

SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT

**DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS**



**FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE
UNIVERSITY OF JAFFNA**

14th to 16th September 2008

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1. SUBJECT REVIEW PROCESS

Subject review is a process designed to evaluate the quality of education within a specific subject or discipline of both undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, focusing on the student learning experience and on student achievement. However, the responsibility for quality and standards lies within the institution itself, since it alone has the powers to control and to change existing practices. This review on the study programme in Agricultural Economics of the Jaffna University of Sri Lanka was conducted according to the guidelines given in the Quality Assurance Handbook for Sri Lankan universities, published by the CVCD and University Grants Commission in July 2002, based on the information contained in the Self Evaluation Report (SER) submitted by the Department of Agricultural Economics, and observations made by the review team during the site visit.

The Self Evaluation Report (SER) submitted by the Department of Agricultural Economics consisted of seven sections, namely: Aims, Learning Outcomes and Programme Details; Students, Staff and Facilities; Curriculum Design, Context and Structure; Teaching, learning and Assessment Methods; Use of Student Feedback; Student Achievements; Postgraduate Studies. There was no indication regarding the History of the University or the Faculty, Peer observation, Skills development and Academic Guidance and Counseling in the SER. Information pertaining to the history was extracted from the presentation made by the Dean of the Faculty and additional documents furnished by the acting Head of the Department. Information pertaining to other aspects was deduced from the discussions held with staff and students. The quality of education was reviewed with respect to the aims and learning outcomes given in the self evaluation report submitted by the Department.

The review team visited the Department from 14th – 16th September, 2008. The agenda of the three day visit is annexed (Annexure 1). During the site visit, below listed sources were used to collect additional information for the review.

- Meetings held with the Vice Chancellor, Dean, Actg. Head of the Department, members of academic staff, nonacademic staff, undergraduate students representing the first year, third year and the final year.
- Presentations made by the Dean / Agriculture and the Acting Head / Agricultural Economics
- Observation of the facilities at the Department and the Faculty (library, computer unit, lecture rooms etc.).
- Observation of class teaching sessions, students' presentations and practical sessions.
- Supporting documents made available at the Department.

The review team focused on the following eight aspects of education at the subject level according to the guidelines given in the quality assurance handbook:

1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review
2. Teaching Learning and Assessment methods
3. Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements
4. Extent and Use of Student Feedback (Qualitative and Quantitative)
5. Postgraduate Studies
6. Peer Observation
7. Skills Development
8. Academic Guidance and Counseling

Each one of the eight aspects was judged as good / satisfactory / unsatisfactory, noting the strengths, good practices and weaknesses in each. Considering the judgment given to eight aspects, an overall judgment was given as confidence / limited confidence / no confidence.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY, FACULTY AND THE DEPARTMENT

The University of Jaffna was established in 1974 as the 6th campus of the University system of Sri Lanka, to offer courses in Science and Humanities. With the implementation of the University Act no. 16 of 1978, it became an autonomous university. During the past 34 years, it has developed into a University consisting of eight Faculties and six academic units. The Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Jaffna has been initially established in December 1990 at Killinochchi, to fulfill the long felt demand from both the academic and public sectors. It was established in the buildings of the In-service Training Institute, the Regional Agriculture Research Centre of the Department of Agriculture and of the National Youth Service Training Centre with the hope of constructing necessary buildings and moving into them later. However, the continued unrest situation prevailed in the area prevented the development of the infrastructure facilities, and the Faculty was shifted in 1997 August to Jaffna (Thirunalvely), 3 km away from Jaffna Town, and about ½ km from the main campus, as per the decision made by the University Council, to facilitate smooth conductance of academic activities. Since then, the Faculty has been operating its academic activities housing its six departments in rented private houses. Due to the temporary nature of its staying at Thirunalvely, the Faculty is not in a position to undertake any major infrastructure improvement. As a result, the Faculty does not have field facilities of its own for practicing crop and livestock farming, or conducting laboratory practical. The laboratory facilities at the adjoining Medical Faculty is shared, and has devised a very impressive novel strategy for using the farms of the farmers in the area and the Farm of the Government Department of Agriculture to provide field experience to the students. This is commendable.

Being located in close proximity to the main campus, the Faculty is in a position to make use of the common facilities available in the University such as the Central Library and Computer unit for academic purposes, in addition to the facilities available at the Faculty. The Library has a satisfactory collection of books and journals in the field of Agriculture, and is kept open from 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. On-line access to journals is not possible yet because the local area network is not functioning. The reading area of the library is considerably adequate. The Computer unit of the Faculty is equipped with about 30 computers for staff and students, of which 10 computers have internet access. Printing facilities are located at the Dean's office for the use of the staff. The Computer unit of the Faculty is kept open from 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. during week days. Since the student numbers are small, it is possible for the Faculty to manage with the available number of computers at present to offer computer applications course etc. The Faculty is in the process of preparing to publish a journal. At present the current research abstracts are published in the Jaffna Science Association Abstracts of Research Papers.

