

Summary report (1st Dec 2005) to the University Grants Commission and the CVCD on the work of the Standing Committee on Career Guidance in Universities

Recent History

“Career Guidance” is a topic that is clearly present and highlighted in the education reform-related documents of 1971 and 1981. It is noted that nothing significant was however implemented. The subject was taken up again in the reform process initiated in mid-90s through the Presidential Task Forces and happily this time things got moving.

Credit must be given to the then Ministry of Youth Affairs that started a Career Guidance Unit (CGU) there and even started coordinating some national activities. Through the UGC it pushed for the establishment of CGUs initially in 4 universities (CMB, SJP, KLN, PDN) and gave a computer, a TV and video deck to each.

Colombo and Sri Jayewardenepura were the first to start CGUs in 1998. Dr Keerthi Premadasa in Colombo and Mr Charles Fernando at Sri Jayewardenepura were the pioneers of that year. Other universities joined the process little by little and we have now come after seven years to a situation where there is at each of the national universities some level of career guidance related work being carried through a Career Guidance Unit (CGU) with typically an academic staff member designated as its “Director”.

The UGC took the initiative in setting up the **Inter-University Committee on Career Guidance** and meetings were held in March and August 2000. In 2001 the Committee was renamed the **Standing Committee on Career Guidance in Universities**. This has been active since then and meetings are held every two months with 19 held so far.

Significant Events and Involvements:

We note here some of the significant events in which the UGC and the Directors of CGUs in universities and/or the Standing Committee collaborated:

1. A residential workshop organised by the UGC at the University of Sabaragamuwa in July 1999. All Directors of CGUs (or nominees who were expected to be involved in Career Guidance work) from all universities participated. Some persons from industry served as resource persons.
2. At the initiative of the UGC a review of Career Guidance in Sri Lankan Universities was undertaken in March 2000 by Dr Richard Maynard (Director of the Careers Centre of the University of Birmingham, UK) with financial support from the British Council. The report “Career Guidance in Higher Education in Sri Lanka” was circulated within the UGC, amongst the Vice-Chancellors and the Directors of CGUs as was a set of recommendations from the Chairman of the UGC.
3. Occurring within the programme of the review above, a second workshop was held at the University of Sabaragamuwa in March 2000.

4. A workshop was held in August 2001 at and organised by the UGC in collaboration with the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce linked also to a pilot mentoring programme coordinated by the Chamber for the Universities of Sri Jayewardenepura and Kelaniya. The event marked also the launch of the “Standing Committee”. The recommendations from the workshop were focussed on 1) Institutionalisation of Career Guidance; 2) Incorporating Career Orientation within Academic Programmes; 3) University-Industry Cooperation; and 4) Career Guidance work and inter-university cooperation.
5. Preparation of the Circular on the “Establishment and Operation of Career Guidance Units in Universities” as UGC Circular 819 of 6th February 2003. This is accepted a very significant milestone in the process of contribution to the institutionalisation of Career Guidance within Universities.
6. Participation in and contribution to workshop held in March 2004 at Kandalama Hotel on the theme “Social Harmony”.
7. Either formally or informally links have been maintained with relevant external organisations. We provide just a few examples. Mr Charles Fernando has been for a number of years and till recently a regular participant at the Chamber-Academia Round Table (CART) of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce. Several Members of the Standing Committee have been participating in activities organised within the context of the Career Resource Forum of the Organisation of Professional Associations within which External Member Mr Lakshman Hettiarachchi is a key figure and at which Dr Rohan Tittagala has been representing the Standing Committee. Mr Charles Fernando delivered one of the two keynote addresses entitled “Some Reflections on Career Guidance in and for Sri Lanka” at the national workshop organised by the Human Resource Development Council of Sri Lanka with a view to establishing the “National Council for Career Guidance”.

A note on continuity

Given that seven years have passed, it is worth looking back. There is no doubt at all that in a new and pioneering project such as this the persons involved play a critical role with factors such as vision, commitment and continuity contributing largely.

