GENERAL INFORMATION

FOR PROSPECTIVE PART-TIME TUTORS

(A)   GENERAL INFORMATION

1.   Introduction

The Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) was first established as the Open Learning Institute (OLI) of Hong Kong in 1989 in recognition of the need for greater provision of local tertiary education places.   It acquired university status in 1997. OUHK is a dedicated provider of higher education principally through open access and flexible learning.   Admission to the OUHK is open to anyone in Hong Kong over the age of 17.   The OUHK is unique among Hong Kong tertiary institutions in that it has no entry requirements for most of its first degree distance learning programmes.   Exit standards, however, are rigorous.

The OUHK academic units - School of Arts and Social Sciences, Lee Shau Kee School of Business and Administration, School of Education and Languages, School of Science and Technology, and Li Ka Shing Institute of Professional and Continuing Education - offer a range of programmes from certificate, diploma and higher diploma, associate degree through degree and honours degree, to post-graduate studies.

OUHK"s main campus is located at 30 Good Shepherd Street, Homantin, Kowloon. A new learning centre, Kwai Hing Learning Centre (KHLC) at Kowloon Commerce Centre, Tower 2, Kwai Chung, N.T., has been opened since September 2013.   In early 2014, a new college (named as Jubilee College) in Chung Hau Street, Homantin will be opened for use to cope with the growing needs of higher education.

2.   OUHK's key values

In providing higher education, the University, as a self-financing, non-profit-making organization:

a.   believes that higher education should be available to all those aspiring to it, regardless of previous qualification, gender, or race;

b.   recognizes the importance of sustainable and affordable high–quality programmes and courses across disciplines and at a variety of levels to meet the needs of lifelong learners;

c.   commits itself to excellence in teaching, scholarship, research and public service;

d.   effectively uses information and communication technologies to support learning;

e.   appreciates the significance of adjusting its learning processes and procedures to meet the different needs of learners.

3.   Tutor's Roles & Duties

There is often confusion about what distance education involves.   'Correspondence teaching' has become associated with courses in which the sole source of teaching is the course material and work submitted by students is marked only for assessment purposes.   In distance education it is recognised, however, that course material alone cannot meet all the needs of individual students. In fact, there is a need to supplement it by providing each student with some form of individual tuition.

At OUHK this is accomplished through the formation of tutorial groups and allocation of a Tutor to each group of students.   The Tutor offers each of his/her students personal help through face-to-

face sessions, telephone/online consultation, and by written comments on submitted work. With the Tutor's advice and guidance, a student should be able to overcome personal difficulties both with the course content and with his/her methods of learning as an independent student.

It is essential for anyone considering working as a Tutor for OUHK to appreciate the special nature of the work.   Even those experienced in teaching similar course content at a conventional, face-to-face institution find that they need to develop different communication skills in order to become a successful Tutor in distance education.   A Tutor at OUHK must be willing therefore to listen to and consider advice from the University's staff on how best to carry out his/her duties.

a.   **Face-to-face Sessions**
The face-to-face sessions may take several forms: regular tutorials, day schools, surgeries or laboratory sessions.

i)   <u>Tutorials:</u>   Tutorials, the most common type of face-to-face meeting at the OUHK, are designed to offer regular support to learners. Normally, about 30-40 learners are allocated to one tutorial group, which meets for two-hour periods at regular intervals throughout the course.

ii)   <u>Surgeries:</u>   Surgeries provide learners with opportunities for direct individual face-to-face consultation. Learners are invited to come to sessions arranged by the OUHK, usually in the evenings or at weekends, to meet their course tutors and discuss any problems they may be having in relation to the study units and assignments. During these sessions one or more tutors will be available to see students on a first-come-first-served basis. This means that learners may not meet their own tutor during these sessions. Tutors normally respond individually to a student but in some cases the answers may be openly shared and discussed with other students.

iii)   <u>Practical work:</u>   Practical work is essential in some OUHK courses (for example science and technology programmes). This type of face-to-face session usually requires students to come into the laboratories at specified centres to carry out experiments and submit experiment reports. These sessions (which usually take place at weekends) may last two to three hours or a day and are scheduled in the semester calendar. The selection and sequencing of practical work is usually done by the Course Coordinator who will also prepare and send out laboratory manuals, worksheets or other necessary resources. Technicians are available to see that equipment is ready before the practical work session starts and also to help during the session.

iv)   <u>Workshops:</u>   This type of face-to-face session is mainly used in some courses in the School of Education and Languages programmes. Workshops aim to provide opportunities for learners to practise some classroom skills, to carry out guided work on lesson planning and analysis, and to develop teaching resources. These are two-hour sessions.

v)   <u>Day schools:</u>   Day schools are designed to provide learners with opportunities for engaging in a variety of learning activities that cannot normally be covered in tutorials. Usually, they differ from tutorials in that they:
- may require students to attend for longer periods, usually half a day or a full day;
- may be presented in a more formal 'lecture' format; and
- are designed to extend a learner's knowledge beyond the core content of the subject matter.

b.   **Telephone/Online Consultation**

A Tutor is expected to initiate contacts and be accessible to students by telephone/online consultation as specified for the course. Tutors are expected to allocate 18 hours per month for such contacts.

