



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW
OF
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY
OF SRI LANKA

Review Report

June 2004



1. Brief introduction to the University and its review context

- 1.1 Recognizing the need to ensure life-long learning and the right of every citizen to improve their life-chances through access to higher education, the Government of Sri Lanka, established the Open University of Sri Lanka in 1980 under Section 23(1) and Section 18 of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978 and the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) Ordinance No.3 of 1980. Amendments were effected through the Open University of Sri Lanka Ordinances No.1 of 1983 and No.12 of 1996. The University incorporated within its system the External Services Agency (ESA) and the Sri Lanka Institute of Distance Education (SLIDE).
- 1.2 The OUSL is unique within the national university system in being the only University utilizing the Distance Mode. The University is committed to providing access to students without regard to location, employment status or previous level of formal education attainment. Therefore, it structures its academic programmes, 42 in all, with over 600 courses to enable students who lack educational qualification to progress academically from Foundation and Certificate to Masters and Ph.D. level with lateral entry and lateral exit. OUSL typically relies on a range of options such as print, audio, video, laboratory sessions, face-to-face discussions, computer and internet to deliver its programmes to students without prejudice to time or space.
- 1.3 The OUSL stands out among the state universities in being the only university in which the students bear partial responsibility for financing their education. Student enrollment for 2003 was over 9,000 with a cumulative total over 22,000. Approximately 80 per cent of the students are employed. Students are served through a network of 27 regional/study centres. However, all centres are not equally functionally active. Staff includes about 190 academic staff, 95 support staff, 30 administrative and 245 other support staff in the permanent capacity. The Government provides capital funds and 65% of the recurrent expenditure, which covers only the personal emolument of permanent staff. The rest, i.e. 35% of the recurrent expenditure has to be met by the income generated by the university.
- 1.4 OUSL's network of centers dispersed throughout the country has brought education literally closer to the students' homes. This regional network has compelled the University to enter into collaborative partnerships with conventional universities and obtain support from professionals outside the central campus for teaching and evaluation. Due to the heterogeneous nature of its student clientele, the University is called upon to provide a wide array of student support services to enable them to complete the programmes they enroll in successfully.

The organizational structure of the OUSL (See Figure 1) is similar to that of conventional universities. The post of the Chancellor is honorary while the Vice Chancellor is the principal executive officer. The Registrar is responsible for the

custody of the records and the property of the University and its general administration. The other Officers of the University are the Deans of Faculties, the Director, Educational Technology, Director, Regional Educational Services, the Librarian and the Bursar.

