

SUBJECT REVIEW



Department of Agribusiness Management
Faculty of Agricultural Sciences,
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

21st to 23rd March 2005

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1. Subject review process

Subject review process evaluates the quality of education within a specific subject or discipline. It is focussed on the student learning experience and on student achievement. 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 Agribusiness Business Management submitted a self evaluation report consisting of ten sections, namely: aims, learning outcomes and programme details; students, staff and facilities; curriculum design, content and review; teaching, learning and assessment methods; quality of students in relation to recruitment, admission, student progress and achievement; the extent of student feedback; external education programmes and research; peer observation; skills development; and academic guidance and counselling. The quality of education was reviewed according to the aims and learning outcomes given in the self evaluation report.

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 counselling.

The review team visited the department from 21st – 23th March, 2005. The agenda of the three day visit is annexed.

The evaluation of eight aspects was based on:

- Meetings held with the Vice Chancellor, Dean, Head of department, academic staff, non-academic staff undergraduate students representing all four years, and students following the diploma course.
- Observation of department and other facilities of the faculty (library, computer unit, audio visual equipment, lecture rooms, farms etc.).
- Observing teaching and practical classes.
- Reviewing documents available at the department.

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

2. Brief History of the University and the Department

The Sabaragamuwa University was started as an affiliated university in 1992. It was converted to a full fledged university in 1996. At present the university has 5 faculties, namely, Faculties of Agricultural Sciences, Geomatics, Social Science and Languages, Applied Sciences and Management Studies, with a total student population of 1800. The Faculty of Agricultural Sciences of the Sabaragamuwa University, which was earlier located at Rahangala was shifted to Belihuloya in March 2001. All faculties, except the Faculty of Applied Sciences are located at Belihuloya, 18 km from Balangoda.

The Faculty of Agricultural Sciences consists of 3 Departments. They are: Departments of Agribusiness Management, Export Agriculture and Livestock Production.

The mission of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences is to search for and disseminate knowledge in the sphere of agriculture. The faculty will produce graduates in Agricultural Sciences who are proficient in science and practical skills in agriculture and contribute towards the manpower requirements of the nation. The faculty will strive to be the nucleus for the socio economic enhancement of the communities in geographic proximity to the faculty.

The faculty offers a B.Sc. (Agric. Sciences) programme for the students who gain direct entry to the faculty on the basis of their performance at the GCE (Advanced Level) examination. The students may specialize either in Plantation Agriculture, Horticulture (under the Department of Export Agriculture); Livestock Production or Agribusiness Management, after 4 semesters of general study, followed by four more semesters of specialized study and industrial / in-plant training. The annual intake of the Faculty is 75.

The Department under review is Agribusiness Management, which is the only Department offering a specialization programmes on Agribusiness Management in the country. It offers courses for all the students of the faculty during the first two years and specialized courses during the third and the final years for the students specializing in Agribusiness management. In addition, the department offers elective courses for students specializing in other Departments within the faculty.

About 10 students in each year specializes in Agribusiness management. The number of courses offered during the first two years by the department is eight, accounting for 24 credits. Twelve courses are offered during the 3rd year, accounting for 36 credits.

Students follow the industrial training during the entire first semester of the 4th year. During the second semester of the 4th year the department offers 15 elective courses.

The department has 7 permanent staff members and 2 temporary staff members, of which 4 permanent members are pursuing their doctoral studies in foreign universities. The only Associate Professor of the Department has been appointed as the Vice Chancellor of the university recently. It has 2 non-academic staff members, one competent data operator and a committed labourer.

The Department has limited facilities to conduct the academic programme. It uses faculty computer unit, which has only 18 computers, the faculty library containing about 5000 books and the faculty reading room with a capacity for 100 students. It has access to adequate number of faculty lecture rooms though ill-equipped with audio visual aids. The department has audio visual equipment for the proposed audio visual centre, which will be shared by the other departments of the faculty as well. Facilities are expected to be improved with the QEF grant of the IRQUE project.

3. Aims and Learning Outcomes

3.1 Aims

The department of Agribusiness Management was established in 1996, to encourage and provide facilities for undergraduate study and research, in keeping with the needs of the agribusiness sector.

