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Review of CHED policies, standards, and guidelines (PSGs) pre- and post-K to 12 reforms

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Review of CHED Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSGs) Pre- and Post-K to 12 Reforms

Gerardo L. Largoza and Clarence Gabriel Fernandez

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Review of CHED Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSGs)
Pre- and Post-K to12 Reforms

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Abstract

In the decade from 2012 to 2021, Philippine higher education experienced three major reforms: the adoption of an outcomes-based typology for programs and institutions, the establishment of the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) setting competency standards, pathways, and equivalencies, and of course K to 12 legislation, which added two years to the country's basic education cycle.

Have these resulted in improvements to the minimum standards embodied in CHED Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSGs) formulated by independent Technical Panels? This study addresses the issue by taking current PSGs from the ten most-subscribed programs and examining the quality of their learning outcomes and performance indicators, using criteria shared by many global quality assurance bodies. It then compares curriculum designs (total credits, proportion of general education and professional courses, internships) to benchmarks from Australia, the EU and ASEAN. Lastly it consolidates the findings from key informant interviews with six Technical Panel chairs and identifies good practices that may be shared as well as forms of CHED support most urgently needed.

The emergent picture is that of overall improvement in the adoption of outcomes-based principles in designing curricula, but with a high degree of heterogeneity both within and across programs. Quality practices such as the use of verbs from Bloom's Taxonomy, and the preference for more so-called authentic assessment are evident in every set of PSGs, but could still be applied much more consistently. On curriculum design (total credits plus distribution of course types), the uniform finding is that general education courses were reduced, but promptly replaced by professional courses, resulting in overall academic loads that are significantly higher than benchmarks from Australia, the EU and ASEAN. Finally, while a few Technical Panels have been able to produce much improved, even exemplary sets of PSGs, strategic clarity and organizational support from CHED are urgently needed for the quality assurance cycle to function effectively.

Keywords: CHED Policies, Standards and Guidelines; Higher Education Technical Panels; Outcomes-Based Education

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Review of CHED Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSGs) Pre- and Post-K to 12 Reforms

Gerardo L. Largoza* and Clarence Gabriel Fernandez

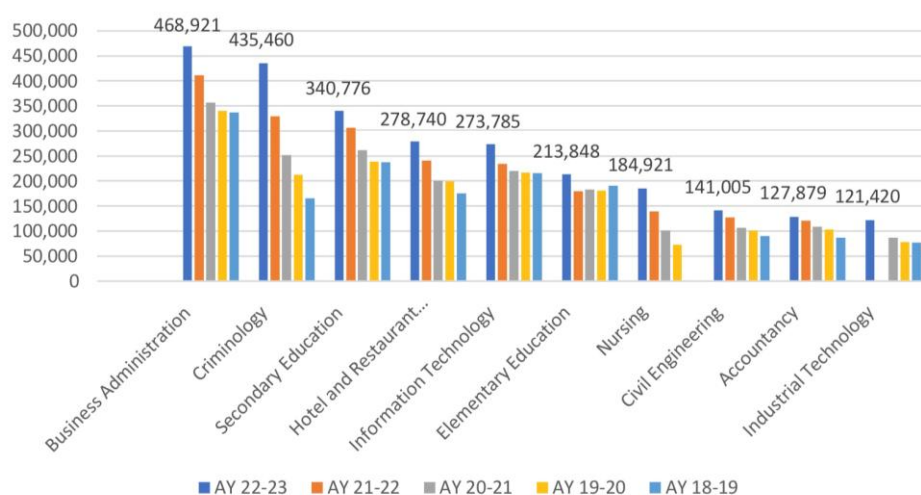
1. Introduction

In the decade from 2012 to 2021, Philippine higher education experienced three major reforms. In 2012, CHED issued Memorandum Order 46, which institutionalized Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) as a pedagogical framework. That same year, President Aquino issued Executive Order 83 establishing the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF). This was to harmonize competencies from basic, higher, and vocational education, raise quality and make Philippine qualifications internationally comparable, if not mutually recognizable. Work on the PQF itself took six years to complete and was ultimately resolved as Republic Act 10968 in 2018.

And then of course there was K-12 legislation, which began as RA 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. The first cohort of senior high school graduates entered university in 2018 and give or take a few semesters because of the pandemic, graduated and entered the workforce in 2022.

How much improvement has there been to higher education quality, reckoned by the minimum standards contained in CHED Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSGs), as formulated by independent Technical Panels? This study addresses the issue in three parts. First, by taking CHED PSGs from the ten most-subscribed undergraduate programs (see Fig. 1) and by examining the quality of the revised outcomes and performance indicators following criteria widely used by QA bodies. In particular, the consistency with which verbs from Bloom's Taxonomy are selected (because they facilitate direct measurement of outcomes), and the preference for so-called "authentic" forms of assessment, which permit students more opportunities to exhibit competencies.

Figure 1. Ten most-subscribed undergraduate programs, AY18-19 to AY22-23



Source: CHED Office of Planning, Research, and Knowledge Management (OPRKM)

Second, by focusing on curriculum design — total required units, then distribution of course types (general education, professional, electives, internship). An unpublished parallel study

commissioned by USAID limited its analysis to changes in the total number of required units, pre- and post-K12. It confirmed predicted reductions in GE units in nearly all 10 programs, but found a pattern of replacement with professional courses, preserving, if not increasing minimum required units. This study provides an international context to this discussion of academic workload by comparing curriculum dimensions against benchmarks from Australia, the EU, and ASEAN.

As part of a mid-project redirect, this study concludes by looking into the workings of CHED Technical Panels, via key informant interviews, to document improvements to their workflows, identify good practices, as well as forms of support needed to realize their expanded functions listed in CHED Administrative Order No. 3 series of 2019.