The vision of the Faculty of Agriculture is to serve as a 'Gateway to the future of Agri-food knowledge', with the mission of 'Providing its students a high standard of knowledge to contribute towards regional, national and global needs in Food and Agriculture'. The Faculty of Agriculture consists of six Departments, *viz*; the Departments of Agronomy, Animal Science, Agricultural Biology, Agricultural Chemistry, Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Engineering. The present total student enrolment is only 135 (in all four years),

which is lower than its entitlement. This is attributed various factors beyond the control of the Faculty. The B.Sc. degree programme in Agriculture offered by the Faculty is of four year duration, based on Carnegie credit units and implemented over eight semesters. The curriculum is modular in nature comprising a compulsory core module and several optional advanced modules. The core module (130 credit units) extends from first to sixth semester, and encompasses a wide range of subjects in six major disciplines, viz., Agronomy, Animal Science, Agricultural Biology, Agricultural Chemistry, Agricultural Economics, and Agricultural Engineering, and common courses in Computer Literacy, Business Management, Business English and Experiential learning. The Core courses are compulsory for all agriculture undergraduates. The students can select one of the advanced modules to be followed during the seventh and eighth semesters based on their preference. Unless and otherwise essential (such as some disciplines not selected by the students), the Faculty does not interfere with students' choice of advanced modules. The advanced module comprises of 26 credit units, of which the final year research project accounts for 10 credits. The students should follow 8 courses in the seventh semester to complete the required 16 credit units. At present, the Faculty is in the process of revising the curriculum of B.Sc. Agriculture degree programme.

The Department of Agricultural Economics is responsible for the administration, design and offering of courses in Agricultural Economics. It aims to provide a firm foundation in Agricultural Economics and Social sciences to undergraduates in Agriculture by equipping them with relevant knowledge and skills in basic and applied aspects of Agricultural Economics through its study programme consisting 7 courses (worth 19 credit units, and equivalent to 14.62% of the credit units) in the core module and 5 courses (of which, one course is common for all the modules) and research project in the advanced module. Although the department has 5 academic cadre positions (including Professor) and 2 non academic cadre positions as indicated in Table 1 and the details given, at present, the Professor cadre remains vacant, and three lecturers are pursuing graduate studies in overseas. Therefore only one senior lecturer who has recently returned after completing M.Sc. in Norway is the only permanent cadre available at present in the department. Thus the Department obtains the services of 4 members of visiting lecturers to carryout the academic programme. The Department does not have a laboratory for practical work. However a qualified B.Sc. agriculture graduate Mr. N. Jeyakumar serves as the permanent Technical officer. The details of academic staff members serving the Department are given below.

Table 1. Present Status of Academic Cadre Positions of the Department

| Cadre | Required | Approved | Existing |
|-----------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Professor | 01 | 01 | Vacant |
| Senior Lecturer | 01 | 01 | 01 |
| Lecturer | 03 | 03 | 03 |
| Technician | 01 | 01 | 01 |
| Labourer | 01 | ---- | ----- |
| Total | 07 | 06 | 05 |

Permanent staff - Academic

Mr.K.Sooriyakumar - On study leave – Pursue PhD program- at USA

Mr.K.Umashankar - Lecturer- M.Sc (Norway)

Ms. A.Sreeranhnan - On study leave - Pursue M.Sc program at Norway

Ms. V. Kandeepan - On study leave - Pursue PhD program at USA

Visiting staff

Mrs. Thavaranjini Sivaskaran – Head, Dept of Management studies

Mr.S.Sivakumar – Deputy Director (Extension) Northern Province

Prof.V.K.Sivanathan – Associate professor of Economics

Mr.N. Perinpanathan – Senior Lecturer and Head, Dept of Economics

It was the objective of this review to evaluate the quality of the study programme of the Department of Agricultural Economics with respect to the aims stipulated in the Self Evaluation Report and findings of the site visit.

