

Re-creating and Re-positioning of Sri Lankan Universities to meet Emerging Opportunities and Challenges in a Globalized Environment

WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS



Editors

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Ministry of
Higher Education



University Grants
Commission of Sri Lanka

*Re-creating and Re-positioning of Sri Lankan
Universities to meet Emerging Opportunities and
Challenges in a Globalized Environment*

Workshop Proceedings

18th & 19th June 2012

Edited by

Ranjith Senaratne

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Conducted by

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PREFACE

The aim of making Sri Lanka a regional educational hub is consistent with the need to face the challenges posed by the current globalized environment. The higher education sector of Sri Lanka has strongly felt the impact of Globalisation during the past few decades, during which higher education has emerged as a global business with over three million students studying outside their countries, and the number growing steadily.

The reason why students seek overseas locations for higher education is not always necessarily a lack of educational and employment opportunities at home. The charm of a pleasant and healthy educational environment abroad even at a somewhat higher cost than at home can be tempting to many students, provided that the education that they receive is of the quality and content that they desire for their intended careers.

Sri Lanka possesses features such as its strategic location, political stability, relatively low cost of living, scenic beauty in a salubrious climate, and a friendly multicultural society with a relatively high level of English proficiency, which are important to attracting international students to its shores. These features also provide it with a great potential to become an educational hub in the region. The Government of Sri Lanka has, rightly, decided to harness this potential and given high priority to elevate the international ranking of Sri Lankan universities in order that they can attract foreign students and thereby develop the country into a regional educational hub.

Despite the high educational standards in the country and a long standing tradition of quality higher education, serious weaknesses have entered our higher education system over the years for a variety of reasons, and need to be addressed with a strong sense of urgency. In the context of making Sri Lanka a regional educational hub, the lack of important facilities, an unappealing physical environment, a rather limited reputation for academic research, and a system geared to cater exclusively to local students and the consequent lack of international flavour are among the most visible weaknesses. Along with these weaknesses are the absence of an adequate academic infrastructure for administering quality assurance and enabling credit transfer between universities locally, let alone internationally. Interruption of the academic programme as a result of student unrest and industrial disputes are major threats to the streamlining and concurrent running of programmes in all faculties and universities, which is an important prerequisite for effective credit transfer as well as the credibility of the institution.

South East Asian countries like Malaysia, Singapore and, to a less extent, South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh and Nepal already cater to foreign students in a variety of fields of higher education. Thus, breaking into an established market will not be easy, and without ensuring consistent performance the market share will not be sustainable.

Such being the challenges and threats faced by the country's higher education sector in tapping its potential to attract foreign students, there is a need to seriously study each challenge and threat and take the necessary steps, often proactively and in anticipation, to transform Sri Lanka into a regional educational hub.

This demands firstly the re-creation and re-positioning of our universities to meet the emerging challenges and opportunities in a globalized environment. That in turn calls for an integrated approach where, besides the Ministry of Higher Education, the University Grants Commission and the institutions of higher education, the relevant Departments and Ministries such as the Department of Immigration and Emigration, the Board of Investment and the Ministries of Tourism, External Affairs have a well defined role to play.

A workshop titled “Re-creating and Re-positioning of Sri Lankan Universities to meet Emerging Opportunities and Challenges in a Globalized Environment” was therefore organised by the University Grants Commission jointly with the Ministry of Higher Education with the participation of key stakeholders, with active deliberation on papers presented by invited speakers on the following themes related to making Sri Lanka an attractive destination for higher education.

1. Policy interventions
2. Institutional leadership
3. Governance and management
4. Academic climate and research & innovation culture
5. Quality assurance and credit transfer

The papers presented in the Workshop covered various aspects of the issues from different perspectives and provided fresh insights and practical propositions to transform Sri Lanka into an educational hub in the region. This volume of the proceedings includes all the presentations, with the exception of presentations relating to the roles of the Ministries of Tourism and Emigration and Immigration and the Board of Investment, which need to evolve in the context of the adoption of strategies for the promotion of Sri Lanka as destination for higher education, following the re-creation and re-positioning of the Sri Lankan Universities to meet the emerging challenges. In addition, a few invited papers have been included in order to complement and supplement the proceedings of the Workshop.

