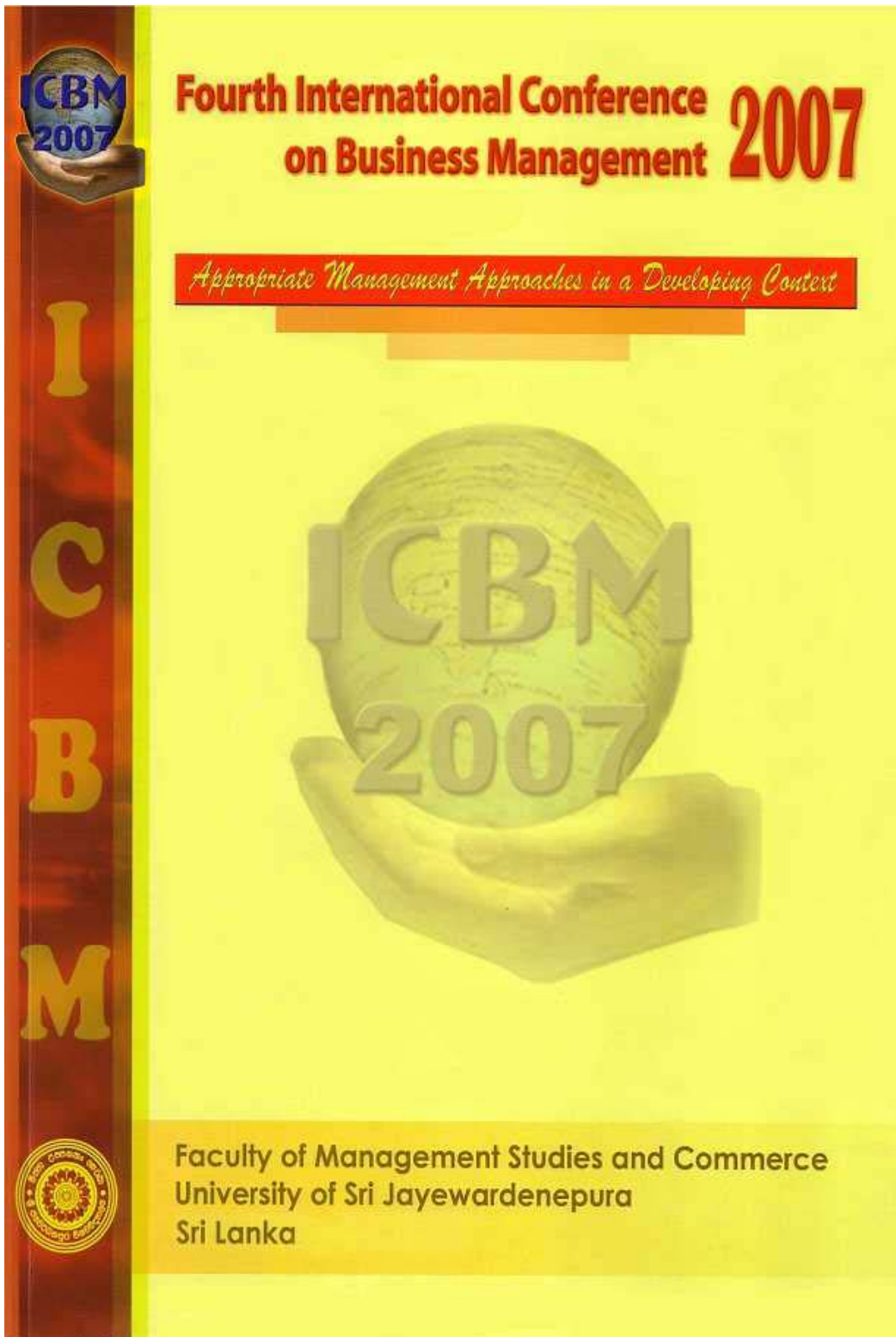


Forming the Sri Lankan Graduate for Tomorrow

Charles Fernando

presented at ...



Forming the Sri Lankan Graduate for Tomorrow

Charles Fernando
Career Guidance Unit
University of Sri Jayewardenepura
charles@sjp.ac.lk

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Abstract:

Higher Education change/reform initiatives in much of the developed world in the nineties were due mainly to national policy initiatives that were a response to the demand for 'employable' graduates satisfying the requirements of the world of work. While such demands are fair, it is worth noting that 'employability' is a social construct in a given context and that while fitting into current requirements, graduates are expected also to be agents of innovation and change.

The author accepts that the problem has been understood at least by some within the academia and industry and elements of solution identified, and suggests that the National Policy on University Education of 1996 was a major step forward.

Proceeding then to inquire into why fundamental and system-wide reforms have not occurred so far, the author submit four postulates and suggests that if needed those can be transformed into hypotheses for future research. Arguing on the basis of the 4th postulate, the author proposes that a centrally-driven yet participatory reform effort is the appropriate way forward and presents an integrative framework by way of a model to guide judgment and action as well as a change strategy judged appropriate.

Key words: Higher Education, Higher Education Reform, Relevance and Quality, Employability, Attributes of a Graduate

1. Universities in Crisis

Universities began as places of learning (monastic or otherwise), as a mark of culture and distinction. In spite of the implied sarcasm of the comparison someone made between the universities and the pyramids of old that have survived unchanged across time, one needs to admit that some adaptation to context and innovation did occur all the time and that they survived by being useful. It is however accepted that today universities (and in varying degrees other post-secondary institutions) are

on the whole in a state of crisis. Amaral and Magalhaes (2003) report that some even claim that the university is living in a state of schizophrenia trying to answer different and sometimes conflicting demands of many stakeholders. The impact of the wider socio-political climate has aptly been summarised as:

Universities must now maintain standards despite attenuated resources; educate a more diverse range of students; introduce more flexible curricula, including new forms of learning delivery and

assessment; teach and research more intensively; prepare students for employment more effectively; contribute to improved economic competitiveness and to local economic success; and replace public investment with the merchant's penny whenever they are able. (Robertson, 1997, p.88)

It is interesting to note that by the 1990s change initiatives were increasingly a response to major national policy initiatives. To take just a few examples of the latter, one lists in the US: SCANS (1992), 'An American Imperative' (1993) and The Boyer Commission (1998); in the UK: the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education / Dearing Commission (1997) and 'The Future of Higher Education' White Paper (Department for Education and Skills 2003); in Australia: The Finn Report (1991), the Mayer Committee (1992), the West Report (1997/8) and the newer policy document 'Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future' (Nelson Report 2003). But perhaps even more interesting because of its 'trans-national' character is the Bologna Process (1999) that put in motion a series of reforms that are drastically changing European Higher Education making national systems more compatible, comparable and competitive.

