



## **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT**

**The Open University of Sri Lanka**

**6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> January 2020**



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**Quality Assurance Council**

**University Grants Commission, Sri Lanka**

## **List of abbreviations and acronyms**

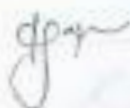
AVRC	Audio Visual Resource Centre
BBB	Big Blue Button
CA	Continuous Assessment
CAT	Continuous Assessment Test
CERC	Consultancy and External Resource Centre
CESSD	Centre for Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development
CERC	External Resource Centre
CETMe	Centre for Educational Technology and Media
CGU	Career Guidance Unit
CLO	Course Learning Outcomes
CTHE	Certificate of Teaching in Higher Education
ERC	Ethics Review Committee
ESA	External Services Agency
GEE	Gender Equity and Equality
HSS	Humanities and Social Sciences
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ILC	Industry Liaison Centre
IQUAU	Internal Quality Assurance Unit
IQAC	Internal Quality Assurance Cell
IRU	International Relations Unit
IR	Institutional Review
IT	Information Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LMS	Learner Management System
MIS	Management Information System
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
PLO	Programme Learning Outcomes

OBE	Outcome Based Education
ODL	Open Distance Learning
OER	Open Educational Resources
OMIS	Open University Information Management System
OUSL	Open University of Sri Lanka
QA	Quality Assurance
QAC	Quality Assurance Council
RSC	Regional and Study centres
SBS	Subject Benchmark Statement
SCL	Student Centred Learning
SDC	Staff Development Centre
SE	Self Evaluation
SEE	Sustainable Energy Engineering
SER	Self Evaluation Report
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SLIDE	Sri Lanka Institute of Distance Education
SLQF	Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework
SMP	Strategic Management Plan
Start@OUSL	Student Academic Readiness Training at OUSL
TOR	Terms of Reference
TRF	Temporary Residential Facilities
UGC	University Grants Commission
UMC	University Medical Centre

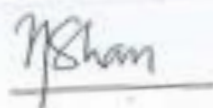
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The Review Team approves the OUSI final review report.



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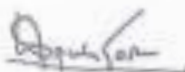
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3. Prof. Jennifer Perera



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## Section 1 - Brief Introduction to OUSL

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) was established in 1980 under section 23(1) and section 18 of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978, and the OUSL Ordinance No. 3 of 1980 recognizing the need of higher education opportunities for every Sri Lankan citizen. Later, in 1990, this OUSL ordinance was replaced by a new one and several amendments have been incorporated since then. At the inception, the University has incorporated within its system the External Services Agency (ESA) and the Sri Lanka Institute of Distance Education (SLIDE).

OUSL is the only national university under UGC which delivers academic programmes through Open and Distance Learning mode (ODL). OUSL provides access to students throughout the country with a network of 09 Regional Centres and 19 Study Centres with the most recent opening at Matale. Its Study Programmes, nearly 65 and over 1500 courses, are structured enabling students to progress academically from foundation and certificate levels to master's and PhD levels with lateral entry and early exit. OUSL offers many certificate and diploma courses in addition to undergraduate courses under all faculties and students with varying entry qualifications are allowed to register for programmes at different levels.

The vision of the University is *“To be the premier open and distance learning institution in Asia through excellence, efficiency and equity in lifelong learning”*. Through this vision, OUSL has developed its mission aiming to provide education to people in all corners of the country. The mission of the University is *“To enhance access to high quality affordable and relevant education through open distance education and ensure lifelong learning opportunities to face challenges in a knowledge society”*. The vision and mission of the University is guided by set of values, which helps the University to achieve realistic goals.

OUSL had started its academic activities with about 4000 students in 1980 and at present its enrolment is more than 40000. It comprises of 06 faculties, Education, Engineering Technology, Health Sciences, Humanities & Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and newly established Management Studies, with a total of 29 academic departments. Faculty of Management Studies has been excluded in this Institutional Review (IR). OUSL also has several institutes/centres, Post Graduate Institute of English (excluded from this IR), Centre for Environmental Studies & Sustainable Development (CESSD), Centre for Educational Technology & Media (CETMe) and Consultancy and External Resource Centre (CERC).

Table 1 and 2 indicate students and staff at present, respectively and staff vacancies that exist at OUSL. The University receives personal emoluments of the permanent staff from the government and all other expenses are met through student tuition fees and income generated by other means. The Table 3 indicates number of graduates that OUSL have produced during last few years.

**Table 1.1 Number of Students at present under each faculty**

Year	Education	Engineering Technology	Humanities and Social Sciences	Natural Science	Health Science	Common to all faculties	Total
2018	6684	5519	14839	4044	3986	4836	<b>39908</b>

**Table 1.2 Number of staff at OUSL by 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2019**

	Total approved cadre	Staff at present	Vacancies
Academic staff	394	335	59
Administrative & Non-academic staff	1291	1046	228
Academic support staff	39	25	14
Temporary Demonstrator/Instructor	176		

**Table 1.3 Number of Students Graduated between 2014 - 2017**

Year	No. of Bachelor's degrees completed / Total	Number of Postgraduates completed		
		Master's	MPhil and PhD	Total
2014	<b>1041</b>	160	3	<b>163</b>
2015	<b>1041</b>	160	2	<b>162</b>
2016	<b>1032</b>	142	2	<b>144</b>
2017	<b>1673</b>	144	5	<b>149</b>
2018	<b>1947</b>	177	8	<b>185</b>

OUSL had its last Institutional Review in 2013. The present review team was provided a document stating that some of the recommendations given after the review in 2013 have been attended, though no information to that effect was provided in the current SER. It only contains some new initiatives and changes that have taken place after the 2013 Institutional Review without addressing to any particular recommendation given. OUSL had received the grade “confidence” according to the grading system existed at the time. The current review team, after studying the document containing actions on recommendations of 2013 review, identified a few areas for particular scrutiny. These were (1) measures taken by OUSL to address recommendations of 2013 review, (2) evidence for adhering to best practices at all levels within the University, (3) commitment to quality assurance and (4) other improvements that University may have made since last IR.

In 2018, several programme reviews had been taken place, namely, BA Honours in English and English Language Teaching, BA in Social Sciences, Bachelor of Law Honours, Bachelor of Education Drama and Theatre, Bachelor of Education (Honours) in Natural Science and Bachelor of Management Studies. However, the SER submitted for the current Institutional Review contains no information regarding any of the programme review outcomes.



## **Section 2 – Review Team’s View of OUSL Self-Evaluation Report (SER)**

### **2.1 Preparation of SER**

The commitment of OUSL to the Self-Evaluation (SE) process is evident as it had been initiated by Director/IQAU informing the members at the 364<sup>th</sup> Senate meeting held in October 2018 about the need of next IR to be carried out in 2019 and thus, the letter of intent was sent to UGC. With the Senate approved procedure, the steering committee for SER writing consists of 19 senior academics and the AR/IQAU as the convener was appointed under the Chairmanship of the Vice-Chancellor. Subsequently, 10 working groups, each headed by a steering committee member had been appointed for handling the task by collecting evidence and writing under 10 criteria. Working groups were represented by academic staff from faculties and heads of administrative divisions/units as relevant. All working groups and group chairs were provided with Terms of Reference (TOR). Several workshops on awareness in SER writing had been conducted for the working groups. Though a few administrative officers were included in the working groups, there was no evidence to show that administrative staff was included in the later stages of the process, in particular, in writing of the SER.

Academic staff, non-academic staff and students were made aware of the Institutional Review 2019 by IQAC chairpersons in the faculties. All staff had contributed to the preparation of documental evidence. After draft documents of self-assessment under each criterion were prepared they had been compiled as the draft of SER which had been circulated to steering committee members for verification and editing. The appointed Editorial Board had scrutinized the compiled SER for its accuracy and integrity. The final document had been submitted to UGC after approval of the Senate/Council.

### **2.2 Adherence to Instructions of Institutional Review Manual**

It was somewhat unfortunate that complete *Manual for Distance and Higher Education Institutions* was not available early enough for OUSL to grasp the whole concept of external review process and its requirements to prepare the SER in accordance with the instructions. However, OUSL had taken a courageous step to compile the SER even without the complete instruction manual (especially, the best practices component) at hand, for which the review team is very grateful.

The SER is written with a good participatory approach as highlighted above. The SER is written according to the format given in the manual. The section on introduction to the University describes the history, the faculties, Regional and Study Centres (RSCs), human resources, etc. However, the information provided was not sufficient to paint a clear picture in the reviewer’s mind on OUSL’s academic entities and their academic responsibilities and

functions. In particular, how RSCs function, their role in conducting academic programmes, the availability of human resources, etc., were not included in the SER.

The progress made by the University since its last IR conducted in 2013 was not clearly documented in the SER with respect to recommendations provided by the review team and any remedial actions taken to rectify the weaknesses. Therefore, it is not clear from the SER how University has adhered to recommendations given by the review team in 2013. Though there had been several programme reviews taken place at OUSL during 2018, no mention in the SER regarding their outcomes either.

SER includes an analysis carried out by the Institution in terms of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT). In the SER, a large number of strengths (18), many weaknesses (11), several opportunities (8) and some threats (6) have been identified. The strengths of the OUSL are (1) being the only national university to offer education through ODL mode, (2) offering university education to many, (3) a major portion of expenditure being financed by the government, (4) a great majority of students having cordial relationship with staff, (5) having a network of regional and study centres, (6) having lateral entry and exit points in study programmes, (7) study programmes catering to diverse needs of the country, (8) having an established procedure for evaluating prior qualifications of prospective students, (9) having a multi-skilled academic and non-academic staff, (10) academic staff having broad research expertise, (11) having in-house expertise to produce learning resources, (12) having a good Management Information System, (13) having facilities and infrastructure to develop online courses, (14) having effective professional development programmes for staff, (15) having a well-equipped printing press, (16) having a state of the art “Media House”, (17) having a well-resourced library and (18) the availability of pre-schools to train primary education teachers. One notable strength omitted in the report is the grade of “confidence”, the University had received after 2013 IR, the highest grade possible in the scale used at the time.

The University has identified following weaknesses; (1) limited senior academic and administrative staff, (2) low completion rates of courses and study programmes by students, (3) not having a good programme for English language proficiency, (4) less commitment by staff towards outcome based performance, (5) lack of interest by staff to ensure quality of services, (6) difficulty in attracting qualified temporary staff due to low rates of payments, (7) not implementing decisions/recommendations in timely manner, (8) academic staff is overloaded with administrative responsibilities, (9) poor coordination among main entities, (10) less commitment to optimise resources and to reduce costs and (11) poor marketing strategies to promote OUSL brand.