3. AIMS AND THE LEARNING OUTCOMES

3.1 Aims

As stated in the Self Evaluation Report, the Department of Agricultural Economics offers a series of courses in the degree programme in Agriculture with the aim of developing the following capabilities in students;

- A fundamental understanding of economic principles and their application to agricultural, resource, rural and related issues.
- An appropriate level of problem identification and conceptualization skills to focus on realistic and research problems.
- A capability to integrate theory, technical information and appropriate methods in effectively analyzing and solving agricultural, resource and rural related problems.
- An appropriate level of communication skills to effectively disseminate research and technical information, including the practical implications of research analyses

In this context, the department aims to provide with:

- A degree program that provides students with an understanding of theories and methods used to analyze economic problems, particularly in those areas emphasized by the Department
- Opportunities to use their theory and methods knowledge and experience to analyze and discuss important economic questions faced by individuals, private organizations and government through their final year research project.
- Course in econometrics and practice in statistical software packages provide an opportunity to enhance their analytical skill
- Opportunity to understand economic problems of farmers and how they take decision with their constraints to maximize their profit through the course “Experiential learning” introduced in the first semester of final year.
- Courses in rural sociology, basic communication and field visit to farmers’ field and organizations related to agriculture provide opportunity to understand the problems faced by farmers, farmers’ organizations and government organizations and also enhance students’ communication ability.
- Course in business management provides managerial skill of students.

3.2. Learning Outcomes

Reproduced below are the learning outcomes of the Agricultural Economics study programme as stated in the Self Evaluation Report. On successful completion of four year course, students are expected to have:

- Learn how to “think like an economist” by comparing the benefits and costs of business and personal actions, activities, decisions and government policies.
- Demonstrate understanding of scarcity, why scarcity is the fundamental principle of economics, and why it results in necessary and unavoidable tradeoffs and choices for individuals, firms, families and societies
- Demonstrate knowledge of economic organization: how societies and nations allocate scarce resources among competing ends.
- Develop knowledge of and appreciation for the enormous differences that exist in agricultural production technologies, food consumption levels and types, and standard of living
- Learn about the causes and consequences of hunger, malnutrition and poverty.
- Demonstrate a through knowledge of production: how inputs are transformed into useful outputs, or goods and services.
- Develop an understanding of and appreciation for how production affects the environment, and how alternative practices could reduce environmental damage.
- Develop and understanding of and appreciation for the impact of international trade and globalization of agricultural markets on producers and consumers. Apply critical thinking skills to the evaluation of globalization and its implication
- Acquire quantitative methods and graphical tools that allow a business firm to select the optimal, profit maximizing, levels of inputs and outputs.
- Demonstrate a complete understanding of how individuals, families and societies decide what to buy and consume. Understand how these choices change in response to changes in prices incomes and socio economic variables.
- Gain a deep and thorough knowledge of: (1) how markets works; (2) the major determinants of supply and demand; and (3) how supply and demand interacts in a market economy.
- Demonstrate an ability to evaluate and assess the characteristics and outcomes of divergent market structures: competition, monopoly, and oligopoly.

4. FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW TEAM

4.1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review

Degree programme of the Faculty of Agriculture is of four-year duration, which is organized based on Carnegie credit units and implemented over eight semesters. The medium of instruction is English. The curriculum is modular in nature comprising a compulsory core module and several optional advanced modules. The core module is offered jointly by six departments during the first six (6) semesters. It comprises 130 credit units from 40 different courses. The department offers the below listed seven (7) courses worth 19 credit units during the first six semesters and contributes 14.6% of the core module.

| | |
|--|----------|
| AEC 1101 Principles of Economics | 4: 60/00 |
| AEC 1201 Agricultural Development and Policy | 3: 45/00 |
| AEC 2101 Basic communication | 2: 25/10 |
| AEC 2102 Rural Sociology | 2: 25/10 |

AEC 2201 Agricultural Marketing and Agri-business Management 3: 45/00
AEC 3101 Resource and Environmental economics 2: 30/00
AEC 3201 Intermediate micro & macro economics 3: 45/00

Advanced modules are offered during the 7th and 8th semesters. Students can select one of the advanced modules for specialization according to their preference and performance. The students come to the Department in the 7th Semester. In the 7th semester, the Department contributes one course [i.e. CC 4103 – Agribusiness Management 2: 30/00] of the 4 common compulsory courses followed by all students (i.e. based on the Handbook 2006/2007).

A minimum of 26 credit units in the selected advanced module should be completed to fulfill the requirements of the degree programme (i.e. 16 credits in the 4th year 1st semester and 10 credits in the 4th year 2nd semester). Of the 16 credit units completed in the 4th year 1st semester, 6 credit units are contributed from three common courses; 8 credit units are from 4 courses offered by the department, and 2 credit units from a single course offered by the Dept. of Agronomy. According to the Handbook (2006 – 2007), a student can select any two-credit course from any other department by replacing any two-credit course offered by the department in the 4th years 1st semester. Below given are the courses offered by the department.

| | |
|--|----------|
| AEC 4101: Econometrics in Mathematical Programming | 2: 30/00 |
| AEC 4102: Agricultural project analysis | 2: 30/00 |
| AEC 4103: Production Economics | 2: 30/00 |
| AEC 4104: International Trade | 2: 30/00 |

In the 4th year 2nd semester, students undertake a research project in the area of specialization, which accounts for 10 credits. This arrangement of having a compulsory core module and optional advanced modules is advantageous, because it provides opportunity for the undergraduates to learn basic aspects of agriculture during the core module and acquire in-depth knowledge and skills in a selected area during the advanced (specialization) module. However, a student should take only a maximum of only 8 credit units from Agricultural Economics out of the 16 credit units in the advanced module, making it more of a ‘transitional module’ than an ‘Advanced module. This aspect needs to be given due consideration during the on-going revision.