2. Requirements of the World of Work

While authors have shown that the capacity to innovate is positively associated with the quality of higher education, and the absorption of innovations depends on the quantity of higher educated people, there was a paradox that unemployment among graduates was in fact rising in many

countries. Employers were demanding that graduates be employable and effective, with relevant competencies and skills. These two factors greatly influenced national policy. The claim of Haug & Tauch (2001) with regard to the European situation that enhanced employability seems to be the strongest source of change and reform appears to be globally valid. This resulted in a shift of emphasis from education centred on developing the potential of the person, and the Platonic 'education for society' to 'education for the economy' with the implicit influence of the 'human capital' theory being clear.

The UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (1998) noted an amazing degree of consensus among employers and researchers on what was required of a graduate going into the world of work:

There is a perceived need for a new vision and paradigm of higher education, which should be student-oriented. To achieve this goal, curricula need to be recast so as to go beyond simple cognitive mastery of disciplines and include the acquisition of skills, competencies and abilities for communication, creative and critical analysis, independent thinking and team work in multicultural contexts. (para 7 of the Summary of the World Declaration on Higher Education)

Other typical lists exist. Concerned with the then situation in the UK, and in order to stimulate discussion the Higher Education Quality Council (1995) listed the attributes of 'Graduateness'. Undertaking a literature review Curtis & McKenzie (2001) provided a summary list of skills areas contributing most to employability. Fernando (2002) also presents a

comprehensive set of examples from across the globe. More recent research of interest was undertaken by UK's Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team project (ESECT 2005).

3. 'Requirements of the world of work' - a socio-political critique

Given that it has to be seen within the broader context of cross-cultural management, one needs to accept that the subject 'requirements of the world of work' in the context of higher education is a contested field, which still lacks a solid base of systematic theory and evidence. While thinkers such as Bourdieu (1998), Chomsky (1997), Freire (1989) and Illich (1971) have written on connected yet broader issues, Mariappanadar (2005) draws attention to the need to relativise management practices. Kogan (1978) suggested that controversies about educational policies are in fact controversies about man's individual and collective present and future wants. One cannot thus ignore the fact that education and educational change are political issues.

The 2000-2002 'Skills-Plus' project in the UK explored ways of 'tuning' existing curricula to enhance their contribution to student employability. Some of the research undertaken (Knight 2002 and Knight & Yorke 2004) did however attempt to question what is often taken for granted with regard to the concept of employability. The "Consensus Theory" implicit in current approaches (e.g. technology as driving force of social change, raising educational standards for all to international benchmarks of excellence will lead to a greater share of the

global high-skilled high-waged labour market) was contrasted with "Conflict Theory" and attempts were made to link issues such as gender and the types of jobs that graduates apply to, and to highlight the social construction of 'employability'. Many current trends (minimal social obligations to employees, preference to hire workers on a 'plug and play' basis without investment in intensive training before new recruits can 'add value') are looked at critically. Posing that those from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to find that the best jobs are assigned to social elites with the appropriate cultural capital (language, accent, dress, rules of the game, etc.) questions are raised about meritocratic competition. Emphasis on employability skills, especially personal and social skills, is shown as a possible attempt to legitimate the reproduction of inequalities rather than improve productivity.

The project promoted 'complex learning' built on concepts such as those of 'capability'. Using also the works of Bandura (1997) and Dweck (1999) they devised the USEM model (Understanding+Skills+Efficacy+Meta cognition) where stress is placed also on 'efficacy beliefs (self-theories such as belief in one's capacity to make a difference) and metacognition (awareness of what we know, and awareness of how we learn and a sense of how we can use these understandings). Affirmative action particularly with regard to arts, humanities and social science students was advocated being an indication of how a broader understanding of employability has influenced their priorities for action.

Numerous other studies have appeared looking at the problem from a broader perspective. By way of illustration we

refer to just a few. 'Universities and Globalization: Critical Perspective' edited by Currie and Newson (1998) examine how a globalizing political economy affects the universities. Volume X of Alternatives Sud (2003) entitled "l'offensive des marches sur l'université" (The Market's Assault on the University) is devoted entirely to the problem. Carnoy (1999) in 'Globalization and Education Reform: What Planners Need to Know' provides useful insights while Dill (2002) in 'Allowing the Market to Rule: The Case of the United States' is emphatic that allowing the market to rule in higher education is a naïve choice for policy makers. Hartley's (1995) 'The "McDonaldization" of higher education: food for thought' was followed by a collection in the form of Hayes and Wynyard (Eds) (2002) on 'The McDonaldization of Higher Education' assessing the impact of industrial rationalization / commodification on the University.

It is appropriate therefore to voice the caveat that the needs of the labour market, and employability attributes of graduates should be accepted as relative concepts, socially constructed in a given socio-economic and political context, and only partly explored. And secondly, given also the discussions about 'complex learning' we do well to pay attention to e.g. Teichler (1999) who argues for balancing the issue of the competencies currently in demand, with that on the extent to which higher education should prepare the students to become active agents of innovation and change. Desmarez and Thys-Clement (1994) too have stressed the need for higher education to be able to close its ears to the siren voices of special interest groups, while still taking on board whatever lessons its environment may have to teach it.

