


CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING



This document is intended to serve as a guideline for Higher Education Provider (HEP) offering programmes via Open and Distance Learning (ODL) for accreditation and programme audit purposes. The document serves many parties, namely dedicated ODL institutions, dual mode HEPs offering both face-to-face and ODL programmes, faculties offering individual ODL courses and individual faculty members offering ODL courses independently.

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FOREWORD

Distance Learning has had a long history in Malaysia, tracing its beginning to the first offering of correspondence courses by Stamford College in 1950's. Similarly, external programmes offered by the University of London and correspondence courses offered by Kolej Adabi are well known early examples of other distance learning programmes. In 1971, Universiti Sains Malaysia became the pioneer tertiary institution in offering undergraduate programmes via distance learning. Over time the congruence of distance and open learning, though not mutually exclusive but has often been interchangeable in practice led to the current practice of addressing the two subjects together, hence the now globally accepted term: Open and Distance Learning, ODL.

In 1993, the Minister of Education Malaysia embarked on a policy of encouraging universities to offer programmes via distance learning resulting in universities such as UiTM (then known as ITM), UKM, UPM, UTM and UUM joining the fray in offering distance learning programmes along with the already established programmes conducted by USM. The increase in demand for distance learning programmes was realised by many parties and the idea of having a national open university offering only distance learning programmes in Malaysia was mooted culminating in the establishment of Open University Malaysia (OUM) in 2001. Since the establishment of OUM, three more open universities were set up namely Wawasan Open University (WOU, 2006), Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU, 2007) and Asia e-University (AeU, 2008).

Hence in just a short span of time, distance learning programmes in Malaysia are offered by four open universities and numerous dual mode universities with the glaring absence of a set of rules or guidelines to monitor those programmes.

Hence this Code of Practice for Open and Distance Learning is well overdue. This code evolved from a set of guidelines prepared under the same scope by a group of academicians with extensive experience in and have been directly involved with distance learning in Malaysia.

With the presence of many distance learning programmes offered by the open universities and the various dual mode universities and colleges in Malaysia, this code of practice is specially intended for those institutions. In addition, aspiring institutions

intending to venture into this alternative way of education can also benefit from this document by studying the standards expected to be fulfilled. Finally, it is hoped that this document will serve as another milestone in the collective effort to make Malaysia as a hub for high quality education in the region.

Thank you.

Dato' Dr. Syed Ahmad Hussein

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GLOSSARY

1. Electronic Platform

Electronic platform (e.g. *LMS, *LCMS and learning portals) serves as an online repository for various digital learning materials, tests, assignments and administrative information that is accessible to instructors and learners. It also serves as an avenue for online interaction between the instructor / tutor and student / learner using various web tools.

* LMS - Learning Management System

* LCMS - Learning Content Management System

2. Face-to-face

Face-to-face refers to the actual physical interaction or other electronically mediated communication that displays the learner(s) and tutor / facilitator / instructor in real time enabling immediate response.

3. Learning Centre

A centre / facility established by the main campus to reach out to learners at different regions or even countries. This centre serves as a support centre for learners where various teaching and learning activities take place. Another name for the centre is regional centre.

4. Learning material

ODL material should be in the form of self-instructional material (SIM) which is based on sound instructional design principles (namely it should be learner-friendly, use simple language, include learning activities and feedbacks). The material may be in various forms: print-based, web-based, multimedia, etc.

5. Moderator

In the context of ODL, a moderator is an academic staff from the HEP or appointed from any other recognised institution / organization / industry responsible for moderating, refining and enhancing learning materials, examination questions or assignments.

6. Modules/Content Writers

A member of academic staff from the university or appointed from any other recognised institution / organization / industry, responsible for developing the learning materials.

7. Online Help Desk

An online help desk is a computer network that a user contacts to seek information or assistance related to various services provided by the Higher Education Provider (HEP).

8. Other Definitions of ODL

- a) The term open and distance learning reflects both the fact that all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learner, and that the mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility, whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure (UNESCO, 2002).
- b) Most definitions of open and distance learning pay attention to the following characteristics: separation of teacher and learner in time and place; institutional accreditation; use of mixed-media courseware, involves two-way communication, possibility of face-to-face meetings and use of industrialised processes (Commonwealth of Learning, 1999).
- c) Open distance learning refers to education and training in which using the learning resources, rather than attending classroom sessions, is the central feature of the learning experience (Commonwealth of Learning, 2003).

9. Programme Coordinator

A person responsible for the overall management of the programme, i.e. planning, implementation, evaluation and improvement processes.

10. Subject Matter Expert

A member of academic staff from the HEP or appointed from any other recognised institution / organization / industry, responsible for overseeing the delivery of the subject which may include preparation of assignments, tests, examinations and curriculum review.

11. Synchronous & asynchronous

Synchronous refers to electronic interactions occurring in real time (live).

Asynchronous refers to electronic interactions occurring in delayed mode.

12. Tutor / facilitator / instructor

A member of academic staff from the HEP or appointed from any other recognised institution / organization / industry responsible for the teaching and learning process, and conducts face-to-face and/or electronic sessions.

