Sri Lanka

Overview of Higher Education System
The Sri Lankan education system is state funded and offered free of charge at all levels, including at the university level. In addition to government operated education institutions, there is a small number of private institutions operating on a fee-levying basis.

The education sector is governed by several ministries with varying responsibilities. However, three ministries carry the main responsibility: Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development (MOYA & SD).

Post-secondary education is offered by vocational training centres, technical colleges, and advanced technological institutes under Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education and universities. Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) operate under both state and non-state sectors. Under the state sector there are 15 National Universities, two Buddhist Universities, and nine institutes affiliated with national universities, which provide some courses leading to undergraduate education free of charge. There are also seven post-graduate institutes affiliated with national universities, as well as semi-Government and non-State higher education institutes that offer many courses of studies at the level of Diploma, Degree, Masters and PhD on a fee-levying basis.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) is responsible for admission to the undergraduate programmes of national universities. Selection is based on student merits and district quota. Due to stiff competition and limited places, excellent grades are typically required to secure a place at university, in particular in study areas that are in high demand, such as medicine, engineering and management.

Some institutes in Sri Lanka offer both local and foreign qualifications through joint programmes with foreign universities. In 2011, approximately 20,000 students were enrolled in this mode of study. It is estimated that around 10,000 students go abroad annually to pursue higher education. Most of them return after completion of their studies, while a small number find employment outside Sri Lanka.

In 2011, the Sri Lankan Government expanded opportunities for foreign students to study in Sri Lankan national universities, earmarking five per cent of places in a given course of study for international students (up from 0.5 per cent). 4.5 per cent of these places are offered on a fee-levying basis. The goal is to increase the number of foreign students in local universities from 1,435 in 2011 to 10,000 by 2015.

National Qualifications Framework
Sri Lanka is in the process of introducing the Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF) to all state and non-state HEIs by 2015. The framework is expected to facilitate credit transfers and student exchanges among HEIs domestically and internationally. Sri Lanka is also in the process of establishing the Sri Lanka Qualification Agency under the MOHE by the end of 2014. The Agency would take on the task of implementing the SLQF.
Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

Students who have gained qualifications abroad are able to request that the UGC accepts their qualification. The UGC only accepts qualifications obtained from HEIs listed in the International Handbook of Universities and the Commonwealth Universities Year Book. If the qualification is accepted the UGC issues a certificate. However, for the practice of medicine in Sri Lanka it is required that the degree holder has obtained his/her medical degree from a medical institute or university recognised by the Sri Lanka Medical Council.

Issues and Challenges Concerning Foreign Qualifications Recognition

While Sri Lanka has a system in place through which foreign qualifications can be recognised, there are limitations to this system. The main challenges lie with identifying and gaining an understanding of the concrete education attainments the qualification has instilled. Often, qualification transcripts do not provide clear understanding of the level of achievement. Information about duration of programme, materials covered, the level at which the subject is addressed, and credit hours is inadequate and dubious in many cases. Sri Lanka needs to develop a system through which the quality and the level of achievement indicated on a particular certificate can be understood and measured.

Progress toward ratification of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention

Sri Lanka will be able to initiate the process of ratifying the Convention when the SLQF is in place, which is expected to be in full operation in 2015.

Commitment to Information Sharing Mechanisms

Sri Lanka plans to develop a separate division under the Sri Lanka Qualifications Agency to perform the functions of a National Information Centre. Sri Lanka is also ready to upload information onto the UNESCO Portal to Recognised Higher Education Institutions.

Criteria and Procedures for Assessment

Entry requirements for foreign students

Applicants are required to attach a letter (original) obtained from the examination board verifying that their education qualifications are equivalent to the Sri Lankan General Certificate of Education Advanced Level, or that they meet the criteria for entering universities in their own country.

Students who have not done their studies in English are required submit the IELTS or TOEFL examination.

Medical degree recognition

Medical degrees are evaluated by the Sri Lanka Medical Council (SLMC), which must recognise the university or college from which the degree is obtained. Without recognition from SLMC, it is not possible to practice medicine in Sri Lanka. Students must also pass the Examination for the Registration of Practice Medicine (ERPM) in Sri Lanka.

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