

# **SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT**

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES



**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES &  
HUMANITIES  
RAJARATA UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA**

23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> April 2007

**Review Team :**

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## 1. SUBJECT REVIEW PROCESS

Subject review process evaluates the quality of education within a specific subject or discipline. It is focused on the student learning experience and on student achievement, and it is designed to evaluate the quality of both undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. 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.

Review process 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. The Department of Humanities (DH) of the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka submitted a Self Evaluation Report (SER) consisting of six sections, namely: (1). aims, learning outcomes and programme details, (2) students, staff and facilities, (3) The evaluation, curriculum design, content and review, (4) teaching, learning and assessment methods, (5). Student profile, (6) feedback, monitoring, and student/peer evaluation.

The quality of education was reviewed according to the aims and learning outcomes given in the SER.

The following eight aspects of education were reviewed at the subject level:

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 observations.
7. Skills development.
8. Academic guidance and counseling.

The Review Team visited the department from 23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> April, 2007. The original agenda prepared by the DH had to be amended due to the non-academic strike scheduled to be commenced from 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2007. The copy of the revised agenda visit is annexed (Annex 1).

The evaluation of eight aspects was based on:

- Meetings held with the Dean, Head of the DH, academic staff, non-academic staff, undergraduate students, senior assistant librarian, IT instructors at the main computer unit as well as faculty computer unit, and an officer in-charge in the university cultural center. Class room observations and discussions with the students were limited due to the non-academic strike.
- Observation of facilities of the department and the faculty (library, computer Unit etc).
- Observing teaching classes only second and third years' students in the general degree programme.
- Reviewing documents available at the DH.

Each of the eight aspects was judged as good/satisfactory/unsatisfactory, in light of strengths, good practices and weaknesses in each.

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

The Rajarata University of Sri Lanka was established on 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1995 under section 21 of the University Act No. 16 of 1978 by amalgamating the resources of the Affiliated University Colleges in the Central, North Western and North Central provinces.

The University consists of Five Faculties, namely; (1) Social Sciences and humanities, (2) Management Studies, (3) Applied Sciences, (4) Agriculture, and (5) Medicine. The University is located twelve km east from Anuradapura at Mihintale. Mihintale is the place where Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. The main campus building is located in the midst of 90 acres reserved for university purpose adjacent to Mihintale sacred area.

### *Department of Humanities*

The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities comprised of two Departments namely; the Department of Social Sciences and the Department of Humanities (DH).

The DH offers a unique opportunity for students to learn Archaeology, English, Heritage Management, History, Mass Communication, Sinhala, and Drama and performing Arts for the BA general degree and Sinhala for the BA special degrees in History. The DH has obtained the approval from the Senate and the Council for introducing BA special degree in History. BA special degree programmes in Archaeology and Heritage Management are expected to be introduced shortly. Additionally, the DH expects to be introduced two new academic departments, namely, the Department of Languages and the Department of Archaeology & Heritage Management.

The total number of students registered in BA general degree is given in the following table.

Subject	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Archaeology	25	14	15	54
Heritage Management	10	09	10	29
History	27	20	18	65
Mass Communication	32	08	09	49
Sinhala Language	63	23	23	109
English Language	18	11	11	40
French	15	02	06	23
Japanese	06	02	03	11
Drama and Performing Arts	-	-	04	04

Students registered in the BA special degree in Sinhala is given below:

Year of Specialization	Number of Students
Year 1	15
Year 2	10
Year 3	25
Total	50

Both General and Special Degree students are expected to submit a research in their final year. The DH consists of 06 Senior Lecturers, 01 Lecturer, 01 Probationary Lecturer, and 01 Temporary Lecturer. Four of the Senior Lecturers have acquired doctoral qualifications; two of them have obtained their degrees from foreign universities. Department's non-academic staff comprise of a clerk and an office assistant.

There are no separate class rooms for the department which shares common resources of the faculty. The faculty lecture rooms are equipped with basic facilities such as blackboard and whiteboards. Some lecture halls are equipped with overhead projectors. The space available for staff is inadequate. The department also has a laptop computer and a multimedia projector.

