

**The Association  
of Commonwealth  
Universities**

# **Course in University Administrative Practice – participants' handbook**

Accredited by the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA)



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# 1. Introduction

The challenges of expansion in higher education experienced by many developing countries in the last decade are not just confined to academics. In many cases they also relate to management and administration – yet the notion of the ‘professional administrator’ is often not well established in many regions. Although at the most senior level, positions such as the Registrar or Bursar (Director of Finance) are recognised, administrative staff at lower levels tend to be regarded more as clerical support. A lack of efficiency and innovation at this level could be seen as constraining the development of institutions more widely.

The existence of an internationally accredited course, which allows administrators to exchange experience, consider real life examples, and encourage the development of innovative solutions, will help establish the necessary professional status and enhance the contribution university administrators and their teams make to their institutions.

The ACU’s Course in University Administrative Practice was developed in collaboration with the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), the University of Liverpool, UK, and Ghana Christian University College.

## 1.1 Programme aims

This programme is designed for mid-level university administrators. It is explicitly intended to enable you to have an impact and enhance the support that your team provides to learning and teaching at your university. The clear intention of the programme is impact, rather than simple attendance and participation, so there is no certificate of attendance, but a certificate of attainment; to achieve this, you must **do** something to improve the support for learning and teaching, and provide evidence of your actions.

The programme aims are to:

- Support participants to effect change that impacts on learning and teaching in their institution
- Facilitate reflection on practice as a means for learning and for planning continuing professional development

## 1.2 Expected outcomes for participants

At the completion of the programme, including a successful project, you will be able to:

- Show how your role supports your institution’s learning and teaching mission and appropriate strategies, including quality considerations
- Use your specialist knowledge and skills to support learning and teaching within a higher education context
- Use your interpersonal and personal skills in the organisation and management of your project
- Identify your own professional development goals, directions or priorities, review your development and practice, and the relations between them, and plan your continuing professional development

If you successfully complete the course you will be awarded a Certificate in University Administrative Practice. The course is accredited by the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) in the UK. Please also see section 5 for further information on SEDA and the certification process.

Upon successful completion of the programme participants will:

### 1) Have shown how their work is informed by and reflects the following SEDA values:

- Developing understanding of how people learn
- Practising in ways that are scholarly, professional and ethical
- Working with and developing learning communities
- Valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity
- Continually reflecting on practice to develop ourselves, others and processes

### 2) Be able to meet the following core development outcomes:

- Identify their own professional development goals, directions or priorities
- Plan for their initial and/or continuing professional development
- Undertake appropriate development activities
- Review their development and practice, and the relations between them

### **The specific learning outcomes of this course:**

Additionally, within their organisational and strategic contexts, participants will be able to:

- Explain how their role supports the organisation's mission and appropriate strategies, including quality considerations
- Use their specialist knowledge and skills within the higher education context
- Use interpersonal and personal organisation and management skills
- Reflect on and plan to meet their own personal and continuing professional development needs and identify appropriate follow-up activity.

### **1.3 Entry requirements**

The course has been designed for university administrators at a mid-level in their career, perhaps at Assistant Registrar, Senior Assistant Registrar or equivalent rank. Course participants will be selected on the basis of a nomination form, which must be completed and returned to the ACU.

It is expected that you will be enthusiastic, highly capable and have the potential to contribute to the future operation of your university. To participate in the course, you must be nominated by your vice-chancellor. This latter requirement is essential as institutional support and cooperation will be needed for the completion of your project.

## 2. Course outline and structure

### 2.1 Pre-workshop

This programme is designed for mid-level university administrators. It is explicitly intended to enable you to have an impact; to enhance the support that your team provides to learning and teaching at your university. The clear intention of the programme is impact rather than simple attendance and participation, so there is no certificate of attendance (at the course workshop), but a certificate of attainment; you must **do** something to improve the support for learning and teaching and provide evidence of your actions.

Before the workshop takes place, you will be expected to complete assignments and take part in discussions via email and online.

