

Here are some extracts from a note I sent to the reviewers through the Conference Organizers

Now that the review process is over, I assume that your knowing the name of the author does not matter.

I wish to thank you both for having gone through the article carefully and for the valuable comments sent. In preparing the final version, I have done all I could to take the suggestions into consideration. Given that the subject area is important and with a view towards some little continuation of the discussion even at a later date, I thought it useful to send a little feedback and explanation.

Some comments on the re-wording of the title (in a way different from what one reviewer has suggested) and some comments on the re-arrangement of the sections were provided.

One reviewer had suggested that I limit myself to the survey I had conducted and move into conclusions. I added the following comments in that regard.

As I believe that not every study needs to be aimed at proving an hypothesis, the “conclusions” are presented as “postulates” which can be easily transformed into “hypotheses” for future research if needed. (I note however that I could have said that I personally believe there is no need for any more study as enough has been done and what was essential was to act ... but I did not say that!)

The main reasons for presenting the conclusions in that way (and thus for the title as given) are provided in the initial paragraph of section 5.

I agree there has been some contribution particularly with regard to “Teaching and Learning” from the Staff Development Centre of Colombo and tried to acknowledge that without using “Colombo” as such. While I am open to evidence to the contrary, I claim that there is no research on Higher Education Policy as such.

Personally I have been a practitioner and am indeed happy that (during the period 2003-2006 .. even though I had 10 years of experience in a somewhat similar project earlier) I was able to re-orient academic programmes and procedures at a Tertiary Institute in Colombo and achieve validation from UK for 3 study programmes the development of which I coordinated with the support of several lecturers from the University sector and from Industry. For me that is proof that Sri Lankans can reach such targets (with an element of compulsion ... which came from QAA of UK!). I am also happy that what is proposed is being achieved by me through the Career Guidance Unit at my own university. The “embedded” approach to skills development (which is what is really needed) is not taking place as yet but the “stand alone” support for “employability skills development” is being realized. We have had dialogues with industry too, and playing a leadership role I have been able to push such orientation also at national level. As the benefits of what is being attempted at

my own university begin to be seen and felt I am sure more support for the embedded/integrated orientation will occur particularly if HE policy becomes clear. But I had been requested to be involved in Career Guidance and opted to contribute to reform of Higher Education through such.

I believe that progress in research on Higher Education Policy cannot depend on me. Many other things have to happen. One initiative that I had hoped would bear fruit seems to have got stalled. I did not wish to refer to it in the article except through the vague reference to “Staff Development”. In the case of SLAIHEE (The Sri Lanka Association for Improving Higher Education Effectiveness) the newsletter seems to have ended with Vol 1 No 1 of Dec 2005. The titles of the papers presented at the first conference March 2005 are on the website but the papers themselves are not and no information on where they might be available in published form. A second conference was announced for May 2006 but no information is available. To me this too is evidence of the fact that Research on Higher Education has really not got off the ground in Sri Lanka and that debate is not being facilitated. It is in that context that the recommendations made (during studies in preparing the WB IRQUE Project ... see annex to my paper) take on significance.

You will also notice that I have toned down what I stated in the earlier draft as “It is clear ... that with regard to forming graduates for the future the objectives have been specified relatively well and coherently”. What I say now is “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.” It was for this reason that not considering it as *deja-vu* it was thought fit to re-state the case. My experience is that very few academics think of these issues and very few (let alone study it) even know of the existence of the 1996 document. It was therefore thought useful that in a Conference where the focus is on the broader subject area of management one could profit from an opportunity to put across some ideas with regard to Higher Education as such.

Even though I am just about starting sabbatical leave at the end of which I will be ready to retire (!) I am and will continue to be interested in these topics. As such I would appreciate further feedback from you both (irrespective/independent of the Conference) and will be ready to provide such in return.

Thank you.

Charles Fernando