### **3. AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES**

#### **3.1 Aims**

The mission of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities is *to train and produce quality graduates with competence and skills fully equipped to meet and respond to diversity of demands and needs in the socio-economic development of the country.*

It is in this holistic faculty perspective in the broader national context and also understanding the central place occupied by academic disciplines, mainly History, Archeology and modern languages in the overall degree programmes, the DH aims to provide:

- a quality education and learning experience in the subjects under the purview of the department enabling the students to enhance the quality of their degree programmes while making them more relevant to social needs;
- a broad based knowledge of the two disciplines (i.e. History and Archeology) in order to encourage the students to study them at higher levels later in their academic careers;
- develop investigative ability and curiosity that would help inculcating research interests and passion for theoretical understanding of various subjects;
- conducive departmental environment for peer relationships and constant contacts with the academic staff that would help developing a culture of team work, collective approach to problem solving and harmony among individual interests;
- the students, the capacity to enrich their experience necessary to provide leadership to social groups and organizations and
- help academic staff members to pursue career development in areas of teaching and research.

#### **3.2. Learning Outcomes**

On successful completion of the study of the two main subjects History & Archeology and Modern Languages including Sinhala in accordance with the stipulated degree programme requirements, the students should have:

- acquired a knowledge base necessary for research in History & Archeology and Sinhala;
- developed their ability for critical self directed learning and confidence and skills in disseminating acquired knowledge among the target necessary social groups;
- acquired necessary knowledge and skills to contribute to wide variety of professions involved in the areas of secondary level teaching, tourism, social work, and maintenance and management of national heritage.

## **4. FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW TEAM**

### **4.1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review**

The subject offered for the BA general degree programmes are Archaeology, English, Heritage Management, History, Mass Communication, Sinhala and Drama & Performing Arts. The BA general degree programme covers three academic years of six semesters of 15 weeks each. To be eligible for the BA general degree a student must accumulate a total of 72 credits (24 credits per year) and satisfy other requirements prescribed by the Faculty such as non credit compulsory courses like English, Basic Mathematics and Sinhala Writing. The maximum credit requirements shall not exceed 14.

The BA special degree programme is offered for Sinhala only. To be eligible for the BA special degree the credit requirement is a total of 96 credits (16 credits per semester) within six semesters after the foundation year. Both BA general and special degree programmes work on a credit system which is a time based quantitative measure assigned to course units. One lecture hour per week throughout a semester (15 weeks) is equivalent to one credit.

The BA general degree consists of courses in major subject disciplines and elective courses as prescribed by the Faculty. The students must select one major discipline which has to be followed throughout their degree programme. Students must select major areas of study and inform the Head of the department during the first semester. The DH will provide special guidelines regarding selection of courses during their orientation programme. Students reading for the BA general degree can select elective courses from the Department of Social Sciences as well. Students follow the programme in Sinhala medium.

The minimum credit requirement prescribed for the BA General Degree is 72, and this is far below the standard credit requirement of 90 adopted in most of the other universities in the country.

The minimum qualification for selecting English as a major for BA General Degree is a pass in the GCE (A/L) examination or a pass in the selective test conducted by the DH. Students for the special degree programme in Sinhala are selected on the basis of the performance at the first year (foundation year) examination and an interview conducted by the DH.

In addition to passing all the courses related to the major subject area, BA General Degree students are expected to submit a Project Report on a subject chosen in consultation with the course coordinator. As for BA special degree students a dissertation of 10000 words is expected to be submitted at the end of their final year. This gives an opportunity for undergraduates to apply their learnt knowledge in practical situations, and to gain experience in real-world problems situations.