### 2.2 The workshop

The workshop runs for one week (five working days) only. The workshop is interactive – you will explore your department's contribution to the core mission of your university, especially with respect to teaching and learning. You will have the opportunity to gain familiarity with a strengths-based approach to professional development, which you will use to develop a simple enhancement project that will be completed in your workplace after the workshop. A significant proportion of the workshop will be devoted to defining and planning this project, to ensure it supports your professional development, contributes to the effectiveness of your workplace, and aligns with workplace culture and relationships. Examples of previous projects will be shared during the workshop.

### 2.3 Post-workshop

After completing the workshop, you will have four months to complete your enhancement project. The project should be one that makes a significant improvement to the work of your department, involves others as partners in the project, and provides opportunities for personal and professional learning that can be explored with your critical friend.

You will be required to submit three monthly reports to your tutors of 500 to 700 words each, and two final reports of approximately 1,200 words each.

The tutors will provide feedback on your monthly reports and will respond to questions posted by you on the workshop's online forum.

### 2.4 Outline of course timeframes

An overview of the course with expected timeframes is shown in the table below

Phase	Month
Call for applications	February 2017
Selection (and confirmation) of participants	April 2017
<b>Pre-workshop</b> tasks assigned and completed by you	May 2017
Identification of potential critical friends by you	May 2017
The <b>workshop</b> begins	June 2017
<b>Post-workshop</b> assignments	June – August 2017
Certificates awarded within <b>four</b> months of the end of the course	December 2017

## 3. Course content and methodology

### 3.1 Course content

The course covers three broad themes: Project development and implementation, understanding and supporting teaching and learning, and professional development

#### Project development and implementation

- Quality and enhancement in higher education in context
- Planning an enhancement project: a solution-focussed approach
- Active project development
- Presentation of project plan
- Project implementation and evaluation of learning and impact

#### Understanding and supporting teaching and learning in the mission of the university

- Understanding learning
- Approaches to learning
- Approaches to teaching
- Key ideas in curriculum design
- Understanding technology enhanced learning
- Diversity and inclusion in higher education

#### Perspectives and skills for professional development

- Understanding and initiating professional learning
- Discovering and developing personal and professional capabilities through peer review groups
- Being an effective change agent
- Keeping a reflective diary
- Critical reflection

### 3.2 Methodology

The course adopts active, reflective, appreciative and solution-focussed methods in learning. These approaches are deployed appropriately in the different stages of the course.

- The workshop programme follows an **active learning** approach in which you master new ideas, information, and processes through practical individual and group activities.
- A strengths-based **appreciative ‘solution-focussed’ method** is used to enable you to review and build your professional development and to plan your enhancement project.
- Pre- and post-workshop sessions involve **experiential and practice-based learning** in which you learn through *reflecting* on your existing situation and on the progress of your enhancement project.
- You receive support from **critical friends** in your own workplace as you implement your post-workshop enhancement project. The role of the critical friends is to **provide constructive feedback and encouragement** to you as you work and reflect on your projects.

## **4. Course content and methodology**

### **4.1 Materials**

You will be provided with any materials required for the course. This includes hand-outs during the workshop and information on a range of readings/resources to structure your learning.

### **4.2 Support**

Throughout the course support will be provided. You will be encouraged to take up opportunities to discuss ideas, and share issues and advice with your peer group and the tutor(s).

### **4.3 Tutors**

A brief introduction to the tutors will be provided prior to the workshop. Tutors will give feedback on your monthly reports and answer questions posted on the online forum. Where necessary tutors will respond personally to messages passed on to them through the ACU office. You should discuss matters with your critical friends in the first instance and/or try the online forum.

### **4.4 Online forum**

For the project phase of the course an online forum will be set up so that you have the opportunity to continue discussions with your colleagues and tutors. It is one way to gain support, to offer support to others, and access further resources. You are encouraged to contribute to the forum at least twice per month during the project phase. The forum will use a closed group on one of the available online platforms. The decision on which platform to use will be made with the group during the workshop, and you will have the opportunity to enrol on the forum during the workshop.