It is worth noting that some Directors of CGUs have been bearing the responsibility for over 5 years now and so have been members of the then Inter-University Committee on Career Guidance and now of the Standing Committee. The most senior currently in this regard is Mr Charles Fernando of Sri Jayewardenepura who has been in post from inception of the CGU in 1998. Dr Rohan Tittagala of Moratuwa comes next having been in post since 2000. An External Member who has similarly rendered continuous service is Mr Lakshman Hettiarachchi who has been the representative of the OPA. One is happy to note that Prof BRRN Mendis was similarly Director Career Guidance of Peradeniya from 1999 and has continued to be involved in Career Guidance but via a different role now as the Chairman of the Standing Committee.

While a few others have been in post for reasonable periods (e.g. Dr P Hewage of Ruhuna) it is noted with regret that occasionally there have been Directors who were in post for only a few months. Such situations have created numerous problems for those who took over after such and have adversely affected progress.

The pioneering role of Dr Keerthi Premadasa of Colombo is well known. It is worth highlighting the fact that even though there have been a few changes of Director there, work has not been disrupted as there has been a counsellor in post who has been able to contribute well to continuity and development of work.

Given the fact that Career Guidance is a new “project” and that traditions are not yet well established and structures and processes are not in place, without doubt another element that has contributed to some level of discontinuity has been the change of university leadership at the level particularly of Vice-Chancellor.

While no Vice-Chancellor in any university since 1998 has denied the importance and the role of Career Guidance, given that Career Guidance is a service directly under the Vice-Chancellor, during periods when the Vice-Chancellors have been overwhelmed by other issues and problems of importance it has occasionally happened that this work has been left to run on its own. It needs to be appreciated that this has contributed to slow progress in some universities particularly because there was no seed money provided initially from central funds.

In this context the Standing Committee members have been highly appreciative of the fact that the UGC provided some funds through the IT allocation in 2003 and 2004, and expects to provide a little support in 2006 for office furniture and equipment. Such a small and gentle push in the initial stages is noted as beneficial and productive.

These and many other factors have influenced the Standing Committee in the identification of objectives and strategies.

Current priorities of the Standing Committee

During the year 2004, the key priority area for action has been “institutionalisation”. This implies getting the CGUs firmly established within each university and making them structurally and integrally part of the university system. Eventually with the development of a broad range of activities it is hoped that Career Guidance will become a productive and meaningful element of the Higher Education environment and culture.

These two issues of “institutionalisation” and “meaningful integration within university environment and culture” were both incorporated into UGC Circular 819 already referred to. It is for this reason that the issuing of the circular is considered a significant milestone.

Institutionalisation particularly from a “structures and set up” point of view is covered mainly by the main body of the Circular. The suggested level of cadre was indicated and mechanisms and schemes of recruitment were indicated. The options concerning the Post of Director were made

clear, and the Director was to be invited as an Observer to the University Senate. The CGU had to be an “academic service” directly under the Vice-Chancellor to be integrated in the annual programme of each university as Project 03 within Programme 03 (Academic Services). Many other relevant issues were covered in the circular with some details provided also in the Annex referred to below.

The development of the service and moving towards integration within university culture were made part of a “policy” style document entitled “**Recommendations for the development and institutionalisation of Career Guidance Services in the Universities**” that was the Annex to the main circular.

The structure of the Annex referred to was as follows:

1. Introduction
2. The Objectives of Career Guidance
 - Career Counselling
 - Information Services
 - Networking
 - Work Experience
 - Graduate Placement
 - Integration within Curricula
3. Institutionalisation within the University
 - An Academic Service
 - Action Plans & Targets
 - Stakeholder Participation
 - Resourcing (staff and infrastructure)
4. Integration of Career Orientation within Academic Programmes.

Having observed the progress of Career Guidance work from 1998 to 2001 and the problems that were surfaced, the Standing Committee was convinced that the establishment of a national policy framework for Career Guidance work within universities was essential. It thus invested an immense amount of time and effort between 2001 and 2003 to studying the issues and to formulating the “policy and guidelines” document referred to earlier.

It is convinced that (*while leaving room for creativity and if necessary slight modificationsto what is foreseen*) if a concerted effort is made at and by all universities along the lines recommended over the next 5 years, Career Guidance work can expect to be well “institutionalised” and to have achieved “meaningful integration within university environment and culture”

The facilitation of and monitoring of the two processes of “institutionalisation” and of “meaningful integration within university environment and culture” are thus the current priorities of the Standing Committee with the first taking priority in the first instance.