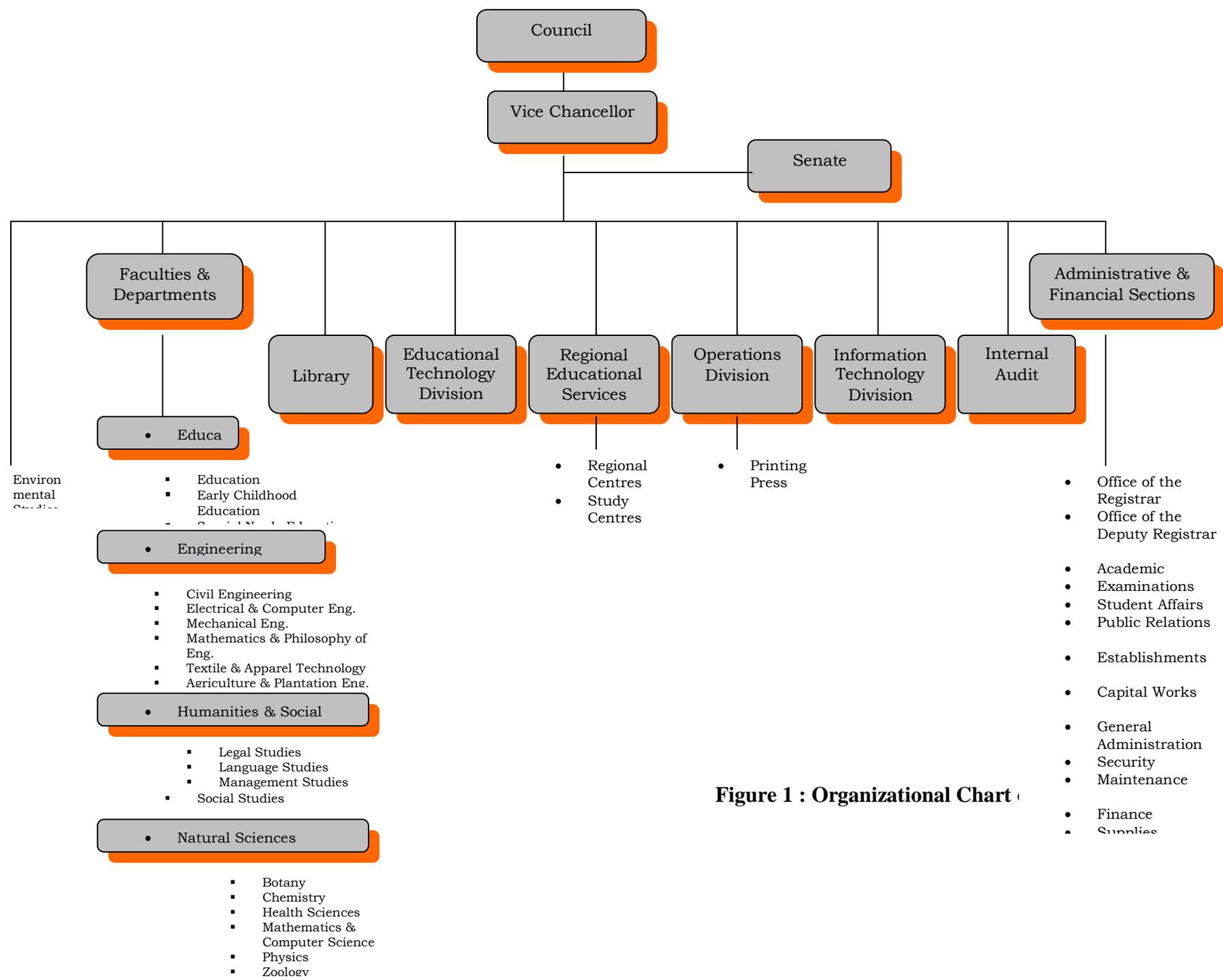


Figure 1 : Organizational Chart

- 1.5 The members of the Institutional Review Panel were appointed by the University Grants Commission (UGC)/Committee of Vice Chancellors and Directors (CVDC) Quality Assurance (QA) Committee.

Review Panel

Prof. E.R.N.Gunawardena	University of Peradeniya - Chairman
Prof. Laxman Jayathilake	Former Chairman, NEC
Prof. S Widanapathirana	University of Kelaniya
Prof. S Wijetunge	University of Colombo
Mr. J. M. Swaminathan	Attorney at Law

- 1.6 Prof. K.Tillekeratne, Chairman of the QA committee organized the first meeting of the panel on 30th December 2003 at the UGC in the presence of Vice Chancellor, OUSL, to discuss and agree on the arrangements with regard to the institutional review process. The self-evaluation report (SER) prepared by the University was made available to the Panel prior to their visit to the University for the Review. The Panel visited the University and conducted the Institutional Review from 28th to 31st January 2004. The Panel held meetings with the persons/groups listed in Annex 1. The Panel is of the opinion that opportunities were given to all those who were willing to meet and express their opinion. The Panel also wishes to state at this point that the forward planning and meticulous arrangements made by the Vice Chancellor/OUSL has facilitated this inclusiveness.

2. Review Team's View of the Self-Evaluation Report

- 2.1 The SER has strictly complied with the format given in the Quality Assurance handbook for the Sri Lankan Universities. The relevant supporting documents for each section have been included in the SER and was made available for the Panel for reference during the review mission. Additional information requested from the Vice Chancellor was provided to the Team within the shortest possible time.
- 2.2 The information provided in each chapter describes the status at present with more emphasis on the positive aspects. It would have been desirable had the critical issues being identified in each chapter other than in the summary of constraints in Chapter 9.

3. Overview of the University's approach to quality and standards

- 3.1 At the apex level the OUSL Council is responsible and accountable for overall administrative and management quality of all operations. Three mechanisms are in place to make sure that the university is conducting its operations in a responsible manner. Firstly, the University has to prepare its Annual Report, which is approved by the Council and scrutinized by the Auditor General. Secondly, matters discussed in the annual report and other issues of interests are

further discussed at the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE), a Subcommittee of the Parliament of Sri Lanka. Thirdly, the University budget outlays and achievements are discussed at the UGC and the Treasury for the determination of expenditure planning.