Whether OUSL has made an attempt to prioritize the weaknesses and to initiate actions towards rectifying any of them is not clear. Low graduation rates in many study programmes had been identified when preparing the current Strategic Management Plan (SMP) in 2015, however, no firm effort has been taken to identify causes for such low rates over the years and to take any action to increase graduation rates. Though OUSL states that not having a comprehensive English programme as a weakness, there is no attempt by the administration to provide a continuous self-learning tools for students to improve their English skills. The

same weakness had been identified in 2015 during preparation of the current strategic plan. Section 5 of this report provides weaknesses that reviewers have identified under each criterion, but few major weaknesses that affected the quality assurance (QA) process as a whole are (i) not internalization and implementation of best practices, (ii) poor documentation and (iii) varying levels of awareness by academic and non-academic staff on the QA process.

The opportunities available to OUSL according to the SER are (1) to expand the regional network, (2) increase number of students, (3) worldwide recognition of ODL mode, (4) collaboration with local and international partners, (5) to offer cross-border study programmes, (6) increasing demand for higher education in remote areas, (7) economic development activities demanding qualified personnel and (8) demand for postgraduate qualifications. Though these opportunities had been identified in 2015 when current SMP was prepared, how they could be used towards improvement of university services is not indicated in the SER. OUSL needs to take serious steps to capitalize on these opportunities when planning its expansion and promotional activities.

The identified threats are (1) reduction in state funding for development work, (2) lack of understanding of the ODL system and its contribution to economic development of the country, (3) adoption of ODL mode delivery by conventional universities, (4) other overseas ODL universities promoting their programmes in the country, (5) private institutions offering attractive remunerations to staff and (6) difficulty in replacement of academics leaving the OUSL for greener pastures. SER could have included a section on how OUSL could initiate some actions to mitigate at least some of the identified threats as they existed since 2015. Some threats such as recurrent student disturbances, ragging in the university and politicization of student unions have not been identified.

A critical evaluation of the above findings of the SWOT analysis, on how strengths are elevating the status of the University, how alleviation of weaknesses could improve University's function, how opportunities could be capitalized to promote OUSL activities and how the impact of threats could be minimized strategically for the University to prosper, would have made the SER more complete and thorough. It is important for OUSL to revisit the SWOT analysis done in 2015 during the preparation of the current strategic plan of 2015 – 2020, to realize that even by end of 2019 some of the same weaknesses and threats still exist and no remedial actions have been taken by authorities for all these years. This is an indication that the five-year Strategic Management Plan of the University becomes just another document produced by the authorities and no proper steps taken to monitor the progress.

SER contains vision and mission statements and several underlying values that each individual must have within, in order to achieve the OUSL vision. Though the stated values are highly respectable and praiseworthy, whether the responsible OUSL community has high regard to those values and whether those values are used as prime guiding lights when serving its clientele are somewhat questionable. SER mentions 7 strategic goals to be achieved, which are taken from the current strategic plan of 2015 – 2020. In the SMP, objectives and strategies to achieve the seven goals have been identified and stated, though many strategies are not specific. Also, under each goal stated in the SMP, many Key

Performance Indicators (KPIs) are listed, to be measured annually. However, no responsible personnel have been identified to implement or carry out the proposed strategies or actions. Thus, a great majority of the KPIs has either not achieved at all or has achieved only partly/minimally by the end of 2019. Annual reports of OUSL do not reflect how much or up to what level each goal has been achieved because no attempt has been made to highlight progress of any of the actions taken or outcomes achieved with respect to the stated objectives/strategies in the SMP or as projected by the action plan of SMP.

OUSL needs to do a thorough analysis on objectives and strategies under each goal in the SMP to identify why many planned activities have not been initiated or implemented, whether the plan itself was too much to achieve, whether identified KPIs were overly estimated and what lessons can be learnt from some of the failures. Several serious brain storming sessions would be required to understand clearly where OUSL was at the start of 2015 and where it is by 2020 before making the next strategic plan. Also, it is very important for OUSL to have year-end meetings to record the progress it achieves with respect to the KPIs stated in the SMP and to publish the findings so that short comings could be identified and addressed within a reasonable time.

### Section 3 – A Brief Description of the Review Process

The institutional review process started with the pre-review meeting held at UGC on 05<sup>th</sup> July 2019 with Prof. Nilanthi de Silva, Director/QAC for all reviewers. At the meeting, the team of reviewers assigned for the OUSL review was handed over the SER and other relevant documents for the desk evaluation. The members of the review team and their affiliations are given below. Prof. Kanthi K.A.S. Yapa served as the review chair.

- Prof. Kanthi K. A. S. Yapa (University of Ruhuna)
- Prof. N. Shanmugalingam (University of Jaffna)
- Prof. Jennifer Perera (University of Colombo)
- Prof. Jianxin Zhang (Yunnan University, China)
- Prof. Wipula Yapa (University of Colombo)
- Prof. Ranjith W. Pallegama (University of Peradeniya)

After the desk evaluation was submitted, a pre-site visit meeting was organized by QAC on 02<sup>nd</sup> August, 2019 to discuss the review process. The team discussed the SER, assigned tasks for each member and prepared a tentative agenda for the site visit. The tentative schedule was sent to Director/IQAU at OUSL for finalizing. The review team conducted the review between 6<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2020. The final schedule of the visit is attached to this report as Annex 3.1. The team arrived at the Hotel in the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> and discussed the SER and planned detail inquiries and meetings. The list below shows the assigned criteria for each reviewer for checking documents and evidence submitted.

- Prof. Kanthi K. A. S. Yapa Criteria 1, 2, 5, 6 and 8
- Prof. N. Shanmugalingam Criteria 2, 3, 4 and 10
- Prof. Jennifer Perera Criteria 3, 5, 7 and 8
- Prof. Jianxin Zhang Criteria 2 and 10
- Prof. Wipula Yapa Criteria 1, 2, 7 and 9
- Prof. Ranjith W. Pallegama Criteria 4, 6 and 9

The review team discussed the schedule with the Director/IQAU and made final adjustments to the agenda before the commencement of the review process. The Vice Chancellor of OUSL presented an overview of the University in relation to 10 criteria of the review at the first meeting held on the 6<sup>th</sup>. During the first four days of the visit, the six-member team was divided into two groups to have discussions in parallel sessions with all stakeholders; academics, non-academics, sample of students from each faculty, alumni, centre directors/coordinators, etc. Through these discussions the team identified some areas that require particular scrutiny. The review team visited all faculties, divisions, centres, the Library, canteens, the temporary residence for students, sports facility, sample of laboratories and lecture/day school rooms, computer labs, etc. to get a firsthand experience of quality of facilities available for staff and students. At the end of each day, the team inspected documents extensively and discussed the plan for the following day. All documents were arranged systematically in a comfortable room where review team could sit and scrutinize them with ease. The review team was very satisfied with the support given by the IQAU

office staff and the facilities provided by them. On the fifth day of the visit, the team divided into three groups to visit few regional centres located in Kandy, Matara, Ratnapura and Kurunagala and few study centres in Kalutara, Gampaha, Ambalangoda and Ambalantota. The review team extends its gratitude to all centre directors and academic and other staff members and students for their cordial reception and kind corporation extended to the team during the visits.

The visit was concluded on the 11<sup>th</sup> morning with a meeting with the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Deans, Librarian, Registrar, Director/IQAU, Directors of centres/units, SER writers and other senior academics. The team presented a summary on strengths and weaknesses found and commented on few issues that needed immediate attention. The Vice Chancellor responded to many weaknesses highlighted at the meeting with a promise to rectify them as early as possible.

## **Section 4 – Overview of the University’s Approach to Quality and Standards**

In the IR manual for Sri Lankan Distance and Higher Education Institutions, only six specific standards are kept for evaluation of the quality assurance process (1.19 - 1.24). These standards reflect more about QA policies and thus, comments regarding them will be discussed under criterion 1 in section 5 of this report. In this section, some specific details and practices of the quality and standards are highlighted.

OUSL had initiated its QA activities in 2004 with a Senate approved committee and the IQAU had been established in 2012 with an increased QA membership to include senior management and other administrative officers. The present IQAU has a Board of Management consisting of the Director/IQAU as the Chairman, Vice-Chancellor or DVC in attendance, Deans, Librarian, Directors, Registrar, Bursar and coordinators of IQACs of Faculties and a secretary (AR) according to the 2019 UGC circular. The review team observed the approach by OUSL to quality assurance process during the site visit period and it is at a satisfactory level and there is a high potential to improve further. IQAU has been fairly active, but IQACs in some faculties are not active to the same extent.

Good quality assurance process and best practices are vital for a successful outcome of an external evaluation. Internal quality assurance process needs to be internalized to all day-to-day activities within the University. The review team experienced considerable interest shown by all stakeholders about QA. However, there have been some shortcomings when writing the SER, mainly, not giving details about faculties and their functions, not including the recommendations of previous IR and how they have been addressed and not reporting the outcomes of programme reviews. Also, many statistical and tabulated data about OUSL staff, students, programmes offered, graduate information, etc. were missing in the SER, which could have been easily attached as Annexes to the SER. OUSL had not appointed an experienced internal review panel (other than an editorial board) to evaluate the SER or to check validity, relevance or appropriateness of collected documental evidence for each standard under each criterion. The outcome of not conducting an internal review affects heavily on the evaluation process, for example, the review team found irrelevant documents provided for many standards or sample/incomplete evidences provided only from a few faculties for some standards even when examples exist in other faculties. Also, there were documents with no date, no authorization or as unfilled forms. A thorough internal review could have avoided such lapses easily. Review team recommends that more senior academics to get involved in the institutional and programme review processes of other universities because that experience will surely improve the quality of the University and its programmes.

The review team found that the recommendations of 2013 IR have not been addressed completely from the document provided (in addition to the SER), the document neither had a date nor a signature by any authority. One of the major recommendations stated was to reform the organizational structure to suit ODL mandate and a new and comprehensive ordinance to be proposed and approved. However, the proposal is still being studied by the

legal officer after approval by the Senate. Out of 13 recommendations, only about six have been addressed to a satisfactory level whereas other recommendations have not been addressed at all or have been addressed only partly. It is important to identify responsible persons to address and monitor those recommendations with a timeline to complete them. It is very important that IQAU monitor the recommendations given in this report and push the authorities to complete them before the next IR.

The IQAU website needs to be updated. Regular activities of IQAU as well as IQACs need to be highlighted on the website for it to appear more dynamic. Internal quality assurance activities need to take place continuously and a schedule of quality promotional activities should be uploaded to the website as a monthly planner. QA by-laws should be available on the website as well. Online programme/course evaluation and student feedback mechanism should have some uniformity among all faculties. IQAU and IQACs need to monitor and encourage all stakeholders to do online evaluations. Analysis of the surveys, as relevant, could be uploaded on the IQAU website.



## **Section 5 – Commentary on the Ten Criteria of Institutional Review**

Analysis of the institutional review of OUSL by the team in relation to ten criteria is stated in this section. As there were similar standards under different criteria, the analysis included them at relevant places avoiding repetition as far as possible.

