

Distribution: Limited

UNESCO-07/REGCOMIX/WD.2-SRL  
Bangkok, May 2007  
Original: English

**Ninth Session of the Regional Committee Meeting for the  
Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and  
Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific**

*in conjunction with the*

**Regional Seminar on Regional Harmonization: Establishing  
a Common Higher Education Area**

Seoul, Republic of Korea  
22-23 May 2007

**Country Report  
SRI LANKA**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The university system in Sri Lanka originated in 1921, with the establishment of the Ceylon University College affiliated to the University of London. This College prepared students for external examinations conducted by the University of London. However, there was the Ceylon Medical College, which was established in 1870. In 1942, both these Colleges were amalgamated and the University of Ceylon was established. The University of Ceylon, thus created had a small student population. Since then the University Education in Sri Lanka has developed and grown to 15 Universities, 3 Campuses, 6 Postgraduate Institutes and 9 other Institutes with a student population of 40,000. During this period of growth, the system faced many changes, but remained with the control of the 'state'.

The university system in Sri Lanka operates within the framework laid down in the Universities Act. No. 16 of 1978. The University Grants Commission (UGC), which functions as the apex body in the university system, allocates funds to the above universities and institutes, serves as the central admission agency for undergraduate degree courses, monitors and reviews the working of the university system with a view to maintaining standards, and implements national policies in respect of university education.

In Sri Lanka, admission of students to universities is being done on the basis of a policy formulated by University Grants Commission with the concurrence of the government. Admission is determined on the basis of the performance of candidates at the GCE (Advanced Level) Examination of the relevant year. The selection of students for admission to undergraduate courses in the universities is the main task assigned to the University Grants Commission under the above Act. The UGC carries out this task in consultation with the Universities/ Institutes.

Selection of students on A/L marks is done on dual criteria, namely (a) merit on all Island basis and (b) merit on district basis. The rationale for the use of a district basis

is the considerable disparities that exist between districts in regard to educational facilities. The dual criteria sought to combine merit with equity and fairness in determining admissions.

Sri Lanka provides free education from primary up to undergraduate education. Currently approximately 600,000 students are entering Grade 1, about 550,000 students are facing GCE O/L (Grade 11) examination and about 250,000 are doing the GCE A/L examination. Pass in three A/L subjects and common general paper (for which examinations are conducted by National Evaluation and Testing Services), is a pre-requisite for entering the state funded universities. Around 115,000 to 120,000 students are satisfying the minimum requirements and of which about 18,000 students are being admitted to universities. This number is about 15% of the number qualified to enter university, 7.5% of the number sat for A/L and less than 4% of their age group as the drop-outs at O/L is as high as approximately 50%. Accordingly the total admission to universities is a rare opportunity and extremely competitive.

The selection of students for university admission is a task assigned to the University Grants Commission (UGC) under the Universities Act (No 16 of 1978). The UGC carry out this task in consultation with the 14 Universities and four Institutions affiliated with the Universities (Table 1). The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) offer courses using distance learning methodologies by direct admission. The Institute of Workers Education of University of Colombo (CMB) and Institute of Technology of University of Moratuwa (MRT) are also admitting students directly under the guidance of the UGC. Several universities are admitting students directly to their external degree programs.

### **National Policy on University Admission and Selection of Students**

Admission of students to universities in Sri Lanka is being done on the basis of an admission policy laid down from time to time by the UGC with the concurrence of the Government. The current policy for university admission outlines the followings:

(a) The student should have obtained a minimum of ‘S’ grade in all three approved subjects and in addition not less than 30% for the common general paper,

(b) Selection of student based on the rank of order on average Z- Score at the GCE A/L examination.

(c) following an admission criteria on the basis of on all island merit order of Z-Score (up to 40% ), district merits (up to 55%), educationally disadvantaged district (up to 5%) and on special admission (1 -2%).

(d) In the case of courses on Arts, Indigenous Medicine, Fine Arts and Law admission will be done on an all island merits basis.

The minimum Z-Score required for admission to different courses from each district which is referred to as cut-off-points (COP) for every year is determined by the UGC based on the students' performance (Z-Score), order of preference for courses and universities, number of places available and population of the district, they belong to.

Students who come within 10% of the top Z-Score will be given the University of their First Choice. Others will be assigned on the basis of:

(a) Order of Z- Score

(b) Order of preference

(c) District of the candidates.

The Z-Score COP will be determined based on the above and will be published by the UGC. The successful candidates will be informed by the UGC, of their selected courses of study and the universities to which they have been selected.