The Review Team has noted that the present curriculum has been designed about ten years ago. The Review Team is of the view that the present contents of subjects are not adequately addressing the development of skills required for certain subject areas such as Mass Communication, Archaeology, Drama & Performing Arts and History. Especially, the lack of practical training as a part of curriculum in the disciplines of Mass Communication, Archaeology Drama and Performing Arts can be a major obstacle to the employability of these graduates. The Review Team also noted that the module outlines of each course need to be further improved by including learning outcomes, breakdown of the total time among each topic, reading list under each topic, and an indication of how learning outcome of each course is related to the overall learning outcome of the Degree programme. In the absence of learning outcomes identified for each course module, the Review Team was not in a position

to assess the relevance and adequacy of course contents to achieve learning outcomes. In general, the curriculum structure of the degree program reflects adequate academic standards.

Faculty conducts periodical reviews of course contents with the help of experienced internal and visiting staff members. Sometimes students are also invited for such review meetings. However, the Review Team feels that there is a greater opportunity for the faculty to review and modernize its present curricula to reflect the current and future needs of the society. There was no evidence on external validation of the curriculum introduced at the inception of the course unit system. The faculty wishes to conduct an external validation activity when major revision is carried out in the future.

***It is the view of the Review Team that the Curriculum Design, Content and Review can be judged as SATISFACTORY.***

#### **4.2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods**

The majority of course units in the BA General and Special Degree programme comprise of 60 hours of teaching per semester. This is equivalent to 4 credits per course module. The learning process still depends heavily on teacher-centred instructions. Formal lectures are conducted with restricted use of audio visual and interactive learning methods in disorganized and untidy class rooms. A comprehensive course outline consisting of course objectives, learning outcomes, detailed syllabus, assessment methods, and recommended readings are hardly provided. However, some lecturers occasionally provide handouts for students.

When the course module system is adopted to replace the traditional curriculum, it is necessary to introduce other innovative components of teaching learning process such as course guides and course outlines to improve the effectiveness of teaching process. The efforts made by the DH in this direction are deemed to be inadequate. It was the view of the students, too, that all modules must have study guides.

There is an acute shortage of internal staff to conduct lectures. As a result, the Faculty is heavily dependent on the visiting staff. It was stated that 70% of the teaching programme is handled by the visiting staff. Overdependence on visiting lecturers to conduct regular teaching programmes adversely affects quality of the degree programme. Very often visiting lecturers are not in a position to cover the entire course modules during their lectures as their attendance is not regular. Since they do not stick to a regular time table and the attendance is irregular, allocation of permanent classrooms for the visiting staff to conduct their lectures for long hours has been very difficult.

Due to the non availability of adequate number of modern teaching equipments such as multimedia projectors, laptops, OHPs, chalk board has become the main means of teaching in the department. It should be mentioned, however, that the use of an overhead projector to show transparencies would have certainly increased the effectiveness of the lectures.

The Review Team observed some of the lectures conducted by the visiting staff as well as the internal staff. The pace at which lectures were conducted was good. However, it was disturbing to observe that one lecturer was dictating a lecture note for the students to take down. Such practices are not conducive to develop an independent learning process. All lecture rooms are well ventilated and fitted with ceiling fans and seating arrangements are also satisfactory.

Discussions with students revealed that teaching is heavily theory-oriented with less field and practical oriented aspects. The students have very limited opportunity for practicing what they have learnt in the classroom. The fact that the submission of a Project Report in the

final semester of both General and Special degree programmes has been made compulsory, can be considered as a compensatory measure to fill the gap of missing practical skills development in the study programme.

The University Library stocks a good collection of reading material on Humanities and Social Sciences. The journals section of the library has only a limited collection of journals and magazines. Students have complained that the lack of multiple copies of certain textbooks causes difficulties on their learning process.

The DH utilizes a combination of different assessment methods for the overall evaluation of student progress throughout the course. In the absence of course objectives and learning outcomes, the Review Team was not in a position to evaluate the assessment schemes used match the course objectives. However, the assigning of a heavy weight on the end-semester examination is common in almost all course modules. The courses conducted by the visiting staff are evaluated entirely on the basis of end-semester examination. Implementation of an unambiguous, proper continuous assessment without adequate permanent staff is a difficult task.

