CVCD

ACADEMIC PROCEDURES HANDBOOK
for
Sri Lankan Universities

PART IV

CODE OF PRACTICE ON
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

Committee of Vice-Chancellors & Directors
and
University Grants Commission

Edited & Printed

by

List of Contents

Page

PURPOSE OF THE HANDBOOK

This handbook is complementary to the Quality Assurance Handbook published by the CVCD and UGC in July 2002. Both handbooks are the result of collaborative work undertaken between the CVCD/UGC, universities and professional bodies in 2002 and 2003. This work builds on the successful project begun in 2001 to develop and implement a comprehensive quality assurance system for Sri Lankan higher education.

The Academic Procedures Handbook is made up of following six parts:
- Part I: Code of Practice on Assessment of Students;
- Part II: Code of Practice on Career Guidance;
- Part III: Code of Practice on External Assessors;
- Part IV: Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Programmes;
- Part V: Code of Practice on Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review;
- Part VI: Code of Practice on Student Support and Guidance

The purpose of the Academic Procedures Handbook is to provide a reference point for all universities, covering the main aspects of academic standards and the quality of education. The six Codes reflect consensus amongst universities and other groups on the key elements of good practice, which support the student learning experience.

The Codes may be added to over time, to reflect developments in Universities and Nationally.

The existence of an Academic Procedures Handbook providing guidance on good practice at National level greatly facilitates the implementation of Quality Assurance mechanisms and the sustenance and enhancement of quality in the Universities within the overarching quality framework described at the end of the book. Individual universities will be expected to use the Academic Procedures Handbook to guide their own developing practice and to supplement it with local handbooks that reflect particular context and requirements of individual institutions.

PART IV: CODE OF PRACTICE ON POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

Foreword

As part of its programme of work, the CVCD/UGC Quality Assurance Committee has developed Codes of Practice covering key aspects of quality assurance in higher education.

This is one of six Codes, all of which have been developed in consultation with university staff through workshops and seminars during 2002 and 2003.

Purpose

The Codes are intended to be used:
- to guide and inform institutional activity;
- to promote and disseminate good practice;
- to encourage a commitment to continuous improvement.

Structure

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

This code provides guidance on the support and supervision of postgraduate research students in particular. While the document is not specifically targeted at students following taught postgraduate programmes, institutions may consider that parts of it are relevant to both research and taught postgraduate programmes.

Development of this Code of Practice has taken place in stages over a two year period. It has involved input from academic staff and practitioners in a range of disciplines and is based on existing good practice in universities, in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. Drafts of the Code have been subject to consultation by groups of academic staff, whose comments and contributions have contributed to this final version.

As with the other Codes of Practice that together form the Academic Procedures Handbook, the Code for postgraduate research programmes is intended for use as a good practice guide for institutions and as a reference point for academic reviewers, at subject and institutional level. With effect from 2006 academic reviewers will ask institutions how they are meeting the expectations and guidance provided in this Code.

The Code of Practice for postgraduate research programmes covers quality assurance matters that relate principally to postgraduate research. It does not cover more general matters that are relevant to all students. Other Codes of Practice, including the Codes for Assessment of Students and External Examining, contain sections that are widely relevant to the assessment of all types of students.

The guidance this Code contains is outlined in three sections:
> A. General Principles
> B. Institutional By-Laws and Regulations
> C. Specific Guidance

The Code sets out a framework within which institutions are expected to develop their own procedures and practice, consistent with the overall guidance in the Code.

A. General Principles

1. Full-time and part-time postgraduate research programmes should only be offered to students who, on the basis of prior learning and achievement, can be expected to meet the academic standards of the institution. Those standards should reflect national and international standards and benchmarks, which should be measured through more than one mechanism, including external examiners.

2. Regulations governing such programmes should be clear, made easily available to students and staff and be sufficiently comprehensive to cover the progression of research students from initial registration through to the final examination and receipt of the award.

