

# **SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**



**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

The subject review process introduced by the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Directors (CVCD) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Sri Lanka, now directed by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council, has been designed to evaluate the quality of education within a specific subject or discipline, for both undergraduate and postgraduate programs in a university. It specifically focuses on the quality of the student learning experience and student achievement.

Higher education is a 'public good' and plays a crucial role in the economic and social development in Sri Lanka. As public institutions engaged in the delivery of this public good, the universities in Sri Lanka have a responsibility to maintain and improve upon the high standards and the quality of higher education.

This report presents the findings of a review of the quality of education provided by the Department of Social Sciences (DSS) at Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. The review was conducted at the Department from 23rd to 25th of April 2007 adhering to the guidelines provided in the *Quality Assurance Handbook for Sri Lankan Universities*, published by the CVCD and UGC in July 2002.

The review process was based on the Self Evaluation Report (SER) submitted by the DSS and supported by the information gathered from the three-day site visit made to the department.

The SER has been prepared under following headings:

1. Vision and Mission of the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka
2. Aim, Goals and Learning Outcomes
3. Students, Staff and Facilities
4. Curriculum Design, Content and Review
5. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods
6. Quality of Students
7. Extent and Use of Student Feedback
8. Postgraduate Studies
9. Peer observation
10. Skills development
11. Academic Guidance and Counseling
12. Conclusion

In the review process attention was focused on the following eight aspects as given 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

The evaluation of eight aspects was supplemented by the information gathered at the

- discussions held with the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Head, academic staff, undergraduate students, non-academic and support staff of the DSS
- observation of departmental facilities (lecture rooms, GIS laboratory, staff rooms, office space etc.) and other facilities
- observation of teaching sessions
- review of documents available at the department, such as study guides, field reports, examination papers, marking schemes, answer scripts, minutes of the departmental meetings etc.

Each of the eight aspects was judged as good or satisfactory or unsatisfactory paying attention to the strengths, good practices and weaknesses found in each area.

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

The Rajarata University of Sri Lanka was established in 1995 under Section 21 of the University Act No. 16 of 1978 by amalgamating the Affiliated University Colleges in the Central, North Western and North Central Provinces. It consists of four Faculties, namely, Social Sciences and Humanities, Management Studies, Applied Sciences and Agriculture. The main Administration Complex, the Faculties of Social Sciences and Humanities, Management Studies and Applied Sciences and the Central Library are located at Mihintale. The Faculty of Agriculture is at Puliyankulama, Anuradhapura.

The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities comprising two departments, namely the Department of Social Sciences (DSS) and the Department of Humanities, offers courses leading to both BA General Degree and BA Special Degree in Social Sciences and Humanities. The students gain entry to the faculty on the basis of their performance at the GCE (Advanced Level) examination.

### ***The Department of Social Sciences***

The DSS shares the mission of the university *“to be a national and regional center of education, research and consultancy in the field of competent and innovative graduates with a sound practical and theoretical knowledge and requisite skills towards achieving social, economic and sustainable development of Sri Lanka”*.

The DSS is committed to its main objective of producing quality graduates with academic knowledge and range of skills, who will meet the challenges posed by the recent global scientific developments. As such, one of the primary strategies of the department is to develop a system to produce skilled graduates with a wide social exposure in the field of Social Sciences.

The following Degree programmes are conducted by the DSS:

1. Bachelor of Arts (Special) Degree in Environmental Management
2. Bachelor of Arts (Special) Degree in Economics

In addition, the DSS offers five major subjects for the General Arts Degree programme, namely, Environmental Management, Economics, Water Resource Development and Management, Travel and Tourism Management, and Sociology (More details are given in Annex 1.)

### **3. AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

#### **3.1. Aims**

The DSS of the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka provides two major services to the region in particular and the nation in general. It is to provide knowledge in social sciences and skills to a majority of poor rural students who otherwise will be unable to obtain a basic degree in social sciences. The DSS would provide manpower for the existing and future service structure of a drought affected area with a heavy tourist trade that depends on rural agriculture and environmental management.