All question papers are moderated either by senior members of the internal staff or senior academics of other universities. The grading system adopted by the faculty is in conformity with the international standards. Classes are awarded based on the Grade Point Average (GPA). The GPA will be calculated as a weighted average on the grade points obtained for the different courses and the number of course credit hours.

***The Review Team judges the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods of the department as SATISFACTORY.***

#### **4.3. Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements**

Recruitment and admission of students to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences are carried out by the UGC as in other universities and the DH has no control over this process. The students admitted for the academic year 2005/06 had z-score ranging from 1.6587 to 1.3334. Several groups of students were interviewed and all of them were rather enthusiastic and motivated despite there are various constraints on the smooth functioning of the academic programme.

The DH has devised an appropriate mechanism to recruit quality students to their Special Degree programme in Sinhala. Students are selected for the Special Degree programme on the basis of the results of the two semester examinations of the first year. A student should obtain at least A or B+ grade in Sinhala at the completion of the first year to qualify to follow the Special Arts Degree programme in Sinhala in addition student should complete all the requirement and examinations of the first year.

The DH gathers information informally from past students when they occasionally visit the university. It is the view of the staff that their graduates who offered History & Archaeology for their degree are employed in the following sectors:

- Cultural establishments
- Education
- Tourism
- Mass media and
- Junior level management and administration



Although the members of the staff were of the view that their students are successful securing employment after graduation, it was noted that the department does not maintain a record of their output. It is strongly suggested that the DH should pay attention to construct a database of their graduates.

***It is the view of the Review Team that the Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements can be judged as SATISFACTORY.***

#### **4.4. Extent and Use of Student Feedback, Qualitative and Quantitative**

The SER itself has noted that the current status regarding the practices of obtaining and monitoring student feedback is poor. It appears that there is no formal mechanism by which student feedback is accessed in any of the teaching modules in the DH. The standard end-semester student evaluation forms have not been administered so far in the department, though there is consensus that this practice should be implemented from the next academic year.

In discussion with staff and students, however, it became evident that more ad hoc processes of obtaining feedback, such as informal discussions carried out by individual teachers with students, views expressed by the student representatives at the Faculty Board are in operation. But it is still not clear how this ad hoc feedback influences changes in course content and logistics and student assessment methods.

***It is the view of the Review Team that the Extent and Use of Student Feedback can be judged as UNSATISFACTORY.***

#### **4.5. Postgraduate Studies**

The DH does not offer any postgraduate programme at present. The existing staff comprising of six Senior Lecturers and two permanent Lecturers are heavily involved in undergraduate teaching. Out of the six Senior Lecturers, four have already obtained their doctoral degrees. Two members of the staff are currently engaged in postgraduate research but they are not involved in their postgraduate studies within the university.

In view of the absence of adequate staff and their heavy involvement in the undergraduate programme, the decision not to conduct postgraduate courses has been viewed by the Review Team as a very responsible decision that deserves to be endorsed.

***It is the view of the Review Team that Postgraduate Studies can be judged as SATISFACTORY.***

#### **4.6. Peer Observation**

The SER does not mention anything about peer observation process in the department. In the subsequent discussions with the academic staff, it was revealed that peer observation does exist as a structured or systematic practice in the DH. Having senior lecturers with doctoral degrees and experience, the DH has a critical mass of staff to implement peer observation process, particularly with new staff and visiting staff. It may be more advantageous if peers could attend each others classes and advise on how their teaching methods (i.e. the pace, material, clarity etc.) could be improved. These practices can later be developed into a more formal system thus ensuring that the practice is both regular and properly documented.

However, moderation of question papers and second marking of answer scripts by senior members of the staff within the department or outside the department are practiced.

***It is the view of the Review Team that Peer Observation can be judged UNSATISFACTORY.***

#### **4.7. Skills Development**

The DH has taken steps to improve generic skills as well as subject specific skills of their graduates. As far as subject specific skills are concerned, the DH has embedded them in the curriculum, though they have not been listed out specifically for the benefit of students and staff. This problem arises because of the absence of course outlines and course guides where course objectives and learning outcomes are specified.