### **Criterion 1: Vision, Mission and Planning**

The OUSL “Vision” and “Mission” statements are in full compliance with the objective of providing high quality education to a wider sector of students and is a clear reflection of the University’s commitment to ODL. Seven strategic goals and action plans and KPIs under each of these strategic goals have been identified, providing the basis for key operations of the University. OUSL has adopted the participatory approach in developing the SMP with discussions having been held at the Council, Senate and Faculty Board levels involving a wider sector of the academic community. The University has developed several important policies such as Codes of Practices and Academic Accountability, Code of Prevention and Redress of Sexual Harassment, Work Norms, Guidelines for copy right etc., to name a few. However, it is equally important that Vision, Mission and the Action Plans are periodically communicated to all stakeholders and their feedback is obtained. There is evidence to show that the information is disseminated and discussions have been held between external consultants and the senior staff members at Council and Senate levels. However, adequate evidence was not provided in the form of feedback forms, minutes of various committee meetings or evidence for interaction with other stakeholders. Whether there had been a greater dialog among all relevant stakeholders seeking their viewpoints was not evident.

Although Vision and Mission statements appear in the University website, they are conspicuously absent in the OUSL standard documents such as hand books, prospectuses or brochures prepared for distribution among the prospective students. The review team is of the view that the OUSL could have more effectively utilized all available avenues/modes to communicate Vision and Mission at the level of Faculty Boards, and using all available resources to other categories of the stakeholders, especially the current and prospective students. Several policies could have been disseminated as internal circulars giving them wider publicity. Most of these documents are not uploaded to the University website. These could be made available under IQAU publications, so that there is easy access to such documents.

It appears that some quarters of the staff and a great majority of the students are not aware of some of the very important policies developed by the OUSL. For example, a majority of academic and non-academic staff members were not aware that there is a document on Prevention and Redress of Sexual Harassment. Thus, although it is commendable that the OUSL took a proactive role in developing several important documents, the failure to publicize these to all sectors of the University community has fallen short of the purpose.

Quality Assurance system has now become an essential and integral part of the National University system. An effective QA system ensures that the University is committed to national policies and guidelines prescribed by the regulatory agencies. The Open University

has established an Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU), complying with the instructions of the Quality Assurance Council of the UGC. The IQAU functions under a Director (Professor, a senior Academic), and a Management Committee has been appointed as per the guidelines stipulated by the QAC. It is commendable that either the Vice Chancellor or the Deputy Vice Chancellor participates in the Management Committee meetings, reflecting the commitment of the OUSL to QA system within the University. IQAU Management Committee meetings have been held regularly and included in the University calendar.

IQAU has an office in the administrative building and the Director is being assisted by a Management Assistant and a part-time Senior Assistant Registrar. Similarly, in each Faculty, Quality Assurance Cells have been established and the University has taken positive steps to develop a quality culture within the University. The review team is of the view that the IQAU has to be further strengthened with another Statistical Officer (or a Graduate Assistant) as it can function as the centre for collecting, analysing and interpreting data from all stakeholders. Although the Director /IQAU is indicated in the Organogram of the OUSL, it is placed at the level of the Heads of the Departments. It is recommended that considering the importance of the role played by the Director/IQAU, the said post be positioned at the level of the DVC or the Deans as stated in the 2019 UGC circular.

The OUSL has taken steps to align the study programmes/courses to Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF) by developing policies and revising curricular, teaching methods etc. The University has developed mechanisms to recognize prior learning and grant exceptions or credit transfers. Although the senior academic staff members are aware of the principle and the components of SLQF, some newly recruited staff members lack knowledge of the SLQF. The IQAU should play a proactive role to formulate OUSL QA policy, setting quality objectives, quality assurance and quality improvement in the entire University, especially in the regional and study centres.

## **Criterion 2: Governance and Management**

Governance means effective stewardship of the University to secure its future, safeguarding the University's mission and the public services it provides, securing the proper and effective use of public funds and accounting to stakeholders and society for institutional performance. Open universities have, over the years, developed managerial approaches in response to the challenges faced by them in a given country's context. In this context, the OUSL has evolved with an appropriate and clearly defined organogram. Its governance and management system are in compliance with the University Act of Sri Lanka and structure and functions are determined by Open University Ordinances. In order to address the problems of governance and management issues encountered during the past, OUSL Ordinance has been amended ten times. In this context, the latest proposal has been drafted in 2019, as a response to the recommendation made by last Institutional Review of 2013, and in the process of finalizing before sent to UGC for approval.

As the premier state higher education institution dedicated to open and distance learning, OUSL has attracted increasing number of undergraduate and postgraduate students over the

years reaching nearly 40,000 at present. With a clear understanding and commitment towards open learning and distance education, the OUSL extended its arms to reach educational needs of the students who faced constraints of time and place. It is commendable that the University is in progress towards ensuring the equity principle of open and distance learning even at the juncture of financial deductions to the Open University system.

A corporate plan for 2011-2016 and SMP and an Action plan for 2016-2020 are available. The University has established ad hoc committees and TORs are given to these committees. The Council monitors the progression of the activities of the University. A SMPcommittee has been established for the purpose of budgetary allocations. A participatory approach is taken in the preparation of action plans, etc. In this regard, a holistic and comprehensive periodic review is also necessary. Non-availability of such documents may lead to inefficient utilization of the budgetary allocations and delayed actions.

Incorporating ICT in key activities including the functions of ODL such as communication methods of e-mail, SMS, MyOUSL are very beneficial to the students. While enhancing the main library with e-journals, e-books, and other materials, taking new initiatives to produce Open U Tube and launching Open Cast are remarkable. In this regard, the development of CETMe is a unique achievement towards fulfilling the ODL mission of the OUSL.

All students are given an Activity Diary when they register for a study programme and many activities as possible being scheduled during weekends and public holidays. It is really a panacea for the working students and for their time management. Still there are issues with outstation students who have to take leave for the practical classes and examinations during working days. Review team encountered such cases and OUSL should manage such cases with an empathetic manner.

Human resource planning is an integral part of institutional governance and management. OUSL needs sufficient numbers of qualified academic, non-academic and technical staff to handle tasks both at the main campus and the network of centres. Present gaps in this regard must be addressed without further delay. Present day compelling system of bringing regional students to main centre for certain courses has to be revisited. Until OUSL facilitates and enriches human resources at the regional centres, it should find some feasible solutions.

Student academic counseling/mentoring is an essential part in any educational system especially in the ODL. University has an organized arrangement in this regard. There are relevant course coordinators. In certain faculties such as Engineering, a *Student Forum* is established and it consists of student representatives and Student counselors to discuss issues and find solutions. There is an announcement of availability of telephone numbers with students to contact and clarify any doubts. But our site visit observation reveals the fact of ‘unspoken’ telephones. OUSL management should ensure such communication facilities with proper monitoring.

The University has a stated policy on partnerships, collaborations and internationalization that includes international student recruitment, staff/student exchange, alliance with offshore universities, student support services, and cross border delivery. The review team assessed

achievements in this regard and strongly recommends a much greater effort towards promoting internationalization. At present there are only about 6 foreign students, fewer foreign teachers and no joint programme with other universities in Asia, which shows less regard to achieving the University vision, “to be the premier in Asia”.

The OUSL has a blessed environment to promote social harmony. With the existing programmes, more creative and interactive endeavors can be evolved with the regional centres. University needs to ensure an efficient mechanism to handle the grievances of staff members, especially the non-academic staff. Ensuring the zero tolerance of ragging and creating awareness about the established Centre for Gender Equity and equality among students is necessary. University incorporates the quality assurance mechanism through IQAU and IQACs in all faculties. Rectifying the gaps in this process and implementation of the recommendations of IRs and PRs must be the priority and the immediate action of the OUSL governance and management system towards quality assurance.

### **Criterion 3: The Learners**

This criterion addresses the needs of the diverse population of learners in an Open University setting. In keeping with the mission statement, the institution’s commitment to widening access to higher education for students from diverse backgrounds was assessed. The OUSL policy and practices related to promoting equity, fairness and justice on one hand, and quality, efficiency and public accountability on the other hand were reviewed under this criterion. Further, how well criteria and procedures on admission, progression and retention policies are communicated to potential candidates were evaluated.

The mission of OUSL is to enhance access to higher education and the need to focus on the characteristics of students who seek services. They may include those residing in remote and isolated geographical areas. In keeping with the mission of OUSL, inclusivity and equity need to be more proactively considered taking into account the diverse background of students. The delivery of education needs to be more efficient through incorporation of current developments in information and communication technology, particularly in relation to regional and study centres spread throughout the country.

Having a process for monitoring student progress, obtaining regular feedback and to follow up dropouts is an important measure that needs to be implemented to ensure that the mission of the University is realized. There is very little learner related research carried out at OUSL. This kind of research will assist the University to obtain insights into the factors that are responsible for successes and failures of students. These could be used for redesigning programmes and courses and to plan support services.

OUSL provides all incoming students a one-day common orientation programme and one-to-one counseling session regarding respective courses and general operational mode of the ODL system of the institution and this programme could be further expanded. In addition to the face-to-face session, a more elaborate description of the study programme, pre requisites for progression, teaching and learning methods and assessment and grading methods need to be provided either online or through the handbook. Students should be given hands-on

training of using the text books and learning material provided so that they acquire the skill of self-directed learning, particularly required by distant learners for effective learning.

The degree programmes mostly conform to those provided by conventional universities. It is important to widen the array of courses and programs based on prospects of employability and economic needs in the country within ODL concepts.

TOR of student counselors needs to be revisited as their immediate responsibility appeared to be linked to maintaining discipline rather than provision of counseling (discipline is the function of marshals and proctors) as transpired at the interview held with counselors. Therefore, counselors need to receive training on basic counseling skills. Linking of discipline to counseling, may distance the students from reaching out to counselors for help.

There is inadequate academic and social interaction among students and between students and staff and this varies widely among Faculties. Considering the diverse nature of the student population, it is important to have more regular forms of interaction, either face-to-face or preferably online to ensure that student needs are understood correctly by the service providers. Having a dedicated student portal/ call centre or student desk may be a useful method for addressing student concerns. The nonworking students need to acquire skills that are required to ensure employability. Career guidance, inculcation of correct values, and overall development of personality should be provided through the career guidance unit.

The regional and study centres (RSCs) are not provided with sufficient physical and study facilities to function effectively. They need adequate and up to date learning material to attain the standards required by the study programme. The low number of experienced and qualified teacher/instructor ratio in RSCs when compared to the Colombo centre can be met with recorded lectures, online broadcasting or through numerous communication technologies currently available at very low cost. The learners in RSCs need to be kept in touch with the Colombocentre more effectively for required information without having to travel there regularly. The knowledge of assistant directors on characteristics and objectives of ODL is not adequate. For this to be achieved, the assistant directors need specific training after they are employed and also a good grounding of their responsibilities and a TOR, without leaving them to their own methodology of management of their respective centres.