It is suggested that perspectives above be considered seriously in the Sri Lankan context where even leading academics and planners seem to promote policies that assume for example that the "Arts" stream of studies (rather than the academic processes involved) is irrelevant and that 'English combined with Computing' or 'Science and Technology' will solve problems of graduate unemployment. Perspectives highlighted earlier can be useful also in many other ways in for example helping recognize creeping trends of invasion by performance-based funding a.k.a. the 'performance monster', of managerialist audit of academic work or of corporatization of universities.

4. Requirements of the World of Work accepted in Sri Lanka

Already from the 1980s but more specially from the 1990s and particularly as a response to national policy initiatives, there was a noticeable global trend across universities to define what learning outcomes should be expected of graduates. They were classified as knowledge outcomes, skills outcomes, attitudinal outcomes and values outcomes. Mission Statements, Strategic Plans etc. incorporating policy statements about the qualities and competencies expected in the undergraduates were being adopted and outcomes-based curricula were being put in place. What is of particular interest to us however is that even if outcomes-oriented and competency-based curricula have not become the norm as yet, the so-called requirements of the world of work

Attributes sought in Graduates in recruitment to leading organizations

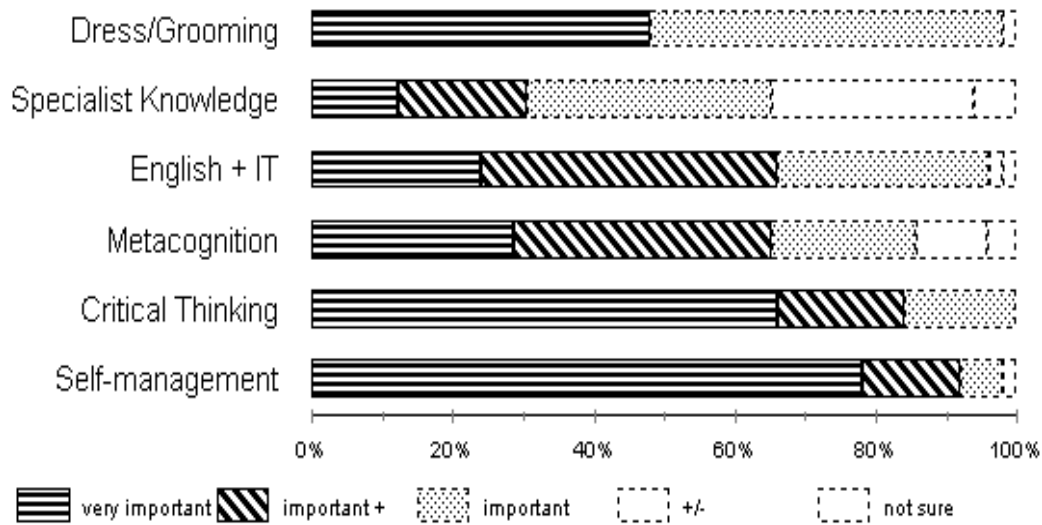


Figure 1: Attributes Sought – The view of leading Human Resource Managers

have, at least in principle, been accepted also in Sri Lanka.

Fernando (2002b) reports on an important initiative from the world of work:

The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce has carried out a survey in 1999 and has listed a set of attributes expected by today's business and industry of a graduate at entry level. ... In addition to essential computing, numeracy and communication (not merely in the vernacular but in English too) skills, general knowledge (world affairs and wide interests) is included. A critical thinking ability combined with an open/positive/practical mindset; the willingness to learn from a wide cross-section of people; good interpersonal skills; ability to work with different people and in different teams; ability to lead a team and achieve results within a given timeframe were stated as required. Other attributes in the list

were the ability to prioritize and organize time productively; ability to adapt to changing work situations; the ability to use initiative; and the ability to take risks.

The author attempted to build on the work done by the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and undertook a survey in October 2002. The responses were from 50 Senior Managers dealing with human resource development in leading Sri Lankan organisations that recruit local graduates. The views of the graduates themselves were obtained via the responses of a sample of 534 graduates of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

With regard to employers' views (*see Figure 1*), it is noted that while English and IT were stressed as critical around the late 90s, it is significant that the higher-order cognitive skills (e.g. critical thinking, metacognition) and the personal/interpersonal skills are

being indicated now at least as equally crucial and important. The author considers this as very positive because these are factors that should discriminate between graduates and non-graduates. The fact that the respondents were asked to attempt thinking beyond one's own organization into today's globalised context may have influenced the responses. It is significant that learning

'how to learn' etc is rated high while specialist-subject knowledge is seen as of lesser importance. (with possible exceptions in the case of highly professional jobs.). The importance of Dress/Grooming etc is understandable in the Sri Lankan private sector environment. There is however a clear division with some considering it 'very important' while an equal number rate it simply as 'important'.