2. Review of CHED PSGs Post-K12 — Quality of Outcomes and Assessments

A forthcoming report from USAID on the same research question tracks changes in PSGs by focusing on curriculum structure: total units, changes to number of general education and internship units.

This section assesses the quality of post-K12 Program Learning Outcomes themselves, and their corresponding Performance Indicators. In the PSGs, the technical panels list outcomes under different classifications. For instance, a set of outcomes specific to the broader discipline (e.g., management), another specific to the actual program (e.g., Accountancy), and one specific to an institution's horizontal typology (e.g., College, University). These outcomes are usually (though not always) matched to corresponding sample performance indicators, examples of ways to assess if the outcomes have been achieved. Here, the focus is on the set of outcomes specific to the actual program, plus their corresponding indicators.

In order to systematically assess the outcomes, a simple criterion is adopted; the verbs used in the formulation of outcomes must be part of the listed verbs within Bloom's Taxonomy, regardless of version (e.g., [University of Arkansas](#), 2024). Using Bloom's verbs ensures that program outcomes are actionable, assessable, and measurable. Furthermore, use of Bloom's verbs ensures outcomes explicitly state what students are expected to do, and frames outcomes as demonstrable competencies, rather than broad aspirational goals. Well-defined outcomes also assist instructors and education regulators throughout the design process, from the creation of course outcomes down to learning activities and assessments.

To assess performance indicators, on the other hand, a stricter set of criteria is used. For an indicator to be considered exemplary, all the following criteria must be satisfied:

- (1) The assessment is "authentic";
- (2) It favors groupwork while providing space for individual evaluation;
- (3) The assessment favors repeated revision; and
- (4) That the assessment integrates knowledge, skills, and attitudes

For an assessment to be authentic, it must mimic the outputs of real-world professionals; in the best instances, the assessment itself would have market value outside class. For one studying Hospitality Management, for instance, an example of authentic assessment would be if the student was required to stage a function using the full range of food preparation techniques, as opposed to an exam that requires them to list food preparation techniques. Group-based

assessments, on the other hand, support the development of interpersonal soft skills, purposive communication, teamwork, negotiation and conflict management, cultural competency, etc. This matters all the more as “work effectively with others” is a commonly listed outcome among PSGs, and at times, an entry requirement for jobs. It also matters that the assessments are designed in a way that the instructor is able to provide regular and customized feedback to the student, and that students are able to work on such feedback before they are evaluated. This may also support a learning-by-doing process, allowing students to learn from their mistakes. This is what spells the difference in learning experience between a thesis and a series of regular exams. Lastly, an assessment is integrative if it explicitly tests students based on competencies they ought to have achieved — i.e., a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Table 1. Assessment of program outcomes based on use of listed Bloom’s verbs

Program	Ratio of Exemplary Outcomes	Percentage of Exemplary Outcomes
Business Administration	3/5	60.0%
Criminology	3/6	50.0%
Secondary Education	31/46	67.4%
Hospitality Management	5/6	83.3%
Information Technology	8/10	80.0%
Elementary Education	2/6	33.3%
Nursing	9/14	64.3%
Civil Engineering	10/13	76.9%
Accountancy	2/5	40.0%
Industrial Technology	6/8	75.0%

Source: Authors’ construction

PSGs such as those of Hospitality Management and Information Technology feature a high percentage of Bloom’s-aligned outcomes; they are exemplars of what program outcomes should sound like. Consider the following outcome for Hospitality Management: “*Plan and implement a risk management program to provide a safe and secure workplace*” (CHED Memorandum Order 62, s. 2017, Section 6.5.5). Not only does this specific outcome use the Bloom’s verbs plan and implement, which is found among the higher-order complex skills, it also explicitly states a demonstrable competency. It paints a very clear picture to students of what is expected, gives ideas to instructors about what course assessments should contribute toward, and more importantly, signals to prospective employers what the successful graduate should be able to do.

Based on current formulations, the same may not be true for outcomes such as: “*Manifest skills in communication, higher order thinking and use of tools and technology to accelerate learning and teaching*” (CHED Memorandum Order 74, s. 2017, Section 6.3[d]) . Here is where one might see that consistent selection of verbs from Bloom’s Taxonomy is not gratuitous. *Manifest* is not a verb on the list; possibly because it is vague and passive. Although one can discern what the program designers seek, the formulation itself does not clearly describe something

actionable or measurable. It is unclear how communication skills and higher-order thinking are demonstrated or *manifested*, how they can be measured and assessed. It comes down to verb choice, which is why many OBE practitioners urge consistency in selection from the available list.

One further consequence to deviating from Bloom's verbs is that the resulting performance indicators tend feature a mix of clear and actionable outputs (a and b), but also less-defined ones (c and d):

- (a) *Demonstrate* skills in creative and critical thinking, logical reasoning, problem solving, and decision making in various classroom situations
- (b) *Create* learning experiences that develop the learners' higher order thinking skills
- (c) Provide opportunities that develop the learners' communication skills
- (d) Use tools and technology to enhance learning and teaching

Source: (CHED Memorandum Order 74, s. 2017, Section 7 [d])

Again, there is no doubt about what competencies the Technical Panels seek. But this consensus is less reliably transmitted to frontline instructors and regulators as a result of eschewing the clearer verbs from Bloom's Taxonomy.

Even PSGs that show a promising percentage of exemplary outcomes are not free from weaker examples. In Civil Engineering, 10 of 13 outcomes (76.9%) use Bloom's verbs, but also contain weaker formulations: "*Know contemporary issues*", and "*Function in multidisciplinary and multicultural teams*" (CHED Memorandum Order 92, s. 2017, Section 6.2 [d, j]).