- 3.2 At the apex level, the University Senate is responsible for quality assurance and improvements with respect to study programs, which include curricula, By Laws, rules and regulations pertaining to examinations and evaluations, and certification. The Faculty Boards are responsible for academic administration while course teams appointed by the academic departments are accountable for quality assurance of study materials. It is mandatory that examination scripts of Special Degree and postgraduate degree programs be second corrected to assure quality. Examination matters are conducted under tight security and confidentiality to ensure quality.
- 3.3 It is commendable that the statutory committee on Quality Management and Services has been created to examine the current systems, procedures, and methods with a view to continuously improve the overall quality of activities, products and services of the OUSL. This Committee was set up about two years ago; it has initially revisited procedures pertaining to purchases, repairs, allocation of capital funds, distribution of staff and training of personnel etc. It was envisaged that these changes would streamline procedures, increase productivity and minimize delays with a view to improve productivity levels of the management system and consequently contribute in particular to the enhancement of the overall quality of administration. Consequently these changes were expected to create a conducive work environment for academics, students and other staff members.
- 3.4 The review team appreciates the regular initiatives taken by the OUSL to improve its quality of services. However, there appears to be problems of ensuring quality, mainly in the areas of operations and regional administration. Some instances of inordinate delays in registration, delivery of learning materials in time, adhering to the time frame of conducting academic programmes, delays in conducting examinations etc have adversely affected the quality of service delivery. The Panel is of the opinion that these problems may have also contributed to the poor completion rate.

4. University goals and corporate planning

- 4.1 The vision of the OUSL is to enhance opportunities for an adult lifelong learning of people by distance learning, facilitating and supporting excellence in research and scholarship. In order to accomplish this mission the University has prepared a corporate plan for 2001-2005, which sets out the strategic development plans for the period and a basis for the review of those plans to assess performance.

- 4.2 The statement of the mission of the University has two main elements, a) to facilitate distance learning, and b) to support excellence in research and scholarship.
- 4.3 The University conducts teaching mostly by preparation of course material and day school instructions. The course materials are prepared both by the permanent academic staff of the University and by outside persons qualified in the particular discipline. It takes about two years to write course material for a new course and it is only after the course material has been prepared that a course is conducted. The course material would also have to be updated from time to time and in most course materials such revisions have periodically taken place. Yet in certain other fields of study there has not been revision of the course materials, but the earlier material have been republished.
- 4.4 At the Colombo Centre the day schools are conducted by senior academic staff of the University and by educational assistants. In the regional centers and at study centers the academic staff is not always available for the conduct of the day schools. In these centers Regional Education Officers and the Educational Assistants are mostly in charge. They have from time to time made several representations to the University authorities to redress their grievances. It appears that these Educational Assistants correspond to demonstrators in the conventional universities. The grievances of these officers would have to be considered separately and if justified, redressed accordingly.
- 4.5 The main aim of the OUSL is to enhance the opportunities for adult lifelong learning by providing an access to larger number of students. At present the number of students who are enrolled in the University is in the region of 22,000. Certain Universities in the region and outside have much larger numbers of students. For instance, Indira Gandhi Open University in India has several hundred thousand students. The Open University in U.K. also has a large number of students. Compared to student numbers in these Universities the number of students in the Open University may be considered low. Therefore, strategies should be adopted to increase the students numbers enrolled.
- 4.6 At present the structure of the OUSL is more or less based on the lines of a conventional University. The Operations Division and the Information Technology Division of the University have a key role to play in its affairs. It would therefore be desirable that the Operations Division and the Information Technology Division be brought under a senior officer of the University. It is suggested that an officer of the University of the status of a Deputy Vice Chancellor head these two Units as the efficient functioning and the coordination between the Operations Division and the Information Technology Division is essential to ensure that material is prepared on time, the registration of students is done on time and examination results are released in time.

4.7 However taking into account the constraints and limitations under which the University is functioning, in our view it has been reasonably successful in achieving its mission of enhancing lifelong learning.

5. Financial resources and management

5.1. Funds for the OUSL are allocated by the UGC based on the funds approved by the Treasury. In general, 65% of the total recurrent expenditure is given by the Government grant, which covers only the personal emoluments of the permanent staff. Capital expenditure is met entirely by the government grant. The University finds it difficult to meet the escalating prices of goods and services, such as electricity, without increasing the course fees. The University at present has a policy of increasing its fees by 10% per annum, yet there is a deficit of about Rs.5.0 million per annum.