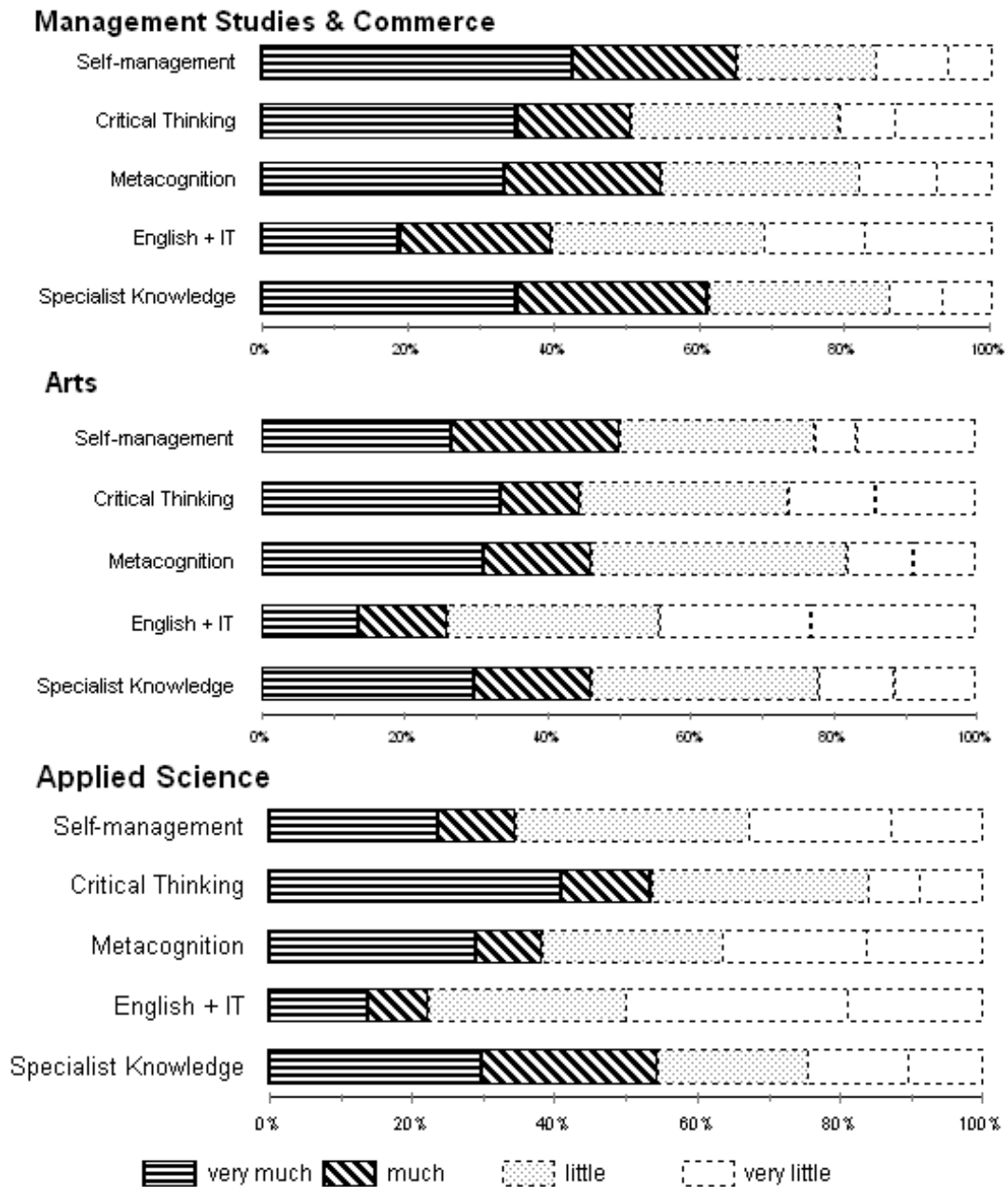


Figure 2: Graduates on Skills Development Support in Study Programmes

While drawing definitive conclusions is not warranted given the sample size and the fact that this deals with past graduates, one notes (*see Figure 2*) that students from the management faculty appear to have a slightly more positive image of the study programmes as contributing to overall skills development. In comparison with those from the Arts Faculty, the Science Faculty graduates are seen to view their programmes as contributing specially to critical thinking and to specialist-subject knowledge.

What is most surprising however is that more than 10 years back the National Education Commission (1996) had issued a National Policy on University Education. The Presidential Task Force on University Education came into existence a while later and did succeed in pushing some reforms through. Some of the recommendations of the 'National Policy' were:

- The traditional role of education as a means of imparting knowledge needs review. ... What is more valid in a constantly changing context is the skill of 'learning to learn'. Education must equip a person to be a continuing learner throughout life. It should also contribute to overall human development through promoting creativity, initiative, problem solving ability, adaptability, and nurturing of skills necessary for personal and social well-being
- Modernisation will lead to the growth of an economy in which information is a resource and a factor of production. Future employers will look for graduates who have good communication skills and can make use of information.
- Graduates will have to accept the need to keep changing jobs, update their knowledge and learn new skills.
- The demands of the 'world of work' have an influence on teaching and learning in universities. Merely increasing curriculum content and student workload cannot provide a solution. Preference should be given to courses which develop students' intellectual capacity, ability to deal with technological, economic and cultural changes, nurture qualities such as initiative, adaptability and capacity to work with greater confidence in a modern work environment.
- In order to help the students to develop the skills that are valued by private sector employers, it is necessary that career guidance programmes be available in the universities.
- The present stereotyped, compartmentalised and subject-based courses are seen to be inadequate in meeting the requirement of producing a well informed graduate with the problem solving capabilities required by complex organisations. A characteristic of the information/knowledge explosion is the interconnectedness of various disciplines. Hence there is general consensus on the need to enhance the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary content of studies.
- The development of human resources imply not only a need for expertise and

professionalism in a narrow sense, but also full awareness of the cultural, environmental and social issues involved. It has become important for universities to reinforce their role in enhancing ethical and moral values in society through focusing attention on developing an active participatory civic spirit among future graduates.

- The methods of teaching and learning in all courses ... have degenerated to gathering a set of notes for the purpose of answering examination questions. Tutorial, coursework, reading assignments, group methods, and special projects are used sparingly, if at all.
- The Higher Education System in this country has reached a state in which piece-meal reforms will not have any impact. Bringing about changes to the curricula and particularly assessment techniques needs a strong commitment on the part of the government and university authorities.

5. Way forward for Sri Lankan Universities

It is true that some isolated studies have been undertaken on some topics connected with higher education in Sri Lanka (with some as preparation for or as part of projects funded by international organizations such as the ADB and the World Bank tending to support certain agendas, with most such studies not available even in the libraries of Sri Lankan Universities with that being quite indicative of the level of stakeholder participation in

such). Some reflection on teaching and learning appears to be taking place for example in one or the other of the Staff Development Centres set up during the last 10 years. The fact however is that while Sri Lankan academics are involved in all types of research, the author has not come across any solid piece of research on Higher Education Policy and Reform in Sri Lanka, nor any research center concentrating on Higher Education. Further the levels of 'metacognition' and reflective practice among current academics as a whole are judged insufficient. It is therefore declared right at the start that the 'conclusions' contained herein are based on experience (national and international), deep involvement (both in the national universities and in collaborative projects that offer franchised & validated foreign degrees in Sri Lanka), and are supported by an action-research orientation and reflective practice (given an involvement particularly in organizational development rather than in research). They are offered as assumptions/postulates (with a few elements of justification for such) with the proviso that those can if needed be transformed into hypotheses for future research.

