010**

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## FOREWORD

The purpose of this Code of Practice is to provide a reference point for all universities, covering the main aspects of academic standards and the quality of education in relation to external degree programmes and extension courses. The Code reflects consensus amongst universities and other groups on the key elements of good practice, which support the student learning experience.

The main principles identified in the Code of Practice are:

- A clear definition of responsibilities.
- Consistent application of policies and practices that are underpinned by principles of fairness and equality of opportunity.
- The availability of clear accessible information.
- The competence of staff.
- Monitoring and review of policy, procedures and practices.
- Use of the Code of Practice in audit and review.

The Code may be added to over time, to reflect developments in Universities and nationally. Individual universities are expected to use this Code to guide its own developing practice and reflect their own particular context and requirements.

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December 2010.

# CODE OF PRACTICE ON EXTERNAL DEGREES

## Structure of the Code

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

Almost all universities in Sri Lanka conduct either full-time or part-time degree programs for large numbers of external students at undergraduate and/or post-graduate level. Many of these students are working professionals or individuals who have failed to gain admission to the national universities as internal students. Designing a code of practice for this aspect of the university system is very important as it lacks uniformity within the national universities and serious questions have been raised on quality. Assurance of the quality of external degree programs is thus a vital issue.

The principal purpose of this Code of Practice is to ensure that teachers and supervisors, their respective academic units and the students, are aware of and clear about their responsibilities, especially that of the university, to maintain the expected standards of their study programs. External students have a right to effective teaching and supervision. At the same time, they have responsibilities to adhere to the university's rules, to be pro-active in completing all components of their study programs, to maintain progress and to communicate with their teachers, whenever possible. This is important in sustaining the standards and the prestige of the institution.

Whilst functions, responsibilities and the relationship between teachers and candidates will vary according to the course of study, especially with regard to the provision of physical resources, the fundamental principles outlined in the following sections apply to all academic units, teachers and students. Additional and more specific guidelines produced by each Faculty / academic unit are expected to be distributed to its external degree students at registration.

For the purpose of this Code, the term 'academic unit' encompasses academic departments, units and centres, depending on the organisational structure of the Faculty and the University.

### A. General Principles

1. External students form an integral component of a university system. It is important that all students are made to understand that they need to integrate well with their

universities and gain clear information on the structure of the degree programs they follow with sufficient knowledge on the examination procedures and credit systems.

2. Where necessary, universities should take steps to develop and promote positive academic cultures within academic units that offer external degree programmes and extension courses, and which ensure that external students are perceived as members of the university community.
3. It is expected that the University provides external students with information at the inception of the programs. Such information should be made known to all students by the Faculty or academic unit. It should include details on requirements and procedures relating to matters such as the facilities and resources available, e.g., library, computing and technical facilities, word-processing training, statistical advice, English language tuition, etc. Adequate and accurate information should be provided prior to enrolment on how such facilities could be accessed.
5. In the event that there is no informative induction programme for students, hand books especially designed for external students should be made available. These should provide the students with appropriate guidance on available facilities and courses.
6. The University should ensure that the quality of its external degree programmes and extension courses, and the administration of such degree programmes and courses are in accordance with recommendations and guidelines issued from time to time by the University Grants Commission.

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

7. The University Council should appoint a central body [which may be named the External Degrees and Extension Courses Unit (EDECU)], with a clear organisational structure, which reports to the Vice-Chancellor of the University.
8. The Head of the EDECU should be a professor or a senior academic staff member of the university with substantial experience and knowledge of the development and administration of external degree programmes.
9. The university authorities should provide office space, supportive staff, and logistics for the EDECU to carry out its duties smoothly.
10. Each university should have by-laws that set out the terms and conditions for commencement of new external degree programmes and extension courses.
11. All external degree programmes and extension courses must be fee-levying. The EDECU should be self-financing for management and implementation of such degree programmes and extension courses.
12. Each university council should, in consultation with the finance committee and finance division of the university, prepare a set of guidelines for regulation of financial matters pertaining to external degree programmes and extension courses.
13. All teachers involved in external degree programmes and extension courses should be made aware of the necessity to implement the university rules and regulations

applicable to external students as well as the working procedures of the university's EDECU.