Thus, the DSS aims to provide

- a quality education and learning experience in the subjects within the department curricula allowing students to participate in a degree programme more relevant to their needs and space.
- a broad based knowledge of the core principles of Environmental Management, Economics, Water Resources Management, Sociology, Travel and Tourism Management in order to facilitate students to continue education and secure employment in both government and private sector
- to enable students to understand core principles and apply the knowledge and skills to solve a wide range of economic, environmental and social problems and issues in the modern competitive world
- research abilities to students through joint and team work with academic staff which will facilitate the development of harmony and problem solving abilities in their future endeavors.
- leadership and guidance to students to be able to initiate and conduct social relations in future.
- assistance to students to cope with rapidly changing socio economic requirements
- support for the academic staff to pursue career development in areas of teaching and research

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

At the end of either the three year general or four year special degree programme in Environmental Management or Economics the students will

- acquire knowledge and necessary skills required for research and management capacities particularly in the fields of Environmental Management, Economics, Water Resources Management, Sociology, and Tourism Management;
- develop their capacity for critical self study and skills in transfer of knowledge in the society;

- acquire knowledge, training and skills required for a wide variety of professions from secondary school teaching, tutorial college teaching, environmental management, economics, financial management and tourism;
- skills for teacher support to the newly introduced school curricula in environment and disaster management with specialized knowledge within management perspective;
- develop their intellectual and analytical abilities through the critical thinking and self directed learning by providing the opportunity to access information.

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

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

As mentioned in the previous section, the DSS conducts the following degree programmes.

1. Bachelor of Arts (Special) Degree in Environmental Management
2. Bachelor of Arts (Special) Degree in Economics

In addition, the DSS offers five major subjects for the General Arts Degree programme, namely, Environmental Management, Economics, Water Resource Development and Management, Travel and Tourism Management, and Sociology.

The curricula of the above degree programmes are designed in a methodical manner. Once a senior lecturer in collaboration with the Head of Department and one or two other members of the academic staff prepares the draft of the curriculum, it is discussed at the departmental meeting. With the consensus of the members of the staff it is then submitted to the faculty for its consideration and recommendation. Subsequently, it is referred to the Senate sub-committee on Curriculum Development. If the Curriculum Development Committee recommends, it is submitted to the Senate for approval.

The contents of the curricula fulfill the requirements of the said degree programmes. Some of the degree programs and subjects offered are of relevance as far as the human resource development of Sri Lanka is concerned. From time to time, however, the contents of the curricula are reviewed at the departmental meetings. For example, the introduction of Environmental Hazards, Disaster Management, Health and Development and upgrading of Sociology to a major subject was carried out during the last academic year. In the current year the DSS expects to introduce a study stream that deals with Climate Change.

***It is the view of the Review Team that the Curriculum Design, Content and Reviewing Process is GOOD.***

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

The main method of teaching adopted is the delivery of lectures. In the observation of teaching sessions it was evident that the lecturers were able to convey the message to the students effectively. However, the use of audio-visual equipment is limited to some programmes. It was brought to the notice of the Review Team that such equipment is in short supply and is not readily available. Also, the fact that the location of lecture rooms far away from the DSS make it difficult to carry the equipment even if they were available readily.

However, the lecturers used the white board effectively and the white board was an adequate aid as far as the small size of the observed classes was concerned. However, in the large classes introduction of other teaching aides would be advantageous. In the classes observed

the response of students to the questions raised by the lecturers was at a satisfactory level. However, the Review Team did not have an opportunity to observe a teaching session conducted by a junior member of the staff due to the prevailing situation created by the non-academic work stoppage.

At the beginning of the semester every student will receive a study guide for the module concerned and it contains information on the objectives of the course, contents, lecture plan, and recommended readings. Also, the Head of DSS has prepared a comprehensive guide for the preparation project reports and dissertations.

In addition to study guides students are provided with handouts and, in some instances, relevant references in photo-copied form. However, the supply of photo copied references is limited to students who are reading for special degrees.

Students are expected to submit assignments and project reports. Also, they are taken on field studies to enable them to obtain practical experience.

It should also be mentioned that students have the opportunity to collect information through internet as there is a fully equipped university computer center with 80 computers of which 15 are allocated for web browsing. In addition to the university computer center, the library and the GIS center have IT facilities. (4 computers with internet facilities)

Student performances are assessed mainly through end-semester examinations. Marks obtained for assignments, reports and presentations are also taken into account in the determination of the final grading. In the case of Special Degree programme, 60 per cent of the total marks are allocated to the end-semester examination and the remaining 40 is given to the continuous assessment (CA) methods. In the general degree programme 80 percent is allocated to end-semester examination and 20 for CA. In the case of GIS modules 70 per cent are allocated to the end-semester examinations and the remaining 30 for Practicals.