Furthermore, a student should successfully complete 156 credit units to be eligible for the award of the degree. This credit unit requirement for graduation is beyond the accepted norm of 120 credit units for a four year degree. This aspect also should be given due consideration during the on-going curriculum revision.

The strengths and weaknesses noted in the curriculum design, content and review are highlighted and suggestions are made to improve the quality of the courses offered by the Department of Agricultural Economics in the subsequent sections of this chapter, with the expectation that these suggestions will be given due consideration during the on-going curriculum revision process.

Strengths

- The arrangement of having a compulsory core module and optional advanced modules is a strength of the curriculum, because it provides opportunity for the undergraduates to

learn basic aspects of agriculture during the core module and acquire in-depth knowledge and skills in a selected area during the advanced (specialization) module.

- Most of the courses offered by the Department of Agricultural Economics are at a suitable academic level in terms of the content, breadth and depth. Of these courses, CC 4101 Experiential Learning has a good approach to get first hand information, knowledge and skills about tropical farming systems, and adds strength to the programme.
- In view of the presence of six departments in the Faculty, the proportional contribution (14.6%) of the department to the core module is adequate.
- The curriculum has been designed not only to improve subject related knowledge and skills but also generic skills such as computer literacy, communication skills, English proficiency and professional development, by including courses on career guidance, scientific writing, English courses up to the 3rd year, and certain aspects of “bio-ethics” and “intellectual property rights”.
- The common courses especially the CC 4102 Experiential Learning is an extremely useful course which provides valuable learning opportunities to be exposed to socio economic problems faced by the farmers and the strategies adopted to overcome. This course should be further strengthened.

Suggestions for improvement

- The review team suggests including a courses in “Fundamentals of Management” and “Principles of Accounting” in the 1st year and an intermediate / advanced level course in “Financial Management” to the 3rd year. The AEC 2201 course may be separated. More emphasis should be given to develop a course in “Agricultural Marketing”. In so doing, the content in the “Agribusiness Management” course can be amalgamated into the common course offered in the 4th year.
- It is advisable to have “Principles of Mathematics and Statistics” course (3 credits) in the 1st year 1st semester to help students catch up the concepts in economics, accounting and other advanced courses easily.
- A “Farm Management” component may be included to the “Production Economics” course. The “Linear Programming” component of AEC 4101 may also be combined with this course (leaving the “Econometrics” course alone – see below).
- Having a course called CC 4102 – Computer Applications in Bio-Statistics is a good practice. The courses “Biometry”, “Computer Applications in Bio-Statistics” and “Econometrics” may, however, be linked to two courses and offered in the 3rd year 2nd semester and/or 4th year 1st semester. This may be carried out by removing certain repetitions noted in these courses. Students indicated the need for software packages such as SPSS exclusively for AEC students. During the on-going curriculum revision these deficiencies need to be rectified.
- The contents of some courses need to be revised by including more relevant materials, increasing the depth / breadth, and including recommended references for the courses.
- It is suggested to teach “Principles of Microeconomics and Macroeconomics” in the 1st year 1st semester and more advanced materials of both in an ‘advanced’ course in the 3rd year.
- Some courses should be rearranged to improve the sequence to proceed from principles to application. For example, it is better to shift the course on “Agriculture Development and Policy” to a later semester (e.g. 4th semester) and bring “Principles of Communication” into the 2nd semester.
- The assigned credit value is not justifiable for some courses. In assigning credit number, the total time spent on lectures, practical and independent work carried out by students

should be taken into consideration. Please try to avoid courses with high credit value (such as 4 credit units) or low credit value (such as 1 credit unit) and maintain a proper balance between courses with 2 and 3 credit units.

- Commencement of the advanced module in the 7th semester makes the students to wait for a long period (six semesters or three academic years) for specialization. Furthermore, the 7th semester module is not ‘advanced’ in true sense, because it consists of 4 common courses (8 credit units) and only 4 (8 credit units). It is more of a ‘transitional’ module than an advanced module. This needs to be rectified.
- We suggest including a compulsory course in “Social Science Research Methodology” by the department. This may be placed in the 4th year 1st semester so that the students can undertake the research project in 4th year 2nd semester efficiently.
- The review team recommends the University to consider IT and English as separate entities, review and expand the syllabi and offer throughout the programme to provide the students with more opportunities to enhance these skills.