The DH has adopted various methods to improve the skills of their students. Since 1997, a non-credit course module in Sinhala has been introduced to students who do not offer Sinhala as a major subject for the BA General Degree with the objective of producing graduates competent in using the basics of Sinhala language and literature.

Students reading for General and Special Degrees are given a training to conduct independent research studies that enhances their research capabilities and presentation skills. As a majority of graduates with BA General Degree are joining the education sector, a course unit in practical teaching has been designed in collaboration with the Provincial Department of Education.

The DH has also made arrangements to improve generic skills of their students through the provision of language (English and Tamil) proficiency, and computer literacy. The Review Team however feels that the standard of English knowledge and Information Technology skills of students have to be further improved. At the discussion with the undergraduate students, it was revealed that the students, especially those in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year, need more hours for computer training. At present IT course of one semester is conducted during the first year. It also focuses more on theory rather than practicals. While endorsing the view of the students, the Review Team feels that steps in this direction should be taken gradually and carefully. Improvement of IT facilities with internet access is also urgently needed.

The DH also coordinates the activities of the University Cultural Centre which also plays an important role in developing skills and talents of undergraduates in art, music, dance and photography.

***It is the view of the Review Team that Skills Development aspect can be judged as SATISFACTORY.***

#### **4.8. Academic Guidance and Counseling**

Although the DH does not have an organized academic counseling system, all members of the staff engaged in counseling in an informal manner. Academic counseling is taking place in the form of advising students in the selection of course modules, especially at the beginning of academic year.

Although the efforts of the members of the academic staff are commendable, it would be much better if the DH could establish an organized system for academic counseling within the department. This has special relevance to the department as some of the students have expressed their frustration over the conduct of their academic programmes.

***It is the view of the Review Team that Academic Guidance and Counseling can be judged as SATISFACTORY.***

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The strengths/good practices and weaknesses identified in each of the aspects of evaluation are summarized below.

### **1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review**

*Strengths/Good Practices:*

- Curriculum has sufficient coverage of the disciplines and meets the acceptable academic standards.
- Curriculum has been designed on the basis of credit-based course module system.

*Weaknesses:*

- The present curriculum is ten years old and has not been subject to a major revision with stakeholder participation.
- Practical training has not been adequately addressed within the curriculum.
- The number of credit points (i.e. 72) assigned to the three year BA General Degree programme is far below the acceptable standard of 90 credits.

### **2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods**

*Strengths/Good Practices:*

- Methods followed are standard and adequate to deliver the planned curriculum.
- Grading system, criteria for evaluation at semester examinations and criteria on awarding classes are standard.

*Weaknesses:*

- Overdependence on visiting lecturers to conduct regular programmes
- Non availability of course outlines and course guides prevents achievement of successful learning process
- Limited use of modern teaching technologies such as multimedia and OHP
- IT and library resources are inadequate

### **3. Quality of Students**

*Strengths/Good Practices:*

- Students are enthusiastic and motivated.
- Student performance at the examinations is satisfactory and encouraging.

*Weaknesses:*

- Department does not maintain a database to monitor the progress of their graduates

### **4. Extent and Use of Student Feedback:**

*Weaknesses:*

- No systematic effort has been made to obtain students feedback formally or informally.

## **5. Postgraduate Studies**

### *Strengths/Good Practices:*

- Staff is engaged in postgraduate studies. Four members of the staff have already obtained doctoral degrees.
- Given the resource limitation, the decision to delay the commencement of postgraduate programmes within the department is a responsible decision.

## **6. Peer Observation**

### *Strengths/Good Practices:*

- Moderation of question papers and second marking of answer scripts by senior academics within and outside the department are carried out.