The evaluation of the performance of students is based on the Grade Point Average (GPA) obtained by a student.

***It is the view of the Review Team that Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods adopted by the DSS are GOOD.***

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

Within the regulations stipulated by the UGC, students are free to select any course unit taught in the DSS for the BA General Degree. The entry into the Special Degree programme is determined on the basis of the results obtained at the First Year Examination. A Pass in General English, Basic Mathematics and a minimum of B+ grade or better in the subject the student seeks to specialize are the criteria for selection for the Special Degree. However, an enthusiastic student who has scored a grade of B with a pass in English and Basic Mathematics may be allowed to follow a special degree programme if he or she successfully face the interview that follows.

A variety of methods, such as obtaining the services of visiting lecturers from other universities and institutions, making students exposed to private sector experiences, providing them with practical and field experiences, are adopted to maintain and improve the quality of students. Also, the Special Degree programmes are conducted in English medium so that students are in a position to expand their knowledge base.

A comparison of examination results during the period from 1997/1998 to 2000/2001, shows that the percentage of students who secure honours at Second class upper Division had

increased from 22 percent to 79 per cent. However, it should also be mentioned that the percentage of student who secure a GPA over 3.5 has decreased during the same period. The same pattern could be observed in the case of General degree too.

At the discussions held with the members of the academic staff it was revealed that the majority of students have been able to find employment after graduation.

However, at the discussions with students it was mentioned that students are in need of an institutionalized training in addition to the subject-specific training they receive. It is the view of the Review Team that such training will undoubtedly enhance the quality of the students while increasing the opportunities for employment.

Although the DSS conducts a well-planned field study programme it is the view of the Review Team that the quality of the programme could be further improved if a sufficient number of staff at senior level is available. Also, attention must be paid to inadequacy of senior academic members for conducting the programmes in Economics and Sociology.

***It is the view of the Review Team that the Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements is at a SATISFACTORY level.***

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

The DSS has already prepared a questionnaire to obtain students' feed back about a variety of aspects, including quality of teaching. The questionnaire will be given to students in the next semester.

Apart from this formal method of obtaining feedback a variety of qualitative methods are being employed by the staff to obtain students' views about teaching and other activities of the department. Especially, the senior staff uses the new recruits to the department as a medium of getting feedback, because by being one or two years senior they are closer to students.

Also, at the lecture sessions, students are given an opportunity to respond to questions asked by the lecturer about the lecture. Since the staff-student relationships are at a good level, staff members are approached by the students to express their views on various matters.

At the discussion held with students it was pointed out that the student representatives in the faculty board, express their views on academic and other relative matters. Also the Head and academic staff are allowing the students to meet them at any time to discuss their grievances and academic issues.

***It is the view of the Review Team that the Extent and Use of Student Feedback, both qualitative and quantitative are at a SATISFACTORY level and could be improved.***

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

It was observed that the DSS has only two senior academics with PhDs. Another 3 members have Masters Degrees and one a PG Diploma. The remaining members possess only first degrees. Apart from the two senior lecturers there are two lecturers and the majority of staff is probationers and temporary lecturers. The DSS depends on visiting staff. The visiting staff, according to the available documentary evidence, possess adequate academic and professional qualifications and experience. At present, the DSS is not in a position to offer postgraduate programmes. It would be little premature to commence such a programme in the near future. There is no attempt being taken to introduce a master degree program too as there are a very limited number of senior academics. However, 5 junior members of the staff have



secured registration in Masters Degree programmes in other universities in Sri Lanka and another one has been able to secure placement for a Ph D programme in an Australian university but facing funding problems.

***It is the view of the Review Team that the Post Graduate Studies are at an UNSATISFACTORY level.***

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

The members of the academic staff of the DSS have realized the importance of peer observation as an useful tool for improving the quality of teaching. However, as far as the problematic factors such as the insufficient staff, the workload of the individual members and the newness of the institution are concerned, peer observation is still a new concept to the department. Nevertheless, a variety of informal methods, such as consultation of senior members by the junior members in the preparation of lectures and practical classes and the moderation of question papers and second marking of answer scripts, the discussion of syllabi and other academic matters at the departmental meetings, are practiced to get the views and responses of a second or a third person. In addition, the visiting lecturers are always guided by the Head and relevant counterpart lecturers in the DSS.