5.1 Postulate 1: Objectives and elements of strategy with regard to forming the graduate for tomorrow have been specified reasonably well

Based on the discussion in section 4, and particularly considering 'The National Policy on University Education' it is postulated that the objectives with regard to university education and the formation of the graduate for tomorrow as well as the reforms needed appear to be understood at least by specialists and

presented reasonably well and coherently.

**5.2 Postulate 2:
The desired/intended reforms
have not been realized as
envisaged.**

While experience within the system does provide more than enough evidence, the best indicator appears to be the fact that while the output of graduates (including external graduates and those from the Open University) from all national universities for the years 2000-2004 has been less than 55,000 the Government has had to provide in 2006 a total of 42,000 jobs in the public sector to unemployed (some say 'unemployable') graduates and promise 10,000 more for 2007. The jobs were/are not provided through an open competitive process but simply on the basis of the graduates holding degree certificates. It is clear that with reference to those with similar or lower qualifications the graduates were either not competitive in the market place including the private sector or were not willing to be involved in such. In a country, where only 3% of the age cohort enters the national universities through a highly competitive process, the inability to transform such input into a productive output is clearly indicative of the failure of the system despite reforms initiated in the late nineties.

**5.3 Postulate 3:
The failure has been due to a
multiplicity of factors, but
primarily a lack of policy, of
determination and of
continuity.**

The 'National Policy' referred to was one mostly in words. It had been formulated by capable and well-intentioned experts but no system-wide

discussion and debate took place (as happened e.g. during the Dearing Commission in the UK or later in Australia). With the then President being keen on such, the Presidential Task Force advocated some reforms which were pushed through by the University Grants Commission (UGC). The National Policy had stated that 'piece-meal reforms' were insufficient, and that a 'strong commitment on the part of the government and university authorities' were needed but with change of political leadership and of political forces, the provision of employment to graduates took precedence over reform aimed at enhancing their employability.

The next wave of reform began in 2003 with the IRQUE (Improving Relevance and Quality of Undergraduate Education) project. While a relatively minor component of funding is set apart for projects affecting each university and its students as a whole, the major thrust and funding is devoted to two 'Competitive Projects' per university. The strategy adopted is totally different from that advocated by the 'National Policy'. In fact, some of the leaders of the reform effort were not even aware that a 'National Policy' had been formulated earlier. The argument was that system-wide reform was neither welcome nor feasible, and that therefore supporting a few who were ready for and capable of change was more appropriate. Figure 4 illustrates the logic that appears to be implied which is quite in line with the corporatist neo-liberal model. Section A3 of the Annex "Elements of a possible Case Study" does also provide questions the answers to which could indicate other hidden agendas and typical vested interests that may have been involved, and thus suggest the need to be ready to go beyond the

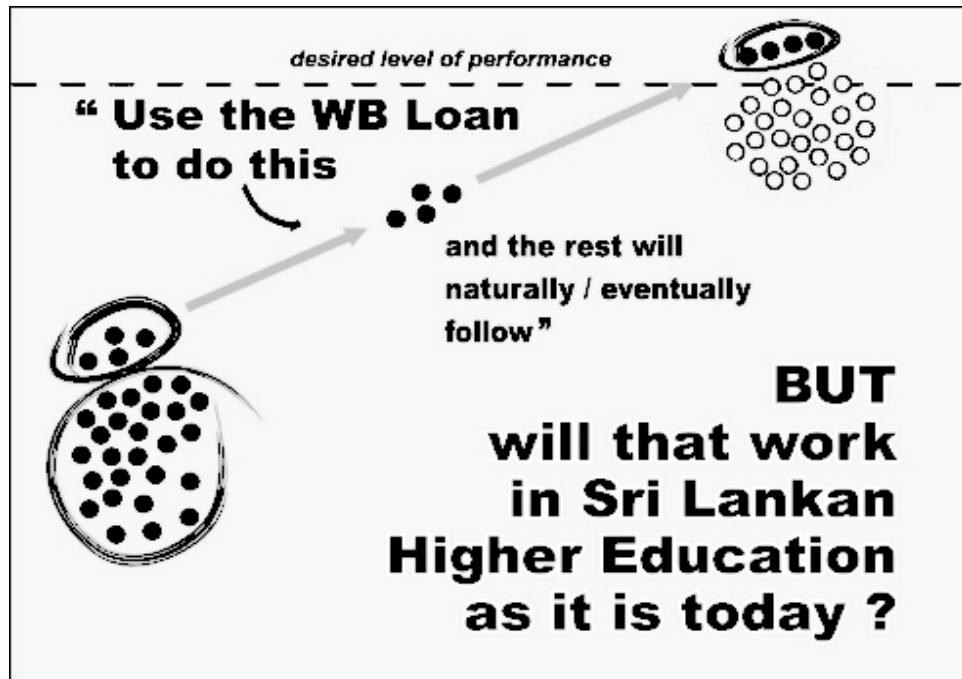


Figure 3: The change strategy that appears to be implied in the IRQUE project (with the data points standing for universities / study programmes)

apparent. But a lack of critical analysis and debate has led to a state of complacency that a major reform effort is under way and that it *will* change the relevance and quality of Sri Lankan Higher Education.

Postulate 4:

A reform effort that is centrally-driven but promotes capacity building and participation is the appropriate way forward

It is postulated further that i) the dominant Sri Lankan culture (as manifest in processes and events, in a system such as the ‘Open Economy’ or in a simpler matter like behaviour on the road) (to say the least) is mostly ‘laissez-faire’; ii) ‘autonomy’ is understood as being free even of a common framework; and iii) that as a consequence, effecting change in Sri Lanka requires an *element* of the Singaporean ‘Lee Kuan Yew’ or the local ‘Premadasian’ approach.