In relation to the curriculum design, content and review, the judgment of the team is ‘SATISFACTORY’.

4.2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods

Members of the Departmental academic staff adopt a variety of teaching/learning methods at present. The most common method of imparting knowledge is through lectures. In addition, a range of more interactive teaching / learning techniques such as case studies, individual and group presentations, take home assignments, term papers, reports, tutorials, field studies, and practical etc are being used. The Experiential Learning programme offered by the department in the 4th year provides valuable opportunities for the students to apply the subject-related knowledge and develop transferable skills.

Most of the lectures are conducted according to a carefully prepared format. For each course, lecture notes are prepared for the use of the teacher, and given resource constraints, parallel sets of handouts that provide the summary of the content are distributed among the students. All students undertake library-based assignments related to their research project and to teaching topics. Time slots are allocated in the formal time table to achieve this target.

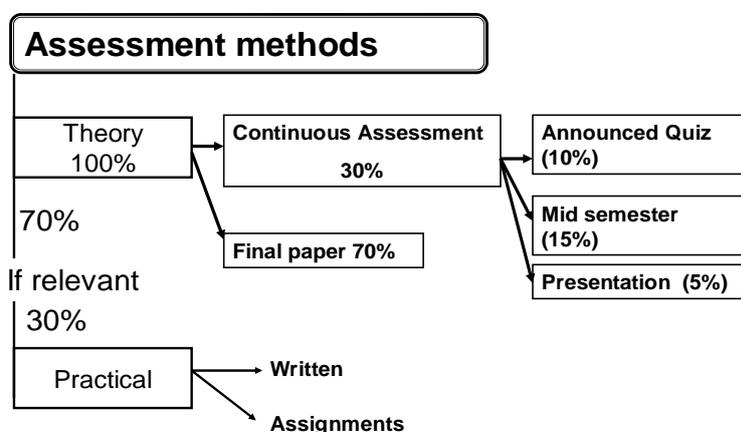
As indicated by the students as well as the staff members during the separate meetings the reviewers held with them, teaching takes place in an interactive environment. The review team too observed teaching classes and judged that teaching environment as intimate and interactive to some extent. With regard to teaching in the advanced courses in Agricultural Economics, the teachers are successful in attracting the attention of almost all students in the class. However, it is recommended to give sufficient time for students to take down notes and pay attention to the lecturer.

The Department is equipped with conventional teaching aids such as chalkboards, whiteboards, OHPs and also with modern aids such as a multimedia. Given the small number of students who specialize in Agricultural Economics at present, the team is of the view that the teaching and learning environment and facilities are satisfactory and adequate to accommodate the learning needs of the students.

Computer-Assisted Learning (CAL) and internet resources currently play a non-significant formal role in the teaching process, although a sufficient number of computers are available. The review team is in the opinion that the teaching environment can be further improved if the students and staff can have access to fast internet facilities at the Department. One of the major complaints that the students made was that they have to visit to the main computer lab to use IT facilities for both academic and other purposes.

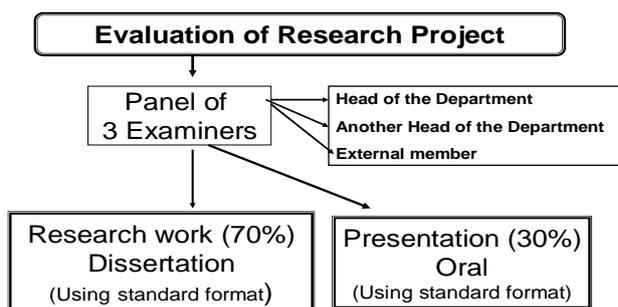
The Department adopts both summative and formative approaches to assess the performance of students, having both the end semester examinations and continuous course evaluation system in place. Progress of the students with respect to each course is assessed through quizzes, a mid semester examination and a term paper or assignment and with a final paper at the end of semester. The end semester written examination comprises a number of components including structured and essay type questions, practical, viva, and presentations depending on the nature of the subject.

In general, the question papers are of comprehensive nature adequately covering the material included in the course outline. Scrutiny of question papers is done by an internal moderator or by both internal and external examiners to ensure that individual questions are clear, fair and discriminatory and that the overall balance and coverage are appropriate. Below given is an outline of the assessment methods used.



Experiential learning is assessed by a panel consisting of the coordinator and the Head of the Department. Equal proportion of marks is given to the report and the presentation for which standard formats have been developed and used.