### **4.5 Critical friend**

The critical friend should be a colleague (peer or senior) within your organisation, but not necessarily in the same department, and be someone who has some knowledge and skills in the area of your project

The critical friend should be able to:

- Provide critical feedback on the nature of the project itself, the progress you are making with the project, the impact of the project on the institution, and your learning
- Provide advice on both the practical and organisational (cultural) aspects of the project
- Encourage you to continue your project

The role of the critical friend is to:

- Encourage you to pursue and complete your project
- Provide critical and constructive oral feedback on your project
- Support you in your learning processes
- Help you to identify and articulate your learning

Time commitment – the critical friend must:

- Meet with you for at least three 30 minute sessions during the three-month project period
- Review discuss, and comment upon your final report, paying particular attention to your learning throughout the project process

An outline of the role is available in Appendix 1 of this handbook

## 5. Assessment and Certification

### 5.1. Assessment

The programme is accredited by [Staff and Educational Development Association](#) (SEDA). This means that all the assessment is aligned to the SEDA values and to the relevant outcomes for the award. This section shows how you will develop and demonstrate SEDA's values, core development and specialist outcomes. The values and core development outcomes underpin all programmes accredited by SEDA, whereas the specialist outcomes depend on the nature of the programme. The specialisation for this programme is 'Developing Professional Practice'.

#### Values

SEDA is a values-driven organisation, committed to educational development, and underpinned by the following values:

- Developing understanding of how people learn
- Practising in ways that are scholarly, professional and ethical
- Working with and developing learning communities
- Valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity
- Continually reflecting on practice to develop ourselves, others and processes.

The table below shows which parts of the programme allow you to develop and demonstrate the values:

<b>SEDA values</b>	<b>Where do you develop and demonstrate this value?</b>
<b>Developing understanding of how people learn</b>	<b>Sessions supporting development:</b> Approaches to learning; Approaches to teaching; Key ideas in curriculum design; Assessment and feedback; Technology enhanced learning  <b>Demonstrated in:</b> project implementation
<b>Practising in ways that are scholarly, professional and ethical</b>	<b>Sessions supporting development:</b> Role of context; Being an effective change agent; Giving a good presentation; Project development  <b>Demonstrated in:</b> project implementation
<b>Working with and developing learning communities</b>	<b>Sessions supporting development:</b> Role of context; Being an effective change agent; Assessment and feedback; Project development  <b>Demonstrated in:</b> project implementation
<b>Valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity</b>	<b>Sessions supporting development:</b> Diversity/Inclusion: what does this mean in your settings?  <b>Demonstrated in:</b> project implementation
<b>Continually reflecting on practice to develop ourselves, others and processes</b>	<b>Sessions supporting development:</b> My learning journey; Self-reflection-key strengths/capacities; Diversity/Inclusion; Daily reflection sessions; Critical reflection  <b>Demonstrated in:</b> project implementation and reflective reports



## Core development outcomes

The table below shows how the assessment criteria align with SEDA's core development outcomes:

Core development outcomes	Where do you develop and demonstrate this core development outcome?
Identify professional development goals, directions or priorities	Pre-work tasks  <b>Sessions supporting development:</b> Planning an enhancement project: Project development; My learning journey – key strengths/capacities; Daily reflection sessions  <b>Demonstrated in:</b> project implementation and reflective report
Plan for their initial and/or continuing professional development	<b>Sessions supporting development:</b> Planning an enhancement project: Project development; My learning journey – key strengths/capacities; Daily reflection sessions  <b>Demonstrated in:</b> project implementation and reflective report
Undertake appropriate development activities	<b>Sessions supporting development:</b> Relevant timetabled sessions in taught element of programme  <b>Demonstrated in:</b> project implementation and reflective reports
Review their development and practice, and the relations between them	<b>Sessions supporting development:</b> Pre-work tasks; Critical reflection; My learning journey; Being and effective change agent; Project development In addition to these timetabled sessions, there are many opportunities for each participant to engage in group or one-to-one discussions for guidance and reflection.  The scheduled formative reports on project and personal development are further opportunities for review.  The group's online network also allows for sharing, questions and discussion to support development. The tutors are available through the online platform or email, to support individual's personal and professional development  <b>Demonstrated in:</b> project implementation and reflective reports