Secondary Education, which has a total of 46 outcomes in its PSG, also combines exemplary and weaker formulations. The outcome for a mathematics education major, "*Demonstrate proficiency in problem-solving by solving and creating routine and non-routine problems with different levels of complexity*" (CHED Memorandum Order 75, s. 2017, Section 6.3.3[e]) is a good example. Although the wording could be further streamlined, it clearly states exactly what a student should demonstrate, and how the same ought to demonstrate it. The same math major, however, is also expected to "*Appreciate mathematics as an opportunity for creative work, moments of enlightenment, discovery, and gaining insights of the world*" (CHED Memorandum Order 75, s. 2017, Section 6.3.3 [g]). While inspiring and reflective of a positive attitude toward the discipline, it lacks that clarity and measurability needed to be assessed effectively. It is abstract, and difficult to operationally define.

This contrast illustrates a common issue found in many of the current post-K12 PSGs, the prevalence of outcomes that are rather broad, vague, or even affective, that lack clear ways of measuring their achievement. These kinds of outcomes also make it difficult to design meaningful learning activities and proper assessments, making it harder to gauge whether a student or not has gained a specific competency.

Table 2, on the other hand, summarizes the results of the exercise in assessing the quality of performance indicators. Post-K12 PSGs would register an improvement in quality if program outcomes were matched with performance indicators (major course requirements) that are authentic, favor groupwork, revision, and are integrative. These criteria are chosen precisely because they support a move away from traditional assessment tools, such as multiple-choice exams. Exams are rarely authentic (accountants, engineers and lawyers rarely sit exams after passing their respective licensure), they rarely provide opportunities for group interaction, they

are often one-shot performances with little chance for revision, and while they can test knowledge, they are much weaker in assessing attitudes and complex skills.

Table 2. Assessment of performance indicators

Program	Ratio of Exemplary Outcomes	Ratio of Exemplary Indicators	Percentage of Exemplary Outcomes	Percentage of Exemplary Indicators
Business Administration	3/5	5/5	60.0%	100.0%
Criminology	3/6	0/2	50.0%	0.0%
Secondary Education	31/46	44/110	67.4%	40.0%
Hospitality Management	5/6	4/5	83.3%	80.0%
Information Technology	8/10	5/8	80.0%	62.5%
Elementary Education	2/6	7/26	33.3%	26.9%
Nursing	9/14	15/56	64.3%	26.8%
Civil Engineering	10/13	2/4	76.9%	50.0%
Accountancy	2/5	13/19	40.0%	68.4%
Industrial Technology	6/8	0/4	75.0%	0.0%

Source: Authors' construction

Programs such as Business Administration and Hospitality Management again reveal a high percentage of exemplary indicators. Their indicators feature course requirements that exhibit the characteristics of well thought out, authentic, revisable, group-based, summative assessments. Consider the following, and subject them to the criteria: *“Formulate compensation and incentive policies; Formulate supplier support policies”* (CHED Memorandum Order 17, s. 2017, Section 7 [Table 2]). And another, from Hospitality Management: *“Stage a function utilizing the full range of food and beverage preparation and service techniques, local and international cuisines, using various management and financial principles and theories”* (CHED Memorandum Order 62, s. 2017, Section 8.2.5). The consistent preference for Bloom’s verbs in formulating program outcomes has resolved into exemplary performance indicators.

A number of performance indicators also happen to commonly fail against specific criteria. For instance, many amount to simple restatements of program outcomes. Many others can hardly be considered “authentic” when subjected to the simple litmus test: would professionals in the field actually do these things?

Some good examples involve designing lesson plans and curriculums, or drawing up assessments; in the case of Secondary Education, these are clearly tasks that teachers would undertake. But within the same PSG, weaker examples would include *“Manifest discretion when selecting approaches or methods that would be effective in teaching particular lessons”* (CHED Memorandum Order 75, s. 2017, Section 7.C [f]), provides little guidance on course requirements that might assess this competency.

Some PSGs provide potentially well-constructed indicators, but fall short on one or two criteria. Nursing contains a long list of indicators, where some outcomes could have up to 10 different unique indicators. Many, however, are not what one might consider revisable, but this is simply because many are real-time clinical tasks. Some also fall short of the group-preference criteria, but only because the students are meant to be assessed as individuals. Some of the indicators, however, are better classed as examples of expected behaviors, less so as assessments: “*Manifest professionalism, integrity and excellence*”, or “*Project the positive professional image of a Filipino nurse*” (CHED Memorandum Order 15, s. 2017, Section 7.13 [b, c]). The key question is: what would have a student have to produce in order to demonstrate these?

Accountancy also faces a similar circumstance, where indicators generally lack revisability, as they are usually compliance-heavy. A good instance: “*Record financial transactions in compliance with generally accepted accounting and reporting standards (both global and local) for sole proprietorships, partnerships, corporations, government and not-for-profit organizations.*” (CHED Memorandum Order 27, s. 2017, Section 7.1). Clearly, this assessment is authentic, as it is what an accountant would do in the real-world, summative, as it tests the knowledge of a student, but may not readily permit multiple revisions.

It is worth mentioning that in the PSGs for Criminology, Civil Engineering, and Industrial Technology, there are many outcomes that do not list any sample of performance indicators. In these PSGs specifically, only one outcome comes with a corresponding list of indicators. This may itself signal that the underlying outcomes are too broad or vague, which makes it challenging to develop direct, authentic assessments. When the outcomes of these PSGs do have indicators, it is also those same outcomes that make use of Bloom’s verbs, those outcomes that are clearly actionable and measurable. Further, Section 4, it is argued that this is precisely where technical support from CHED is most needed. Where Technical Panels agree on standards, expertise is nonetheless needed to ensure proper formulation of outcomes and completeness of performance indicators.