As such:

1. The Standing Committee has collaborated with the UGC Chairman (& of course the UGC) in facilitating the achievement of the specified objectives, concentrating much initially on the “institutionalisation”. Thus there was much involvement in making a case for some seed money for every university and the actual provision to all universities of the minimum cadre foreseen in Circular 819.
2. A review has been done of the process of Institutionalisation and the results are made available next.
3. While accepting that a full-time Director of Career Guidance will be the ideal at least for an initial period of 5-10 years until the service is well established and functioning effectively, it is however assumed that often academics will not normally be ready to sacrifice career advancement and promotional prospects by leaving aside their specific academic & research activities (*which continue to be critical in the Sri Lankan system even though many other countries have adopted a broader definition of “scholarship”, “creativity” and “contribution”*) and that as such part-time Directors may be the actual reality in most universities even in the future. In such a context the role of the support staff, particularly of those currently designated as “Career Guidance Counsellors” has been taken up as a subject for serious review.
4. On the basis of such study and review, the Standing Committee has thus already decided on recommending to the UGC a change of designation from “Career Guidance Counsellor” to “Careers Adviser” to bring such in line with international practice.
5. Further details such as Career Progression, relevance of the Efficiency Bar as currently specified etc are being studied and the Standing Committee hopes to make relevant recommendations to the UGC within six months from now.
6. Examining the experience so far and with a view towards the future, the Standing Committee is also studying the composition of the Standing Committee and proposes to make relevant recommendations in due course.
7. It is only to be expected that the emphasis will shift now gradually from “institutionalisation” to that of “facilitation and monitoring” of “meaningful integration within university environment and culture” and the supporting of inter-university and university-industry collaboration for same. That is the task ahead.

Review of “Institutionalisation” of Career Guidance within the Universities

We move now finally to a presentation of the results of the review of the process of institutionalisation and to some observations & recommendations connected thereto.

Summary Report on Institutionalisation of CGUs at Universities

dated 01-12-2005

CMB	EUSL	JFN	KLN	MRT	PDN	RUH	RUSL	SUSL	SEUSL	SJP	WUSL
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Director

Formal Appointment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Full Time / Part Time	Pt	Pt	Pt	Pt	Pt	F	Pt	Pt	Pt	Pt	F
For entire university	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Allowance	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	?	Y

Counsellor at CGU

Availability	2	N	N	N	N	1	N	N	N	N	1	N
Full Time for CGU/Part Time	F					F					F	
Permanent/Contract/Temp	P+C					P					P	

Computer Applications Asst.

Availability	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Full Time for CGU/Part Time	F				F	F	F		F	F	F	
Permanent/Contract/Temp	P				C	P	P		Pt	C	P	

Labourer

Availability	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
Full Time for CGU/Part Time	F		F	Pt		F	F				F	
Permanent/Contract/Temp	P		P	P		P	P				P	

Location / Space

Yes / Shared / Nothing	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Less than 200 sq.ft / More	M	L	M	M	M	M	M	L	L	M	M	

Telephone

University Intercom	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	
Direct Line	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	?

Fax

Yes / Easy access / Nothing	Y	E	Y	Y	E	E	Y	N	E	E	E	E
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Photocopier (duplicating device)

Yes / Easy access / Nothing	Y	E	Y	Y	Y	E	Y	D	Y	N	Y	Y
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Stationary & Consumables

Easy / Difficult / Nothing	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	D	E	E	E	E
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Postal Service

Easy / Difficult / Nothing	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
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Transport Facilities

Easy / Difficult / Nothing	D	E	N	D	D	E	D	D	D	E	D	E
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Official e-mail account for CGU

Availability	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
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Access to e-mail

Easy / Difficult / Nothing	E	E		E	E	E	E	D	D	D	D	E
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Access to the Internet

Easy / Difficult / Nothing	E	E		E	E	E	E	D	D	D	D	E
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Purchases from 1mn IT Grant

Availability at CGU	Y	L	Y	L	Y	Y	Y	N	L	?	Y	Y
Yes / Little / Nothing	Y	L	Y	L	Y	Y	Y	N	L	?	Y	Y

University Budget

CGU Integrated within	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	?	Y?	Y
Fully or Partly	Pt	Pt	Pt		F	F	Pt	Pt			Y?	Pt

Codes stand for the options shown in the left-most column. "Y" & "N" are standard while "?" indicates an element of doubt.