A Tutor is required to adhere to the University's policy on using email as the primary means of written communications.

All OUHK courses are supported by an online delivery system, the Online Learning Environment (OLE). Different courses may have different online components, but all courses have key online components like 'Course News,' 'Course Schedules.' 'Discussion Board', 'Email' and 'Course Guide'. Most courses (except some from Open University, UK) also have online study units.

c.   **eLearning**

It is one of The Open University of Hong Kong's missions to offer flexible and high-quality e-learning courses and programmes. E-learning is a mode that makes use of the latest technologies to facilitate teaching and learning. The Tutors for e-learning courses are conducting interactive teaching activities, for example, Tutors employ video conferencing software to deliver tutorials. Tutors are also required to participate in online discussion, receive questions from students and provide prompt feedback to them.

Through the Online Learning Environment (OLE), students can study the course materials, view video-taped lectures, and complete interactive learning activities. These activities encourage the formation of learning communities which enable the effective sharing of knowledge and enhance the learning experience.

d.   **Assignment Grading**

The major part of a Tutor's work will be grading assignments, the marks for which form a substantial percentage of the final grade for the course. However, it must be appreciated by the Tutor that the assignments are also to be used as an important teaching tool. Any criticism of a student's work must be carefully phrased to avoid destroying the student's confidence and enthusiasm for his/her studies. Tutors will need to familiarize themselves fully with all of the components of the course in order to provide total guidance through their written comments which try to help students overcome any problems or misunderstandings they face with the course content. While comprehensive marking schemes are provided to Tutors, the provision of written comments is something that a Tutor must consider carefully as it will be specific to each student. Making useful teaching comments on a script will be the most difficult part of a Tutor's work. For courses that are delivered using the online environment, Tutors are expected to mark and give comments on the assignments via Internet.

Each Tutor's work especially on assignments will be monitored by the Course Coordinator and the External Examiner to ensure that both the assessment and the written comments are of the required standard. Tutors will be given feedback on various aspects of their teaching.

e.   **Other Duties**

In addition to the teaching of course content there are other important contributions to be made by the Tutor. Independent learners can often feel isolated from an institution which communicates via print or electronic materials. Therefore, an OUHK Tutor provides the

'human face' of the institution to its students, and reassures them about problems in areas not directly related to course content, e.g. study methods. In this and the other types of work, the Tutor will be able to call on the University's full-time staff to assist with or, where necessary, take over a student's problem.

A further role of the Tutor is in helping with the development of the course. For example, where courses are imported, there is always a danger that the content is culturally inappropriate. In such cases, OUHK reviews courses with this in mind and provides additional material as necessary, and the Tutor should feel free to contribute to this process on the basis of his/her local experience.

More generally, Tutors are seen as a major source of advice on how course content and presentation can be improved. Tutors are expected to work with the Course Coordinator to identify any problems with the course and to find solutions. It is hoped that Tutors will feel part of the academic team and as such contribute to the short and long-term planning of programmes.

While most of the OUHK courses are offered in the distance learning mode, some courses are offered in the face-to-face taught mode. Normally, a Tutor will conduct face-to-face teaching with a group of students for 2 hours on a weekly basis. The total teaching hours are usually around 45 hours per semester. In addition, the Tutor will be required to mark assignments and provide guidance and support to students through the telephone, Internet or other communication channels.

A Tutor may be assigned to take up special duties, e.g. *teaching practice supervision*. In some courses offered by the School of Education and Languages, a Tutor may be appointed to take up the role of a '*Teaching Practice Supervisor*' who will be required to carry out "practicum visits" to assess students" teaching performance through classroom observation, and to provide guidance on their teaching. The teaching practice supervisor will also be required to conduct day schools on the relevant courses.

4. Academic Calendar

Under the aligned academic calendar with effect from September 2015, the academic year will start with the Autumn term in early September and the Spring term in late January followed by a Summer Break* before the next academic year starts. (*Summer break not applicable to some courses of Schools and most programmes offered by Division of Nursing and Health Studies)

5. Hours of Work

A Tutor's weekly loading varies according to the length, level and characteristics of each course, the assignment schedule and, in particular, the number of students and tutorial groups assigned to him/her. A Tutor's personal factors will have impact on his/her weekly workload as well. In general, a Tutor's weekly loading will not reach or exceed 18 hours throughout a course presentation.

6. Remuneration

An attractive remuneration package will be offered.

7.   **Tutor Training & Development**

It is the University's policy to provide necessary training opportunities to Tutors for effective performance of their jobs.   A Tutor Orientation and Training (TOT) Course, which comprises self-study course materials and about 3-4 face-to-face sessions, is offered to all new Tutors. The first session is usually scheduled for the second last Saturday before the term starts.   Full attendance at Tutor training sessions is mandatory and a Certificate of Completion will be awarded upon successful completion of a Computer Marked Assignment.

In addition, all new Tutors are also required to attend an online course on Online Teaching Skills and Strategies (OTSS) to equip them with the necessary online delivery skills. The course is held for 4 weeks usually from 2nd/3rd week of the term.   Other training opportunities, e.g. Professional Development Seminars, will also be arranged for Tutors to enhance their knowledge and skills in open and distance education.