3. CHED PSGs — Curriculum Design versus AUS, EU, ASEAN Benchmarks

Changes to credit loads following K to 12 are useful, but they require a fuller context. One of the main drivers behind Outcomes-Based Education is the desire to make programs more internationally comparable. As more information on global market needs becomes available through skills reports and stakeholder conferences, one would expect a convergence in the kinds of outcomes sought from tertiary programs. This looks to be the case, given the proliferation of “classic” outcomes such as critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, but also “21st-century” outcomes such as purposive communication, digital literacy, cultural competency, self-direction, etc.

But this means a shared set of outcomes can now provide a basis for benchmarking credit loads and curriculum design internationally. If programs across countries share more or less the same 10 to 12 outcomes, but are able to deliver them via 120 units (US, EU averages), 135 (China), or 145 (Latin America), then why should it take dozens more units for HEIs from the Philippines?

The purpose of this section is simply to lay down a set of stylized facts about Philippine higher education curricula, as the reality and extent of curriculum bloat is yet to be widely established

(Dabbay and Largoza, 2024; Testu, 2008). This is done visually in the succeeding figures, through the use of tree maps.

Notes on Methodology

1. Academic workload in Philippine higher education is typically expressed in *units*. One unit in general corresponds to one hour per week of instruction time. No formal reckoning of hours for independent study has yet been agreed. Thus, a three-unit course means three hours of contact time per week; PSGs, prospectuses, and syllabi are generally silent on expected academic workload outside class;
2. CHED PSGs used as reference for minimum units to a degree per discipline are the following:

CMO No. 17, Series of 2017. Revised for Bachelor of Science in Business Administration

CMO No. 5, Series of 2018. Bachelor of Science in Criminology

CMO No. 75, Series of 2017. Bachelor of Secondary Education

CMO No. 62, Series of 2017. Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management and Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management

CMO No. 25, Series of 2015. Revised for Bachelor of Science in Computer Science, Bachelor of Science in Information Systems, Bachelor of Science in Information Technology

CMO No. 74, Series of 2017. Bachelor of Elementary Education

CMO No. 15, Series of 2017. Bachelor of Science in Nursing

CMO No. 92, Series of 2017. Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering

CMO No. 27, Series of 2017. Bachelor of Science in Accountancy

CMO No. 13, Series of 2023. Bachelor of Industrial Technology

3. Official country benchmarks for curricula are not uniformly available because, unlike CHED, most education authorities do not prescribe minimum credit requirements per discipline. Instead, they simply provide categories based on curriculum size (e.g., within the European Credit Transfer System or ECTS, programmes are either 180 ECTS or 240 ECTS);
4. Thus, to establish benchmarks, we look to similar programs from individual institutions, declared below. These tend to be institutions whose websites provide extensive public information on programs, allowing us to evaluate similarity and obtain information on total credit requirements, breakdown of course types, etc.

ASEAN/SOUTHEAST ASIA

University Teknologi Malaysia
 Universiti Sains Malaysia
 Universiti Malaysia Sabah
 Universiti Teknologi Petronas
 Universiti Malaya

AUSTRALIA

Australian National University
 University of Sydney
 Edith Cowan University

EU/USA

Universiteit van Amsterdam
 University of Bristol
 University of Stirling
 Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
 University of Galway
 University of Leeds
 Universidad de Navarra

- To convert international credits to the parlance of Philippine units, we adopt the extensive Transfer Credit and Conversion Guide of the University of Arizona (validated against similar guides, such as that provided by Old Dominion University). Through it, we are able to confirm the following equivalences:

1 PH unit = 1 USA credit hour
 1 PH unit = 1 MY unit
 6 ANU credits = 3.75 USA credit hours
 6 Sydney credits = 4 USA credit hours
 20 Edith Cowan units = 5.5 USA credit hours
 4 UK credits = 1 USA credit hour
 2 ECTS = 1 USA credit hour

Table 3 summarizes benchmark universities and credit conversions per CHED discipline.

Table 3. Summary table of international benchmarks per CHED discipline

Program	University	Country	Conversions
Business Administration	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	Malaysia	
	Australian National University	Australia	6 ANU Units = 3.75 US Credit Hours 144 ANU Units = 90 US Credit Hours