The undergraduate programme in Agribusiness Management is the first of its kind in a Sri Lankan University. The activities of the Department are organized in broad areas, and comprise of areas such as Agribusiness Management, Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Marketing, Business Management, etc. The department aims to provide;

- 3.1.1 Theoretical and practical knowledge in all related areas in Agribusiness sector in order to make students fully competent in the discipline.
- 3.1.2. Comprehensive intellectual background to enable students to undertake research in all major branches of Agribusiness Management.
- 3.1.3. Fundamental and conceptual knowledge and analytical tools to cope efficiently with the problems and challenges of the dynamic business and economic environment.
- 3.1.4. Package of interpersonal and transferable skills to develop critical, conceptual, problem solving and decision making capabilities of the students.

- 3.1.5. Capacity to explore the opportunities and potentials prevailing in the environment in terms of agribusiness sector in Sri Lanka.
- 3.1.6. Opportunities for students to develop the skills and enthusiasm required for lifelong learning.
- 3.1.7. Support for the teaching staff for their career development which in turn will create a positive impact on the students' performance.
- 3.1.8. Effective organization of the departmental activities including teaching, learning, assessment, review and quality assurance.

3.2 Learning Outcomes

Students should possess the following learning outcomes on successful completion of the specialization in Agribusiness Management.

- 3.2.1. Comprehensive knowledge in all the disciplines in Agribusiness Management; Agricultural Marketing, Agribusiness Management, Agricultural Extension, Agricultural Finance & Accounting, etc.
- 3.2.2. Ability to involve in Agribusiness researches effectively.
- 3.2.3. Capacity to contribute in Agricultural projects in all areas of the project cycle.
- 3.2.4. Competence to foster the farming community for their needs in agribusiness related disciplines.
- 3.2.5. Employability: Students should successfully address the needs of the private and state sector employment opportunities in relevant fields.
- 3.2.6. Range of personal and transferable skills such as critical ability, innovativeness, assertiveness, data handling and interpretation, computer literacy, information management, oral & written communication, etc.

Students are expected to obtain knowledge and understanding in subjects offered by the department when they complete the entire degree programme with two year period of specialization in the department. In addition, students must complete all other subjects (English, Computer Science and Farm Practice Course) offered by other departments (Dept. of Livestock Production and Dept. of Export Agriculture) in their first two years.

4. Overall Judgement

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

| Aspect reviewed | Judgement given |
|--|-----------------|
| Curriculum design, content and review | Good |
| Teaching learning and assessment methods | Good |
| Quality of students including student progress and achievements | Good |
| Extent and use of student feedback, qualitative and quantitative | Good |
| Postgraduate studies | Satisfactory |
| Peer observations | Satisfactory |
| Skills development | Good |
| Academic guidance and counselling | Good |

Overall Judgment - Suspended

4.1. Curriculum design, content and review

The students follow a general programme during the first 2 years, followed by a specialized programme from the third year onwards. The academic year consists of two semesters. During the first two years, the Department of Agribusiness Management offers 8 subjects to provide the required basic knowledge. During the 3rd year, 12 compulsory courses are offered for those specializing in Agribusiness Management to enhance the theoretical and practical knowledge. The entire first semester of the 4th year is allocated for industrial training. This gives an opportunity for undergraduates to apply their learnt knowledge in practical situations, and gain experience in real-world problems. During the 2nd semester of the 4th year, the students have the option of selecting courses from any Department of the Faculty which are all elective courses.

The review team is of the opinion that the content of the courses offered, adequately covers the requirements for a degree programme of this nature. However, the contents of some course need minor revisions as given under recommendations.

The discussion with a group of students who have undergone the industrial training at reputed establishments indicated that they were offered permanent employment. This confirms the team's opinion. The team noted the significant efforts made by the

Department Staff in the overall programme to ensure production of graduates of high quality.

The students follow the entire programme in English. Both English and IT courses are offered during the first three years as compulsory courses. This was also noted as having a significant effect on developing soft skills, which are vital for employability. As revealed during the discussion with students, there is a high competition among students within the faculty to specialize in agribusiness management, demonstrating the quality and relevance of the programme.

The present curriculum has been designed 5-6 years back and the department itself identifies the need for a revision in order to address the future needs. At present there is no formal mechanism for curriculum revision.

In relation to the curriculum design, content and review, the judgement of the team is good.

4.2. Teaching, learning and assessment methods.

A range of teaching methods are presently being used by the Department staff. The most common method of imparting knowledge is through lectures. As indicated by students as well as staff members, the teaching takes place in an interactive environment. This was also noted by the review team during the observation of teaching sessions. In addition, a range of more interactive methods such as case studies, role play, individual and group presentations, take home assignments, term papers, reports, tutorials etc. are being used. It was noted that interactive teaching methods such as role play are effectively being used to impart knowledge while improving soft skills of students.