ABBREVIATIONS

APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
COPPA	Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
HEP	Higher Education Provider
LC	Learning Centre
LCMS	Learning Content Management System
LMS	Learning Management System
MOE	Ministry of Education Malaysia
MQA	Malaysian Qualifications Agency
MQF	Malaysian Qualifications Framework
ODL	Open and Distance Learning

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

This document is intended to serve as a guideline for Higher Education Providers (HEP) that offer programmes via Open and Distance Learning, (ODL) for accreditation and programme audit purposes. HEP must proactively acquire the relevant knowledge and skills in planning, developing and implementing their ODL programme(s). Hence, this document should not be used as a manual to initiate an ODL programme.

INTRODUCTION

Definition of Open and Distance Learning:

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) refers to the provision of **flexible** educational opportunities in terms of **access** and **multiple modes** of knowledge acquisition.

- **Flexible** means the availability of choices for educational endeavours anywhere, anytime and anyhow.
- **Access** means opportunity made available to all, freeing them from constraints of time and place.
- **Multiple modes** mean the use of various delivery systems and learning resources.

(Ahmad, Phillips, Santhi & Wahid 2010)

Among the more commonly used terms related to ODL are the following: correspondence education, home study, independent study, external studies, continuing education, distance teaching, adult education, technology-based or mediated education, learner-centered education, open learning, open access, flexible learning, and distributed learning.

ODL is becoming an accepted and indispensable part of mainstream education prompted by the need to make learning more accessible to a wider population, the growing need for continual skills upgrading and reskilling; and advances in technology that have made it possible for teaching to be conducted at a distance. Government are cognizant of the potential of ODL in fulfilling the fundamental rights of all people to

learning and the need to incorporate it within the framework of human capital development.

Advances in the information and communication technology (ICT) have opened up new possibilities and opportunities in ODL. The increasing number of open universities being established across the world is highly indicative of this trend. Similarly, more and more traditional universities are transforming from single mode to dual mode universities, recognising the importance of distance education in providing greater accessibility and up-to-date educational resources.

In the light of these trends, the nine areas of the Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA) serve as the guidelines for the HEPs and the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) in assuring the quality of the ODL programmes. The guidelines serve many parties namely **dedicated ODL institutions, dual mode HEPs offering both face-to-face and distance learning programmes, faculty / departments / units offering individual distance learning courses and individual faculty members** independently offering distance learning courses. These guidelines developed with the collaboration of stakeholders.

It aspires to:

- seek to enable rather than restrict the offering of ODL
- be easily understood with minimum complexity and jargon
- allow reflection on current practices

This document aims to:

- inform HEPs of good practices, assist in the design of learning, and offer a practical guide in assessing an ODL programme
- provide a platform for HEPs to discuss, update and share ODL practices
- provide a mechanism of quality assurance for ODL programmes using the nine areas in the COPPA

AREA 1: VISION, MISSION, EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The vision, mission and goals of the HEP guide its academic planning and implementation as well as bring together its members to strive towards a tradition of excellence. The general goal of higher education is to produce wholly educated graduates through the:

- provision of knowledge and practical skills based on scientific principles;
- inculcation of attitudes, ethics, sense of professionalism and leadership skills for societal advancement within the framework of the national vision;
- nurturing of the ability to analyse and solve problems as well as to evaluate and make decisions critically and reatively based on evidence and experience;
- development of the quest for knowledge and lifelong learning skills that are essential for continuous upgrading of knowledge and skills parallel to the rapid advancement in global knowledge; and
- consideration of other issues that are relevant to the local, national and international contexts.

Academic programmes are the building blocks that support the larger vision and mission of the HEP. Hence, one must take into consideration these larger institutional goals when designing programmes to ensure that one complements the other.

The quality of the HEP and the programme that it offers is ultimately assessed by the ability of its graduates to carry out their expected roles and responsibilities in society. This requires a clear statement of the competencies, i.e., the practical, intellectual and soft skills that are expected to be achieved by the learner at the end of the programme. The main domains of learning outcomes cover knowledge, practical and social skills, critical and analytical thinking, values, ethics and professionalism. The levels of competency of these learning outcomes are defined in the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF).

STANDARDS FOR AREA 1

1.1. Statement of Programme Aims, Objectives and Learning Outcomes

The stated aims, objectives and learning outcomes of an **Open and Distance Learning (ODL)** programme reflect what it wants the learners to achieve. It is crucial for these aims, objectives and learning outcomes to be expressed explicitly and be made known to learners and other stakeholders alike.

1.1.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The programme must define its aims, objectives and learning outcomes and make them known to its internal and external stakeholders.
- (b) The programme objectives must reflect the key elements of the outcomes of higher education that are in line with the national and global developments.
- (c) The programme aims, objectives and learning outcomes must be developed in consultation with principal stakeholders which should include the academic staff.
- (d) The programme aims, objectives and learning outcomes must be consistent with and supportive of the HEP's vision and mission to engage in ODL.

1.1.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The aims, objectives and learning outcomes of the programme should encompass qualities in the areas of social responsibility, research and scholarly attainment, community involvement, ethical values, professionalism and knowledge creation.
- (b) The faculty / department / unit should consult relevant stakeholders, particularly potential employers, when formulating programme aims and objectives.
- (c) The programme aims, objectives and learning outcomes should be periodically reviewed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders that may include the alumni, industry, community, civil society organisations and international peers.