#### **Criterion 4: Human Resource Development**

A qualified and committed academic and non-academic staff over 1000 are employed at the OUSL. The University has a substantially structured and developed Staff Development Centre established and strengthened under the UGC Circular 937. It operates under a Management Committee chaired by the Vice-Chancellor with the assistance of a Programme Committee and is manned by a relatively new Director with a small staff. However, the University is still developing a comprehensive human resource (HR) policy covering wider aspects such as cadre enhancement and recruitments, HR management, staff development and obtaining services effectively with specific job descriptions. The University should make sure that the HR policy is conducive for a development of an ODL system and the specific/individual job descriptions are categorically aimed at developing and facilitating

ODL. A policy on grievance handling was available, however, evidence on consistent application and monitoring was limited. In the absence of a clear and wider policy, scattered policies and practices were observed. OUSL should encourage young academics to receive PhDs and take measures to attract overseas PhD holders to OUSL especially with some prior experience in ODL. OUSL needs to place at least one senior academic staff member at all Regional and established Study Centres or compensate that by academic staff members being present online in scheduled timeslots from Colombo Centre. Assistant Directors at RSCs should be provided easy and unhindered access of contacts with programme coordinators/course coordinators in the main campus.

The availability of academic staff at the Colombo Regional Centre can be considered satisfactory to manage the academic and administrative activities, although they require further training and insight to ODL. However, availability of academic staff in RSCs is very unsatisfactory. Administrative and non-academic staff are deficient at the Colombo Regional Centre as well as in other RSCs. With the available human resources, a minimum academic quality could be ensured at the RSCs. A limited cadre for general and finance administration is also noted. The University may act proactively with a strategic plan to enhance cadre and human resources at the Centre as well as at RSCs.

Induction programmes offered to young probationary and senior lecturers' recruited covering a wide collection of topics should be appreciated. However, a similar / relevant training should be offered to all categories on non-academic staff recruited. In addition to some scattered practices, the University may establish a formal mentoring programme for the new probationary lecturers and should be covered in the same HR policy.

The University possesses facilities for development of good ODL material, but interest among academic staff on ODL is poor. Their orientation is towards the same delivery, assessment and student support methods used in conventional state universities. The ODL philosophy and its relevance for a country like Sri Lanka where a large number of A/L qualified students are deprived of an opportunity for higher education is not strongly in the thinking process of many academic staff. The University may train the academic staff on the value of ODL in the current context and requirements of the country and promote them to go more for ODL with online capabilities involved and enhanced. Training must be provided on the education philosophy in an ODL and OBE context and the awareness should be raised in relation to the public accountability and purpose of an ODL system in a country. This should include an effective training on learning material development, delivery, assessment, student support and communication appropriate for an ODL model especially using online tools.

No critical analysis was found on a fair distribution of work for all categories of staff. While appreciating awards offered for excellence in research, the University may consistently and continuously adopt a university-wide broad method to appraise performance and satisfaction and award excellence in teaching and other services while finding remedies for concerns and underperformance. Excellent performance in ODL (especially with online methods and tools) for both academic and non-academic staff should be appreciated and rewarded. In addition to limited participants' evaluations obtained at the end of various short-term training programs

and workshops, the University may conduct an objectively designed training need evaluation to identify areas that should be strengthened to develop the ODL system.

Support and administrative staff should be trained on their specific tasks with an emphasis on the ODL in order to enhance their performance and to prevent them towing the system away from ODL towards a conventional system. The promotion scheme of academic staff in an ODL system should be different to the one used for conventional state universities and it should promote ODL. For example, innovative ODL activities, introducing study programmes which are more appropriate for ODL, developing ODL material, providing online student support services such as academic support, counselling and career guidance, ODL related research should receive a higher value. The training may also include the possibility of using open source and free platforms such as social media in effective communication and distribution of learning material. The training should highlight and effectively engage academic staff, administrative staff and technical staff automating and going online while reducing presence of students in the Nawala premises.

Staff welfare must be improved, and special attention should be placed on welfare, safety and health of non-academic staff of lower categories in order to enhance their job satisfaction and thereby services and contributions. In particular, vehicle drivers of the university, need to be provided suitable quarters with proper sanitation to rest in between their work schedules. A cordial environment needs to be established among administrative officers and non-academic staff in order for everyone to feel satisfied and respected.

Higher administrative officers must be made more aware of current national priorities and requirements for human development and motivate them to align their thinking, strategies and activities with the national requirements.

### **Criterion 5: Programme Design and Development**

Being the only national university offering education in ODL mode, the OUSL has strived to reach the masses in the country by offering many programmes in wide areas catering to professional, vocational and academic interests and needs. The University offers many Study programmes under several faculties allowing students to enter at different entry points depending on their level of qualification and students can exit at different exit points as well. This is commendable as it serves many who need to satisfy their aspirations without an obligation to complete a whole programme which quite well agrees with the ODL mandate. Nevertheless, in some programmes the exit points are not well-defined and not clearly communicated to stakeholders in an understandable manner.

Many faculties have gone through periodical programme reviews and guidelines, by-laws and regulations are available for design and development of study programmes. It is advisable that some of these guidelines to be developed as university policies so that procedures would be uniform. The process of design and development of programmes and their specifications are communicated to all stakeholders. It is important to broaden the programme specifications given for prospective students to include opportunities in the world of work after graduation. How well the programmes are designed incorporating diverse areas for



learners to develop a range of skills was not very clear from the documents provided. Mapping of the curriculum to graduate attributes is not done in appropriate manner, for example, a correct mapping technique should give a proper consideration to skills of students at entry level and what teaching/learning strategies are used in delivery, among other things.

OUSL delivers programmes to clients who are having a diverse knowledge base and who are coming from all corners of the country. Therefore, it is necessary that development of new study programmes or major revisions of existing programmes should start with a needs survey and a proper need analysis. Though OUSL claims that need analysis is mandatory, whether it has been adhered by all is not clear. It should be compulsory to do the analysis after a survey is done. Also, stakeholder participation at all key stages of programme design and development is important and evidence had been provided only in some cases. Participation by outside experts in the programme design and development stage should be mandatory and there was no evidence for such involvement.

Naming of the degree programmes in accordance with SLQF guidelines need to be completed soon, some programmes still have old names. Graduate attributes/profile is not defined for many programmes. OUSL needs to study SLQF guidelines regarding graduate attributes and to identify how they can be adapted to suit ODL mode delivery as well as how to consider varying skills that clientele already have at entry points. Also, features of outcome-based education is not visible in study programme design, development and delivery. OUSL needs to identify proper delivery methods within ODL context to achieve the outcomes defined in study programmes.

Regular surveys should be conducted on undergraduate/graduate satisfaction regarding study programmes. Also, student feedback on study programmes should be taken annually and take measures to improve the programmes. Proper KPIs should be identified considering ODL mode so that they are realistic to achieve within an identified time frame. These KPIs should be monitored on timely basis and be used for programme outcome measurement and programme evaluation. Annual tracer study should be conducted in a broader aspect, to include an evaluation of the study programme by graduates.

Low completion rate of students had been identified as a threat in the SWOT analysis. Though it had been identified as a threat even in the past as stated in 2015 SMP, there was no study launched by OUSL to find reasons for such low rates. A proper mechanism should be identified to monitor student progression more closely so that their difficulties in remaining with a study programme as well as in completing a programme could be recognized. It will help OUSL to take necessary steps to address the issues and to improve its retention and completion rates. Multi-disciplinary, vocational and professional courses could be included in study programmes to enhance their quality. Study programmes need to be incorporated with many different teaching/learning strategies for delivery within the ODL mode, may be using mostly online/video/audio methods.

## **Criterion 6: Course Design and Development**



Guidelines approved by Senate for course design and development are available and they are communicated well to all relevant personnel. Course design and development templates have been approved and are incorporated and adopted in current modules and units. LMS has been used as the primary platform to display course synopsis and course structure to students. However, as it is important for prospective students to be knowledgeable about details of course units/modules before registration to make informed choices, they should be available under faculty websites as well. As OUSL caters to students spread across the country, courses should be designed in manner that they could be delivered effectively to students who are engaged in an ODL system. For example, in planning day-school dates for delivery of some content and assessments, a course should be designed in manner that those could be delivered without major disturbances to students who are already employed and who have least access to the main campus. Further, in today's context, it would be more appropriate to design courses in a manner that could be delivered online.

Subject Benchmarks have not been used in a satisfactory manner in course unit design and development, and no evidence of national and/or international Benchmarks being used in many course modules, though regulations are available. To thrive on OUSL vision, "To be the premier ODL institution in Asia...." it is important to identify international trends and to use/compare/comply with international benchmarks as applicable as possible.

Course unit ILOs have not been mapped to graduate attributes in a proper manner. It is not advisable just to map parts/sections of course contents to attributes without identifying what teaching/learning methods being used in delivery or through self-learning. Both syllabi and teaching/learning strategies need to encourage development of skills, creative and critical thinking, independent and life-long learning, interpersonal communication and team work, etc. Also, assessment methods have not been well adapted to match OBE and encourage student centred learning or for students to achieve course ILOs and in turn PLOs. Online or distance learning and assessment techniques need to be incorporated more into course design.

Some course units have high credit values of 6 and in an academic year one of the study programmes at OUSL offers 5 such courses to cover the required 30 credits. The learning volume in a 6 credit course is too heavy for a student, even for a student learning in a conventional university, especially when they prepare for assignments and examinations. Therefore, all theory and practical course units need to have reasonable credit values, for example, between 1 and 4 credits (course units with 2 and 3 credits are preferable). For projects and research courses, allocating about 6 – 8 credits is acceptable. The fact that the learners at OUSL are from a diverse background needs to be given high consideration when course delivery, assessment and student support system are developed. Course specification, delivery modes, assessment criteria of each course should be made available at relevant websites for student access at all times, especially for prospective students' perusal. Stakeholder feedback needs to be obtained regarding course material, conducting day schools, continuous assessment, etc. after completion of each course unit and it needs to be analysed and communicated to relevant authorities for corrective mechanisms, if required.

The review team observed that OUSL is gradually deviating from open and distance mode and progressively leaning towards conventional university teaching/learning mode. OUSL

needs to take a serious look at its current trend and must take necessary steps to preserve “Open and Distance Learning” concept. The staff, academic and non-academic, and students should be given a deeper understanding of the purpose and value of the concept, the vision and mission of the University and how it should be different from conventional university in many ways, especially in designing courses, planning lessons and in delivery. A good brainstorming session on how open and distance learning has been serving the rest of world would be an eye opener to the OUSL community.

Academics should consider that it is mandatory to maintain updated learning materials for all courses. A deadline should be given for academics to update already outdated material. It was a common observation that most of the materials are not updated and learner friendly. With the current trend of using mobile phones and laptops by almost every student, providing printed course books is not mandatory by OUSL, thus, access to soft copies of course books with more appealing colour pictures/figures/plots could be given with a lower registration fee for all. Also, all e-versions can be made available to anyone through the downloadable site. For each course, credit hours and notional hours need to be defined properly according to SLQF guidelines and students should be educated on what and how notional hours need to be spent in their learning. The copy-right policy need to be finalized and approved. The ultimate responsibility of a developed course and course material should be borne by a course team, not by a single teacher.