14. Each university should have a clearly written, accessible policy on grievance procedures, by which either the candidate or the programme coordinator may make representations as appropriate (in confidence, if necessary) if significant difficulties arise in conducting the study programs, to the Head of the Department or Faculty.

### **C. Specific Guidance**

#### ***1. Admission criteria***

15. The likelihood of a student's success in the pursuit of a higher degree is enhanced by selection and admission procedures which ensure that the applicant is sufficiently qualified for admission to the programme of study and that the applicant appears to have the capacity required to undertake the program successfully and in a reasonable length of time.
16. The university should have a clearly written policy on standards for admission of students to its external degree programmes and extension courses. Such standards should comply with the UGC's recommendations in this regard.
17. The university should have provisions to guarantee that there is adherence to the University's and UGC's standards for admission and requirements for progress in the particular degree or study program.
18. Universities should explore the possibility of introducing schemes that enable students to transfer credits earned as internal students or external students on other programmes in the same or other universities

#### ***2. Curriculum development and design***

19. Course curricula should be designed with the participation of all stakeholders, and subject to regular review and revision.
20. Course curricula should include non-credit course units that encourage students to develop appropriate generic skills that enhance employability.
21. Course curricula should specify the core subjects and course units that should be offered by all students, while also providing students with choice in their study programme, through optional subsidiaries, wherever possible.

#### ***3. Programme delivery and learner support***

22. It is recommended that an academic staff member within the relevant academic department / unit is appointed to monitor the general progress and welfare of external students. It is also recommended that the Head of department / unit is not appointed to this role, in order to provide students with an alternative pathway for consultation.

23. Where required, students should have access to appropriate tuition in course units relevant to their study programs, report writing, computing, word processing, statistical methodology and information retrieval, etc.
24. Students should be provided with detailed advice on necessary completion dates of successive stages of work so that the programme may be completed within the scheduled time.
25. Students should be encouraged to show initiative and self-motivation, so that he / she is able to pursue independent study.
26. The academic unit with responsibility for the study programme should establish and maintain a schedule of regular (at least monthly, if possible) contact with external students, in accordance with university policy.
27. The academic unit should recognise the importance of providing external students with regular written work, and interim reports, etc, in order to encourage progress in course work.
28. The University's administrative procedures should assist candidates to complete their degrees as expeditiously as possible within the regulations.

#### ***4. Student assessment and evaluation***

29. Students should be provided with clear guidelines on the timing and mode of examinations by which their academic progress is assessed.
30. The university should have clear guidelines for examiners on the university's expectations for the degree.
31. Examiners should be appointed by the Senate of the university, on the recommendation of the EDECU and relevant Faculty Board.
32. The university should have provision for appeals procedures, setting out the grounds on which, and the means whereby students may appeal against the conduct and outcome of examinations.

#### ***5. Quality assurance***

33. All external degree programmes and extension courses should be subjected to external review and quality assurance. The parameters of quality assurance will be similar to those for other degree programmes.
34. Each university should have regulations that ensure attainment of quality in their external degree programmes and extension courses through:
  - Reasonable access to physical facilities and learning resources appropriate to the study programme
  - Completion of study programmes within a stipulated time schedule, with due consideration for difference categories of external students
  - Requiring programme coordinators to make regular reports on student progress to the respective faculties and Heads of department.

35. Students should be made aware of unsatisfactory progress in the study programme. Delays should be identified and reported and addressed promptly and appropriately.

***6. Collaboration with other institutions***

36. Universities should explore the possibility of collaboration with other institutions / organisations for course delivery and student support, in order to ensure optimal utilization of available human and physical resources.