1.2 Learning Outcomes

The quality of an ODL programme is ultimately assessed by the ability of the learners to carry out their expected roles and responsibilities in society. This requires the programme to have a clear statement of the learning outcomes to be achieved by the learners.

1.2.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The programme must define the competencies that the learner should demonstrate on completion of the programme that cover mastery of body of knowledge; practical skills; social skills and responsibilities; values, attitudes and professionalism; problem solving and scientific skills; communication, leadership and team skills; information management and lifelong learning skills; and managerial and entrepreneurial skills.
- (b) The programme must demonstrate how the component modules contribute to the fulfilment of the programme's learning outcomes.
- (c) The programme must show how the learner is able to demonstrate the learning outcomes, for example, through summative assessments.

1.2.2 Enhanced Standards

- a) The programme should specify the link between competencies expected on completion of studies and those required during career undertakings and further studies.

AREA 2: CURRICULUM DESIGN AND DELIVERY

For the purpose of this code of practice for accreditation of programmes offered by HEPs, the term 'curriculum design and delivery' is used interchangeably with the term 'programme design and delivery'. 'Programme' means an arrangement of courses that are structured for a specified duration and learning volume to achieve the stated learning outcomes and usually leading to an award of a qualification.

STANDARDS FOR AREA 2

2.1 Academic Autonomy

A faculty / department / unit offering an ODL programme is expected to have sufficient autonomy over academic matters. Such autonomy should be reflected at the faculty / department / unit level where the programme is being offered.

2.1.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit must have sufficient autonomy to design the curriculum and to allocate the resources necessary for its implementation to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes.
- (b) Where applicable, the above provision must also cover programmes franchised to, or from, other HEPs in accordance with national policies.
- (c) The academic staff must be given sufficient autonomy to focus on areas of their expertise, such as curriculum development and implementation, academic supervision of learners, research and writing, scholarly activities, and academically-related administrative duties and community engagement.

2.1.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The boundaries of academic autonomy for the faculty / department / unit and the academic staff should continue to expand reflecting the intellectual maturity of the HEP.

2.2 Programme Design and Teaching-Learning Methods

2.2.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit must have a defined process by which the curriculum is established, reviewed and evaluated.
- (b) Process of designing the programme must include the viewpoints of various stakeholders: academicians, administrators and ODL learners to ensure that the perspectives of people who will receive and deliver ODL programmes are considered.
- (c) The programme must be considered only after a needs assessment has indicated that there is a need for the programme to be conducted using ODL mode and there is evidence to ascertain sustainability.
- (d) The programme content, approach, and teaching-learning methods must be appropriate and consistent, and support the achievement of the programme learning outcomes.
- (e) There must be a variety of teaching-learning methods in order to achieve the eight domains of the learning outcomes and to ensure that learners take responsibility for their own learning.
- (f) The programme must involve the provision of appropriate learning materials for ODL learners who have to assume greater responsibility for their learning.
- (g) There must be a unit or section devoted to the design and development of learning materials for the ODL programme.
- (h) Learning materials for the programme must be provided in the following ways: adopting existing materials; adapting existing materials; or creating original materials or any other appropriate approaches.
- (i) The HEP must provide an electronic/online platform to conduct teaching and learning activities.
- (j) The faculty / department / unit must decide on the nature of interaction between learners and instructors which may be synchronous or asynchronous or a combination of both.
- (k) Some of the interaction must be carried out through face-to-face sessions which can include electronic mediated communication.

2.2.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The curriculum should encourage multi-disciplinary approaches to enhance the personal development of the learner through electives, study pathways and other means, which should be monitored and appraised.
- (b) The HEP should consider establishing a system where all forms of interaction and delivery are integrated.
- (c) The needs analysis for the programme should involve feedback from external sources including market, learners, alumni, peers, and international experts whose commentaries should be utilised for the purpose of curriculum improvement.
- (d) There should be co-curricular activities that will enrich learners' experiences, and foster personal development and responsibility.
- (e) The HEP should consider having intellectual property rights and licensing policies for learning materials and innovations.

2.3 Curriculum Content and Structure

A teaching-learning environment can only be effective when the curriculum content and structure of a programme are continually kept abreast with the most current development in the field of study.

2.3.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The programme must incorporate the core subject matter essential for the understanding of the concepts, principles and methods that support the programme outcomes.
- (b) The programme must fulfill the requirements of the discipline taking into account the appropriate discipline standards and international best practices for the field.
- (c) The content of the programme must be periodically reviewed to keep abreast with scientific, technological and knowledge development of the discipline, and with the needs of society. Student feedback must also be incorporated in the curriculum review process.

2.3.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit should establish mechanisms -- through the use of the latest technology and global networking -- to access real time information and to identify up-to-date topics of importance for inclusion in the curriculum and its delivery.

2.4 Management of the Programme

2.4.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) Students must be provided with the most current written information about the aims, outline, learning outcomes and methods of assessment of the programme.
- (b) The programme must have a qualified coordinator and team of academic staff (e.g., a programme committee) responsible for the planning, implementation, evaluation and improvement of the programme.
- (c) The programme team must have authority and established procedures for planning and monitoring the programme.
- (d) The programme team must have adequate resources to implement the teaching and learning activities, and conduct programme evaluation for quality improvement.
- (e) The programme, especially its content and delivery, must be regularly reviewed and evaluated and the results utilised to assure quality. (At level 6 and above of the MQF, the review must involve external examiners).
- (f) The faculty / department / unit must provide its learners with a conducive learning environment in which scholarly and creative achievements are nurtured.