3. Regulations should be subject to regular review, at the level of the subject and the Institution.

4. It is recommended that all postgraduate research programmes should have multiple entry and exit points to enable candidates to be rewarded for achievement at different stages of the programme. Such stopping off points might be: Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma, Master's Degree. Each of these qualifications will indicate

successful completion of part of the programme, with the volume and level of study previously determined.

B. Institutional By-Laws and Regulations

5. It is suggested that the following areas should be covered in written institutional by-laws and regulations:

5.1. information provision, including student handbook, prospectus and university calendar;

5.2. admissions arrangements;

5.3. criteria for registration including evidence of prior academic achievement, e.g. accreditation of prior learning at another institution (specifying award, classification and level of credit), or a level of professional achievement, accredited by a professional body where appropriate;

5.4. procedures for obtaining ethical clearance, where relevant;

5.5. requirements attaching to particular postgraduate research awards;

5.6. specific requirements for the conduct of postgraduate research in the institution, which will be conveyed to students during their induction and will enable them to understand the academic and social environment within which they will be working;

5.7. arrangements for progression through the programme;

5.8. supervision and monitoring arrangements, including written criteria for the appointment of supervisors and any external consultants involved in the supervision of students, e.g. in cases of interdisciplinary research;

5.9. arrangements concerning any study undertaken in collaboration with external agencies, including intellectual property agreements;

5.10. assessment requirements and examination procedures, including criteria for the appointment of thesis examiners/evaluations, taking account of intellectual property rights;

5.11. procedures for dealing with detected instances of plagiarism or fraud;

5.12. complaints and grievances mechanisms (with reference to the Code of Practice on Student Support and Guidance).

Institutional regulations should be communicated at least annually to:

- those registering as research students;
- staff directly involved with supervising research students;
- staff involved with assessment and progression arrangements for research students, such as Deans of graduate faculties or schools; and
- third parties such as sponsoring organizations and research councils.

to ensure that all parties are aware of their responsibilities and to encourage transparency of procedures.

C. Specific Guidance

It is recommended that formal institutional regulations be supplemented by more specific guidelines on the matters below. Individual schools or faculties may in turn supplement institutional guidelines with advice for students and staff that directly relates to the subject being studied, e.g. the conduct of the oral examination in a Performing Arts discipline such as music or drama.

6. Research Environment

An appropriate research environment is likely to include:

- Academic staff with a high level of research expertise and achievement in their subjects;
- Good quality infrastructure within which research can take place.

Research opportunities should only be offered where students can be adequately supported within an appropriate research environment. Universities should define what in their view constitutes a sufficient community of academic staff and students engaged in research (critical mass, level, resources, etc.) in each subject, to provide a successful research environment.

In evaluating this environment, the following should be considered:

6.1. the quality of supervision available, criteria for the appointment of supervisors and guidelines on the supervisory role;

6.2. the availability and adequacy of research methods training;

6.3. whether the facilities and equipment made available to research staff and students are adequate;

6.4. whether students have sufficient access to academic and pastoral support;

6.5. whether there are opportunities for effective student representation;

6.6. the extent of support available for management of research grants and projects;

6.7. the volume of research income being generated and whether this could be increased;

6.8. the amount of research output, as indicated by publications or other tangible products;

6.9. whether facilities exist for postgraduates and academic staff to present research developments, e.g. through symposia, journals, etc;

6.10. the implementation and monitoring arrangements those need to be applied where a project is undertaken in collaboration with another organization.

7. Publicity

All publicity materials associated with postgraduate research programmes should be clear, accurate and of sufficient detail to inform student choice.

In advertising postgraduate research opportunities, institutions should ensure that advertising material:

7.1. is accurate and provides information on what the institution will provide by way of resources and support, and the financial and other demands that will fall on the student;

7.2. includes relevant admissions criteria, as used by academic staff to select students.

8. Selection and Admission Procedures

8.1. Admissions procedures should be clear both to applicants and university staff and consistently applied across each institution.

8.2. Only suitably qualified and/or prepared students should be admitted to programmes of study. Where the programme involves ethical issues, there should be a clearly stated procedure for obtaining ethical clearance.

8.3. Evidence should be obtained to demonstrate the candidate's academic capabilities, normally a certificate of academic achievement from an appropriate institution.