In the year 2000 the World Bank published the Report ‘Sri Lanka - Recapturing Missed Opportunities’. It is suggested that orientation given to the IRQUE project (with a US\$ 40 million loan from the World Bank) has on the whole made Sri Lanka lose a golden opportunity for system-wide Higher Education reform. Section A2 of the Annex “Elements of a possible Case Study” shows that a solution based also on the experience of UK judged fitting the recommendation above (particularly with regard to capacity building and participation) had been proposed and was discarded by a small group of decision-makers without open debate on why it was inappropriate except for a premise that ‘it will not work’. It is proposed that discussion and debate on the way forward be undertaken in order to ‘Recapture the Missed Opportunity’.

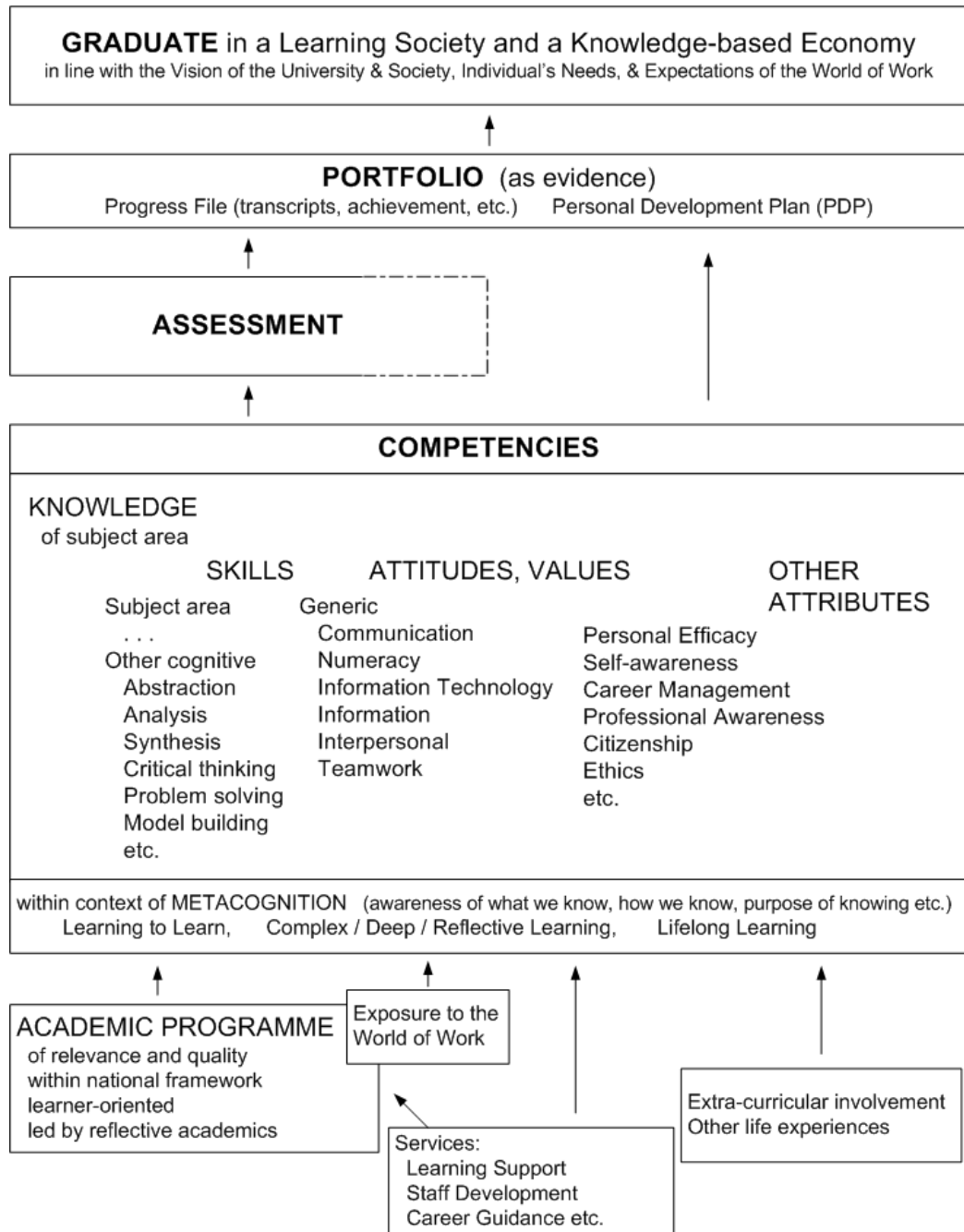


Figure 4: Integrative Framework for the Formation of a Graduate

It is further proposed that what is presented in Figure 4 be adopted as an integrative framework that builds on the Sri Lankan reform effort of the nineties, and on the experience of others across the world. Continuity would then be respected and one would not be trying to re-invent the wheel. The current over-emphasis on

the path 'Academic Programme → Knowledge → Assessment → Transcript → Graduate' would then hopefully be relativised within a broader context.