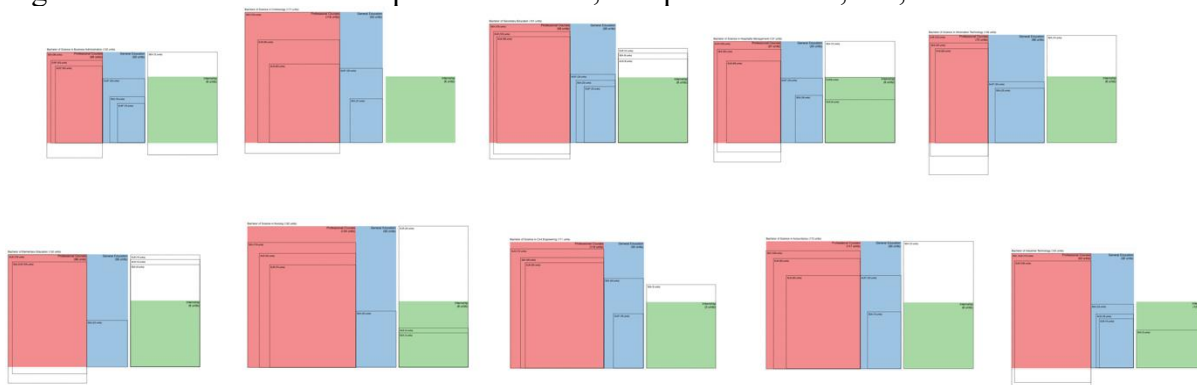
	Universiteit van Amsterdam	Netherlands	2 ECTS = 1 US Credit Hour
Criminology	Universiti Sains Malaysia	Malaysia	
	Australian National University	Australia	6 ANU Units = 3.75 US Credit Hours
	University of Bristol	United Kingdom	4 UK Credits = 1 US Credit Hour
Secondary Education	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	Malaysia	
	University of Sydney	Australia	6 Sydney Units = 4 US Credit Hours
	University of Stirling	United Kingdom	4 UK Credits = 1 US Credit Hour
Hotel and Restaurant Management	Universiti Malaysia Sabah	Malaysia	
	Edith Cowan University	Australia	20 ECU Units = 5.5 US Credits
	Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona	Spain	2 ECTS = 1 US Credit Hour
Information Technology	Universiti Teknologi Petronas	Malaysia	
	Australian National University	Australia	6 ANU Credits = 3.75 US Credit Hours
	University of Galway	Ireland	2 ECTS = 1 US Credit Hour
Elementary Education	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	Malaysia	
	University of Sydney	Australia	6 Sydney Units = 4 US Credit Hours
	Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona	Spain	2 ECTS = 1 US Credit Hour
Nursing	Universiti Malaya	Malaysia	
	University of Sydney	Australia	6 Sydney Units = 4 US Credit Hours
	University of Leeds	United Kingdom	4 UK Credits = 1 US Credit Hour
Civil Engineering	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	Malaysia	
	University of Sydney	Australia	6 Sydney Units = 4 US Credit Hours
	University of Bristol	United Kingdom	4 UK Credits = 1 US Credit Hour
Accountancy	Universiti Malaya	Malaysia	
	Australian National University	Australia	6 ANU Credits = 3.75 US Credit Hours
	University of Bristol	United Kingdom	4 UK Credits = 1 US Credit Hour
Industrial Technology	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	Malaysia	
	University of Sydney	Australia	6 Sydney Units = 4 US Credit Hours

	Universidad de Navarra	Spain	2 ECTS = 1 US Credit Hour
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In Fig. 2 below, minimum credit requirements are visualized as boxes, set to scale. They are arranged in the order of highest enrollment (Business Administration) to lowest enrollment (Industrial Technology) among the Top 10. Consolidating the treemaps comes at the expense of shrunk text, but other elements should provide the needed information. Red indicates the proportion of units devoted to professional or specialist courses, Blue for general education (GE) courses plus free electives, and green to internship. In each case, dotted lines signify proportions from selected international benchmarks. When visible inside boxes, they mean lighter loads compared to Philippine PSGs. When they extend outside colored boxes, they indicate more units devoted to those courses internationally, compared to PSG minimums.

A note on international benchmarks: these are not national minimum requirements, not the equivalent of PSGs. In practice, national authorities set much broader, less specific program requirements. These international benchmarks are from selected institutions, whose program details are available on their official websites.

Figure 2. Consolidated treemaps for ten PSGs, compared to AUS, EU, ASEAN benchmarks



Source: Authors' construction

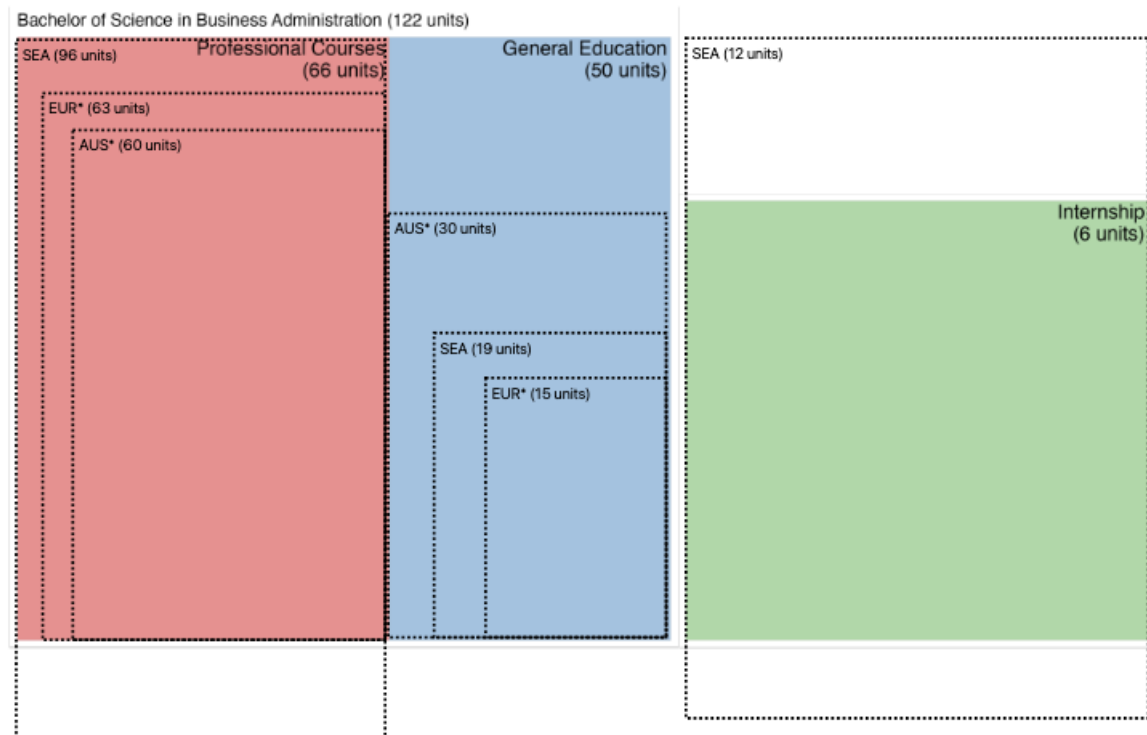
As previously documented, there is a very large discrepancy in the minimum number of units required across PSGs, from 122 (Business Administration) to 192 (Nursing). It needs to be emphasized that, as in basic education, the norm is for institutions to exceed minimum credit requirements, presumably as a signal of quality.