### **Criterion 7: Learning Infrastructure, Resources and Learner Support**

Availability of adequate facilities in terms of learning resources, well established student support system and a satisfactory welfare system are vital elements in providing a quality Education. However, providing such a system, especially in the ODL context, is often challenging. The OUSL has embarked on several ways to provide a conducive learning environment for the students. It has an island-wide network of Regional Centres and Study Centres, located in each district of the island enabling the University to reach every corner of the island. The OUSL has a robust organizational structure, which is similar to that of a conventional university. Primary responsibility of the Deputy Vice Chancellor is to attend to the needs and issues related to students. In addition, several administrative positions have been created, such as the Director for the Centre for Educational Technology and Media (CETMe) in which, the mandate is to apply Educational Technology through the exploitation of media. It appears that CETMe plays a pivotal role in providing guidelines for designing self-instructional materials, designing and developing educational media while ensuring quality standards of the OUSL course materials. It is the service provider for all five faculties to develop their courses including online courses.

To cater to students spread in the country, the OUSL has established a network of libraries, Nawala main campus is having the central library and several regional centres are having branch libraries. In addition, there are even smaller libraries in some study centres. Furthermore, the OUSL is planning to have a “Library Corner” in each of the main municipal libraries, which is an innovative step taken by the University in view of the constraints faced establishing a fully equipped library in each study centre. The main library at Nawala premises is equipped with a good collection of books in diverse subject areas and a collection

of journals, both foreign and local. There are areas dedicated for discussions inside the library, which promotes peer-assisted learning. The main library is open for students from 8.30 am to 6.30 pm each day including week-ends except poya and other holidays. In addition to the print media, it also provides students audio and video support through the Audio Visual Resource Centre (AVRC). The AVRC provides internet facilities free of charge for students. However, the number of working computers does not seem sufficient and students are not allowed to take their own laptop into the library. The review team had the opportunity to visit some of the regional and study centres and a vast difference was observed in terms of facilities, available academic and non-academic staff and available space. For example, the library in Kandy regional centre is quite satisfactory, whereas the Kurunagala regional centre does not even have a proper room for the library. The seating is available only for about 15 students, which is quite insufficient.

It is commendable that OUSL has uploaded past exam papers of most of the study programmes to the web so students can have access. In addition, it is important that at least model marking schemes of examinations are available for students so that they can have some sort of self-assessment on their performance. The review team is of the view, that although the main campus and few regional centres have adequate resources to cater to the needs of the students, radical improvements are needed in other centres. Therefore, need assessment surveys must be carried out at regional and study centres, so that progressive steps can be taken to better equip them. Inclusion of soft copies of books, as available, is another important step that OUSL can take to provide more online access to them.

OUSL is using adequate technology and possesses mechanisms to provide learner support services enabling students to access information effectively through a variety of modes. The website provides vital information about the university, faculties as well as programmes conducted with all necessary information (Admission requirements, closing dates, fee structure) for students. OUSL uses Moodle 3.2 and provides three types of online courses, which include Optional or Supplementary courses, Online Plus (20% compulsory) and Fully Online courses. Once a student is registered for a course with an online component, the NAC (National Online Distance Education Service Access Centre) can assist and guide the students on accessing and using online components. MyOUSL allows students to access online Moodle courses, timetables, payment details and to apply for exams. It is very helpful for the students in the context of the ODL system. Further, the OUSL provides video conferencing through Big Blue Button software and the central campus can easily be connected to RSCs. This enables the day schools to be live telecasted to other centres at a distance. However, most of the RSCs are not equipped properly to receive these webcasts. It is encouraging that the University has two video channels, the Open UTube and Open Cast, which need to be used more in delivery.

Use of a wide range of media for teaching and learning should be an integral part of a successful ODL system. OUSL uses study packages consist of printed course material, audio visual aids, discussions, day schools, tutor clinics, lab and field classes, industry visits, web-based learning etc. Based on the necessity, students will also be provided with other supportive material applicable to a course, such as study guides, practical guides, audio visual material, etc. However, the review team found out that some of the printed material provided

is illegible and outdated. Thus, there is an urgent necessity to regularly update the course material and to make them available as soft copies for students to follow until the printed material is available.

The University claims that each student is assigned a personal tutor/counsellor during the pre-registration/orientation sessions of some programmes, how real the claim is not certain. It is important that the University establishes an effective peer mentoring system, which is not available in certain faculties and also in the RSCs. Since the face-to-face time with lecturers are minimal in an ODL system, strengthening the peer mentoring will help students to gain information about the University, the study system, examination system and assessment methods and other particulars regarding the programme of study through their peers.

Colombo Regional Centre and only few other regional centres are equipped with necessary facilities required in a higher education institute such as lecture halls, laboratories where relevant (Engineering, Natural Sciences and Health Sciences), seminar rooms, conference halls, examination halls etc. Most of the labs the team observed were in good condition with proper working instruments. Department of Computer Science has a well maintained computer lab which caters to all faculties. However, the Elementary computer lab, apparently managed by two demonstrators, is having too many out of order computers. The review team suggests the management to seriously look into the possibility of amalgamating these two laboratories, so that the equipment is well maintained and it can serve students more efficiently and effectively. The review team also noted that a section of the computer lab, where high end computers are located, needs urgent repairs. Consequently, only about half of the latest computers (i7) are being used. Further, an online UPS system, which has been requested by the computer department for the computer lab, is recommended.

Department of Zoology has established a museum which has some rare and valuable specimens, which can give students much needed hands-on experience in the subject. However, this is currently managed by a Senior Lecturer, assisted by a part-time laboratory attendant. Given the fact that there are only two lab attendants for the entire department, and considering the importance of the museum, the review team recommends a career position be provided (Lab Attendant) for the museum so that this facility will be properly maintained and used frequently for educational purposes.

OUSL provides temporary residential facilities mainly at the main campus, but to a limited number and for a limited period. This provision is commendable as it enables outstation students to effectively engage in learning activities and promotes student-student interaction in all faculties, which is rare in an ODL system. The Physical Education Unit and the Fitness Centre are managed by a Director and arrangements are being made to house this facility in a new building. Coaches are available for each of the sports. It is commendable that the OUSL has allocated Rs. 40 million for the department to improve sport facilities.

OUSL provides a limited number of bursaries administered by the university and Mahapola Scholarships administered under the Mahapola Trust. The University Enhancement Bursary is a scheme purely based on Merit; the overall student performance at Final Exams. The Enrolment Bursary is provided for those who need financial support during the first year. The

Mahapola Trust provides scholarships to students who are from low income families. The criteria for Bursaries and Scholarships are communicated to students through Assistant Registrars of each Faculty. In addition, OUSL provides Rs. 50,000 for each Final Year research project. Thus, OUSL provides adequate financial support to various categories of students at different levels.

Any higher education institute must focus special attention on students with special needs and differently-abled students. It is the responsibility of the institute to provide necessary infrastructure facilities, academic support, special learning resources and an overall conducive atmosphere within the university for such students. The OUSL has developed a policy on differently-abled students in 2018, but the review team did not come across any progressive steps taken by the University to meet the needs of such students. Thus, while appreciating the development of a policy, the team recommends the University to take necessary steps immediately to implement the policy, so that students will have the opportunity to participate fully in academic, social and cultural activities in the university.

The University practices obtaining feedback of the graduates at the time of the convocation, but has not provided any evidence on student satisfaction surveys, that the feedback was taken on the curriculum, learning resources and academic programs. Further, no evidence was found on the actions taken on the feedback given by the students. Thus, it is imperative that the University monitors students learning experience, achievements and satisfaction at least annually, and take appropriate actions based on the feedbacks to ensure that students have achieved desired learning outcomes and have spent a productive time at the University.

### **Criterion 8: Learner Assessment and Evaluation**

Assessments drive learning and they are responsible for maintaining academic standards. SLQF and SBS as well as reputable professional bodies often determine them. Therefore, assessments need to be linked to the expected learning outcomes. The assessment strategies need to be reviewed in a regular manner and amended so that they are fit for the purpose. The assessment criteria, weightage, grading and appeal policies should be documented and approved by the relevant committees prior to implementation and should be communicated to both staff and students in a timely manner. The assessments should be valid, reliable and fair. Protocols and procedures for conducting simultaneous examinations should be in place at all locations, while ensuring integrity. Any changes to assessment formats must follow the established approval policies and protocols. It is also important to use multiple methods of assessments, including formative assessments and work place based assessments. To achieve these objectives, teachers should receive regular training on methods of assessments.

External scrutiny and evaluation is an important aspect of assessments and blind second marking should be an integral component of good assessment practices. The protocols for reconciling major discrepancies in marks should be explicitly stated. External examiners reports should be maintained and evaluated critically to make any improvements required for assessments. Student assessment results should be communicated to students in a timely manner, while providing feedback to facilitate further learning. Examination/assessment

regulations should ensure that disciplinary procedures are in place for handling violation of codes of conduct by students/staff during such instances.

The institution should give the responsibility to an identified body to use plagiarism software to determine similarities among student research and project reports and theses as well as manuscripts/abstracts submitted by staff/students for conferences/publications. Many programmes use assignments and use of a plagiarism checking policy/ guideline is essential to ensure adherence to similarity indices across faculties.

Disabled students should be given appropriate allowances to ensure that they are assessed in a fair manner when compared to their peers. At OUSL, students get a good grounding of assessment formats and marks breakdown between exams and marking schemes at the inception of the course. There is a comprehensive examination manual and conflict of interest forms for examiners. Presence of an appeal system to re-scrutinize examination marks is a healthy practice. Continuous assessments are being used in all degree programs as a regular feature, posting their results in a timely manner is essential for students to get ready for summative assessments. Use of external examiners for final examinations is commendable, and there is a need to obtain regular external examiner reports to maintain and improve quality. There is a need to provide regular, comprehensive and timely feedback to students on their performance, especially on continuous assessments, to enable them to benefit from them. This should be adopted across all faculties as a policy. Assessment blue prints need to be used so that course outcomes match with assessment formats/tasks.

### **Criterion 9: Postgraduate Studies, Research, Innovation and Commercialization**

OUSL identifies research and innovation as a priority in the corporate plan. The University has activities and strategies at a satisfactory level that encourage and facilitate a research culture and the University awards excellence in research by academic staff. The interest in establishing partnerships, interactions and collaborations through MoUs with local and international organizations/institutions and industry is appreciated. The University has established by-laws, rules and regulations for research and postgraduate research degrees but the evidence of dissemination of those and making those available to relevant parties is limited. The University has employed clear and transparent policies and procedures in advertising and recruiting postgraduate students, but the induction for postgraduate programs has been without a formal procedure. Considerable number of programs are being conducted to enhance research skills of the staff. The University conducts short and ad-hoc training for PG research students on conducting research. The research is a component found in curricula of almost all undergraduate study programs (where evidence was made available) and student engagement in research is encouraged and satisfactorily facilitated by the University. The contribution by Industrial Liaison Centre of the University is noteworthy.