## Specialist outcomes for developing professional practice:

SEDA offers a number of awards related to different specialisations. Your programme's specialisation is **developing professional practice**. The table below shows how the assessment criteria aligns with SEDA specialist outcomes:

Specialist outcomes	Where do you develop and demonstrate this specialist outcome?
Explain how their role supports the organisation's mission and appropriate strategies, including quality considerations	<b>Pre-workshop:</b> Prior to joining the programme participants will be asked to submit some basic information so that we have an understanding of their university – and their department's role in the university, <i>before</i> you arrive.  In addition, as part of project development an early task involves identifying services and processes operated by you or your department that successfully support teaching and learning.  <b>Sessions supporting development:</b> Quality in context: East African quality guidelines; role of context; project development  <b>Demonstrated in:</b> project implementation; formative reporting on project progress and the final project report
Use their specialist knowledge and skills	<b>Sessions supporting development:</b> Technology enhanced learning; project development

<b>within the higher education context</b>	<b><i>Demonstrated in:</i> project implementation; formative reporting on project progress, and the final project report</b>
<b>Use interpersonal and personal organisation and management skills</b>	<b><i>Sessions supporting development:</i> Planning an enhancement project; being an effective change agent; giving a good presentation; project development</b>  <b><i>Demonstrated in:</i> project implementation; final project and reflective reports</b>
<b>Reflect on and plan to meet personal and continuing professional development needs, and identify appropriate follow-up activity</b>	<b><i>Sessions supporting development:</i> Project development; my learning journey; daily reflection sessions; critical reflection</b>  <b><i>Demonstrated in:</i> project implementation; final reflective reports and programme evaluation</b>

## Assessment procedure

1. You must submit your final report by the stated deadline and in the form required.
2. Your work will be assessed by the course tutors (the assessors).
3. Should the assessors decide that your work is not of a sufficient standard, they will give you one opportunity to resubmit, by a specific deadline, with feedback on what is required in the resubmission.
4. If you disagree with the assessors' decision on the first or second submission, you can make an appeal to them with evidence of any mitigating circumstances you wish to have considered. They will then review your decision. Decisions can only be changed on procedural, rather than academic grounds. If you have concerns about the procedures, then you can refer these concerns to the ACU's Deputy Secretary General.
5. A sample of the reports, along with the assessors' decisions and comments, will be sent to the ACU external examiner for review. Resubmissions will be sent to the external examiner.
6. The Assessment Board, including the assessors, the Deputy Secretary General and the external examiner, will then meet to agree a final decision. The outcome can be either a pass or a fail. The decision of the Assessment Board is final.
7. You will be notified of the decision, as well as provided with detailed feedback on your work, by the assessors.
8. The external examiner will report in writing to the Deputy Secretary General on the standard of work and on the assessment process. You may not approach the external examiner directly; their role is to provide quality assurance for the course.

## Assessment requirements

There are four summative assessment requirements in order to complete the course:

### 1. Presentation of your project to your peers

The presentation takes place during the workshop. This is a brief presentation outlining your ideas for your project. It needs to cover: the project's aims, the actions you will take, the difference you think the project will make, and the type of evidence you might collect.

### 2. Meet with a critical friend and submit brief monthly summaries of your progress and meetings with your critical friend

You are required to meet with your critical friend at least three times. The last occasion should be a progress review, which you need to write up and get your critical friend to sign off. You are required to report your progress to the tutors on a monthly basis, including a summary of the interim meetings with

your critical friend. These reports are not marked, but you will receive feedback. It is expected that you will report on: progress being made, challenges faced, plans to address these challenges, changes to your original plans, key learning for you both about managing projects in general, and your personal learning. **Between 500 and 700 words for each report.**

### **3. Report on the project**

Your report on your project describes progress on actions taken, impact of project and evidence. This is descriptive and includes critical analysis. The descriptive part needs to be sufficient to allow any reader who has no prior knowledge of your project to understand what you did and the context within which you work. Make sure you leave space for critical analysis, to explain what helped your project work (or not), how do you explain success (or not), what were the key factors and why were these key factors important in this case. **Approximately 1200 words.**

### **4. Reflective report on your learning (see Appendix 2 for report template)**

Your reflective report is a summary of what *you* learnt. It should cover your professional development, for example: ways of running a project, supporting learning and teaching in your setting, and new understandings about learning and teaching. It should also include matters that are more personal to you, for example: changes in confidence, ways of working with your colleagues, and changes to how you see your role. Plus, you need to include a short section on your ideas/plans for your continued professional development. **Approximately 1200 words.**

These requirements will be fully outlined in the workshop sessions.