## **2. SITUATION ANALYSIS OF CROSS-BORDER EDUCATION**

Higher education is becoming increasingly important for Sri Lankan students. It is no longer only the higher echelons of society that are sending their children to study abroad. There is an emerging middle class, which is striving to give their children an educational advantage. While parents and students value higher education, they are far

from happy with what is offered by Sri Lankan Colleges and universities. Parents with the capacity to choose are increasingly unwilling to send their children to Sri Lankan universities and seek private higher education and overseas educational opportunities with a growing sense of urgency.

Therefore, demand for international education and qualifications continue. In 2006, over 2000 Sri Lankan went to study in the UK. An increasing number of UK institutions see Sri Lanka as a significant market as they seek to diversify. They are also establishing more courses run jointly with Sri Lankan institution in country, and/or promoting distance or open learning methods. While the situation remains, parents and students will opt for whatever alternative they can afford. This represents a significant opportunity for overseas supplier countries.

Due to lack of university facilities, only 15% out of the 120,000 qualified students gained admission to local universities. The remaining 85% of students had to seek an alternative to continue their higher studies. The majority of these students generally opts for international affiliated colleges or undertakes professional courses such as CIMA, SLIT, and CIM etc. According to the information received by the UGC the registered number of students in local private higher education are around 45,700. Therefore, it is important to examine the quality in relation to facilities available, quality of staff etc. in these local and foreign degree courses conducted in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka there are several agencies that represent overseas Universities to recruit students. Similarly there are institutions that conduct courses to prepare students for overseas degree programs. Furthermore, thousands of students are already pursuing higher education at various overseas institutes.

Issues related to cross border higher education are many. They are the need to;

1. Safeguard the broader cultural, social and economic contributions of higher education and research, particularly given the critical role they play in today's global knowledge society.
2. Protect the interests of students and facilitate their mobility.

3. Strengthen the capacity of developing countries to improve accessibility to quality higher education, especially at a time when the gap in resources and access to knowledge between the industrialized and developing world is growing.

4. Preserve linguistic and cultural diversity within higher education.

### **3. NATIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES ON QUALITY ASSURANCE AND MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

The University Grants Commission in Sri Lanka has established the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Unit which is managed by the Standing Committee on Quality Assurance and Accreditation to carry out the following activities.

1. Evaluation of commencement of new degree programs and establishment of new Departments, Faculties, Institutes, Centers, Schools, in the Universities & Higher Educational Institutes.
2. Granting Degree Awarding Status, upgrading into a postgraduate Status.
3. Quality Assurance for Self-Accrediting Universities, Subjects and functional units.
4. Criteria and processes for recognition of new universities
5. Accreditation higher educational courses offered by non-self accreditation Institutes.
6. Assessment of foreign degrees and delivery arrangements, and agreements on mutual recognition of awards accredited by foreign Quality Assurance Agencies.
7. Report on, and making recommendations regarding national quality assurance and accreditation arrangements.
8. Subject and Institutional arrangements.
9. Subject Benchmarking.
10. Training of Reviewers.

In terms of the provisions of the Public Administration Circular No. 16/92 dated 13.03.1992 the University Grants Commission recognizes Universities that are listed in the

following International Publications which are authentic sources of information on Universities and Higher Educational institutions in different countries of the world.

1. Commonwealth Universities Yearbook
2. International Handbook of Universities

There are no provisions regarding the following.

- Recognition of Universities which are not listed in the above two Publications.
- Recognition of Online Degrees.

#### **4. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL AGREEMENT**

No action has been taken for this.

#### **5. EMERGENT ISSUES RELATING TO RECOGNITION OF STUDIES, DIPLOMAS AND DEGREES IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

##### **Issues Relating to Recognition of Foreign Degrees**

**Difficulties arise in following situations –**

- Recognition of Universities based on their earlier names when the name is changed at present.
- Recognition of affiliated colleges Institutes etc. When they are not listed under the relevant university in the above two Publications.

#### **6. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE NINTH SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE**

The following suggestions can be made to promote the Cross –Border Higher Education (CBHE).

- CBHE should strive to contribute to the broader economic, social and cultural well-being of communities
- while CBHE can flow in many different directions and takes place in a variety of contexts, it should strengthen higher education capacity of developing countries in order to promote global equity
- in addition to providing disciplinary and professional expertise, CBHE should strive to instill in learners the critical thinking that underpins responsible citizenship at the local, national and global levels
- CBHE should be accessible not only to students who can afford to pay, but also to qualified students with financial need
- CBHE should meet the same high standards of academic and organizational quality no matter where it is delivered
- CBHE should be accountable to the public, students and governments
- CBHE should expand the opportunities for international mobility of faculty, researchers and students
- Higher education institutions and other providers of CBHE should provide clear and full information to students and external stakeholders about the education they provide