Observations on the basis of the review conducted:

Post of Director

Every CGU now has a Director who has been formally appointed by the University. This is a big achievement. Attention is however drawn to the “Note on Continuity” on page 2 of this report.

Two universities have “Full Time” Directors.

SJP has a full-time Director who did in fact argue the case to be released for this work through “option a – on release” offered by UGC Circular 819. At the time of such appointment, by way of sharing good practice, the Standing Committee was kept informed of the selection process followed (i.e. internal advertisement, calling for applications, formal interview with the VC and the Deans, etc.).

To the person involved, the above release at SJP has however created quite a few problems from the Department and the Faculty with various accusations being levelled. It is very strange that Departments and Faculties (*that have granted extended leave for staff for study purposes etc with some of them not even coming back ... or leaving the job soon afterwards for better prospects abroad ... or sometimes even have ‘free-riders’*) find problems in accepting a staff member (*who has never taken leave since 1985 other than 7 months on sabbatical*) who is devoting himself for the benefit of the students and the university. Further, UGC representatives who promised that appropriate action will be taken to ensure that the career progression of people who devote themselves to innovative work of this nature will be safeguarded do not appear to have solved such problems either. It would thus appear that academics who wish to devote themselves full-time to this type of work will need to seriously consider their options and implications. The issue is being highlighted here as it is necessary that the system too reviews the situation if progress is to be made in new priority areas that may be identified also in the future.

PDN too has a full-time Director. The situation is different here from that described above as the person is one who has retired recently from University service, and has been recruited on contract basis using “option b – on contract full-time” offered by UGC Circular 819.

All the other Directors are on a part-time basis and are for the entire university. The conditions attached to the payment of an allowance are clearly specified in the circular. One Director does not seem to be receiving an allowance whereas one who has only recently been appointed does not know about it as yet.

The Standing Committee assumes that issues connected with the allowance will be sorted out given that information on practice elsewhere is now available.

It is noted that while only one Director of CGU is to be appointed per University, there is provision in the Circular for the appointment of Academic Counsellors. Such academics will liaise with and form a team with the CGU. It is noted that this mechanism can be useful for Faculties, as well as for universities that have campuses at different locations.

Post of Counsellor (s)

The Circular envisages one counsellor per unit. A second counsellor may be requested for by universities that have more than 3000 (assumed internal & undergraduate) students and have CGUs that have reached a good level of sustained activity.

At the moment CMB has two Counsellors (one permanent and one on contract basis) while SJP and PDN have one Counsellor each.

All other universities do not have a Counsellor in position. Considering this a start-up situation the Standing Committee has actively searched for a solution with regard to the provision of the minimum cadre for each university. We have been informed that this has now been approved also by the Treasury.

It is noted elsewhere that the Standing Committee has recommended to the UGC a change of designation from “Career Guidance Counsellor” to “Careers Adviser”. A number of reasons (bringing the service in line with international practice, possible issues in the future with regard to professional accreditation if the title “counsellor” is used, etc.) are indicated in the memo being submitted to the UGC.

As this is a new project and it is best to set the standards right at the start, the Standing Committee is also reviewing matters on the basis of experience gained by the three universities in working with such staff so as to move towards recommendations by way of “good practice”. As indicated elsewhere issues such as the training, efficiency bar, career progress etc of such staff are being looked at too.

All in all, it is accepted that the “Career Adviser” (using the proposed new title) will be a key person in a CGU (particularly if the Director is part-time ... but even otherwise) and as such it is assumed that with cadre provision being made available the universities will begin to recruit and develop persons for and within this post.

Post of Computer Applications Assistant

At the moment 7 of the standard universities appear to have a person in position while only 5 do not. This person is expected to act also as the Secretary and receptionist. The CGUs are encouraged to recruit capable persons with the right client-oriented positive attitudes and approaches.

Labourer

At the moment 6 units have such a person in position. There will normally be no formal cadre position but each university is normally expected to help the CGU in this regard.