8.4. Admission decisions should always involve the judgment of more than one member of institutional staff. All staff contributing to such decisions should possess relevant expertise, as determined by the institution.

8.5. Institutions should make provision for ensuring that admissions procedures are followed and for checking that this occurs.

8.6. It is considered good practice to interview candidates where practical and where resources allow.

8.7. where prior learning is to contribute towards the qualification for which the student is registering, there should be previously determined criteria for evaluating the extent to which such prior learning is taken into account, and at what level. Where an applicant lacks a first degree, appropriate mechanisms should be found to assess suitability and preparedness for studying towards the higher degree. This may have been achieved through work-based learning.

8.8. External references should be used to provide guidance on the extent to which the candidate's intellectual and personal skills make them suitable for following the chosen programme of study. Where relevant, this should cover ethical clearance (see 8.2 above)

8.9. Steps should be taken to ensure the applicant's language ability where study is to be undertaken in a language that is not his or her native language. Proficiency levels should be made clear to staff and applicants in advance through publication. Institutions should endeavour to provide in-house language training for applicants who need it.

8.10. Allocation of responsibilities in the admissions procedures should be clear to all concerned, in particular the balance of duties between staff in departments and those in central administration.

8.11. Confidentiality of applicants' personal details should be maintained throughout the admissions process.

8.12. Applications and admissions procedures should promote equality of opportunity.

9. Student Enrolment and Registration

9.1.	Entitlements and responsibilities of students should be defined and communicated to all students and relevant staff.

9.2.	The formal offer letter (and any electronic communications used instead) made to successful candidates should cover:

- the total fees, including additional charges such as 'bench' fees;
- a brief outline of the programme of research and study to be undertaken, together with a description of the facilities to be made available;
- the name of the student's supervisor and a description of supervisory arrangements;
- the institution's requirements in terms of attendance, progress reports, extent of contact with the supervisor, arrangements for registration; .
- the institution's code of research conduct, including ethical considerations and discipline specific requirements laid down by subject groups;
- health and safety regulations and procedures with respect to plagiarism and scientific misconduct;
- the institution's expectations of students in terms of social conduct and performance;
- guidance to students on taking responsibility for their studies;
- the nature and extent of any teaching and/or demonstrating to be undertaken by the

student during the programme of study;
- the institution's policy, practices and requirements with respect to intellectual property;
- conditions and/or requirements of the student's sponsor, where relevant;
- university policy and practice on the granting of leave for postgraduates, including arrangements for the extension and suspension of the period of study;
- the implications for the student should he/she fail to meet the requirements of the institution, i.e. what penalties will be imposed for defaulting.

A copy of the University by-laws and/or regulations governing the degree should be sent to the student with the formal offer letter.

10. Student Information and Induction

10.1.   All students registering for postgraduate research degrees should receive appropriate induction, which should include opportunities to understand the academic environment within which they will be working.

10.2.   The induction should be arranged in advance of the student's starting date and the programme communicated to the student before he or she arrives in the institution. The induction period should normally occur within a short period of enrolment (to be determined by the institution).

10.3.   The induction programme should include briefing on the following:

- the research environment of the discipline in which the student will be studying;
- the institution's registration, enrolment, appeals and complaints procedures, assessment requirements, and research degree regulations;
- challenges that students are likely to encounter and how to overcome them, including practical guidance and where to find it;
- facilities that will be available to the student during the period of study;
- relevant health and safety information;
- details of training courses available to the student/subject-specific, research methods and personal skills training, including ICT;
- welfare and pastoral information;
- arrangements for supervision;
- opportunities for meeting other research students and for sharing and understanding the student's immediate area of study;
- social opportunities.

11. Supervision

11.1.   Institutions should ensure that all staff undertaking supervisory duties have recognized subject expertise, and that their capability and qualifications are recognized by their peers in their own subject.

11.2. In addition to subject expertise, supervisors should have appropriate skills and experience to enable them to support, monitor and direct research students' work.