The Departmental conducts the academic programme with the assistance of visiting lecturers, and supervise the final year research projects of students with or without the support of an external co-supervisor. The final year research project is assessed based on Report and Presentation. A panel of three examiners as indicated in the below given outline is used to assess the research project. A marking scheme approved by the Faculty Board and the Senate is used to evaluate these and the criteria for evaluation are clear to the students. Project report is assessed based on adherence to style and format, grammar and spelling, neatness, importance of topic, objectives, etc (Annexure 3). Presentation is assessed based on Organization, content, visual aids, presentation skills and discussion (Annexure 4).



A 4- point scale grading system is adopted to assess the students’ performance in each course. The cut-off marks and the grading scale used appear to be different to those adopted by other Faculties of Agriculture. The Faculty needs to pay attention to remove such discrepancies during the next curriculum revision. “Classes” are awarded based on the cumulated Overall Grade Point Average (OGPA) from all the courses. The criteria are as follows:

- 1st Class - OGPA ≥ 3.70
- 2nd Upper - OGPA 3.30 to 3.69
- 2nd Lower - OGPA 3.29 to 2.80

The cut-off OGPA used for the award of a First class is lower than 3.75 accepted by the Faculties of Agriculture. This discrepancy also needs to be rectified during next curriculum revision.

The department has only a single non-academic staff member at present. As a result, the probationary lecturers have to allocate considerable amount of time to carry out the duties that they are not liable for. It is recommended to recruit at least one qualified non-academic staff member (clerical) / computer application assistant, and a laborer to the available cadre positions. In addition, it is strongly recommended to recruit a Professor to the Department as soon as possible to strengthen the department,.

With respect to Teaching, learning and assessment methods used, the judgment of the team is ‘GOOD’.

4.3 Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements

The Faculty and the Department admits new entrants allocated by the UGC, and has no authority in selecting them. The quality of students admitted to follow the degree depends on UGC policy. At present, there are only 135 registered students in four batches (first to final year batches). Given below is the number of registered students at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Jaffna from 2003 till 2007. The intake has never reached the eligible quota. It is recommended to organize publicity campaigns and launch them coinciding with the time the admissions are called to attract more students to the study programme.

| Year of Study | Year of Admission | Student numbers | | |
|---------------|-------------------|-----------------|------|--------|
| | | Total | Male | Female |
| First year | 2005/2006 | 41 | 18 | 23 |
| Second year | 2004/2005 | 53 | 22 | 31 |
| Third year | 2003/2004 A | 29 | 12 | 17 |
| | 2003/2004 B | 31 | 11 | 20 |

The department receives students to follow the advanced module in the seventh semester, allocated based on their preference and performance. In general about 12 % of the students opt for following the advanced module in Agricultural Economics. Up to July 2005 – 219 students passed of which 26 students (=11.87%) specialized in Dept of Agricultural Economics. Since the department contributes to about 1/6th of the study programme, and the faculty consists of six departments, it would be better if the department is able to attract about 14-15% of the students for following the advanced module in Agricultural economics. Possibly the lack of a senior member in the academic staff has lead to this situation. Nonetheless, attracting aboou 12% of the students is satisfactory. Meeting with the final year students revealed that they select the advanced module in Agricultural Economics because of the potential job opportunities.

The records of student progress (Annexure 5) indicate that generally the students who select Agricultural Economics specialization programme have maintained satisfactory GPA and have secured Second class upper division or lower division degree. One student has received the Best Research Award also.

It was noted that the drop out rate of the students following the advanced module in Agricultural Economics is zero and that all the graduates specialized in Agricultural Economics have found employment in governmental departments, non governmental organizations (INGOs), Banks, Schools, Colleges and Universities. Waiting time for the first job after graduation has declined in the recent past mainly due to the demand for graduates among the INGOs and other non governmental organizations and all the graduates are employed at present.

In relation to the quality of students, student progress and achievements the judgment of the team is ‘GOOD’.

4.4 Extent and Use of Student Feedback

Student feedback is obtained through both formal and informal approaches. The department uses structured questionnaires on Teacher and course evaluation for this purpose. Questionnaire surveys are conducted at the end of every course during the final week of the semester. However, there was no evidence to indicate the use of the student feedback for improving teaching.

The review team suggests to introduce mid semester teacher / course evaluation survey in addition to the existing end semester survey and make use of the results of mid semester survey to identify deficiencies and improve teaching. Furthermore, it is recommended to introduce a system of recognition of good teachers using student feed back and other supporting documents in future.

In relation to the extent and use of student feedback the judgment of the team is ‘SATISFACTORY’.

4.5. Postgraduate Studies

According to the SER, the Faculty of Agriculture has appointed a postgraduate degree committee consisting senior staff from all the disciplines to enable students to carry out postgraduate study. Faculty of graduate study offers only research based postgraduate studies

in agriculture. So far the Faculty of graduate studies has not offered any taught postgraduate studies in the disciplines of agriculture.