The same framework can be useful for review of many aspects of the formation of the graduate. What the 'National Policy' document referred to

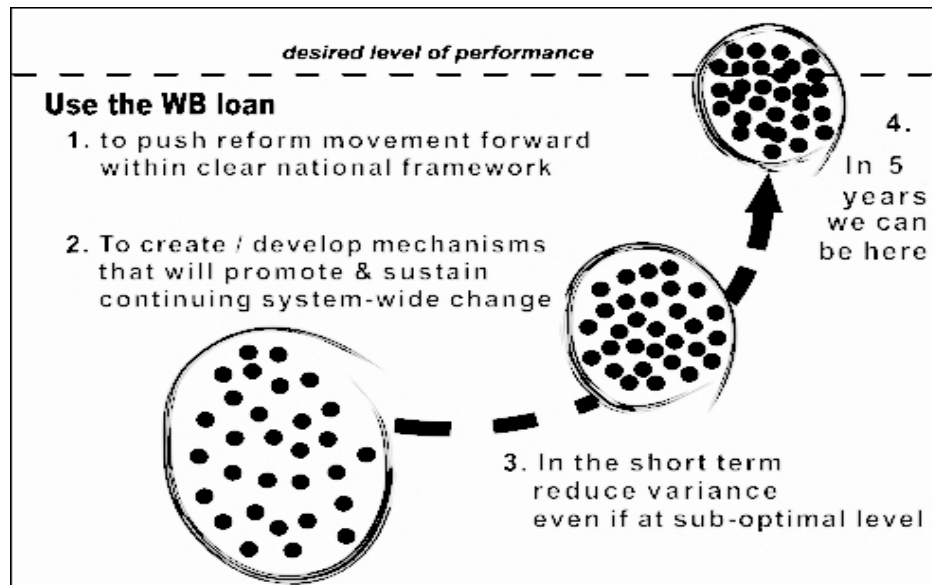


Figure 5: A possible change strategy for system-wide change
(with the data points standing for universities / study programmes)

as “merely increasing curriculum content and student workload” would be acceptable if the ‘Academic Programme’ was the only input. The question can then be asked whether the current situation (workload, timetables, etc.) facilitates and promotes the involvement in other activities deemed necessary.

Further, the ‘Exposure to the World of Work’ component is shown in the model as linked with the academic programme. The question can be asked whether the purpose / meaning / implications of and distinction between internship/placement and ‘doing a job’ have been understood. In fact it can even be hypothesized that the emphasis being placed on the so-called “experience” by some Sri Lankan employers is leading to a deterioration of standards in Higher Education as students in some study programmes even do two years or more of full-time work and “pass exams” (often with little or no participation in academic activities). It is hypothesized further that a dichotomy is being introduced with a trend within Higher Education

where academics are being seen (and see themselves) as providing the “theory” while the responsibility for providing the “practical” is being passed on to the world outside. These and many such issues are not even being looked analytically or reflectively.

As for the change strategy, in place of one that supports the survival of the fittest with regard to our limited perception of the market place, it is suggested that the strategy as shown on Figure 5 be adopted. That would build up the capacities even of the weakest, promote system-wide reform with the dynamism created by the early stages being utilized to move further forward.

It is argued further that a National Policy and a National Framework which all have to adhere to with regard to being outcomes-oriented and competency-based needs to be accepted. Autonomy and creativity is to be exercised within that. Quality Assurance (QA) will initially seek compliance (with the requirements and standards in the National Framework

rather than trying to surface standards from what has grown up in disparate manner) and will use both incentives and pressure (by way of control of funding beyond the minimum) in attempting to establish a reflective culture of relevance and quality, and to help move the institutions towards Quality Enhancement (QE) and self-regulation. The goal would be to transform the universities (in organization development terminology) into truly Learning Organisations capable of 'transformational change' going beyond simpler forms of change such as developmental or transitional.

6. Conclusion

On the basis of this study, it is possible to say that at least some in Sri Lanka are conscious both of the need and also very much of the way forward with regard to forming the graduate for tomorrow. The hopes and aspirations of young people are at stake and time may be running out. What lacks is perhaps a combination of clear National Policy, Continuity and Determination, Stakeholder Participation, Honesty and Political Will.

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Annex : Elements of a possible Case Study

A1. Introduction

In Sept-Dec 2002 a World Bank Funded study on Strengthening of Undergraduate Education in Sri Lanka was conducted in Sri Lanka. The Contract had been awarded to Melbourne University Private (a spinoff from Melbourne University). The project entitled 'Strengthening of Undergraduate Education in Sri Lanka' had the task of studying the following in preparation for a World Bank funded major reform project:

1. System-wide Governance and Management Reform
 - 1.1 Reform of the Legislative and Administrative Framework General
 - 1.2 Reform of the Financial Framework and Improvement of National Planning and Monitoring Systems
 - 1.3 Establishment of a Competitive Fund and a Financing Formula to Allocate Resources between Degree Programmes
 - 1.4 Establishment of an Autonomous Board of Quality Assurance and Accreditation
 - 1.5 Establishment of Student Support Fund
 - 1.6 The Promotion of Social Harmony as cross curricula through Core Curricula of Priority Disciplines
2. Enhancing Quality and Relevance of Undergraduate Education
 - 2.1 Supporting On-Going Work on Promoting the Development of Learning Materials to Foster Competencies and Skills Need in the Labour Market
 - 2.2 Enhancing Education Quality Inputs to Improve Teaching and Learning
 - a. Information and Communication Technology
 - b. Upgrading Teaching and Learning Methodology, Equipment and Facilities
 - 2.3 Strengthening Labour Market Linkages
 - 2.4 Upgrading University Institutional Capacity and Faculty Administration
3. Improving Access to Undergraduate Education
 - 3.1 Enhancing the Efficiency of the University Admission Process
 - 3.2 National Plan to Increase Enrolments
 - 3.3 Stakeholder Consultation Process and Beneficiary Assessment Study

The current author who had normally avoided taking part in such projects finally decided to offer his services as National Consultant to work with an International Consultant (who incidentally was one of the most respected in the team and had a keen interest in the developing world). There were two reasons for the decision. Firstly, he had been invited to work within the sub-component 2.1 which was very much connected to the work he was involved in within the University and the University system and secondly given his broader interests he was interested in seeing at first-hand what happened in projects of this nature..

At the end of the study the International Consultant and the National Consultant agreed to propose what was seen as needed for Sri Lanka to be able to undertake a system-wide effort to move all universities forward.

A2. The Recommendations (in brief and without details ref. logic & strategy etc)

At National Level:

A **National Centre for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (NCLT-HE)** to be established (ideally within a university with at least some tradition of education research) to support the implementation of reform based on a participatory, innovative and reflective process within the university system involving teachers, students and the world of work.