5.2 The institutional mechanism to manage the funds is in place and there is evidence to show that the stipulated procedures have been followed in allocation and disbursement of funds. In respect of the financial management of the University, the Auditor General's Reports for the last few years do not have any adverse comments of a substantial nature and therefore it could be stated that the funds of the University have been well managed.

5.3 There have been problems with the cash flow, which hinders the smooth functioning of the University. Inability to procure goods and services in time has affected the quality of service delivery. The stringent bureaucratic procedures to be followed also contribute to this problem.

5.4 There may also have to be closer co-ordination between the budget, the cash flow and the corporate plan so that funds would be available as per the corporate plan for inauguration and successful implementation of courses of study. The review and the assessment of the corporate plan shows that the plan has to a very large extent been complied with, and wherever such compliance has not been possible, it has largely been due to circumstances beyond the control of the University.

5.5 It was brought to the notice of the Panel that funds should be allocated to deliver courses which are in demand and that a substantial portion of the funds generated through such activities should be made available to upgrade and improve the quality of such courses. At present, there is no such mechanism available, which hinders the development and delivery of new courses of study. This does not encourage Departments and Faculties that work hard and deliver the goods. Therefore, activity based costing, which has been already identified by the OUSL, has to be introduced and implemented. Decentralization with accountability has to be introduced, at least at the Faculty level.

5.6 The OUSL should be given more autonomy to manage its own funds since a substantial portion of its annual income is self-generated. Some of the archaic

financial regulations have to be revised so that the constraints to development of the OUSL can be removed.

6. Research

- 6.1 The OUSL places significant emphasis on research, as is demonstrated by the mission statement in the corporate plan which states:

“Our mission is to enhance opportunities for adult life-long learning of people by facilitating open and distance learning and supporting excellence in research and scholarship.”

- 6.2 The review team acknowledges the constraints faced by the OUSL in the first decade of its inception, which resulted in a low output of research. It was noted that in the first few years after the establishment of the OUSL, the faculties concentrated more on the development of course materials relevant to their distance education programmes.
- 6.3 The university has the policy and necessary legislation for postgraduate research leading to M Phil and Ph D degrees in all Faculties. The Higher Degrees and Research Committees of Faculties have the necessary mechanisms to ensure the quality of research undertaken by their postgraduate students.
- 6.4 The establishment and functioning of the distance education research unit known as CRADE can be viewed as a very progressive development in the research agenda of the university. This committee facilitates and monitors distance education research in the university and also, recommends that certain facilities be given to academic staff for research while providing small amounts of funds for research. The staff development centre of the university offers research training facilities to academic staff regularly through seminars, lectures and research presentations.
- 6.5 As in all other universities in Sri Lanka inadequate research funding is listed as one of the major constraints faced by the staff. However the OUSL has been fortunate enough to receive finances through several reputed international funding organizations like ADB, Commonwealth of Learning (COL) SIDA, UNESCO and UNICEF etc.
- 6.6 Annual reports of the university contained lists of research publications, research papers read at local and international seminars and conferences. In addition, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences has inaugurated annual research sessions and the publication of a journal, VISTAS. The OUSL has an in-house refereed journal which publishes research findings on distance education and in other areas, and this journal has released 3 issues so far. In addition, a journal of the Engineering research unit has also been published by the university.

- 6.7 In general, research effort in the areas of Sciences / Natural Sciences was not adequately visible. The laboratories of the science department were not at all equipped for research. The number of research publications as seen in the annual reports in the university is not adequate and fall below the level expected of the university. However constraints outlined in the self evaluation report such as resource limitations, limitations in funds and equipment and above all heavy work load of academic staff may explain this situation.