2.4.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) Innovations to improve teaching and learning should be developed, supported, and evaluated to keep abreast with the advancements in ODL.
- (b) Innovations on improving teaching and learning should be done in consultation with principal stakeholders, experts and learners.
- (c) The review and evaluation of the programme should involve stakeholders as well as national and international external expertise.

2.5 Linkages with External Stakeholders

Linkages with stakeholders outside of the faculty / department / unit, particularly at the operational level, are crucial for identifying, clarifying and improving key aspects of the programme and their interrelationships in the planning and implementation processes. The linkages are best developed and maintained at local, national, regional and global levels.

2.5.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit must have linkages with all levels of stakeholders outside of the faculty / department / unit for the purposes of curriculum planning, implementation and review.

2.5.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The programme team should obtain feedback from employers and use the information for curriculum improvement, including for the purposes of learner placement, training and workplace exposure.
- (b) Students should be given the opportunity to develop linkages with external stakeholders.

AREA 3: ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

Student assessment in ODL is a crucial aspect of quality assurance because it drives student learning. It is one of the most important measures to show the achievement of learning outcomes. The result of assessment is also the basis in awarding qualifications. Hence, methods of student assessment have to be clear, consistent, effective, valid, reliable and in line with current practices and must clearly support the achievement of learning outcomes. In addition, specialised needs have to be taken into account to cater for students that can be distributed over various geographical locations due to the nature of ODL.

STANDARDS FOR AREA 3

3.1 Relationship between Assessment and Learning

3.1.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) Assessment principles, methods and practices must be aligned with the learning outcomes and programme content.
- (b) The assessment must be consistent with the levels defined in the MQF, the eight domains of learning outcomes and the programme standards.

3.1.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The link between assessment and learning outcomes in the programme should be reviewed periodically to ensure its effectiveness.

3.2 Assessment Methods

3.2.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The frequency, methods, and criteria of student assessment – including the grading criteria and appeal policies – must be documented and communicated to students on the commencement of the programme. The various modes of assessment components (e.g.: assignment, project, report, test) must each be given weightage contributing to the final grade.
- (b) Assessment must be formative and/or summative, and the system reviewed at appropriate scheduled intervals.
- (c) A variety of methods and tools must be used appropriately to assess the learning outcomes and competencies.

- (d) There must be mechanisms to ensure the validity, reliability, consistency, currency and fairness of the assessment methods. Specific procedures to cater for the examination of ODL students must be put in place which could involve distant locations and simultaneous processes in many locations.

3.2.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The methods of assessing should be comparable to ODL best practices locally and internationally.
- (b) The review of the assessment system should be done in consultation with external experts, both locally and internationally.
- (c) The faculty / department / unit should consider introducing innovative assessment methods for ODL courses e.g. online synchronous assessment.

3.3 Management of Student Assessment

The management of the assessment system is directly linked to the HEP's responsibility as a body that confers qualifications. The robustness and security of the processes and procedures related to student assessment are important to gain confidence in the quality of the qualifications awarded by the HEP.

3.3.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit managing the assessment process must be set up and its personnel trained for the ODL assessment system.
- (b) Student assessment results must be communicated to the student within reasonable time, taking full advantage of the ICT capabilities to ensure efficient communications.
- (c) Changes to student assessment methods must follow the established procedures and regulations and communicated to the student prior to their implementation.
- (d) There must be mechanisms to ensure the security of assessment documents and records.
- (e) The policy and procedures in handling plagiarism must be put in place and made aware to all students and staff.

3.3.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit and its academic staff should have sufficient autonomy in the management of student assessment.
- (b) There should be independent external scrutiny to evaluate and improve the management of student assessment, including formal certification of the processes.
- (c) The faculty / department / unit should consider having the appropriate software to detect cases of plagiarism/similarities among students' work.

AREA 4: STUDENT SELECTION AND SUPPORT SERVICES

In general, admission policies of the programme need to comply with the prevailing policies of the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE). There are varying views on the views on the best method of student selection. Whatever the method used, the HEP must be able to defend its consistency. The number of students to be admitted to the programme is determined by the capacity of the HEP and the number of qualified applicants. HEP admission and retention policies must not be compromised for the sole purpose of maintaining a desired enrolment. If an HEP operates geographically separated campuses or if the programme is a collaborative one, the selection and assignment of all students must be consistent with the national policies.

STANDARDS FOR AREA 4

4.1 Admission and Selection

4.1.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The programme must have a clear statement on the criteria and processes of student selection, including that of transferring students.
- (b) The number for each student intake must be stated and related to the capacity of the faculty / department / unit to effectively deliver the programme.
- (c) The criteria and processes of selection including the need for prerequisite knowledge and skills must be published and disseminated to the public, especially students.
- (d) If a selection interview is utilised, the process must be structured, objective and fair.
- (e) The student selection must be free from all forms of discrimination and bias.
- (f) There must be a clear policy on, and appropriate mechanisms for appeal.
- (g) HEP must provide an orientation programme to prepare the student for ODL.
- (h) The faculty / department / unit must offer appropriate developmental or remedial support to assist students who need such support.
- (i) Visiting, exchange and transfer students must be accounted for to ensure the adequacy of the faculty / department / unit's resources to accommodate the additional students.