Key task to be undertaken initially: Preparation of a National Policy on outcomes-oriented competency-based curricula

The Centre had then to support course material and learning support material development/procurement, reviewing and strengthening assessment practices etc. The centre was also to liaise with and support through capacity building and resourcing the work of Learning and Teaching Groups and Support Units, Subject/Discipline Networks, and Career Guidance Units at the universities.

Subject/Discipline Networks were to be organised and funded as special interest groups as part of the reform process. They were to be independent of the more formal Standing Committees at the University Grants Commission.

At each University:

Staff Development and Curriculum Development Units to be amalgamated, strengthened and empowered as **Learning and Teaching Centres** to provide professional development activities related to:

- Improving teaching and learning methodology
- Improving understanding of how students learn
- Supporting the development of new assessment practices
- Delivering instruction in curriculum design
- Supporting course development using outcomes-based subject outlines
- Supporting curriculum writing and production
- Establishing facilities to support student learning

It is recommended that all academic staff be involved in staff development activities to ensure their understanding of curriculum design and development is in line with competency-based learning outcomes.

A framework for academic work was to be developed at university, faculty and department level, taking into account all the typical roles of academic staff mentioned above, and endeavouring to clearly identify the responsibilities of staff without losing their traditional autonomy in pursuing knowledge independently.

It was recommended that the capacity of the **Career Guidance Units** in the universities be strengthened to support labour market linkages and the enhancement of the generic competencies of graduates, and that Career Guidance Units work closely with Learning and Teaching Centres, with

industry/community and with high level policy committees in the universities to ascertain the needs of the world of work and the community.

Additional Recommendations (a few example)

The NCLT-HE will liaise with the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Board with regard to programme and subject specifications and will work towards progressive integration and embedding of the skills /competencies agenda within curricula. It is recommended that faculty-wide curriculum templates be developed in order to ensure the quality of course design and delivery, in line with system-wide quality assurance and course accreditation. A progressive and developmental approach will be adopted with an initial emphasis on making explicit the Aims of Study Programmes, the Intended Learning Outcomes and the means by which they are to be achieved and demonstrated (with regards to both knowledge and understand as well as skills and other attributes). Mapping techniques will be encouraged. The long-term goal would be to contribute to structured and effective design and review of academic programmes as appropriate for today's needs, using as a change strategy a 'diffusionist' model. Innovators and early adopters would be supported as pioneering projects become beacons of influence. Dissemination, publicity, awareness-raising combined with effective informational and training strategies would be normal. Sharing of good practice is paramount. Incentives, rewards, and eventually some pressure can be used.

It needs to be accepted that a number of initiatives are already operational within the science and technology field, and that disparities and constraints do affect the students from the periphery and disadvantaged areas (e.g. insufficiency of qualified and capable teachers, lack of science laboratories forcing many students into the arts and humanities subject areas). Within the context of equity and 'Social Harmony', some level of affirmative action needs to be promoted initially with regard to the subject areas where high levels of unemployment or underemployment exist.

It is recommended that each university formulates a policy regarding the enhancement of learning resources in terms of library and computer capacity. As part of this policy decision, it is recommended that the implementation of national language policy on the learning and teaching of English, Sinhala and Tamil be accompanied by the provision of adequate resources in the languages adopted.

Some comments being provided now

Activities were developed for each of the recommendations and costings were provided for 5 years. By way of illustration: Annual National Conferences on Teaching and Learning, as well as Conferences per subject/discipline network. Twenty 'Excellence Awards' and twenty 'Merit Awards' per annum foreseen (for staff or Departments with regard to achievement of the stated objectives). Monthly meetings, newsletters, a Discussion list and a website were envisaged.

The said study was to prepare for the current IRQUE (Improving Relevance and Quality of Undergraduate Education) Project. No doubt there are some benefits to the universities as such through the minor component identified as IBG. Section A3 illustrates the need to consider the project as a whole given what typically happens.

A3. Questions Worth Posing (just a few by way of example)

- What is the philosophy and change strategy underlying the main thrust of the project as currently is?
- Do we see agendas such as that of neo-liberalism at work?
- If it is a change of paradigm, what studies have shown such to be appropriate?
- What is the link with earlier reform efforts (National Policy for Higher Education, Presidential Task Force, etc.) ? Is continuity respected?
- Were the stakeholders really involved (beyond a show of such involvement)?
- What was the role of the student body? How were the academic staff involved?
- When by the time the new project as such was initiated and equity issues were brought up by some suggesting that critical issues and real needs required other approaches and solutions, did the reaction of those who thought they were in a position to win funding through the competitive process provide a clue as to what the typical culture within the system was?
- How transparent was the process of preparation of the IRQUE project and the decision making involved?
- Is the inclusion for example of ‘a Competitive Fund’ within the Terms of Reference (as reflected in the list of subjects given earlier) an indication that it was something already decided? How was such decided upon?
- How was it that long after the award of the consultancy contract the then senior-most leader of the university system was confusing ‘Melbourne University Private’ with ‘Melbourne University’? How is it that other senior academics thought those involved were from Monash? Is that indicative of the level of discussion and debate that preceded the award of the contract?
- How is it that (while Melbourne University founded in 1853 is the 2nd oldest university in Australia) ‘Melbourne University Private’ which only existed for 7 years between 1998 and 2005 and which was closed down with losses estimated at AUS\$250 million awarded the contract? What experience and qualifications did the team leaders offer?
- Is there any link between the then Consultant to the Ministry, Melbourne University Private, and the Local Consulting Firm that was the intermediary?
- Who pushed for Indonesia to be taken as an appropriate role model for reform? Why?
- What would have been the net result if for example the consultants were really people who had been involved in a meaningful reform effort in Australia, or for that matter in the UK?

(Note: The issues brought up concern the preliminary study stage, the decision making process, and the said IRQUE project as announced. But study into the workings of the IRQUE project as such can be useful too.)