## **What constitutes evidence?**

The evidence that you submit as part of your post-workshop assignments does not necessarily have to be all text based. It may include pictures, diagrams, audio and/or video recordings, etc. Different media are welcomed, but please ensure that the evidence supplied clearly meets the requirements and provides examples of your practice.

Within submissions, where evidence/data supplied by individuals is used, it should be anonymised. This is particularly important if you plan to make your assignment public in anyway or were intending to use the information for alternative uses/applications. For example, you may wish/need to use your portfolio in its entirety or parts of it in the future for further continuing professional development or career opportunities. However, as a minimum for this course, you should consider that assessment materials will be viewed by your tutor, a second marker and, possibly, the external examiner.

## **Role of the external examiner**

It is important that the assessment processes used within this course follow standard processes employed in comparable higher education provision e.g. marking against the stated learning outcomes, feedback that supports learning, and moderation of marking. In addition, the administrative processes that support the academic undertakings must be accessible and efficient. In order to ensure this is the case, the ACU has appointed an external examiner specifically to review assessments within this course.

## **5.2. Expectations of you**

### **Confidentiality**

It is expected that you will keep any comments and discussion involving others confidential. You will be encouraged to share openly and to support the work of others. Expectations of you, the other participants, and the tutors will be discussed on the first day of the workshop.

### **How many hours a week?**

It is anticipated that completing the project may take up to 10 hours per week. This is our expected maximum and not every week will take the same amount of time. However, projects do vary and so will the time involved. As shown above, you are expected to contribute to the online forum at least twice per month, submit monthly reports to your tutors, and meet with your critical friend once per month.

### **5.3. Certification**

This course is accredited by SEDA through its Professional Development Framework (PDF). SEDA-PDF provides recognition for higher education institutions and related organisations, accreditation for their professional development programmes, and recognition for individuals who complete those programmes.

It uses a range of named awards to accredit different types of professional development. The ACU Course in University Administrative Practice uses the Developing Professional Practice named award. All named awards share a common set of values and core development outcomes, and each named award has its own set of specialist outcomes as described in Section 1 above.

Following confirmation that you have successfully completed the course, you will receive a Certificate in University Administrative Practice from the ACU, as well as a certificate from SEDA confirming the Developing Professional Practice award.

## Appendix 1 Advice for critical friends

### Role of the critical friend

Thank you for agreeing to act as a critical friend to support your colleague's enhancement project. They are designing and carrying out a project that will improve the support that they or their team provides to some aspect of the learning and teaching work of your institution. This section is specifically written for you and overlaps with other information in the handbook. No doubt many of the ideas will be familiar to you, but some may be new e.g. the importance of SEDA, its values and accreditation of the programme.

### Critical friends

As a critical friend your role is to provide support and encouragement to your colleague. This support may include information and insight into the workings of your organisation – it may also include giving feedback, based on your experience and knowledge. The feedback could come in the form of suggestions for your colleague to consider, rather than directions. It is important to create an atmosphere where your colleague can openly discuss both the challenges they are facing and their successes with you. These suggestions aim to cover what is meant by 'critical'.

Encouragement is the straightforward personal reinforcement that helps your colleague to persist. Think of it as the types of actions that a friend would take. Here you are a 'friend' of the project! The project will be important to your institution; how can you help?

We hope that gives a sense of what we mean by 'critical friend.' The information given to programme participants that is in the handbook is copied below. You will also find more useful detail on the programme and the expectations for the projects in the handbook; familiarity with this will help you in your role as a critical friend.

### SEDA

The programme has been accredited by SEDA, a UK-based association that supports and leads learning and teaching in higher education in the UK and internationally: 'SEDA is seen by many as the shaper of thought and initiator of action in staff and educational development, not only in the UK but in the international domain also'. This is very important in terms of international recognition and credibility that it confers on the programme and those who successfully complete the programme.