That said, clear common patterns emerge, and these can be confirmed in Figs. 3 to 5, which enlarge treemaps for the Top 3 most-subscribed programs: Business Administration, Criminology, and Secondary Education. In every case, Philippine programs exceed general education requirements overseas, exceed AUS and EU professional/specialist course requirements (but not ASEAN requirements), while featuring smaller internship requirements. In other words, Philippine higher education curricula are nearly all GE-heavy, internship-light.

In the specific case of internship, information is less reliable (although the pattern remains robust) because PSGs reckon internship courses as units (typically three) rather than actual hours. A three-unit internship course in Economics would be fulfilled by 200 hours, whereas a similar credit load in Engineering might require a 450-hour practicum. HEIs like DLSU have adopted international workload equivalencies (one unit = one hour of contact time plus 2.5

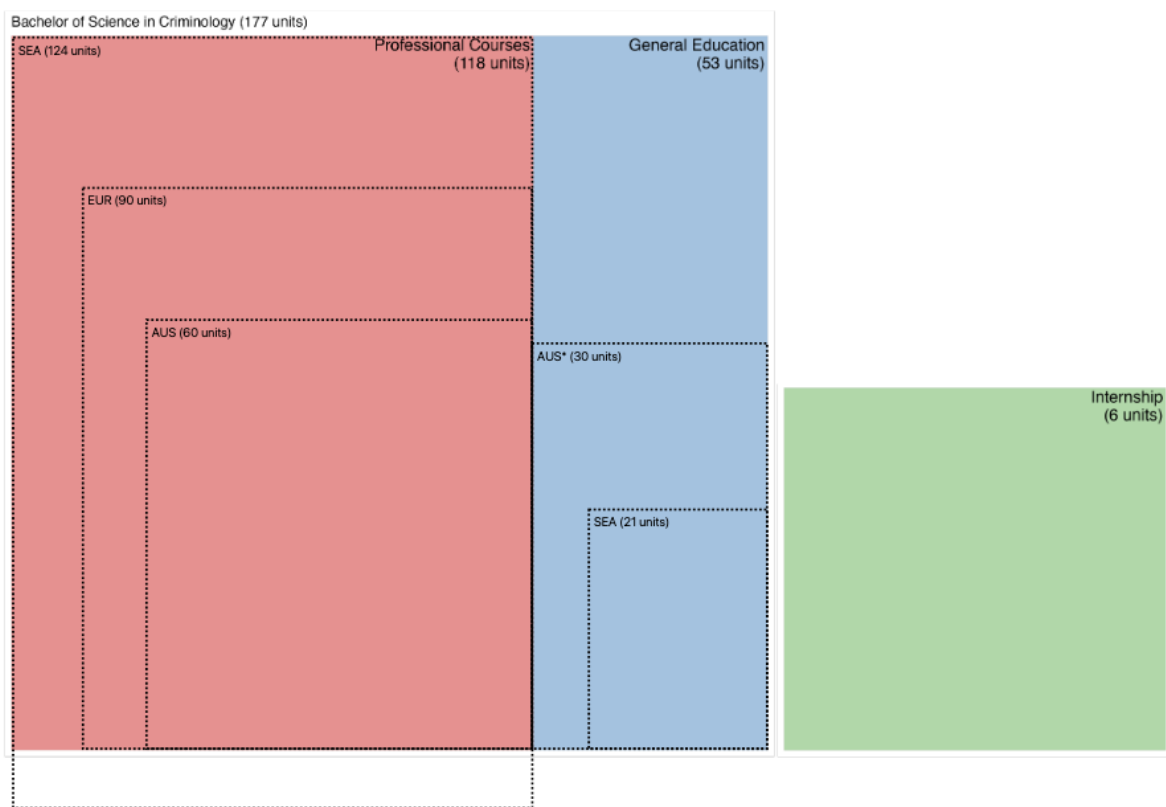
hours of independent study), and CHED would do well to mainstream this. Using contact hours is a throwback to input-based education; contact hours plus standards for independent study are more consistent with OBE.

Figure 3. Treemap for Business Administration, compared to AUS, EU, ASEAN benchmarks