The standards stipulated by the SLQF for post-graduate research degrees have been adopted by the University to a reasonable degree although evidence was not available for all programs of all faculties. However, the University could map and illustrate the compliance with evidence. A firm and proper mechanism may be introduced for effective monitoring of postgraduate research programs covering all relevant aspects which applies to all faculties and post-graduate institutions. A higher-level monitoring and progress evaluation mechanism

need to be established, which may include obtaining feedback from students and supervisors for improvement of the procedures and practices.

The policy and practices on appointing supervisors for postgraduate research degrees need to be clear with established criteria. The newly prepared guidelines for research supervisors should be appreciated and the same should be made available for research students and well communicated to supervisors in advance. Senate approved clear policies and criteria for authorship of research output and intellectual property need to be established. Further, in addition to ethics review, a policy, underlying by-laws and a full code of conduct/practice that covers all areas of research should be in place to prevent misconduct, plagiarism etc. A policy, procedures and guidelines to avoid conflicts of interests may be established for researchers and research students and communicated to all relevant parties, implemented and monitored. Only scattered evidence was made available during the site-evaluation in this regard. A fair, transparent and robust complaints and appeals procedure related to research needs to be established with the approval of the Senate and the Council, and it should be made accessible to researchers and research students and should be applied consistently.

The University may promote research on ODL and may place an emphasis on those in considering applications for academic promotions. Further, the University may establish a policy on financing research and encourage obtaining outside grants by researchers to conduct research with an application and a national relevance. The effort by OUSL to provide research grants to facilitate undergraduate research work and financial support to staff to present research findings at international conferences as well as to publish in indexed journals is praise worthy. The University may strengthen the research culture and the academic environment within the university community by conducting activities such as seminars, workshops, guest lectures and student research discussion forums etc. regularly with a coordinated mechanism. It is recommended to conduct these using online tools/methods with available and free online platforms without physically inviting individual students and staff to premises.

### **Criterion 10: Community Engagement, Consultancy and Outreach**

The Open University, as a unique learning and teaching space, always gives a blend of remote and face-to-face engagement events and creates a sense of community amongst students and staff. In this respect the OUSL as reflected in its mission have clearly defined policies for collaborations, linkages, community service and outreach activities.

OUSL has established organizational structures such as Consultancy and External Resource Centre (CERC), Centre for Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development (CESSD), Support Centre for Children and Adolescent at Risk Situation, International Relation Unit (IRU) and Career Guidance Unit to gear, facilitate and engaging such activities.

Community engagement takes place at deferent stages of national development. OUSL academics have been regularly contributing to the lifelong learning mission of the Open University and directly influencing the national level policy development such as constitutional reforms and other development policies on Education, Media, Law, Public



Administration etc. This engagement varies from consultancy to research initiatives. In this respect it is commendable that OUSL is encouraging staff and students by facilitating considerable financial assistance to engage in community based research activities. Their social work activities are also remarkable. Co-Curricular Activities of the Societies /Associations in the University are noteworthy in this regard. It is impressive that the academic programs and courses are planned to create insightful and socially responsible graduate attributes and cultivate necessary social skills.

A holistic perspective of education to cultivate its roots in social, environmental, cultural and economic betterment of the communities is evidence even in the Mathematic courses by linking Philosophy of Engineering. The work based assignments and training for students also gives an opportunity to gain employment. In this respect university need to strengthen its alumni without further delay. Realization of such importance being experienced during the interaction with alumni of OUSL. Welfare unit has to facilitate such formation.

Regarding the International Relation Unit, the review team wishes to record its dissatisfaction. University has ample opportunity to contribute through internationalization of consultancy as well as other out reaching activities and in return can earn monetary benefits as well as global recognition. Needs of the regional centres in relation to the community engagement, consultancy and outreach activities have to be addressed with special attention.

## Section 6: Grading of Overall Performance of the Institution

The review panel examined all documents pertain to each standard thoroughly and a final score for each standard was agreed by consensus of all six reviewers.

No	Criterion	Weightage on a thousand scale	Raw Criteria-wise maximumScore	Raw Criteria-wise Score received	Converted actual Criteria-wise Score	Weighted minimum score *	Above weighted minimum score (Y/N)
1	Vision, mission and Planning (24)	80	72	62	<b>69</b>	40	Y
2	Governance & Management (40)	150	120	91	<b>114</b>	75	Y
3	The Learners (13)	50	39	27	<b>35</b>	25	Y
4	Human Resource Development (22)	100	66	41	<b>62</b>	50	Y
5	ProgrammeDesign and Development (30)	100	90	61	<b>68</b>	50	Y
6	Course design and Development (24)	120	72	46	<b>77</b>	60	Y
7	Learning, infrastructure, resources and Learner support (28)	150	84	67	<b>120</b>	75	Y
8	Assessment & Evaluation (21)	100	63	40	<b>63</b>	50	Y



9	PG studies, research, innovation and commercialization (27)	100	81	57	<b>70</b>	50	Y
10	Community engagement, consultancy and outreach (8)	50	24	18	<b>38</b>	25	Y
	Total score (out of 1000)				<b>715</b>		
	Total score (out of 100)				<b>71.5</b>		

\*Represents 50% of the values given under “weightage on thousand scale” in the Table

### Performance of the Open University of Sri Lanka

- i) Overall University Score **71.5**  
And
- ii) A score equal to or more than the weighted minimum score for all **10** criteria.

**Accordingly, the quality of education, provision and standard of awards of the Open University of Sri Lanka can receive B grade (*Good*).** Hence, the University has a satisfactory level of accomplishment of quality expected of an academic institution and there is room for further improvement.

It is a requirement that the IR report includes a list of standards which have received an inadequate or barely adequate score (score of 0 or 1) when the institution reviewed obtains a Grade of B. Accordingly a list of standards which scored 0 or 1 are given below (only standard, 9.18, received a score of 0). The reason/s for a low score could be either due to absence of evidence or insufficient or inappropriate evidence provided to support the claim that the best practices are internalized at all or most of the divisions and levels/faculties of the university.

Criterion	Standards which received a score of 0 or 1
1	1.8, 1.9
2	2.9
3	3.12
4	4.1, 4.5, 4.13, 4.14, 4.15, 4.18, 4.20
5	5.13, 5.15, 5.18, 5.19, 5.20, 5.25, 5.26
6	6.1, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.11, 6.18
7	7.8, 7.9, 7.14, 7.15
8	8.4, 8.5, 8.8, 8.9, 8.11, 8.20, 8.21
9	9.10, 9.16, 9.18, 9.20
10	-



## Section 7 - Commendations and Recommendations

### Criterion 1: Vision, Mission and Planning

#### *Commendations:*

1. Vision and mission statements are in line with ODL concept.
2. Strategic Management Plan was developed and reviewed periodically.
3. A comprehensive action plan and some policy documents have been developed to maintain the academic quality of study programs conducted by most of the faculties.
4. Best practices have been adhered to improve and maintain quality of many study programmes.
5. University adheres to a clear policy to recognize prior learning.
6. The University has a policy for MIS to cover key operations in the university.

#### *Recommendations:*

1. OUSL needs to assess its current mandate with respect to its vision and mission and take measures to maintain Open and Distance Learning (ODL) concepts and practices without depriving opportunities for many prospective students/learners.
2. The quality of the university website needs to be enhanced and it should be updated to include more information to attract prospective students, in particular.
3. An effective feedback system should be developed to collect data from all relevant stakeholders.
4. OUSL needs to establish a mechanism to redress grievances of the staff and students.
5. Quality assurance policies need to be institutionalized by proper communication with all staff members.
6. More training programmes for non-academic staff need to be introduced. Knowledge and skills of Technical staff, in particular, need to be updated regularly.
7. OUSL must take some actions to promote internationalization in order to realize its vision “.... to be the premier ODL Institution in Asia ....”

### Criterion 2: Governance and Management

#### *Commendations:*

1. The university complies with standard regulations to govern and maintain its stand as a premier open and learning (ODL) institution and it progresses satisfactorily even at the juncture of financial deductions.
2. The network of Regional Centres with Assistant Directors and study centres have been expanded to ensure the equity principle of Open and Distance Learning.
3. Development of CETMe during the review period and produce open U tubes and launching open cast are remarkable achievements towards fulfilling ODL mission.
4. While enhancing the main library with e-journals, e-books, and other materials, taking new initiatives to establish OUSL library corners at public libraries, where necessary, is an innovative step.

5. All students are given an Activity Diary when they register for a study programme and many activities as possible being scheduled during weekends and public holidays. It is really a panacea for working students and for their time management.

### ***Recommendations:***

1. There should be a regular mechanism of holistically integrated evaluation process to review achievements and to identify gaps with strategic and action plans.
2. While expanding the regional centres and study centres with administrative Asst. Directors, it is necessary to have academic leadership at regional centres for coordination and improvement of learning facilities.
3. With a special attention, an arrangement has to be made with participation of all stakeholders to address the low completion rates of courses /study programmes by students.
4. University has to strengthen the Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU) and Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQACs) at the faculty level to achieve progress towards recommendations of the previous IR with a time frame.
5. An establishment of systematic interactive sessions for mentoring/student counselling is urgently needed. In this respect, necessary facilities and proper monitoring should be arranged.
6. A smooth procedure for accepting overseas PhD candidates needs to be facilitated.
7. Strengthening and activating the International Relations Unit are necessary.
8. The University has to realize its capacity for generation of funds. It is imperative that the University identifies its fund generating avenues.
9. As the Open University represents academic systems catering to large populations of mature learners, widely dispersed and highly diversified, it needs a different governance arrangement compared to conventional universities.

## **Criterion 3: The Learners**

### ***Commendations:***

1. OUSL delivers many degree programmes, diploma and certificate courses.
2. A Management Information System (MIS) having student information and other related data, is currently functioning in the university.
3. University website provides updated information on courses and programmes.
4. Provision of feedback to learners on their course work is available.
5. Need surveys for new courses are carried out.
6. A comprehensive disability policy is available.
7. Student representation in Faculty Board meetings is provided in many faculties.
8. An orientation and counseling sessions are conducted at the inception of all programmes.
9. Some faculties conduct a useful module for orientation of students on Open Distance Learning methods.