- (j) The admission policy for the programme must be monitored and reviewed periodically and in consultation with relevant stakeholders to improve the selection processes.

4.1.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) There should be a relationship between student selection, the programme, and the desired learning outcomes.

4.2 Articulation Regulations, Credit Transfer and Credit Exemption

4.2.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit must have well-defined and effectively disseminated policies, regulations and processes concerning articulation practices, credit transfers and credit exemptions.

4.2.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit should always be in touch with the latest development and thinking about the processes of articulation, credit transfer and credit exemption through networking with other parties, including cross-border collaborative provisions.

4.3 Transfer of Students

In this age of increased cross-border education and student mobility, nationally and globally, the question of the transfer of students and credits and the articulation of accumulated learning has become a very important aspect of higher education. Thus, sufficient attention must be given to ensure that the transfer students are smoothly assimilated into the institution without undue disruption to their studies. It is also important to describe the policies and mechanisms to facilitate student mobility, exchanges and transfers, nationally and internationally.

4.3.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit must have a well disseminated policy with clear criteria, mechanisms and processes, both academic and non-academic, to enable qualified students to transfer to another programme.
- (b) Incoming transfer students must have comparable achievement in their previous institutions of study.

4.3.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit should have in place policies and mechanisms that facilitate student mobility between programmes and institutions, within the country or cross-border, through articulation arrangements, joint degrees, exchange semesters, advanced standing arrangements, and the like.

4.4 Student Support Services and Co-curricular Activities

Student support services and co-curricular activities facilitate learning and wholesome personal development and contribute to the achievement of the learning outcomes. They include physical amenities and services such as recreation, arts and culture, accommodation, transport, safety, food, health, finance, academic advice and counseling. Students with special needs and those facing personal, relationship or identity problems can be helped through special-purpose facilities and professional counseling. Career counseling can help students make more informed programme and career choices by examining students' approaches to career planning and suggesting appropriate resources to guide them.

(Many of the components below apply at the institutional level and the students at the faculty / department / unit level have access to these central services and facilities.)

4.4.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) Students must have access to appropriate, adequate and continuous support services, such as physical, social, financial, recreational and online facilities, counseling (academic and non-academic) and health services.
- (b) Student support services must be evaluated regularly to ensure their adequacy, effectiveness and safety.
- (c) There must be a mechanism for students to air grievances and make appeals relating to student support services.
- (d) There must be a designated administrative unit responsible for planning and implementing student support services staffed by individuals who have appropriate experience consistent with their assignments.

- (e) Academic and career counseling including e-counseling must be provided by adequate and qualified staff and issues pertaining to counseling must remain confidential.
- (f) An effective orientation to the programme must be made available to students to promote self-directed learning / self-manage learning. The orientation programme must be evaluated regularly with special attention given to out of state and international students as well as students with special needs.

4.4.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) Student support services should be given prominent organisational status in the HEP and a dominant role in supplementing programme learning outcomes.
- (b) There should be a structured training and development plan to enhance the skills and professionalism of the academic and non-academic counselors.

4.5 Student Representation and Participation

The participation of students in various faculty / department / unit activities inculcates self-confidence for leadership and provides experience in education and related matters. By involving students, it will also be easier for the faculty / department / unit to obtain their feedback. Student publications can also contribute to an atmosphere of responsible intellectual discourse.

4.5.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit must adhere to the HEP's policy on student participation and representation as and when they apply to the faculty / department / unit level.
- (b) There must be a policy and programmes for active student participation in areas that affect their welfare, for example, peer counselling, co- curricular activities, and community engagement.
- (c) Student rights and responsibilities must to be spelt out in the Student Handbook and made available in the faculty / department / unit portal.

4.5.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) At the faculty / department / unit level, student activities and student organisations should be facilitated to gain basic managerial and leadership experience, to encourage character building, to inculcate a sense of belonging and responsibility, and to promote active citizenship.
- (b) Where student publications or other media exist, the faculty / department / unit should provide a clear, formal and well publicised policy regarding such publications.
- (c) The faculty / department / unit should have adequate facilities to encourage students to be involved in publication activities.

4.6 Alumni

4.6.1 Benchmarked Standards

Not applicable.

4.6.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit should foster active linkages with its alumni.
- (b) The faculty / department / unit should encourage the alumni to play a role in the development of the programme, preparing the students for their professional future, and to provide linkages with the industry and professions.

AREA 5: ACADEMIC STAFF

The quality of the academic staff in ODL is one of the most important components in assuring the quality of that mode of higher education. Thus, every effort must be made to establish proper and effective recruitment, service, development and appraisal policies that are conducive to staff productivity. It is important that every programme has appropriately qualified and sufficient number of academic staff, in a conducive environment such as flexible working hours that encourages recruitment and retention.

The faculty / department / unit should consider the various responsibilities and specialised tasks that would be required of the ODL academic staff, for example; knowledge in andragogy, IT-related technical skills and student support.

Teaching, research, consultancy services and community engagement are the core interrelated academic activities. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the degree of involvement in these areas varies between academic staff and between academic institutions.