7. Quality management and administration

- 7.1 The corporate plan of the OUSL 2001-2005 has highlighted quality assurance as one of the seven principal goals of the University, stated as “assure quality in open distance learning”. Within this broad goal, it has further spelt out the quality objectives of “continuously improve quality standards in open distance learning” for which a number of specific strategies have been laid out. The above quality objective initially covers a broad spectrum of domains including quality management and quality assurance. The former aspect deals with administration and management perspectives of quality while the latter deals with quality assurance, which covers teaching, learning, accreditation and research.
- 7.2. The organizational structure of the OUSL is very much similar to that of a conventional University. The Vice Chancellor and the Council is responsible for the overall management of the University. The overall responsibility for quality assurance of the academic programmes rest with the Senate of the University. The Faculties, headed by the Deans are responsible and accountable for ensuring quality at the lower levels.
- 7.3 The Registrar of the University manages administrative functions including student affairs, finances, examinations, and human resources. Each of these sections is headed by either a Senior Assistant Registrar or Assistant Registrar. The Bursar is responsible for managing the finances with the assistance of Senior Assistant Bursars. The administrative arrangements of the Centre is very much similar to those of the conventional University.
- 7.4 The major difference between the OUSL and the conventional University is the existence of the Regional Education Services, which provides services required by the four Faculties of the OUSL to conduct their academic programmes. These are being carried out through 28 regional and study centers spread throughout the country. The Director of the RES who is in-charge of all activities of the RES is attached to the Central Campus at Nawala. Four Assistant Directors administer the four Regional Centres and the Study Centres are administered by Regional Officers in Charge of the Centres or by full time coordinators.
- 7.5 The panel is of the view that the RES, presently headed by an Acting Director, is severely under staffed and under-funded. There seems to be a marked disparity in

resources, both human and financial, allocated to the administration of the Central campus and the RES. The Registrar and his administrative staff appear to have less responsibilities compared to the services demanded from the personnel attached to RES and associated regional and study centres. This was mainly due to the duplication of the administrative structure of the conventional university system, whereas the service delivery requirements of the distance mode with national level access to the student population demands a different approach.

- 7.6. The OUSL has developed detailed By Laws, manuals of procedures, schemes, house styles, and standards to cover most of its activities, to standardize procedures pertaining to the design and development of study programmes, development of study materials, conduct of examinations and certification including award of degrees. There are other manuals and procedures specific to the respective Faculties on student registration, academic counseling, day schools etc. dealing specifically with quality assurance of study programmes. The timetables and forward planning is done in advance for almost all the programmes.
- 7.7. Though such meticulous planning and procedures are in place, there is evidence to show that there have been some inordinate delays in implementation. There are numerous shortcomings in the delivery of services to students. Among these, one of the serious shortcomings has been the inability of the OUSL to provide learning materials to the students in time. The Operations Division, presently headed by a Deputy Director, is severely understaffed. The overall coordination of all the Faculties and other service centres of the main campus is essential for effective service delivery from the Operations division. The Panel noted that this division is severely under-staffed, lacks the authority it requires to request the services from different Faculties/ divisions/units of the University. This has seriously affected the quality of education services provided by the OUSL. The Panel strongly feels that a structural change is required to strengthen the Operations division, along with other necessary institutional changes in order to improve the services to be provided by the OUSL.
- 7.8. Not adhering to an academic calendar, has been one of the serious shortcomings in the delivery of academic courses. This leaves the students with an uncertainty as to when they could complete a course once they get registered. There have been inordinate delays in commencement of some of the academic programmes, in holding examinations and in releasing results. There have been many instances of postponement of examinations. In some instances results have not been released even after one year of holding the examination. These will undoubtedly demoralize students and result in loss of faith in the OUSL.
- 7.9. The Printing press is one of the important Resource Centres of the University. Given the constraints, the service provided by the printing press is satisfactory. However, there appears to be tremendous potential for improvement in services linked with the press. Although a large number of good quality teaching materials

are available, there is no pro-active thrust to improve the sales. The Panel is of the view that the Printing press, along with the purchasing Centre for learning materials could be re-organized as a single unit, to function on lines of private sector organizations enabling the University to generate adequate funds and enhance sustainability.