At present, the Department of Agricultural Economics (AEC) has no post graduate programme, while members of the department do not teach in post graduate programmes. Lack of senior academics in the department has contributed to this situation. The probationary lecturers themselves are graduate students of the other Post Graduate Institutes in Sri Lanka and abroad. The absence of a postgraduate programme at the department is noted as a weakness by the review team. It is recommended to recruit a Professor to the available cadre as soon as possible to introduce research culture and post graduate studies.

In relation to the postgraduate studies the judgment of the team is ‘UNSATISFACTORY’

4.6. Peer Observation

Peer evaluation form for theory / practical has been developed (Annexure 6), but not implemented. There is no formal effective practice of peer observation at present on lectures and practical. However, the academic staff members indicated of having informal discussion regarding teaching/ learning and assessment methods, new developments in subject areas and the problems pertaining to academic activities.

Moderation and scrutiny of the examination papers are done with the help of external examiners and Faculty members. This is a good practice that should be continued. It would be advantageous if peers could attend the classes and advise the staff on how teaching could be improved. Peer observation should be extended to visiting staff also and developed into a more formal system, to enhance the quality of teaching.

Lack of a formal mechanism for peer observation was noted as a weakness by the review team. Unavailability of senior lecturers in the Department has contributed to this situation in the Department. The team recommends recruitment of at least one Professor as soon as possible to the Department to promote research culture, postgraduate supervision and peer evaluation of lectures and practical.

In relation to the peer observation, the judgment of the team is ‘SATISFACTORY’.

4.7. Skills Development

The Department has included courses such as Agricultural Project analysis, Computer Applications in Biostatistics, Agri Business Management, Experimental Design, Experiential Learning and Student Research Project to improve subject specific skills and generic skills of students. In addition, the curriculum comprises of courses in Fundamentals of Information technology, English language, Business English, Basic Communication, which promote generic skills. The courses in English language are offered during two semesters while a course on Introductory IT is offered during one semester. This is commendable. During the discussions held with the students and presentation sessions observed by the review team, it became evident that the students are fairly confident in the use of computer software, and communication skills in English. They are objective minded, and skillful. Their generic skills are in par with those of typical agriculture graduates from other universities. While the Department can be happy about the performance of the students, it should take necessary

steps to further improve the curriculum and staff strength to attract more students. By incorporating the suggestions given to improve the curriculum, the Faculty will be able to facilitate further improvement of the skills of students.

In relation to the skills development the judgment of the team is ‘SATISFACTORY’.

4.8. Academic Guidance and Counseling

Due to the prevailing conditions in the area, student counseling appears to be one of the important aspects to maintain social harmony and undergraduate education. All the students are grouped and assigned a lecturer as their personal counselor. In addition, the Faculty has two senior academic members appointed as Student counselors (one female counselor and one male counselor) and three trained student counselors from the Faculty. The counselors conduct a comprehensive orientation programme including academic guidance, evaluation, library, welfare, etc. This is highly commendable and encouraging. One senior student counselor is from the Department of Agriculture. Thus the students from Agricultural Economics have easy access to having guidance. In addition, all the staff members and students maintain a friendly environment. The use of the Vice Chancellor’s fund and the Faculty Welfare fund for the benefit of students can be considered as a good practice.

The team of counselors takes several measures to overcome problems such as ragging and other stress situations. Discussions with the students also revealed that the existing counseling service is effective and that the students are satisfied with the counseling services provided. However, there was neither a specific place allocated to carry out counseling services nor there was a record of the performed services. While congratulating the student counselors for the effective service rendered and devotion, the review team recommends allocating a place (room) for Student counseling and start maintaining records of the counseling services provided and achievements made to make it more visible and effective in future.

With respect to academic guidance and counseling, the judgment of the review team is ‘GOOD’.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The curriculum comprises a core module (130 credits) and advanced module (26 credits) providing the opportunity to acquire basic knowledge and skills in agriculture and in-depth knowledge and skills in a chosen field of specialization to students. However, the total number of credit units (156) to be completed to be eligible for the award of degree is greater than the accepted norm of 120 credit units for a four year degree programme.

The Department of Agricultural Economics offers 7 courses which contributes 19 credits (14.6%) of the core module. The proportional contribution of the department to the core module is satisfactory. Core courses offered are at a suitable academic level in terms of the content, breadth and depth. The common course CC 4101 Experiential Learning has a good approach to get first hand information, knowledge and skills about tropical farming systems, and adds strength to the programme. The curriculum consists of courses that facilitate improving generic skills of students in addition to the subject related knowledge and skills. This is a positive point.