With the non-availability of adequate academic staff, each member has a high teaching load as evidenced by the Department time table and the time tables of individual lecturers. The significant involvement of the Vice Chancellor and the Head of the Department in teaching undergraduate courses demonstrates the gravity of the situation. With the return of the academic staff on completion of their Ph.D. programmes, the situation is expected to improve considerably.

Though the department lacks modern teaching aids, it makes the maximum use of the existing teaching aids, such as OHP, whiteboard and chalkboard. Handouts are provided whenever possible. Multimedia and video demonstrations are used in certain situations. Lack of internet facilities at the department and limited library facilities hinder the learning process. As the faculty has been successful in obtaining a QEF grant of the IRQUE project, it is expected that these resources will be significantly upgraded.

The teaching and learning environment is conducive. The review team noted the students to be highly motivated and quite enthusiastic, despite the limitations of facilities. Both academic and non-academic staff displayed a high level of commitment.

Both summative and formative assessment methods are being used. Approximately 1/3 of the final mark given comes from summative assessments, whereas the remaining 2/3 is through an end semester examination combining MCQ, structured and unstructured essay type questions. The papers are scrutinized, moderated and double marked with an internal or an external expert. In general, the question papers for each course adequately cover the material included in the course outline. The repetition of questions in different years is minimum.

The industrial training, which is one of the salient aspects of the programme, is evaluated on the basis of the end report (60%), external supervisor's evaluation (20%) and oral presentation (20%). The end report is evaluated by the internal supervisor and the presentation is evaluated by a panel. The marks given by the external supervisor is based on ten criteria; punctuality, attendance, time management, commitment to work, efficiency of work, communication skills, ability to work independently, interpersonal relationships, leadership quality and innovation / creativity. The oral presentation is evaluated based on topic and content, delivery, time management, use of visual aids and clarifications and discussions.

In relation to the teaching, learning and assessment methods the judgement of the team is good.

4.3. Quality of students including student progress and achievements

The department ensures high quality of student intake into the specialization programme by admitting those who have scored highest marks for the 1st and 2nd year courses it offered. With the reputation the department and the faculty have built up, the Z score of students entering the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences of the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka (1.1889 in 2002) is in par with similar programmes in other universities.

Throughout the program various measures are taken to ensure student progress to achieve the expected outcome of the programme. These include monitoring performance through continuous assessments, mandatory attendance of more than 80%, advising and counselling of weaker students etc. During the discussions held with the students as well as teaching sessions observed by the review team, the students were found to be quite confident and demonstrated good communication skills in English. The Department, as an incentive for students to perform well, is awarding a gold medal annually for the student with the best performance.

The final results of the last three years indicate a high proportion of students obtaining 1st and 2nd upper classes out of the students specializing in agribusiness management. The discussions held with department staff members and final year students revealed that all the graduates of this programme are presently employed, mainly in the private sector organizations.

In relation to the quality of students, student progress and achievements the judgement of the team is good.

4.4. Extent and use of student feedback, qualitative and quantitative

The student feedback is taken through formal and informal methods. The batch representatives from each batch as well as the faculty representatives provide the feedback of students to the department and faculty respectively. Use of structured questionnaires to obtain student feedback on teaching of some staff members of the department was evident from the documents available at the department. The feedback obtained from such surveys is mainly used by staff members to improve the quality of teaching. There is no mechanism of analyzing the results of such questionnaires by the department or the faculty. At the end of the semester some lecturers get the comments regarding their teaching by getting the students to make written comments on their strengths and weaknesses in teaching. The discussions with staff and students revealed that the feedback has been effectively used by the lecturers in improving their teaching. The review team noted the existence of a close rapport between students and staff, which facilitate constant feedback from students. It was also felt that the department should encourage other staff members too to obtain feedback through questionnaires.

Feedback on present curriculum too has been obtained from students as an initial step towards next curriculum revision.

In relation to the extent and use of student feedback the judgement of the team is good.

4.5. Postgraduate studies

The department has started a M.Phil degree programme in agribusiness management for which three students have been registered. So far, none of them has completed the programme. In our opinion it is difficult to conduct a postgraduate programme until the members who are on study leave return after obtaining their Ph.D. degrees.

The department however conducts a Diploma in agribusiness course for middle level managers in the agricultural sector. The discussion held with two students of this programme revealed that it is very popular. Some of the registered students for this programme are already graduates from recognized universities.