- 7.10 Print was the principal delivery medium available at the inception of the OUSL. Recognizing the importance of audio-visual materials as tools of effective teaching, especially for OUSL students to combat the issue of learning at a distance, a fully -fledged Educational Technology Division (ETD) was established in 1993 with assistance from Japan. Since then the ETD has become a service provider for the four Faculties of the OUSL to produce instructional audio-visual materials. The variety of AV materials produced by the ETD was also made available to the Review Team.
- 7.11 Lack of adequate qualified staff, especially at the middle level was given as one of the constraints in the effective functioning of the ETD. Unavailability of and lack of enthusiasm in the academic staff to help produce was also highlighted during the review process. Subject specialist from academic departments who underwent AV training from the ETD carry out the production of instructional AV programmes. The ETD provides technical assistance. However, with the introduction of new study programmes the academic staff find it difficult to get involved with AV production due to heavy academic workload. The responsibility for producing and completing education video programmes lies with the academic staff of each Faculty. It was reported that several footage of unfinished productions are still lying in the ETD due to unavailability of subject experts. Lack of professional producers was also quoted as a constraint for the smooth functioning of the ETD.
- 7.12 Lack of adequate academic staff due to large number of un-filled vacancies was given as a reason for various shortcomings in the delivery of academic programmes. In certain instances, the numbers admitted to some academic programmes, though they were in very high demand, were restricted due to this reason of lack of adequate academic staff. Some of the academic members were of the opinion that the student numbers should not be increased if adequate support services cannot be provided to them. On the other hand, the Departments are under pressure to generate adequate income to sustain the programmes. This dilemma has to be sorted out by the authorities so that the students get a fair deal in completing their academic programme once they register, and at the same time, the academic staff can perform their duties without stress.

8. Quality assurance

- 8.1 The Goal of the university as stated in the corporate plan are to “create a more conducive academic environment and consolidate quality, efficiency and

sustainability in all activities (Goal 1)” and “assure quality in open and distance learning (Goal 3)”.

- 8.2 Quality assurance can be considered as those mechanisms, activities and procedures which are deliberately designed to regulate the input and output variables within the system to enhance the effectiveness, maintain standards and improve the quality of learning among the learners in order to achieve the desired objectives for which the institution is established.
- 8.3 It is evident that the appropriate procedures and practices to ensure quality have been adopted at the OUSL. The Faculty Board, the Senate and the appropriate senate sub-committees are in place and functioning well in order to achieve the objectives for which those subcommittees have been created.
- 8.4 All appointments, confirmation and promotion of staff conform to national policy and are made in accordance with the scheme of recruitment as prescribed by the University Act and ordinances/Rules made by the UGC.
- 8.5 The differences in teaching methodology and the way curriculum is presented in the form of course materials in ODL system demands different roles from the teaching staff. These roles are those of planners, curriculum developers, writers, editors, script writers, evaluators, monitors, tutors, coordinators, trainers, demonstrators, managers, researchers, reviewers, supervisors, team leaders etc. With the latest developments in ICT, roles of teachers will further be revolutionized.
- 8.6 This multiple role has been identified, appreciated and followed by teachers who underwent training at the initial stages of the development of OUSL, especially under the DIFD programme. However, the majority of academic staff, who had teaching experience at the conventional universities, and the new recruits who learned under the conventional system find it difficult to fit in to this multiple role model. Therefore, training of OUSL staff in distance mode education delivery is a priority need. At the same time, it is worth exploring the possibility of allocating staff for specific roles. For example, some teachers could be trained specifically to develop AV and Teaching materials. Another group could be specifically given the responsibility for conducting tutorials, practicals and carry out evaluation work. Research staff could be appointed separately to improve the research activities of the University. There could be overlaps, but division of labour might be helpful to improve the productivity of services. If not, the eternal complaint of heavy workload from the teaching staff with regard to their expected multiple role would continue.
- 8.7 There is a grievance from the academic support staff, namely Educational Assistants and Engineering Teaching Assistants. A total of 85 of them contribute to the teaching programme. They have been involved in almost all the teaching activities, starting from curriculum development to marking the answer scripts.

Lack of promotional schemes and the privileges enjoyed by the Academic staff were the grievances put forward by the Academic support staff. A long-term solution should be found to accommodate them fully in the delivery of the academic services to the students.

- 8.8 Inadequacy of academic staff has been mentioned as a main constraint to improving the quality of service during various meetings. It was also noted that the staff/student ratio of the OUSL is still high compared to similar institutions in the region and the world. Over the years, institutional changes have taken place due to expansion of activities of the OUSL. However, these expansions have been typed on similar processes in place in conventional Universities. The students also expect the identical type of service delivery to that of a conventional University. Therefore, it is important to again revisit the vision and mission of the OUSL and effect changes to the institutional, administrative and service delivery functions so that the declared vision and mission of the OUSL can be achieved. It is worth exploring the possibility of having a separate Act for the OUSL so that the required institutional and administrative arrangements can be made to overcome the present limitations.