However, certain amounts of repetitions, presence of less relevant content, and insufficient depth were noted in several courses. Some courses have been placed inappropriately, while some others should be combined. In some courses, the assigned credit value was not appropriate. Suggestions for improvement are indicated elsewhere in this report. These defects should be rectified during the on-going curriculum revision.

The advanced module offered by the department is not adequately organized to provide 'in-depth knowledge and skills in all relevant spheres of agricultural economics' exclusively for students specializing in Agricultural Economics. Present advanced module is more of a 'transitional module' than an 'advanced module'. Commencement of the advanced module in the 7th semester makes the students to wait for a long period to start specialization. These disadvantageous aspects need to be corrected.

Members of the Departmental academic staff adopt diverse teaching/learning approaches. They seem to be highly committed and contented. However, at present, the Department does not have even a single professor to guide these probationary lecturers. The academic programme is conducted with the assistance of visiting lecturers at present because all academic members except one are on study leave.

The Department is equipped with sufficient teaching aids, while teaching takes place in an interactive environment. Student feedback is obtained through both formal and informal approaches. However there was no documentary evidence on the use of such student feedback to improve the quality of teaching further.

Both summative and formative approaches are used to assess the performance of students. The question papers are of comprehensive nature. Question papers are moderated and scrutinized with the participation of an internal moderator or internal and external examiners. Classes are awarded based on the Overall Grade Point Average (OGPA). This adopted OGPA cutoff points are different to the CGPA cutoff points adopted by other Faculties of Agriculture.

The Department of Agricultural Economics (AEC) has no post graduate programme, while peer review is still not conducted formally. But the Department obtains the services of external examiners.

Academic guidance and counseling is good and appreciated by most students. But there is no specific office allocated for counselors, while no documentary evidence regarding the services provided was available.

The Faculty does not receive its entitled quota of undergraduates, while the drop out rate of students following Agricultural Economics is zero. All the graduates specialized in Agricultural Economics have found employment. Waiting time for the first job has declined significantly in the recent past.

Based on the information provided in the SER and observations made during the study visit by the review team as discussed above, the eight aspects were judged as follows:

| Aspect Reviewed | Judgment given |
|--|-----------------------|
| Curriculum Design, Content and Review | Satisfactory |
| Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods | Good |
| Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements | Good |
| Extent and Use of Student Feedback, Qualitative and Quantitative | Satisfactory |
| Postgraduate Studies | Unsatisfactory |
| Peer Observations | Satisfactory |
| Skills Development | Satisfactory |
| Academic Guidance and Counseling | Good |

The overall judgment is suspended

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the context of all above, to improve the academic programme offered by the Department of Agricultural Economics, the review team recommends the following modifications, for which the reasons are given in the sections 4.1 – 4.8.

Suggestions for improvement

- Include courses in “Fundamentals of Management” and “Principles of Accounting” in the 1st year and an intermediate / advanced level course in “Financial Management” to the 3rd year. The AEC 2201 course may be separated. More emphasis should be given to develop a course in “Agricultural Marketing”. In so doing, the content in the “Agribusiness Management” course can be amalgamated into the common course offered in the 4th year.
- Have “Principles of Mathematics and Statistics” course (3 credits) in the 1st year 1st semester to help students catch up the concepts in economics, accounting and other advanced courses easily.
- A “Farm Management” component may be included to the “Production Economics” course. The “Linear Programming” component of AEC 4101 may also be combined with this course (leaving the “Econometrics” course alone).
- The courses “Biometry”, “Computer Applications in Bio-Statistics” and “Econometrics” may be linked to two courses and offered in the 3rd year 2nd semester and/or 4th year 1st semester. Students indicated the need for software packages such as SPSS exclusively for AEC students. During the on-going curriculum revision these deficiencies need to be rectified.

- Sequence the course in “Principles of Microeconomics and Macroeconomics” at the 1st year 1st semester and teach more advanced materials of both courses in an ‘advanced’ course in the 3rd year.
- Shift the course on “Agriculture Development and Policy” to a later semester (e.g. 4th semester) and bring “Principles of Communication” into the 2nd semester.
- In assigning credit number, the total time spent on lectures, practical and independent work carried out by students should be taken into consideration. Minimize 4 credit courses and 1 credit courses and maintain a proper balance of 2 and 3 credit courses.
- Improve the ‘advanced module’ in Agricultural Economics to be a true advanced module. Consider commencement of the advanced module earlier than the 7th semester.
- Include a compulsory “Social Science Research Methodology” course for the 4th year 1st semester.
- Recruit a Professor to the available cadre as soon as possible to introduce research culture and post graduate studies.
- Introduce formal peer evaluation as soon as possible.