Given that internal use of e-mail within a university is not yet common, letters and documents have to be typically delivered/collected to/from various locations. Even though the use of cleaning services has become common and some of the tasks typically associated with this position may not be the person’s responsibility, it is expected that the person will need play a multiplicity of roles as the services develop including those of a security person, technician, equipment operator etc.

Location / Space

Once again, as with the appointment of a Director of the CGU, the universities appear to have made good progress in this regard. Only one university does not appear to have a place designated specifically as the CGU.

It is also worth noting that 8 universities have allocated more than 200 square feet to the CGU thus leaving room for the service to grow.

The provision of a physical location is recommended as important as the CGU will need to build up its own identity. The running of an office will also minimise the risk of what has happened in some places where a new Director takes over and finds that there are no documents and files, and needs to start work from scratch. This could also explain why funds provided for the CGUs under the IT allocations appear to have been utilised without any (or only some) equipment being present at CGUs.

Telephone, Fax, Photocopy facility

The Standing Committee would not insist that each CGU have a direct phone, a fax and a photocopier.

In the case of the telephone the minimum essential is that external parties can easily reach the CGU via the telephone. However given the typical bottlenecks within the system, the ability to dial-out is considered important. Thus a university intercom with a functional dial-out facility is the minimum encouraged while a direct line may be desirable.

Some Directors have found that the only way they can have telephone access is to use the facilities in the Faculty or the Department. In the long term the facility should however be available at the CGU.

Fax is not considered essential with the minimum requirement being that one needs to have "Easy Access" to such service as and when required. While the minimum requirement is that one has easy access to a photocopy service, given the office context today a photocopier would be desirable.

It is noted that if a direct telephone link is available, faxing out via a computer should normally be easy.

Stationary, Consumable, Postal Service, Transport

On the first three items noted above, generally the situation can be judged as satisfactory.

Transport appears to be a common problem. This is reported as leading to situations where the staff get so fed up that they just use their own vehicle and petrol. It is of course up to the UGC and the Universities to decide whether that is a happy situation or whether other solutions need to be looked into so as to keep the staff motivated and productive.

E-mail, access to e-mail, access to the internet

While access to the “internet” is considered useful, the Standing Committee wishes to lay the stress on e-mail which is (and is developing still further to be) the most common means of communication for the type of interactions one expects particularly between the CGU and the external world. (In the future it is expected that “fax” will be reduced in importance.) The Standing Committee has been encouraging the adoption of common solutions even in matters such as the e-mail address. “careers@ ‘university domain’ “ or “cgu@ ‘university domain’ “ are the solutions being proposed such that external parties will find things easy.

It is regrettable that with so much foreign grants and funding used for IT, a number of universities are unable to yet provide an official and functional e-mail account to the CGUs.

We do not go here into the technical justifications for having both types of access (e.g. web based and POP) and also the need in fact to have two official accounts (one for the office which will be the normal one to be used and which will be looked at by the entire team ... and one for use by the Director which can then be used also for matters of a confidential nature). Issues such as these are seen in fact as related to the need for a university (or university system) policy on IT in general and e-mail in particular.

Given that there is no easy solution some of the CGUs and Director use their personal accounts. This not considered a good solution. It also leads to problems in inter-university communication when Directors change etc.

Purchases from the IT Grant

The Standing Committee is grateful to the UGC that (even if it was after a few years of difficult operation without any seed money) some funds were provided for this purpose. Most were able benefit fully or partly. Some problems were already referred to under the heading “Location/Space”.

Inclusion within the University Budget

This too is considered an important element within the process of “institutionalisation” such that things can move on in a systematic and regular manner without those responsible having to argue for each and every requirement.

Most have made good progress in this regard, and the Standing Committee looks forward to this being finalised at least in 2006.

A problem that has been noted is that the CGUs have submitted the estimates for the budget. Feedback mechanisms seem however to be weak such that one is not sure whether the estimates provided were in fact incorporated official and formally. This may be symptomatic of a system that seems to require that those below have to seek for information without such flowing down.

Report prepared by Charles Fernando. Useful input from Dr Rohan Tittagala and the other Directors of CGUs is gratefully acknowledged.