Source: Author's construction

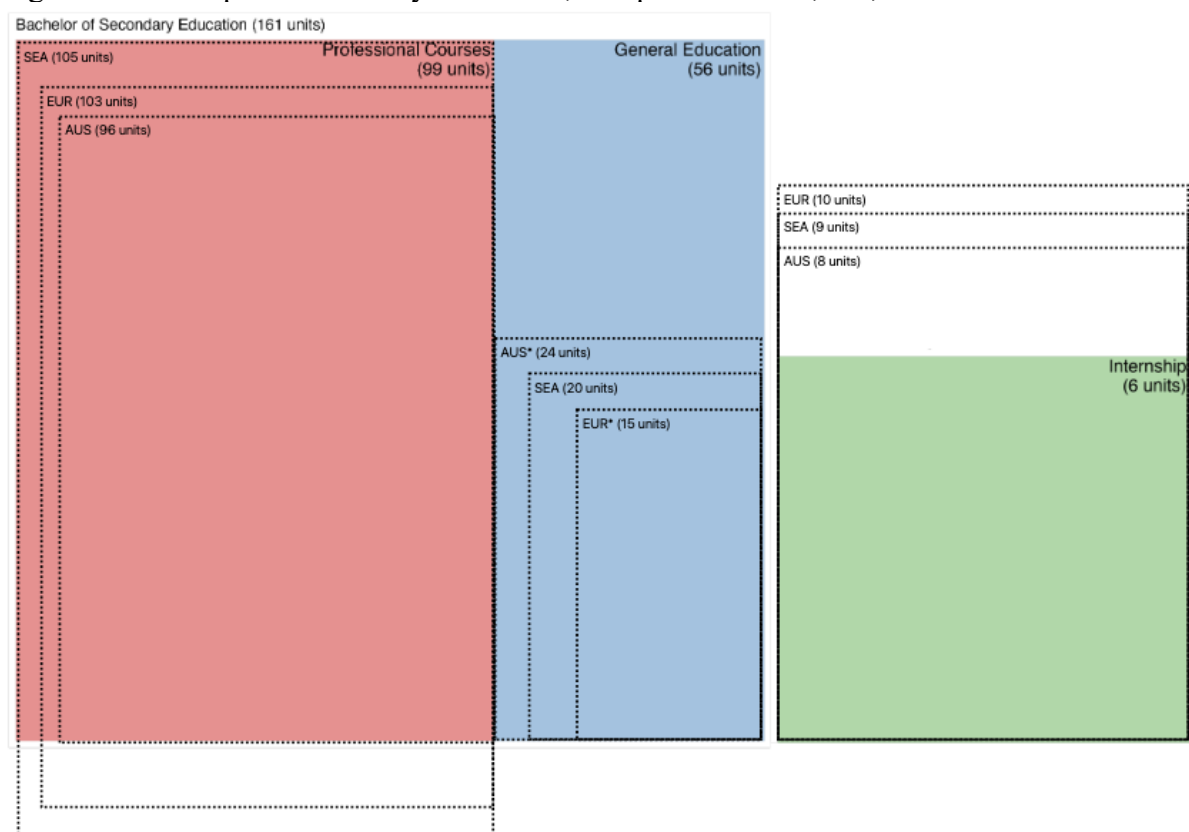
Figure 4. Treemap for Criminology, compared to AUS, EU, ASEAN benchmarks



Source: Authors' construction

(International internship requirements are absent in the benchmarks selected, but in the US range from 120 to 240 hours, lower than the 540 hours mandated within the CHED PSG).

Figure 5. Treemap for Secondary Education, compared to AUS, EU, ASEAN benchmarks



Source: Authors' construction

4. Technical Panels and CHED's Organizational Capabilities

The organization and operation of disciplinal Technical Panels is set out in CHED Administrative Order No. 3, series of 2019. The guidance is comprehensive, providing Panels with clear parameters, but also the flexibility to accommodate discipline-specific requirements.

All six key informants provided positive accounts of the work undertaken by Technical Panels post-K12. Member selection was sound (including the choice of industry stakeholders; though one might quibble over how some Panels may see fit to define their “industry” more broadly). There was very clear evidence that Panels used international skills reports and industry standards in crafting PSGs, and that they were active within international academic circuits. Most importantly, they had a very palpable disposition to serve, despite what follows.

Because in practice, the work of Technical Panels is impeded by a lack of complementary administrative support — in most cases, literal staff headcounts — within the relevant CHED offices. This was cited by each of the six Technical Panel chairs interviewed. To allow Technical Panels to function more efficiently (shorter PSG revision cycles) and effectively (more consistently formulated PSGs, program outcomes, performance indicators), CHED needs stronger organizational capabilities.

Organizational capabilities are intangible assets like skills and knowledge, practices, tools and routines that allow more productive work to be done. These would be embodied in technical experts and administrative staff, as well as in templates and routines that together ensure a more

even level of quality across PSGs. These would also allow more systematic sharing of good practices across Technical Panels, whose members work part-time and are regularly changed.

Four specific needs were identified as urgent:

First, for OBE specialists. Technical Panel chairs were unanimous in their view that CHED lacks technical experts and OBE specialists. These are individuals trained in translating the ideas and agreements among Technical Panels into the standard language of OBE, so that practices such as choosing Bloom's verbs, ensuring assessments are authentic, are standardized. This would minimize the current heterogeneity in the completeness and quality of PSGs.

One can compare the amount of support available to the Technical Panel on Teacher Education versus Hospitality Management. Teacher Education is able to mobilize dozens of experts from the Teacher Education Council (TEC) to support their work. In Hospitality Management, among other Panels, the Chair has to personally write out and proofread the final version of the PSG, nearly a hundred pages long.

Second, administrative support. This would standardize basic aspects of how Technical Panels work, especially in the following areas: recruiting and onboarding members (in a number of Panels, Chairs have yet to receive formal appointments; in others, pending issues were forgotten following changes in Panel composition). Some Chairs claimed a lack of templates for PSGs, and that Panels are meant to define their own review cycles ("usually when a new international standard is issued", etc.), or their own QA process.

Third, legal support. The actual implementation of CHED PSGs is deeply political at the frontlines. CHED Regional Offices and Technical Panel members have to deal with the inevitable and often unwelcome pressure coming from institutions with vested interests. A typical example would be entreaties to require equipment x or optionalize equipment y when settling upon the list of minimum requirements to offer a program. In highly-subscribed disciplines, even small changes to these lists have triggered reprisals, even litigation. For educational standards to be raised, Technical Panel members must be shielded from these pressures by clear messaging and organizational (legal, public relations) support from CHED. The independence of Technical Panels relies on the understanding that CHED leadership unambiguously supports the difficult reforms involved in upgrading higher education.