SEDA has a set of carefully thought through values that underpin all of their work and the programmes that they accredit. Part of what we ask of you to do is become familiar with SEDA and its values. In your discussions with your colleague you can refer to the values, to ensure that the project and your colleague's learning are in accord with the values.

SEDA is a values-driven organisation, committed to educational development, and underpinned by the following values:

- Developing understanding of how people learn
- Practising in ways that are scholarly, professional and ethical
- Working with and developing learning communities
- Valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity
- Continually reflecting on practice to develop ourselves, others and processes.

Take a look at the [SEDA website](#) for more information.

### Finally

Once again thank you for agreeing to be a critical friend of your colleague and of their project. It is a vital part of the support provided to the participants on the programme. We hope that your input will help them to complete a project that will make a real difference in your institution. We hope your colleague will learn a great deal from the process. We also hope you will learn something from your involvement and enjoy the process.

Please contact the programme facilitators at any time if you have any questions.

Thank you

Ian and Brian

**Dr Brian K. Jennings FHEA, CQP-MCQI**

Institutional Quality Coordinator,  
Ghana Christian University College,  
PO Box AF919, Adenta, Accra, Ghana

[BrianKJennings@gmail.com](mailto:BrianKJennings@gmail.com) | +233 543567100

**Dr Ian Willis PFHEA**

Lead on Internationalisation Research for the online EdD programme  
Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Liverpool  
126 Mount Pleasant  
Liverpool  
L69 3GW  
UK

[Educational Development Blog](#) | [Educational Development Webpage](#)  
[ian.willis@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:ian.willis@liverpool.ac.uk) | 0151 794 2490

**From the handbook**

The critical friend should be a colleague (peer or senior) within your organisation, but not necessarily in the same department, and also someone who has some knowledge and skills in the area of your project

The critical friend should be able to:

- Provide critical feedback on the nature of the project itself, the progress you are making with the project, the impact of your project on the institution, and your learning from the project
- Provide advice on both the practical and organisational (cultural) aspects of the project
- Encourage you to continue your project

The role of the critical friend is to:

- Encourage you to pursue and complete your project
- Provide critical and constructive oral feedback on your project
- Support you in your learning processes
- Help you to identify and articulate your learning

Time commitment – the critical friend must:

- Meet with you for at least three 30 minute sessions during the three-month project period
- Review, discuss, and comment upon your final report, paying particular attention to your learning through the project process

## Appendix 2 Reflective report template

### Further evidence of development of professional learning and practice

1) Review your 'Journey to the Future' Learning Map by completing the chart below.

<b>Future Perfect</b>	Briefly describe your goal for your career for the next five years and say why it is important:	
<b>Next steps</b>	What small further actions towards your future perfect does your successful project allow you to take?	
<b>Decisive Present</b>	On a scale of 1 to 10, indicate the contribution your project has made towards your future perfect and comment on what makes it that high	
	Rating out of 10:  Contribution:	
<b>Project</b>	Summarise the learning from your project and comment on how it contribute to the realisation of your future perfect	
	<b>Learning</b>	<b>Contribution</b>
<b>Enabling past</b>	Summarise the main things you have already learnt from your past achievements that will contribute to the realisation of your future perfect.	

2) Review your chart and answer the following questions:

- How did my project build on the things I had learnt already?
- How did my project enhance my existing learning?
- What new things did I learn?
- What will this learning contribute to my future development?
- What are my next steps?

3) Discuss your chart and your answers with your critical friend – give a summary of your discussion (this does not need to be signed by your critical friend):

Name of Participant:

Date:

Please submit this form to Evelina Vardanyan ([Evelina.Vardanyan@acu.ac.uk](mailto:Evelina.Vardanyan@acu.ac.uk))



## **The Association of Commonwealth Universities**

Woburn House  
20-24 Tavistock Square  
London WC1H 9HF  
United Kingdom  
Tel: +44 (0) 207 380 6700  
Fax: +44 (0) 207 387 2655  
[www.acu.ac.uk](http://www.acu.ac.uk)