9. Learning infrastructure and student support system

- 9.1 The Open University of Sri Lanka offers a large number of courses and programs of study at different levels and disciplines to service approximately 22,000 students on roll, through a network of centers and utilizing the distance mode. To serve this heterogeneous student body of distance learners spread island-wide, a multiple media approach is adopted. The teaching staff comprise of academic staff, academic support staff and visiting staff called upon to play multi faceted roles in providing student support.
- 9.2 The student profile reflects heterogeneity by age, and level of educational qualifications at entry; while the highest concentration of students is in the age range of 21-30, there are a fair percentage of students in the 31-40 and older age groups. Lateral entry enables students with variable educational qualifications to enter and progress through the system according to their needs and educational aspirations. A large percentage of students are employed. The extent of student support required is therefore variable, depending both on learner characteristics and learning system features. The transformation from a teaching dependent learner orientation characteristic of the school education system in Sri Lanka to that of a self and distance learner is in itself a challenge to the OUSL student. The learning infrastructure and student support system has been designed to cater to the diverse needs of this clientele of learners.
- 9.3 The Regional Educational Service network of 28 Centres consisting of 4 Regional Centres, 17 Study Centres and 7 Teaching Centres spread island-wide has a critical role to play in facilitating student learning. The RES is headed by a Director and the Centres are administered under an Assistant Director or a

Regional Officer. Academic staff and Counselors are also stationed at the Regional Centres to provide academic support. The Central Campus at Nawala and the Colombo Regional Centre which caters to 56% of the total student population is equipped with considerable facilities and learning infrastructure such as laboratories geared to teaching students at higher level, a large computer laboratory, a Library with a large collection of books and journals, Audio-Visual Resource Centre, Media House, Canteens and temporary residential facilities for students.

- 9.4 Resource constraints have imposed limitations variably on the provision of facilities in the different Regional, Study and Teaching centers.
- 9.5 The study system relies fairly heavily on printed learning materials distributed to students and is supplemented by audio visual aids, interactive day classes, seminars, workshops, tutor clinics, laboratory and field work depending on course requirements. A system of continuous assessments according to a planned schedule, with assignments marked and returned to the student with tutors' comments and observations, tests, project work etc. provides learner support by way of feedback, enabling self-monitoring of learning progress. The design and quality of the learning materials, facilitation of peer learning to overcome the isolation of the distance learner, tracking learner progress are fundamental to student retention and successful completion.
- 9.6 The review process enabled the team to investigate the operational aspects of the learning infrastructure and student support system described above. It is evident that over time, the OUSL has made considerable strides in streamlining and bringing about qualitative improvements in most aspects of the system, given the structural, operational and resource constraints within which such improvements have been effected. The Prospectus and Guide Books provide comprehensive information to students, further supplemented by pre-registration counseling sessions. The progress made in Course material design and development is reflected in the quality of more recently produced or updated lesson material in some of the programmes, including print quality. Measures have been adopted to assure and enhance quality of learning materials, such as intensive training for staff involved in course design and development.
- 9.7 Some features that detract from the motivation and job satisfaction of the service providers in the system were noted, which should be addressed to enhance their commitment and institutional affiliation. A degree of discontent regarding cadre designations and avenues for career progression was noted, on the part of some of the academic support staff, particularly those who have kept abreast with their own continuing education and earned higher degrees. Perhaps these issues should be addressed adopting a system's approach, considering futuristically the role of the Regional Educational Service Network as well. The press to increase student enrollments will necessitate a more de-centralized system of service provision and further reliance on academic and academic support staff stationed in the regions.

9.8 A perusal of student enrollment and completion rates in the different disciplines indicates that this demand is not adequately sustained, as reflected in course completion rates. A closer scrutiny of all aspects of service delivery and, obtaining feedback on further student support needs may help in rectifying the situation and, enhance further the rates of enrollment.

10. University/Industry/Community and other extension services

10.1 The OUSL is at an advantageous position since most of the students are employed and have links with the industry. In addition, most of the visiting staff is drawn from the industry. However, this advantage has not been capitalized on fully.

10.2 Consultancy and External Resource Centre (CERC) is mandated to facilitate the interaction between the University and Industry. The consultancies, especially helps to generate much needed funds for the University and also to remunerate staff who get involved in the projects. Lack of adequate staff and the restrictions imposed as a result of strict financial regulations were quoted as two major reasons for less number of activities undertaken by the CERC. The Panel is of the view that the OUSL could generate considerably more funds from outside considering the resources available at the main campus.