Finally, Technical Panel Chairs look to their principals at CHED for strategic leadership. Some of the areas in which leadership is most urgently sought are: resolving conflicts of interest between academic and industry stakeholders (e.g., how to incorporate more internship hours given credit-heavy curricula), putting training and coaching systems in place to develop good judgment among QA practitioners on the frontlines, so that, on the one hand, PSGs and similar regulations are not enforced too narrowly, but on the other hand, that they don't engender complacency and a "minimum compliance" culture among HEIs.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The CHED Policies, Standards, and Guidelines governing the ten most-subscribed programs have all undergone significant revision during the decade following K-12 legislation in 2013. But a proper reckoning of improvements must include the impact of two parallel reforms: the adoption of a competency and outcomes-based pedagogical framework via CHED CMO 46 (s. 2012) and the establishment of the Philippine Qualifications Framework in 2018. The introduction of Senior High School, extending the basic education cycle by two years, indeed resulted in General Education courses being reduced in seven of the nine programs that had PSG versions that pre-dated K to 12. But rather than reduce the total credit load in higher education, as has been the trend globally, GE units remained high, and any reductions thereto were simply replaced by more professional courses such that, overall, baccalaureate programs in the Philippines remain bloated compared to benchmarks from the EU, Australia, and ASEAN.

The more unambiguous improvements in PSGs are seen from a clearer understanding of outcomes-based education (OBE), in the formulation of program outcomes and performance indicators. These are more likely the result of the QA-driven reforms — CMO 46 and the Philippine Qualifications Framework.

That said, a high degree of heterogeneity exists across CHED PSGs, whatever dimensions are used. Revisions took anywhere from eight years to 13 years to complete. GE courses were reduced by 27 units in some programs, 15 in others, but also remained unchanged (Information Technology), and even increased (Civil Engineering). Total units currently range from 122 in Business Administration (closest to global norms) to 192 in Nursing. Similar variance can be observed in the qualitative aspects of PSGs — how industry stakeholders are defined, how international standards are adopted, how consistently Bloom’s taxonomy is used in formulating outcomes, and how much guidance on assessment is provided via performance indicators.

The independence of Technical Panels is guaranteed by CHED Administrative Order No. 3 (2019). It is reasonable, even desirable, for PSGs to vary according to disciplinary requirements, but many of the differences observed in the desk review and gleaned from interviews seem to stem from a paucity of overall strategic leadership from CHED, and a shortage of technical and administrative expertise to support the work of Panels.

To further improve the quality of CHED PSGs and reduce unwanted variance in the implementation of outcomes-based education:

First, Technical Panels must continue the practical work of improving the formulation of program outcomes by adhering more consistently to Bloom’s verbs, and emphasizing direct measurement using authentic forms of assessment. When consulting international benchmarks, special attention should be paid to innovative forms of assessment, especially those designed to measure attitudes and skills (arguably even more than knowledge, as industry stakeholders often emphasize). Twenty-first century outcomes require twenty-first century assessments and performance indicators: those that mimic what professionals in the field do, that encourage teamwork, communication, negotiation and needed soft skills, those that may be repeated and built upon, those that have value outside class.

Second, CHED must dramatically level up its organizational capabilities and better support Technical Panels in their work. Significantly increasing the number of administrative staff is a

start, but this must be further augmented by a pool of in-house experts on Outcomes-Based Education. That way, the decisions and agreements of Technical Panels can be distilled into a standard set of PSG elements. The role of CHED staff should be to ensure that program outcomes are properly formulated, performance indicators are properly described, all the necessary components of a PSG are completed, and good practices are shared across Technical Panels. In this way, the only differences across PSGs should arise from disciplinary requirements and choices. They should not arise from differences in the understanding of OBE, in experience with authentic assessment, etc. among Panel members.

Finally, CHED must match the arduous work of Technical Panels with stronger strategic leadership, especially on the big questions of Philippine higher education. What is the desired end-state — does it make sense for the ten most-subscribed programs to produce graduates who will end up in some of the least productive industries, and therefore lowest-paying occupations?

It is unlikely that individual Technical Panels will wrestle adequately with these difficult realities. The strategic thinking required to make hard choices is precisely what, in other countries, is sought from education authorities. Hard choices do not mean heavy-handed governance (although many countries have not hesitated to cap the number of admission slots per discipline). They might come in the form of clear guidance to Technical Panels: e.g., to formally consider average wages and other market signals as part of PSG development and HEI evaluation, as well as to develop roadmaps that include a much wider range of career pathways for graduates, to avoid occupational surpluses that further drive wages down and induce artificial pressure among to pursue graduate studies.

There is a useful if troubling parallel between higher education and the situation in Philippine agriculture. Whatever problems there are requiring solutions, and there are many, they will all have to reckon with the overarching strategic question: how large does the country want the sector to be? Is having ten million workers in agriculture, 25 percent of the labor force, in low-productivity and low-wage employment, consistent with the profile of a middle income economy aspiring to high income status? Likewise, is the model of economic transformation embodied in the Philippine Development Plan 2022-2028 consistent with four million college students, nearly half of them in Business Administration, Criminology, Elementary and Secondary Education, with 39 percent dropping out, and the rest entering sectors whose average wages have been historically low? And if not, in both cases, historically, what else but visionary and committed state action at the highest level has ever driven transformations of this magnitude?

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