11.3. Where a supervisor withdraws or is unable to perform his or her supervisory duties for a period of time, alternative arrangements must be made that enable the supervisor's student(s) to receive adequate support, monitoring and direction during the period of absence.

11.4. Wherever possible, training should be made available to supervisors before they begin their role. At the same time, appropriate institutional guidance should be made available to supervisors, outlining the institution's expectations, summarizing good practice in supervision, and providing background information on the supervisor's role.

11.5. Heads of department or research groups should ensure that individual supervisors are not overloaded. In some areas, it may be advisable to set a maximum number of research students for whom one supervisor is responsible. It is advisable for research student supervision to be included as one of a number of activities that form a balanced portfolio for an individual.

11.6. Supervisors should receive additional support when addressing serious concerns of student ability or failure to complete work on schedule.

11.7 Supervisors should ensure that research students have the following opportunities:

- regular supervisor/student interaction, with a minimum number of scheduled review meetings;
- meetings with other researchers in their field, including opportunities for collaboration;
- participation in research forums relating to their subject area;
- access to advice on health and safety, ethical and other issues; .
- access to independent advice if the supervisor/student relationship breaks down.

12. Student Progress and Assessment

12.1. Research student progress should be regularly and consistently monitored and the outcomes of the monitoring process communicated to students in a timely manner.

12.2. Universities should provide supervisors and departments with a framework that defines:

- the nature and frequency of contact between supervisor and student;
- the content and format of monitoring reports, and the timing for their submission to the department or faculty;
- the processes through which students are advised that academic standards have not been, and/or are not likely to be achieved;
- guidance and counseling services available to students;

- how students may transfer between different registration categories and awards;
- how decisions on suspension or termination of a research student's registration are made and how they are communicated to students.

13. Approval of Research Projects

13.1. Care should be taken by the institution (and the student's sponsor, if appropriate), to ensure the feasibility of full-time and part-time students undertaking and successfully completing a research project.

13.2. Students should be given opportunities to discuss their proposed research project with their supervisor and, if relevant, their sponsoring organization, to help to determine that their chosen project is both suitable and feasible. In establishing the feasibility of the project, it is good practice for the student to provide a written outline of the project for discussion with his/her supervisor/sponsor.

13.3. Guidance should be available to supervisors and students, indicating how to evaluate whether a research proposal is at the right level, for example, whether the student should register for an M.Phil. or a PhD.

14. Professional Conduct of Research Students

14.1. *Ethical Practice*

- Research involving patients, care professionals, volunteers or their organs, tissue or data should be reviewed independently by an ethics committee, to ensure that the proposed research meets ethical standards.
- Approval must be sought from relevant regularly bodies, national and/or international
- Researchers should ensure the confidentiality of personal information of participants in research activities.
- Research must support national frameworks and any government concerning ethical practice.
- Research training should include guidance on research design and ethics approval.
- Researchers should take into account the active involvement of patients and consumer groups in research and in the dissemination of findings.
- Insurance for carrying out clinical trials should be put in place by institutions to cover research activities involving patients.
- Universities should provide guidance to researchers on ethics applications for human clinical research and provide facilities for such applications to be archived in the university administration.

14.2. *Research Misconduct*

Universities must take seriously any allegation of research misconduct and should have a policy on public interest disclosure.

University regulations should include clear guidance on the nature of research misconduct and how this will be dealt with, at both the investigative and disciplinary stages. There should be an appeals process that involves independent and objective review.

15. Assessment

15.1. The assessment processes for postgraduate research programmes should be transparent and clearly communicated to students, supervisors and examiners, before the student's assessment begins.

15.2. Institutions should ensure that assessment processes are operated rigorously, fairly, reliability and consistently, in respect of all students and all programmes.

15.3. Supervisors may not be appointed as the international examiner for the students they supervise.

16. Evaluation

16.1. Institutions should ensure that, as part of their quality assurance procedure, there are mechanisms to monitor the extent to which they are discharging their responsibilities for the standards of the research awards granted in their name.

16.2. Institutions should also put in place procedures to assure the quality of the education provided to enable research students to achieve the necessary standards to receive the awards for which they are studying.