***Recommendations:***

1. Vision and mission statements are not available in all handbooks. It is important to display them in all faculties and in places where students, visitors and non-student stakeholders meet.
2. Approval needs to be obtained for the draft policy on IT security from the Council for implementation.
3. Student tracer studies and data on dropout and completion rates (student progression) for different courses and programmes are not available. Tracer studies / exit interviews of students who drop out need to be done on a regular basis.
4. Student need surveys on learning environment should be conducted and survey results need to be discussed and implemented as relevant.
5. Provision of regular feedback on student learning assignments should be made a component of ODL university culture in all programmes.
6. Needs to create awareness of the disability policy and gender policy among all students, staff and student counselors/mentors, in particular.
7. It is necessary to increase staff and student interaction through online modes in issues related to learning and problem solving.
8. Need to establish regular formalized meetings with representative students from the student community in decision making processes related to curriculum.
9. Include a module on open distance learning methods in all faculties
10. Management Information System needs to be more comprehensive, up to date, flexible and homogeneous to all faculties.
11. English and IT modules should be made available to all students at the beginning as well as throughout, irrespective of study programmes.
12. English language of students should be improved through self-learning online modules on continuous /level to level basis.
13. An appeal system should be in place to take up academic grievances of students in keeping with the mission of life-long learning.
14. Complaint/suggestion boxes for students should be placed at faculty/departments.
15. Student hotline/student desk needs to be installed and be manned by a committed person who is given a specific TOR as problem of communication with main campus was highlighted as an issue by students.

**Criterion 4: Human Resource Development*****Commendations:***

1. A qualified and committed academic/non-academic staff over 1000 is employed at OUSL.
2. Training activities for academic staff for their continuous professional development are at an acceptable level.
3. Newly recruited senior and probationary academic staff undergo a compulsory induction training programme.
4. OUSL possess a Staff Development Centre with adequate resources.

***Recommendations:***

1. University needs to develop its own comprehensive policy on human resource development including induction training covering all categories of staff.
2. All academic staff and technical staff should be continuously updated and trained on ODL methods and OBE, and should be motivated to use more online material and have online presence.
3. OUSL should encourage young academics to receive more PhDs and take measures to attract overseas PhD candidates to OUSL.
4. OUSL needs to place at least one senior academic staff member at all Regional and established Study Centres or compensate that by academic staff members from Colombo centre being present online in scheduled time-slots.
5. Assistant Directors at Regional Centres should be provided easy access of contacts with programme coordinators/course coordinators at main campus.
6. An organized mechanism of appraisal and rewarding system need to be formalized for all categories of staff, paying special attention to lower-grades of non-academic staff and taking remedial actions on underperformance.
7. Assessment of job satisfaction and training needs should be done in a systematic manner in order to take appropriate measures to bridge the gaps.
8. A mechanism needs to be established that every academic staff member is provided at least a half-a-day training programme every year on ODL concepts and practices as well as on updating self.
9. A cordial environment needs to be established among administrative officers and non-academic staff in order for everyone to feel satisfied and respected.
10. Vehicle drivers of the university, in particular, need to be provided a suitable place with proper sanitation to rest in between their work schedules.

**Criterion 5: Programme Design and Development*****Commendations:***

1. Many faculties have done regular revisions of their study programmes.
2. Many study programmes have lateral entry and early exit points.
3. Guidelines are available for design and development of study programmes.
4. The process of design and development of study programmes are communicated to all stake holders.
5. By-laws and regulations for study programmes are available.
6. Programme specifications are communicated to all stakeholders.

***Recommendations:***

1. Graduate profiles for all study programmes need to be identified clearly within an ODL context.
2. Proper need surveys/analysis should to be carried out during revision of all study programmes.
3. Stakeholder participation (input from graduates/undergraduates, in particular) in programme revision needs to be considered to a greater extent.

4. Curriculum mapping needs to be done in a proper manner, considering appropriate teaching/learning strategies in ODL context.
5. Key performance indicators as per ODL system need to be identified for programme outcome measurements and for programme evaluation purposes.
6. Regular student feedback and satisfaction surveys need to be conducted/analysed for proper evaluation of Study Programmes.
7. All Study Programmes should be named clearly according to SLQF guidelines.
8. Tracer study should be conducted annually, in a broader aspect, by including an evaluation of respective programme of study by each graduate.
9. Student progression needs to be monitored more closely and university must take steps to improve completion and retention rates.
10. Opportunities for more multi-disciplinary, vocational and professional courses needs to be enhanced.

## **Criterion 6: Course Design and Development**

### ***Commendations:***

1. Senate approved guidelines are available for course design and development.
2. Guidelines, rules and regulations are communicated well.
3. Approved course design and development models are incorporated and adopted in current course modules/units.
4. Course synopsis and course structure is available on LMS for many course modules.

### ***Recommendations:***

1. National and international benchmarks need to be incorporated more in design of course modules as much as possible.
2. Proper teaching/learning strategies (in the ODL context) need to be carefully identified in order to do a proper curriculum mapping.
3. Proper assessment methods need to be developed for students to achieve identified PLOs and course ILOs.
4. OUSL needs to revise credit values assigned for theory/practical course units carrying values of 5 or more (except research/project courses which may carry credits of 6 – 8) to include maximum of 4 credits or less.
5. Diversity of learners needs to be given a high consideration when course delivery, assessment and support system for learners are developed.
6. One-page course structure (course specifications, delivery modes, assessment criteria etc.) of each course should be made available on the University website (in addition to LMS and other restricted environments) under each study programme, targeting prospective students/learners.
7. Stakeholder feedback needs to be obtained after completion of each course unit.
8. OBE and SCL approaches in delivery/assessment of course units need to be introduced in ODL context, as appropriate and as relevant.

9. To preserve “Open and Distance Learning”, the staff as well as students need to be provided with a deeper understanding of the concept, the goals and its proper application.
10. OUSL needs to introduce downloadable e-versions for all learning materials and convert the delivery of course units to on-line method as much as possible, if not all.

## **Criterion 7: Learning Infrastructure, Resources and Learner Support**

### ***Commendations:***

1. Resources and facilities are available for social and personal development of students.
2. A well-equipped computer lab is available.
3. A mixture of resources are used to conduct programmes.

### ***Recommendations:***

1. Support services for the differently abled students need to be improved.
2. Regular communications between students and staff are needed.
3. All continuous and other examination results need to be released on time.
4. Learner satisfaction surveys at all Regional and Study Centres need to be conducted.
5. Infrastructure facilities, especially in the Regional Centres, need to be improved. E.g. Web-based communication facilities for students to follow day schools conducted at Colombo centre (Skype/video conferencing, etc.)
6. Some teaching materials available are out dated and need to be updated. All academic staff who have not done updating yet should be given deadlines to complete updated soft-versions of their course material
7. Some course books printed are not very clear and are not legible. Responsible academics should be given clear instructions to develop soft-versions immediately.
8. OUSL needs to take immediate steps to establish online examination methods so that employed students are given least disturbance to their work place responsibilities.
9. Examination time tables should be given closer attention to avoid overlaps as well as to allocate sufficient time periods between examinations if a student has to sit for more than one exam in a single day.
10. OUSL may consider having an online UPS system for the Computer Lab.
11. The University should take necessary steps to curb ragging at all costs. Facilitating more and more online modes of delivery/assessment would help to reduce presence of students at centres, particularly at Main Campus.
12. Temporary student residential quarters should be made available through a streamlined procedure and it should have two permanent cadre positions of male/female sub-wardens for smooth running.
13. There should be at least one female student counselor for each faculty.

## **Criterion 8: Assessment and Evaluation**

### ***Commendations:***

1. Rules and regulations on exams for most study programmes are available.



2. Assessments are conducted fairly and in a transparent manner.
3. Programme handbooks are available in print as well as on the website.
4. Continuous assessments are available for study programs.
5. Procedure manual for examinations is available.
6. Information on exam formats and marks distribution for assessments are available.
7. A formal appeal system for scrutiny of examination results is accessible to students.
8. Moderation of examination papers is being conducted and external examiners are appointed.
9. Marking schemes of examination papers are provided for many.
10. Plagiarism checking software is available.

### ***Recommendations:***

1. Accreditation/approval from professional organizations needs to be obtained/renewed to enable practicing relevant professions by graduates.
2. All programmes need to adopt double marking/second marking at examinations.
3. Student exit surveys and exit feedback surveys after examinations need to be carried out.
4. Assessment blue prints that match with learning outcomes should be made available.
5. Prerequisites for entry to different levels need to be clearly specified.
6. Formative assessments need to be adopted in all study programmes, as relevant.
7. Regular and timely feedback on assessment should be given to students.
8. Regular timelines for release of results need to be adopted for all programmes.
9. Regular training programmes on assessments need to be conducted for staff.
10. Use of temporary staff for examination work should be avoided and involvement of probationary lecturer on examinations need to be supervised by senior academics.
11. External examiner/moderator reports for examinations should be obtained to enable improvement of examination quality.
12. Plagiarism checking policy / guideline has to be established.
13. Changes to existing assessments need to follow accepted protocol for approvals through Curriculum Committee, Faculty Boards and Senate.
14. All programs need to adhere to proper SLQF formats in determining duration and graduate profiles in ODL context.
15. Unnecessary burden faced by students due to too many prerequisite completions needs to be minimized/removed at all levels of degree programmes.
16. Completion of requirements of IT, English and other non-degree/GPA courses for graduation should be made more flexible in time and should be considered only at graduation.

## **Criterion 9: Postgraduate Studies, Research, Innovation and Commercialization**

### ***Commendations:***

1. OUSL has an interest in research development and innovation and is identified in the corporate plan.
2. University encourages and facilitates research by learners and academic staff and has a significant interest in PG training.

3. Undergraduate and postgraduate research are considered very important and the research component in most of the PG programmes (where evidence made available) are in compliance with SLQF
4. Contribution by Industrial Liaison Centre is noteworthy.

***Recommendations:***

1. Mechanism of appointing supervisors for postgraduate research degrees needs to be enhanced with some established clear and specific criteria.
2. Guidelines for supervisors should be available and the same should be made available to students.
3. A proper monitoring mechanism of postgraduate research degrees in all faculties need to be established (e.g. Annual PG sessions to monitor progress)
4. A Senate approved clear policies and criteria for authorship of research output and intellectual property need to be established.
5. A Senate approved policy on potential conflict-of-interest in supervision/examination need to be available and it needs to be communicated to all prospective students and staff.
6. A Senate approved policy and underlying by-laws are required regarding research misconduct.
7. A fair transparent, robust complaints and appeals procedure related to research needs to be approved and it should be made available to researchers and research students and should be applied consistently.

## **Criterion 10: Community Engagement, Consultancy and Outreach**

***Commendations:***

1. University has established organizational structures to initiate and facilitate promoting community engagement, consultancy and outreach activities.
2. University academics' contribution to national development is remarkable.
3. Making Considerable financial assistance available to encourage staff and students in community based research activities is a unique endeavor.
4. University has identified appropriate professional courses and has provided such facilities to public at regional level.
5. Curriculum development aligning with community needs and community development skills is commendable.

***Recommendations:***

1. Community needs surveys have to be done periodically.
2. Innovative programmes have to be planned with proper time schedules.
3. Academics from all departments should be encouraged to get involved in outreach activities.
4. Independent outreach activities and community engagement programmes should be planned at regional level.