***Although the department does not have a formal method of peer observation but informal methods are being practiced, it is the view of the Review Team that Peer Observation at the DSS is at a SATISFACTORY level.***

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

At present the subject-specific skills are provided to the students adequately but there is room for further improvement. As far generic as or employable skills are concerned the DSS and the faculty employ a variety of strategies. For example, computer skills are provided to students at faculty and department levels. At the same time, English language proficiency is provided both at department and faculty levels. Also, students are provided with training in report writing and presentations. Further, they are trained to conduct independent research studies and surveys in different subject areas. It was brought to the notice of reviewers that some lecturers employ specific methods such as asking students to write a few sentences in English at each teaching session with a view to enhancing their English language knowledge.

However, students were of the view that it would be much better if they could obtain practical training out side the university so that they expand their employment potential.

***The Review Team is of the view that Skills Development is SATISFACTORY.***

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

When students enter the faculty there is one month-long orientation program focusing on academic guidance and counseling. Also, during the time of orientation the Faculty provides a detailed Hand Book of all the degree programs to all students.

At the departmental level, students are advised on matters pertaining to the selection of subjects both at general and special levels. Also, each student is provided with a supervisor for guidance in research work field surveys.

Also, the members of the academic staff are available at any time to be consulted by the students.

***The Review Team is of the view that Academic Guidance and Counseling is SATISFACTORY.***

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

It is the view of the Review Team that in curriculum design and review, good practices such as the active participation of the members of the academic staff, are observed. However, the lack of staff at senior level with higher level academic and professional qualifications is a problem faced by the DSS.

In the area of teaching, learning and assessment, too, the DSS attempts to maintain a high standard. Also, the introduction of new courses of relevance has to be commended. However, the unavailability of qualified staff at senior level has led the DSS to depend on visiting staff. Special attention must be paid to the dearth of qualified staff to conduct Economics and Sociology programmes.

The DSS has employed a variety of methods to maintain the quality of their students. At the same time, students have also pointed out that they would like to have teachers with higher qualifications and more exposure to outer community.

As far as student feedback is concerned, different methods of qualitative nature are being employed to obtain the views of students on the academic programmes. The DSS has prepared a questionnaire, the results of which could be quantified. Due to the fact that a large number of programmes are being conducted by the visiting staff and junior members in the department it is essential to obtain student' feedback in order to implement a programme of a high quality.

At present, the DSS does not conduct any postgraduate programmes. It is the view of the Review Team that the members of the academic staff should acquire postgraduate qualifications before commencing any postgraduate level programmes.

Although a formal method of peer observation is not practiced, a variety of methods of informal nature are being practiced. It is suggested that with the consensus of the whole staff a suitable method has to be employed and this could be done at the beginning of the academic year when time tables are prepared.

In the area of skills development special attention has been paid to improve the knowledge in English. However, as students have pointed out, they must be provided with an opportunity to obtain work experience through organized programmes in the government and non-government sectors.

As far as counseling is concerned, the availability of the members of the academic staff for consultation by students has to be appreciated. In fact, there is a close and cordial relationship between staff and students.

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

<b>Aspect Reviewed</b>	<b>Judgment</b>
Curriculum Design, Content and Review	Good
Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods	Good
Quality of Students	Satisfactory
Extent and Use of Student Feedback	Satisfactory
Postgraduate Studies	Unsatisfactory
Peer Observation	Satisfactory
Skills Development	Satisfactory
Academic Guidance and Counseling	Satisfactory

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- It is strongly recommended to provide the opportunities and facilities for post graduate studies for the academic staff without delay.
- It is recommended to strengthen the teaching of Economics and Sociology degree programmes by the provision of staff at senior level.
- The DSS may consider providing institutionalized training for students especially in the subject areas of professional nature.
- The basic modern teaching aides like multimedia equipment need to be provided. It has to be noted that the GIS facility at the DSS is lacking some basic equipment.

## 7. ANNEXES

### Annex 1. PROGRAMME DETAILS

Department of Social Sciences is conducting two Special Degree programs (Environmental Management and Economics) and providing five subjects (Environmental Management, Economics, Water Resources Management, Sociology and Tourism) as major subjects for the General Degree program.