All the papers have been reviewed and rewritten by the authors following their presentation in the Workshop. The papers will certainly be of immense value to legislators, policy makers, planners and institutional leaders in dealing with the changes needed in the higher education system and the reshaping of the universities to match their anticipated role in transforming Sri Lanka into an educational hub. The information contained therein will also be of value to university teachers, other educationists and students as well as to anyone interested in higher education and its role and place in a changing global environment.

Ranjith Senaratne
Sivanandam Sivasegaram
Editors

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Thanks are particularly due to Dr. Kobena Hanson, Head, Knowledge and Learning, African Capacity Building Foundation, Zimbabwe for his keynote address titled “Rethinking Institutional Leadership in a Globalized Era: Strategic Imperatives for Higher Education”, which set the tone and tempo of the Workshop. Our special thanks also go to presenters of papers, chairpersons and rapporteurs of the sessions for their valuable contribution to make the Workshop a success. Particular mention should be made in this context to the contributions by Dr. Sunil Jayantha Nawaratne, Prof. Gamini Samaranyake, Prof. R.P. Gunawardane, Prof. Arjuna Aluwihare, and Prof. Dayantha Wijeyesekera.

Active participation in the deliberations of the Workshop by the galaxy of luminous personalities, including policy makers, planners, intellectuals, institutional builders, institutional leaders, vice chancellors, senior dons and entrepreneurs present contributed in no small measure to raising the intellectual atmosphere of the event.

Financial assistance for the Workshop was provided by the World Bank Project on “Higher Education for the Twenty First Century”. The support extended by Dr. Harsha Athureupana and Prof. Lakshman Ratnayake in this regard is gratefully acknowledged.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Contributors	I
Preface	V
Acknowledgements	VII
Table of Contents	IX
Rethinking Institutional Leadership in a Globalized Era: Strategic Imperatives for Higher Education.....	1
Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE) in Selected Asian Countries: Contextual Issues, Trends, and Questions/Options for Sri Lanka.....	19
Policy Reforms in Higher Education: Transforming Sri Lanka into an Education Hub	43
Internationalizing Sri Lanka’s Universities: A Review of Fiscal and Governance Issues	55
Shifting Paradigms of Higher Education in Sri Lanka	75
Role of the UGC as a Catalyst and Facilitator of Higher Education	97
New Breed of Institutional Leaders for Internationalizing Sri Lankan Universities....	115
Remodelling State Universities in Sri Lanka for Globalization	129
Elements of Innovation and Entrepreneurialism at Uva Wellassa University.....	139
Promoting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Universities	147
The Role of Private Higher Education in Reforming the Higher Education System in Sri Lanka	167
Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Degree Programmes	181
Credit Transfer in Higher Education: Quest for a System for South Asia	201
Author Index.....	216
Programme of the Workshop.....	221
List of Participants.....	225

Sri Lanka shows great promise as a regional educational hub. However, in order to realize this potential, it has to deal with manifold challenges of the highly globalized competitive environment. This volume of Proceedings of the workshop titled “Re-creating and Re-positioning of Sri Lankan Universities to meet Emerging Opportunities and Challenges in a Globalized Environment” organised by the University Grants Commission jointly with the Ministry of Higher Education on the following themes is of great value and relevance in this context.

1. Policy interventions
2. Institutional leadership
3. Governance and management
4. Academic climate and research & innovation culture
5. Quality Assurance and credit transfer

The papers cover various aspects of the issues from different perspectives and provide fresh insights and practical propositions to transform Sri Lanka into an educational hub in the region and will be of immense value to legislators, policy makers, planners and institutional leaders in dealing with the changes needed in the higher education system and the reshaping of the universities to match their anticipated role in transforming Sri Lanka into an educational hub. They will also be of value to university teachers, other educationists and students as well as to anyone interested in higher education and its role and place in a changing global environment.