Work and its equitable distribution is one of the ways the HEP recognises meritorious contribution for the purpose of promotion, salary determination or other incentives. It is crucial for the HEP to provide training for its academic staff. The equitable distribution of work helps ensure that such training can be done systematically and fairly.

STANDARDS FOR AREA 5

5.1 Recruitment and Management

5.1.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The HEP must have a clear and documented academic staff recruitment policy where the criteria for selection are based on academic merit. Academic staff recruited must be directly related to the fields/areas of discipline of the courses offered.
- (b) The staff–student ratio for the programme must be appropriate to the teaching-learning methods and comply with the programme discipline standards, taking into consideration the uniqueness and flexibility of the ODL.

- (c) The faculty / department / unit must determine the core academic staff responsible for implementing the programme, as well as those teaching the core subjects.
- (d) The faculty / department / unit must have an adequate number of full-time academic staff for the programme. The ODL programme coordinators must be full-time staff of the HEP. In addition, the following supporting academic staff is required on full-time or part-time basis: subject matter experts, module/content writers, moderators, tutors / facilitators / instructors.
- (e) The faculty / department / unit must clarify the roles of the academic staff in teaching, research and scholarly activities, consultancy, community services and administrative functions.
- (f) The policy of the faculty / department / unit must reflect an equitable distribution of responsibilities among the academic staff.
- (g) Recognition and reward through promotion, salary increment or other remuneration must be based on equitable work distribution and meritorious academic roles using clear and transparent policies and procedures.
- (h) In playing a role in the HEP's academic appointment and promotion exercise - for example, that of Professors and Associate Professors -- the faculty / department / unit must be guided by considerations which are in line with the national policy and best international practices.
- (i) Training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes related to ODL must be done for all full-time academic and supporting academic staff and the process is evaluated.

5.1.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The recruitment policy for a particular programme should seek a balance between senior and junior academic staff, between academic and non-academic staff, between academic staff with different approaches to the subject, and preferably between local and international academic staff with multi-disciplinary backgrounds.
- (b) As part of the faculty / department / unit's commitment to provide a conducive working environment and ensure staff loyalty, various incentives should be put in place to reward innovation in ODL.

- (c) The faculty / department / unit should have national and international linkages to provide for the involvement of well renowned academics and professionals in order to enhance teaching and learning of the programme.
- (d) The faculty / department / unit should encourage academic staff to foster national and international links via conferences, joint-research, journals in ODL, staff exchange, collaboration and seminar series.

5.2 Service and Development

5.2.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The institution and faculty / department / unit policy on the academic staff must complement each other and address matters related to service, development and appraisal.
- (b) The faculty / department / unit must provide mentoring, tools, support and technology for self-learning and formative guidance for new academic staff as part of its staff development programme.
- (c) The HEP should have a clearly stated policy on conflict of interest, particularly in the area of part-time employment.
- (d) The HEP must describe the processes and procedures in handling disciplinary cases involving the academic staff.
- (e) The HEP must describe how the students' appraisal of the academic staff is conducted and indicate its frequency.

5.2.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The HEP should provide opportunities -- including funding -- for academic staff participation in professional, academic and other relevant activities at the national and international levels. It should appraise this participation and demonstrate that it utilises the results of this appraisal for improvement of the student experience.
- (b) The HEP should have appropriate provision to allow for advanced enhancement for its academic staff through research leave, sabbatical, and sponsored participation in, and organisation, of conferences.

AREA 6: EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Adequate educational resources are necessary to support the teaching-learning activities of any learning programmes including ODL. These resources include finance, expertise, physical infrastructure, ICT facilities, and if relevant, also research facilities. There must be a strong commitment by the HEP to provide sufficient resources to plan, manage, deliver and support the programmes.

The physical facilities to support an ODL programme are slightly different from facilities for face-to-face programmes. The normal facilities and space to house the necessary equipment for administration and classroom sessions would be similar to face-to-face programmes. Other facilities such as libraries, resource centres, lecture halls, auditoriums, tutorial rooms, science and computer laboratories, workshops, studios and in case of clinical learning, hospitals and clinics would also be needed. For ODL, learning centres (LCs) are needed to cater for students that are spread over a wide geographical area. A learning centre would have a minimum requirement in terms of infrastructure and facilities. Other facilities which are essential for supporting teaching-learning activities in ODL such as electronic learning platform, virtual library and counseling / advisory facilities / system via distance are equally important.

Where appropriate, research facilities are included as part of educational resources because a research-active environment improves the quality of higher education. A research culture attracts high caliber academics that engender critical thinking and enquiring mind, contributing further to knowledge advancement. Active researchers are best suited to interpret and apply current knowledge for the benefit of academic programmes and the community. Active researchers also attract grants that increase the number of staff and their morale. Interdisciplinary research has positive effects on academic programmes.

A research-active environment provides opportunities for students to observe and participate in research through electives or core courses. Exposure to an environment of curiosity and inquiry encourages students to develop lasting skills in problem-solving, data analysis and continuous updating of knowledge. Some students may develop interest in research as a career choice.

Adequate quantity of physical and financial resources and services are crucial. Equally important, if not more so, is the quality, relevance, accessibility, availability and delivery of such resources and services, and their actual utilisation by students. These considerations must be taken into account in evaluating the effectiveness of educational resources.