#### **Duration**

The B.A. General Degree Program covers three academic years or six semesters (one semester runs for 15 weeks) while special degree program covers four academic years or eight semesters

**Environmental Management (B.A. Hons)** offers following courses:

Intermediate Microeconomics, Mathematics, Statistical Methods, Fundamentals of Environmental Science, Environmental Physics, Principles of Environmental Management, Introduction to Environmental Economics, Elements of Cartography and Geographical Information System(GIS), Environmental Resources, Research Methodology, Environmental Impact Assessment, Resource Management Techniques, Environmental Legislation, Environmental Sociology, Advanced GIS, Property Rights and Environmental Management, Project Evaluation Environmental Policy Analysis, Environmental Quality Management, Advanced Environmental and Resource Economics, Biodiversity Management, Waste Management, International Environmental Policy and Law, Energy Resource Management, Land Economics, Water Resource Management, Poverty and Environment, Climate change and Global Environment, Conservation Finance, Urban Environment, Environmental Hazards, Disaster Management, Environment and Health. These graduates study in detail social relations and field management of hazards and disasters which is essential to a period of rapid climatic change and geological change as at present experienced by Sri Lanka.

**Economics (B.A. Hons)** offers following courses:

Intermediate Macroeconomics, Mathematics, Statistical Methods, Intermediate Microeconomics, Introduction to Agriculture Economics, Financial and Monetary Economics, Resource Economics, Participatory Planning, Industrial Economics, Development Economics, Applied Economics, Transport Economics, Data Analysis in Economics, Industrial Economics, Introduction to Business Economics, Production Economics, International Economics, Managerial Economics, International Trade Theories and Policy Practices.

**Environmental Management as a Major subject in B.A (General Degree)** offers following courses:

Introduction to Environment, Basic Concepts of Environmental Management, Geographical Information Systems, Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Policy Analysis, Sustainable Development and Environmental Accounting, Environmental Valuation Method, International Environmental Issues and Agreements, Environmental Planning in Sri Lanka, Environmental Conservation and Project work on Environmental Management.

**Economics as a Major subject in B.A (General Degree)** offers following courses

Microeconomics, Applied Economics, Financial Management, Development Economics, Economics of Privatization, Financial and Monetary Economics, Privatization in Sri Lanka, Banking Theory and Practice, Economics Project Work on Economics. These graduates study economic relations and management, which is essential to a period of rapid economic change in Sri Lanka.

**Water Resource Development and Management as a Major subject in B.A (General Degree)** offers following courses:

Water Resource Planning and Development, Irrigation Management, Irrigation systems in Sri Lanka, Village Tank Based Irrigation, and An Institutional approach in Irrigation Water Management in Sri Lanka, Project Work on Water Resource Management.

**Travel and Tourism Management as a Major subject in B.A (General Degree)** offers following courses:

Geography of Tourism, Hospitality Management, Accommodation Management, Travel and Tourism Service Management, Nature Tourism, Tourism Marketing, Tourism Research Methodology, Archaeological Tourism in Sri Lanka, Tourism Promotion Planning, Project Work on Travel and Tourism Management

**Sociology as a Major subject in B.A. (General Degree)**

An initiative has been made to establish a Department of Environmental Management in the next academic year, with an aim to train graduates who will be capable of attending to local issues of water, environmental change, and economics of environmental management, waste, hazard and disaster management.

## **Annex 2. NUMBER OF STUDENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, 2007**

Course	1 <sup>st</sup> Year			2 <sup>nd</sup> year			3 <sup>rd</sup> Year		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
B.A.(Sp) in Economics	07	19	<b>26</b>	10	03	<b>13</b>	02	06	<b>08</b>
B.A.(Sp) in Environmental Management	04	17	<b>21</b>	09	06	<b>15</b>		04	<b>04</b>
B.A. (General)	38	67	<b>105</b>	35	58	<b>93</b>	30	78	<b>108</b>
<b>Total number of students</b>							<b>393</b>		

**\*Those who are selecting major subjects offered by the department**

**Annex 3. MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC STAFF PARTICIPATED IN SUBJECT REVIEW**

- Dr. JMSB Jayasundara
- Dr HMMB Seneviratne
- Mr. PSR Senadheera
- Mrs. KS Denipitiya
- Mr. SKN Gamage
- Mrs. SWGK Bulankulama
- Mr. PSK Rajapakse
- Mrs DML Dissanayake
- Ms. SAU Niranjala
- Ms AMP Adhikari
- Ms. HGA Nilmini