5. Role of Alumni has to be realized in enriching community engagement and outreach activities and OUSL Alumni with inter-faculty interaction has to be established without further delay.
6. Issues at regional centres that to cater to the needs of students in relation to community engagement, consultancy and outreach require contextual interventions.
7. International Relations Unit has to strengthen consultancy and outreach activities at global level to attain global recognition of OUSL.

## Section 8 – Summary

The Open University of Sri Lanka is the only national university that offers academic programmes in the Open and Distance Learning mode, enabling many students across the country to obtain higher education under nominal fees. The university has six faculties and offers a range of programmes from foundation and certificate levels to diploma and undergraduate and to masters and doctoral level. At present the total student population is about 40,000. The network of Regional and Study Centres (RSCs) extends to all corners of the country and supports OUSL functions and reaches out to a great majority of its students. RSCs bear a high responsibility in coordinating with students and delivering some selected programmes and courses mainly at lower levels. Organizing day-schools for many courses and conducting laboratory classes and holding examinations, are some of the key tasks at these centres, depending on available facilities. Human and physical resources at RSCs vary widely, forcing students to travel to Colombo centre to accomplish some of their academic needs. Delivering more and more courses online or in a true ODL mode, in particular, foundation and lower level courses, would help students to follow course material with ease without being a burden to Colombo centre.

The current webpage of OUSL carries no information for prospective students. Since the University has to find its own students, the webpage needs to be more dynamic and attractive to prospective students. It is important to emphasize and educate new students more on the ODL concept and make them more aware about the system used by the OUSL before start of the academic work in order to prevent them expecting a similar experience like students in a conventional university. This cannot be done only by providing learning material or giving a one-day orientation programme. More proactive initiatives need to be taken by OUSL to attract students as well as to keep them in the ODL system until completion. For example, some interesting and attractive documentary videos could be developed and place on the OUSL website for prospective students as well as for existing students to learn what ODL is all about. A properly developed online mentoring programme, an effective online help desk, attractive course material, more interesting/innovative/blended day-schools of flipped-class style, etc. would help students to stay with a study programme and eventually complete it. Enhancing CETMe activities, Open U tube and open cast productions and similar activities would be a way to preserve ODL philosophy and the identity of the OUSL.

As a University, generating a considerable income from its large student population, OUSL needs innovative means to improve its public image. Incorporating more ODL strategies in programme and course delivery, establishing secure online assessment/examination methods and Introducing more learner friendly remote services, etc. should be OUSL's mandate to keep up with ODL vision. Learner related research and tracer studies need to be carried out to understand their strengths, weaknesses and needs as well as their successes and failures. Though a very high percentage from registered students at an ODL University is not expected to complete, the current graduation rate of OUSL is remarkably low in many study programmes. It can diminish the acceptance level of ODL concepts among students and within the society at large. Therefore, OUSL needs to take some strong initiatives to enhance its programme and course delivery, improve learner services, maintain proper scheduling of

day-schools, CATs and other examinations and ease some of the unnecessary pre requisites so that more trust and understanding would be developed in students with ODL system. It is very important that OUSL prevents an enrolled student expecting an experience similar to a conventional residential university from the outset.

At present, OUSL seems to be moving away from the ODL concept and leaning towards a conventional university setting in many ways. Staff and students in general are not aware of the great need and relevance of ODL to the country in the present context, not appreciative of its value and not seems to understand the freedom and flexibility it provides. This creates a threatening environment and may become an inherent weakness and a barrier for OUSL to flourish and progress. It is important for all stakeholders to realize that function of OUSL is different in many ways compared to a conventional university and that difference is what makes OUSL a unique place. Therefore, the mind-set and attitude of all academic and non-academic staff need to be changed and improved to feel and understand the underlying values of an ODL system and to identify and realize the significance of their contribution in serving masses to achieve aspirations that conventional universities cannot provide. Sri Lanka is indeed fortunate to have at least one Open University established to fulfil the thirst for higher education among its citizens and the country expects more similar institutions in the future. The demand for higher education cannot be met by increasing the intake for conventional universities, but another open university may serve the requirement better. Further, having another University serving in ODL mode in Sri Lanka will create a healthy competition between the Institutions so that quality of education provided in ODL mode would improve immensely.

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## Annexes

### Annex 3.1

<b>Day 1 (Monday): 06-01-2020</b>		
<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Coordinator</b>
08.00-08.30	Meeting with the Director IQAU/Finalizing the Agenda by the Review Team with the Director /IQAU	Director/IQAU
08.30-08.45	Meeting with the Vice-Chancellor (Courtesy visit)	Director/IQAU
08.45-09.30	Presentation by the Vice-Chancellor (in the presence of the Members of the Council, Deans, Directors of Centres/Units, IQAU Director, Registrar, Bursar, Librarian, Marshall, Senior Medical Officer, Wardens, Senior Student Counsellor etc.)	Director/IQAU
09.30 -10.00	Discussion (with tea)	AR/QA
10.00 -10.30	Meeting with the Administrative Staff (Registrar, DRs, SARs, ARs)	Registrar
11.00 -11.30	Meeting with Bursar, SABs, ABs	Bursar
11.30 -12.00	Meeting with Internal Audit Department	Head / Internal Audit
12.00 -12.30	Meeting with the members of the Internal Quality Assurance Unit, Team leaders of SER writing team	Director/IQAU
12.30 -13.30	Lunch	AR/QA
13.30 -14.30	Meeting with the Librarian and Staff, Observing facilities	Librarian
14.30-15.00	Meeting with Senior Student Counsellors/ Student Counsellors	Snr. Student Counsellor
15.00 -18.30	Review of documents (with Tea)	Director/IQAU
<b>18.30</b>	<b>Leaving for the Hotel</b>	

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW – OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

### SCHEDULE FOR SITE VISIT (06.01.2020 – 11.01.2020)

<b>Day 2 (Tuesday): 07-01-2020</b>		
8.00 — 9.00	Review of documents	
	<b>Team 1</b> <b>Faculty of Natural Sciences</b>	<b>Team 2</b> <b>Faculty of Engineering Technology</b>
9.00 — 9.30	Meeting with the Dean, Heads of Departments, Coordinators	Meeting with the Dean, Heads of Departments, Coordinators
9.30 — 10.00	Meeting with Academic staff	Meeting with Academic staff

10.00 - 10.30	Meeting with Non-Academic staff With Tea	Meeting with Non-Academic staff With Tea
10.30 -11.00	Meeting with undergraduate Student	Meeting with undergraduate students
11.00 -11.30	Meeting with Diploma/PG students	Meeting with Diploma/PG students
11.30-13.00	<b>Observing Facilities:</b> Lecture halls, Computer Labs, science Laboratories, workshop, Research labs, study/discussion areas, canteens, etc.,	
<b>13.00 – 14.00 Lunch</b>		
	<b>Team 1</b>	<b>Team 2</b>
<b>14.00 -16.30</b>	<b>Faculty of Education</b>	<b>Faculty of Humanities &amp; Social Sciences</b>
14.00 — 14.30	Meeting with the Dean, Heads of Departments, Coordinators	Meeting with the Dean, Heads of Departments, Coordinators
14.30 — 15.00	Meeting with Academic staff	Meeting with Academic staff
15.00 - 15.30	Meeting with Non-Academic staff With Tea	Meeting with Non-Academic staff With Tea
15.30 - 16.00	Meeting with undergraduate Students	Meeting with undergraduate students
16.00 - 16.30	Meeting with Diploma/PG students	Meeting with Diploma/PG students
16.30-18.30	Reviewing Documents	
<b>18.30 – Leaving for the Hotel</b>		

<b>Day 3 (Wednesday): 08-01-2020</b>		
8.00 — 9.00	Observing documents	
	<b>Team 1</b> <b>Faculty of Health Sciences</b>	<b>Team 2</b> <b>Faculty of Management Studies</b>
9.00 — 9.30	Meeting with the Dean, Heads of Departments, Coordinators	Meeting with the Dean, Heads of Departments, Coordinators
9.30 — 10.00	Meeting with Academic staff	Meeting with Academic staff
10.00 - 10.30	Meeting with Non-Academic staff With Tea	Meeting with Non-Academic staff With Tea
10.30 -11.00	Meeting with undergraduate Students	Meeting with undergraduate Students
11.00 – 11.30	Meeting with Diploma/PG students	Meeting with Diploma/PG students
11.30-12.30	Observing Documents	
<b>12.30 – 13.30 Lunch</b>		

	<b>Team 1</b>	<b>Team 2</b>
13.30 — 14.15	Visit to Centre for Educational Technology & Media	Visit to CESSD (Centre for Env. Studies and Sustainable Development)
14.15 — 15.00	Visit to Staff Development Centre	Visit to Industry Liaison Centre
15.00 - 15.30	Open slot for any additional meetings/visits	Visit to Career Guidance Unit
<b>15.30 — 16.00</b>	<b>Tea Break</b>	
16.00 – 18 30	Reviewing Documents	
<b>18.30 – Leaving for the Hotel</b>		

Day 4 (Thursday): 09-01-2020		
	Team 1	Team 2
8.00 — 8.30	Meeting with OER (Open Educational Resource) team	International Relation Unit
8.30 — 9.00	Museum (Zoology)	Printing Press
9.00 - 9.30	Meeting with Director/Physical Education Unit	Medical Centre/Counselling unit
09.30-10.00	Meeting with Director/Gender Equity and Equality	Hostel facilities/Canteens
10.00 – 10.30		
10.00-10.30	Tea Break	
10.30-11.00	Meeting with Alumni	
11.00 -11.30	Demonstration of OMIS (IT Division)	
11.30-12.30	Visit to Colombo Regional Centre	
12.30 – 13.30 Lunch		
13.30 — 14.30	Reviewing Documents	
14.30 — 15.30	Meeting of the Review team to summarize findings	
15.30 – 18.30	write up summaries	



<b>18.30 – Leaving for the Hotel</b>	
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**Day 5: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020 (Friday): Visit to regionalCentres and Study Centres**

Start:

6.00 a.m. from the Hotel

OUSL to arrange Transport (3 vehicles)

		Regional Centre	Study Centre
Team A	Prof. Shan Prof. Ranjith Pallegama	Ratnapura	Kalutara Gampaha
Team B	Prof. Kanthi Yapa Prof. Wipula Yapa	Kandy Kurunagala	
Team C	Prof. Jennifer Perera Prof. Jianxin	Matara	Ambalantota Ambalangoda

**Day 6: (Saturday): 11-01-2020**

8.00-10.30	Discussion among members of the Review team and write up
10.30-12.00	Wrap-up meeting with the VC, Deans, Registrar, Bursar, Directors, IQAU Director, Leaders of writing team, etc.
12.00-12.30	<b>Lunch</b>
12.30	<b>Departure</b>