STANDARDS FOR AREA 6

6.1 Physical Facilities

6.1.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The programme must have sufficient and appropriate physical facilities and educational resources to ensure its effective delivery.
- (b) The physical facilities must comply with the relevant laws, and with health and safety regulations.
- (c) ICT and related facilities (for example, learning management system, digital/virtual library, video conferencing, virtual labs, online helpdesk) must be provided for and maintained up to acceptable current standards and capacities.
- (d) The library or resource centre must have adequate and up-to-date reference materials and qualified staff that meet the needs of the programme and research amongst academic staff and students. These include provisions for adequate computers, and information and communication technology-mediated reference materials.
- (e) For practical-based programmes, equipments and facilities for training must be adequately provided for at all learning centres.
- (f) For research-based programmes and programmes with a substantial research component, the faculty / unit / department must provide adequate and suitable research facilities and environment.
- (g) The HEP must have a policy regarding the selection and effective use of electronic devices, internal and external networks, and other effective means of using information and communication technology in the programme. This includes coordination with the library services.

6.1.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The learning environment should be regularly improved through renovations, building new facilities and the acquisition of the latest and appropriate equipment to keep up with the development in educational practices and changes.
- (b) The educational resources, services and facilities should be periodically reviewed to assess the quality and appropriateness for current education and training.
- (c) The facilities should be user-friendly including to those with special needs.

6.2 Research and Development

(These standards are largely directed to universities offering degree level programmes and above.)

6.2.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit must have a policy and a programme on research and development, and adequate facilities to sustain them.
- (b) The interaction between research and education must be reflected in the curriculum, influence current teaching, and encourage and prepare students for engagement in research, scholarship and development.

6.2.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) There should be a link between research, development and commercialisation.
- (b) The faculty / department / unit should do research in ODL, to expand the body of knowledge in the area and benefit from the outcome of that research.

6.3 Educational Expertise

6.3.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit must have a policy on the use of part-time academics from other institutions for teaching and learning purposes. This policy must address academic qualification, specialisation and overall workload.
- (b) The faculty / department / unit must have provision for personnel serving as instructional designers, editors, graphic designers and ICT support.

6.3.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) There should be access to educational experts and the faculty / department / unit should utilise such expertise for staff development and educational research.
- (b) The faculty / department / unit should consider developing a policy or initiatives on sharing of resources (staff, facilities) with other institutions.

6.4 Educational Exchanges

6.4.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit must comply with the HEP policy on educational exchanges and disseminate it to students and faculty members.
- (b) The faculty / department / unit must have a clear and documented policy on credit transfer/exemption and a system to cater for Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

6.4.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit should have national and international collaboration with other relevant institutions, and a clear policy and future planning on such collaborative activities.
- (b) The faculty / department / unit should provide appropriate facilities and adequate financial allocation for exchanges of academic staff, students and resources.

6.5 Financial Allocation

6.5.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The HEP must have a clear line of responsibility and authority for budgeting and resource allocation that take into account the specific needs of the faculty / department / unit.
- (b) The faculty / department / unit must have budgetary and procurement procedures to ensure that its resources are sufficient and that it is capable of utilising its finances efficiently and responsibly to achieve its objectives and maintain high standards of quality.

6.5.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) Those responsible for a programme should be given sufficient autonomy to appropriately allocate resources to achieve the programme goals and to maintain high educational standards.

AREA 7: PROGRAMME MONITORING AND REVIEW

Quality enhancement calls for programmes to be regularly monitored, reviewed and evaluated. These include the monitoring, reviewing and evaluating of institutional structures and processes.

The HEP is expected to have a procedure for programme monitoring and review. Monitoring and review for ODL programme should encompass elements such as the ODL system / structure, learning materials, delivery system, communication system, student support services, financial strength, assessment system, teaching strategies and physical facilities.

Programme monitoring and review activities should involve all academic and non-academic staff and students. These activities involve the process of gaining feedback from all relevant stakeholders. The findings should be recorded, reviewed and evaluated. Furthermore, actions should be taken on the findings with the purpose of enhancing all aspects of the programme.

STANDARDS FOR AREA 7

7.1 Mechanisms for Programme Monitoring and Review

7.1.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) Faculty / department / unit must have a systematic mechanism of assuring that programmes are monitored and reviewed accordingly to ascertain that the programme objectives are met. Programme evaluation is done periodically, using proper mechanisms and resources, including benchmarked data, teaching-learning methods and technologies, administration and related educational services, as well as feedback from principal stakeholders.
- (b) Various aspects of student performance and progression must be analysed in relation to the objectives, the curriculum and the learning outcome of the programme.

- (c) The programme monitoring and review committee must consist of both internal and external representatives. The academic programme committee should have its organisational structure as well as the Terms of Reference (TOR) that will ensure the design delivery and evaluation of the programme are continually reviewed.
- (d) In collaborative arrangements, the partners involved must share the responsibilities of the programme monitoring and review.

7.1.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit's self-review processes should be able to identify areas of concerns and demonstrate ways to improve the programme.

7.2 Involvement of Stakeholders

7.2.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) Programme evaluation must involve the relevant stakeholders including students, alumni and employers.