The absence of a more successful postgraduate programme at the department is noted as a weakness by the review team.

In relation to the postgraduate studies the judgement of the team is satisfactory.

4.6. Peer observations

Peer observations are being practiced to some extent at an informal level. The teaching conducted by temporary assistant lecturers have been observed and feedback given by the former Head of the Department. In addition, continuous guidance is provided to them on all aspects of teaching. For some courses such as “Supporting services in Agriculture” co-teaching is practiced. This also can be considered as an indirect way of peer observation.

Lack of a formal mechanism for peer observation was noted as a weakness by the review team.

In relation to peer observations the judgement of the review team is satisfactory.

4.7. Skills development

Various methods are effectively used to develop required skills of students, such as problem solving skills, time management, leadership qualities, inter-personal skills, communication skills, computer literacy, ability to work in groups, critical thinking etc. As noted by the review team during the observations of student-centred teaching methods conducted for 3rd and 4th year students (role play and presentations), the approaches used by the teachers are targeted to improve a range of skills in students. Industrial training, which is conducted in a very effective manner, also makes a significant contribution to develop the above mentioned skills.

In addition, the department recognizing the need to improve literacy in English and computing has introduced compulsory courses during the first three years. To ensure a successful development of computer skills, the entire batch is divided into smaller groups of about 15 students each, for the practical sessions on computing at the computer unit of the faculty. The students are assessed individually at the end semester examination, for which a pass/fail grade is given, and a pass grade is made compulsory for graduation. In order to improve competency in English a significant time is allocated (approximately 4-6 hours/week), during the first three years. The bold step taken by the faculty to conduct the entire study programme from the very first semester in English is another contributory factor for high standard of English, which is being appreciated by the students.

The review team noted the inadequacy of computers and other IT related facilities, which is an obstacle in successfully conducting these courses. Nevertheless, the department and the computer unit have taken adequate measures to overcome them.

In relation to the skills development the judgement of the team is good.

4.8. Academic guidance and counselling.

The faculty and the department have taken adequate measures to ensure effective academic guidance and counselling, both in formal and informal ways. During the first semester itself, students are assigned to an academic staff member who acts as an academic mentor for their entire period of stay in the university. During the industrial training programme, the internal supervisor also provides guidance for students.

The university appoints student counsellors from all faculties. At present the only two permanent staff members of the department are appointed as student counsellors for the year.

In relation to academic guidance and counselling the judgement of the team is good.

5. Summary of conclusions

Based on the observations made by the review team in relation to the self evaluation report, the reviewers are able to give an overall judgement of “**confidence**” for the academic programme of the Department of Agribusiness Management of the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka.

The summary of the judgements of the eight aspects are given below:

5.1. Curriculum design, content and review

This aspect was judged as “good”.

Strengths

- The content of the courses offered adequately covers the requirements for a degree programme of this nature.
- The presence of an industrial training component, which helps the students to acquire soft skills vital for employability.
- Entire programme is conducted in English.

- Both English and IT courses are offered as compulsory courses during the first three years.

Weaknesses

- No formal mechanism for periodic revision of curriculum

5.2. Teaching, learning and assessment methods

This aspect was judged as “good”.

Strengths

- Use of a range of teaching methods
- Interactive and conducive environment for teaching and learning
- High level of commitment of academic staff
- Effective use of teaching aids
- Effective use of continuous assessment methods
- Effective use of industrial training to improve skills

Weaknesses

- Lack of adequate facilities

5.3. Quality of students including student progress and achievements

This aspect was judged as “good”.

Strengths

- Intake of high quality students into the specialization programme
- Continuous monitoring of student performance using various methods
- Mandatory attendance of 80%.
- Awarding a gold medal annually for the student with the best performance.
- High proportion of students obtaining classes
- High employability of graduates

5.4. Extent and use of student feedback, qualitative and quantitative

This aspect was judged as “good”.

Strengths

- Obtaining feedback from batch representatives
- Use of structured questionnaire to get feedback on teaching

- Written comments taken on the strengths and weaknesses in teaching
- Existence of a close rapport between students and staff

Weaknesses

- Absence of a formal mechanism of using questionnaires

5.5. Postgraduate studies

This aspect was judged as “satisfactory”.

Strengths

- Initiation of a M.Phil degree programme in agribusiness management
- Conducting a Diploma in agribusiness course

Weaknesses

- The absence of an active postgraduate programme at the department

5.6. Peer observations

This aspect was judged as “satisfactory”.