### *Weaknesses:*

- Despite the availability of senior members in the department, peer observation with respect to the conducting of lectures by new staff and visiting staff is not practiced

## **7. Skills Development**

### *Strengths/Good Practices:*

- Department has made many efforts to impart subject specific skills and transferable skills among the students with the available minimum resources.

### *Weaknesses:*

- The present arrangement to provide IT and English language skills is inadequate and far from satisfactory.

## **8. Academic Guidance and Counseling**

### *Strengths/Good Practices:*

- All members of the staff are engaged in counseling in an informal manner.

### *Weaknesses:*

- There is no organized and formal system of academic guidance and counseling. Counseling activities are not documented and counselors are untrained.

Based on the observations made during the study visit by the Review Team, the eight aspects were judged as follows:

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Judgment</b>
Curriculum design, content and review	Satisfactory
Teaching learning and assessment methods	Satisfactory
Quality of students including student progress and achievements	Satisfactory
Extent and use of student feedback, qualitative and quantitative	Unsatisfactory
Postgraduate studies	Satisfactory
Peer observation	Unsatisfactory
Skills development	Satisfactory
Academic guidance and counseling	Satisfactory

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings indicated above, the Review Team wishes to make the following specific recommendations:

1. A major review of the existing curriculum with stakeholder participation is highly recommended.
2. The DH may consider redesigning the BA General Degree programme in order to be consistent with the standard minimum credit requirement.
3. Course outlines or Course Guides needs to be prepared for every course module, to develop more student-centred learning process.
4. It is recommended to incorporate the practical training component into the curriculum of Mass Communication, Archaeology and Heritage Management.
5. Introducing compulsory course modules for English Language proficiency and Computer Literacy is recommended.
6. Overdependence on the visiting lecturers to conduct regular teaching programmes needs to be rectified.
7. It is recommended that the continuous assessments be applied to the courses conducted by the visiting lecturers as well.
8. Staff should be encouraged to use modern teaching technology and lecture handouts when conducting lectures.
9. More formal methods need to be devised to obtain teacher evaluation and student feedback.
10. The DH may explore the possibility of implementing a formal and effective mechanism for peer observation.
11. It is recommended that the DH pay attention to construct a database of their graduates.
12. It would be advisable to establish a formal system of educational guidance within the department.

## 7. ANNEXES

### Annex 1. AGENDA FOR THE SUBJECT REVIEW VISIT

#### **DAY 1 – 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2007**

08.30 - 09.00	Private Meeting of Review Panel with QAA Council Representatives
09.00 – 09.30	Meeting with the Dean/Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
09.30 – 10.00	Discuss the Agenda for the Visit
10.00 – 10.30	Department Presentation on the Self Evaluation Report
10.30 – 11.00	Discussion
11.00 – 11.15	Observe Teaching (History – Second Year)
11.20 – 11. 40	Observe Teaching (Mass Communication – Second Year)
11.40 – 12.00	Observe Teaching (Sinhala – First Year)
12.00 – 13.00	<i>Lunch</i>
13.00 – 13.30	Visit to the Cultural Centre
13.30 – 14.00	Observing Department Facilities
14.00 – 15.30	Observing Other Facilities (Library, Computer Unit)
15.30 – 16.30	Observing Documents ( <i>working tea</i> )
16.30 – 17.30	Brief Meeting of Reviewers

#### **DAY 2 – 24<sup>th</sup> April 2007**

09.00 – 10.30	Meeting with the Academic Staff
10.30 – 12.00	Meeting with Students
12.00 – 1300	<i>Lunch</i>
13.00 – 14.30	Observing Documents
14.30 – 15.00	Meeting with the Non-Academic Staff
15.00 – 16.30	Meeting with Head and staff
16.30 – 17.30	Meeting of Reviewers

#### **DAY 3 – 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2007**

09.00 – 09.30	Meeting Student Counselors/Academic Advisors
09.30 – 10.30	Reviewers' Private Discussion
10.30 – 12.30	Meeting with Head and Staff for Reporting
12.30 – 13.30	<i>Lunch</i>
13.30 – 17.00	Report Writing