7.2.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) Stakeholders should have access to the reports on programme review and student performance, and their views considered.
- (b) For a professional programme, the faculty / department / unit should engage the relevant professional body in its programme evaluation exercise.

AREA 8: LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

There are many ways of administering an educational institution and the methods of management differ between HEPs. Nevertheless, governance that reflects the leadership of an academic organization must emphasise excellence and scholarship. At the faculty / department / unit level, it is crucial that the leadership provides clear guidelines and direction, builds relationships amongst the different constituents based on collegiality and transparency, manages finances and other resources with accountability, forges partnerships with significant stakeholders in educational delivery, research and consultancy and dedicates itself to academic and scholarly endeavours. Whilst formalised arrangements can protect these relationships, they are best developed by a culture of reciprocity, mutuality and open communication.

A leader should be visionary, capable of action that guides an organisation into the future as stipulated in its vision, mission, goals, and objectives. The ODL leadership does not only guide the organisation, but at the same time s/he has the competency in knowing, developing, implementing, managing, leading, and visioning the ODL programme.

STANDARDS FOR AREA 8

8.1 Governance

8.1.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The policies and practices of the faculty / department / unit must be consistent with the statement of purpose of the HEP.
- (b) The faculty / department / unit must clarify its governance structures and functions, the relationships within them, and their impact on the programme, and these must be communicated to all parties involved based on the principles of transparency, accountability and authority.
- (c) Evidence must be provided that the Governing Board is an active policy-making body for the HEP.
- (d) The faculty / department / unit responsible for the ODL programme must be an active policy-making body with an adequate degree of autonomy.

- (e) Mechanisms to ensure functional integration and comparability of educational quality must be established for programmes conducted in campuses that are geographically separated.

8.1.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit should have a comprehensive, interconnected and institutionalised committee system responsible for programmes that takes into consideration, among others, internal and external consultation, feedback, market needs analysis and employability projections.
- (b) The governance principles should reflect the representation and participation of academic staff, students and other stakeholders.

8.2 Academic Leadership of the Programme

8.2.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The criteria for the appointment and the responsibilities of the academic leadership for the programme must be clearly stated.
- (b) The academic leadership of the programme must be held by those with the appropriate qualifications and experience, and with sufficient authority for curriculum design, delivery and review.
- (c) Mechanisms and processes must be in place to allow for communication between the programme and the HEP leaderships in relation to matters such as staff recruitment and training, student admission, and allocation of resources, technologies, support system and decision making processes.

8.2.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The academic leadership should be evaluated at defined intervals with respect to the performance of the programme.
- (b) The academic leadership should take on the responsibility of creating a conducive environment to generate creativity and innovation in services delivery.

8.3 Administrative and Management Staff

8.3.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The administrative staff of the faculty / department / unit must be appropriately trained, technically competent and sufficient in number to support the implementation of the programme and related activities, and to ensure good management and deployment of the resources.
- (b) The faculty / department / unit must conduct regular performance review of the programme's administrative and management staff.

8.3.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit should have an advanced training scheme for the administrative and management staff to fulfill the specific needs of the programme and learner, for example, risk management, technology management, maintenance of specialised equipment, and additional technical skills.

8.4 Academic Records

8.4.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit policies and practices concerning the nature and security of student and academic staff records must be consistent with that of the HEP.
- (b) The faculty / department / unit must implement policies that have been established by the HEP on the rights of individual privacy and the confidentiality of records.

8.4.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit should continuously review policies on security of records including increased use of electronic technologies and its safety systems.

AREA 9: CONTINUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT (CQI)

There is an increase in the society demands for greater accountability from the HEPs. Therefore, the ODL institutions are of no exception, perhaps drawing even more scrutiny because of the inherently different ways used in delivering their programmes. Educational needs are also constantly changing because of the advancements in science and technology, and the explosive growth in global knowledge, which need to be rapidly and widely disseminated.

In facing these challenges, HEPs have little choice but to become dynamic learning organisations that need to continually and systematically review and monitor the various issues so as to meet the demands of the constantly changing environment.

STANDARDS FOR AREA 9

9.1 Quality Improvement

9.1.1 Benchmarked Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit must support and complement the HEP's policies, procedures and mechanisms for regular reviewing and updating of its structures, functions, strategies, policies, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and core activities to ensure continuous quality improvement.
- (b) The faculty / department / unit must develop a unit with relevant personnel to review its programmes at specified regular intervals, implement its recommendations, and record the achievements accomplished in the quality improvement of the programmes. Alternatively, the HEP with an established Quality Assurance (QA) unit can serve all the faculties / departments / units of the HEP offering ODL programmes.
- (c) The following aspects / items must be reviewed periodically: curriculum, delivery process including the online system, learning materials, assessment, administration / management of the programmes, ICT system including bandwidth management, physical facilities and student support services.
- (d) The policies and SOPs for various / all operations must be disseminated to relevant parties involved in the programme.

- (e) Relevant stakeholders must be involved in the continual quality improvement process.

9.1.2 Enhanced Standards

- (a) The faculty / department / unit should embrace the spirit of continual quality improvement based on prospective studies and analysis, which leads to the revisions of its current policies and practices, taking into consideration past experiences, present conditions, and future possibilities.
- (b) The QA unit of the HEP / faculty / department / unit or the CQI process should strive to be recognised by external accreditation body.

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