Strengths

- Practiced to a limited extent

Weaknesses

- Lack of a formal mechanism for peer observation

5.7. Skills development

This aspect was judged as “good”.

Strengths

- Effective use of various methods to develop required skills
- Conducting the entire programme in English
- Compulsory courses on English and computing in first 3 years
- Availability of an effective industrial training component

Weaknesses

- Inadequacy of computers and other IT related facilities

5.8. Academic guidance and counselling.

This aspect was judged as “good”.

Strengths

- Assigning an academic mentor for each student
- Appointment of 2 student counsellors from the Department
- Close rapport between student and staff

6. Recommendations

The recommendations of the review team to further improve the program are as follows:

1. Establish a formal mechanism for periodic curriculum revision. This may be done by obtaining the views of all stakeholders, and assistance of the proposed department advisory committee (see recommendation 2)
2. Establish a department advisory Committee consisting of senior personal of the industry.
3. It is not appropriate to include strategic management as a sub topic of principles of management.
4. Duration of computer classes should be increased to at least 2 hours for them to be more effective.
5. Develop and maintain a database of the present students consisting of their personal information and the performance of the degree programme. The same database could be extended to include the employment records etc. when they graduate.
6. Establish a formal student feedback process. This could be done through the use of a well structured questionnaire, which should be given to the students at the end of the course by the department.
7. A more successful postgraduate programme should be conducted once the staff members return from study leave.
8. Establish a formal mechanism of peer observation.

Prof. Darshani Kumaragamage / University of Peradeniya

Prof. Lalith Munasinghe / University of Kelaniya

Dr. R. Sunil Gunatunge /University of Sri Jayawardenapura

Date : 24 March 2005

ANNEXURE
AGENDA OF THE SUBJECT REVIEW
DEPARTMENT OF AGRIBUSINESS MANAGEMENT
Held on 21st to 23rd March 2005

DAY PRIOR TO THE REVIEW

07.30 p.m. - Private meeting of Reviewers

DAY -1 (21st March 2005)

09.00 –9.30 a.m. - Welcome Meeting with the Vice-Chancellor, Dean and Head of Dept

09.30-10.00 a.m. - Discuss the Agenda of the Review

10.00 – 10.30 a.m. - TEA BREAK

10.30 –11.30 a.m. - Department Presentation on the Self Evaluation Report

11.30 – 12.30 p.m. - Discussion

12.30 –01.30 p.m. - LUNCH BREAK

01.30 – 2.30 p.m. - Observation Department Facilities

2.30 – 03.30 p.m. - Observing Other Facilities (Library, Computer labs, Audio Visual Unit)

03.30 – 4.30 p.m. - Meeting with Department Academic Staff (**WORKING TEA**)

04.30 – 05.30 p.m. - Meeting with Students – in two sessions

05.30 –06.00 p.m. - Brief meeting of Reviewers

DAY -2 (22nd March 2005)

09.00- 09.30 a.m. - Observe teaching class -1st Year : Macro Economics

09.30-10.00a.m. - Observe teaching class - 3rd Year : Social Sciences Research Methods

10.00- 11.00 a.m. - Observe Documents (**WORKING TEA**)

11.00- 12.00 p.m. - Meeting with Non-Academic Staff

12.00- 12.30 p.m. - Meeting with Diploma students

12.00 - 01.00 p.m. - LUNCH BREAK

01.00 – 02.00 p.m. - Brief meeting of reviewers

02.00 - 03.00 p.m. - Observe teaching class - 3rd Year : Agricultural sociology

03.00 - 04.00 p.m. - Observe Practical Class: 3rd Year - Managing Situation (Role Play)

04.00 – 05.00 p.m. - Observe practical class: Agric. Development & Policy - Presentation

05.00 -05.30 p.m. - Academic Guidance & Counselling Core Aspect Meeting

DAY - 3 (23rd March 2005)

09.00 – 09.30 a.m. - Observe practical - 3rd Year: Prod. Economics (Group Presentation)

09.30 –10.00 a.m. - Observe practical - 1st Year : Applied Statistics (Quiz)

10.00-11.00 a.m. - Reviewers Private Discussion (**WORKING TEA**)

11.00- 12.00 p.m. - Meeting with Head & Staff for Reporting

12.00- 01.00 p.m. - LUNCH BREAK

01.00-05.00 p.m. - Report Writing (**WORKING TEA**)