10.3 The provision of educational facilities to students in remote and rural areas through a network of 27 centres spread island-wide is a great community service. English language and the Information Technology courses offered at these centres have been very popular in the past. It is sad to note that the expansion of some of these services have been curtailed due to resource constraints.

10.4 The model pre-school is another community service that has been well known and very popular among the people. Most of the teachers who have been trained in these centres have gained useful employment.

10.5 In general, the OUSL has many advantages over the conventional universities in offering active community and extension services, mainly due to its network of centres and its mandate to cater to a diverse group of students. This advantageous position should be capitalized on, mainly by removing the institutional and resource constraints and, by strengthening the centres.

11. Overall judgement of level of confidence in the university's quality assurance arrangements

The panel is of the opinion that the OUSL can be given an overall judgement of CONFIDENCE on its quality assurance arrangements in the areas of a) University goals and corporate planning, b) Financial resources and management, c) Research, d) Quality management and administration, e) Quality assurance, f) Learning resources and student support, and g) University/Industry/Community

and other extension services, irrespective of the shortcomings noted in the report. The Panel agrees that the University has attempted its best to deliver a quality service to the client. The limitations/constraints in respect of a) the institutional arrangements, b) regulations imposed by the government and the UGC limiting the administrative and financial autonomy, c) limited funds available to implement the corporate plan, and to deliver a quality service were to a considerable degree beyond the control of the University authorities. The Panel has arrived at their judgements taking all the above factors into account.

12. Commendations and recommendations

Commendations

The Panel wishes to commend the OUSL particularly for:

- a) The excellent Self Evaluation Report (SER) supported by documentary evidence to substantiate the information provided in the SER.
- b) The enthusiasm and the support provided by all the individuals and groups who participated in the Review Process.
- c) Preparation of Corporate Plan, Faculty Prospectus, Handbooks, detailed By Laws, procedural manuals, schemes, house styles, and standards to cover most of its activities, to standardize the design and development of study programmes, development of study materials, conduct of examinations and certification including award of Degrees.
- d) Initiatives taken to establish a statutory committee on Quality Management Services to improve the quality of services provided by the OUSL.
- e) Enhancing of research activities and dissemination of research finding through three in-house journals.
- f) Continuously developing new demand driven courses not being offered by the conventional Universities.
- g) Providing community services through the network of regional/study centres, especially in the areas of English language, Information Technology and Childcare.

Recommendations

- a) More financial and administrative authority should be granted to the OUSL enabling it to deliver the services expected more effectively.
- b) A major structural change is in order, for the future growth of the OUSL. RES, Operational Division and Information Technology Division should be re-organized and managed by an authority higher than a Dean (ideally a Deputy Vice Chancellor) who should get instructions directly from the Vice Chancellor and is able to demand services from the Deans and Heads of Departments. Required human as well as physical resources should also be provided.

- c) Administrative and financial divisions, which are structured similar to the conventional Universities at present, should be re-organized in keeping with the diverse requirements for the smooth functioning of the OUSL and its network of Regional/Study Centres.
- d) Initiatives taken to develop activity-based costing should be pursued in order to improve the response time in the development and delivery of demand-driven courses and, to support the Departments willing to take challenges.
- e) The ETD, Printing Press and the Sales Centre should be combined as a single unit and upgraded, with required human and physical resources. This unit should be managed as a self-sustaining unit with adequate administrative and financial autonomy.
- f) The outsourcing policy of the OUSL (page 10 of SER) should be rigorously pursued. Possibilities of offering academic services in partnership with the private sector institutions/conventional universities should be explored.
- g) The Consultancy and External Resources Centre (CERC) should be properly institutionalised and strengthened, similar to those at the Universities of Moratuwa and Peradeniya, so that it could help strengthen University-Industry linkages and generate much needed income for the University.
- h) Urgent steps should be taken to prepare and adhere to a proper academic calendar, including the holding of examination and releasing of results.
- i) The updating of course materials should be pursued as a priority activity.
- j) Training of staff (both academic and academic support) should be pursued, on subject matter and in areas relevant to distance mode delivery.
- k) A long-term solution should be found to the grievances of the academic support staff (Teaching Assistants and Engineering Assistants) and the Directors/Co-ordinators of the Regional/Study centres.
- l) Steps should be taken to fill the vacancies, especially of the academic staff, and to provide the required infrastructure facilities such as lecture rooms, laboratory facilities, computers, transport etc.
- m) Resources of the regional/study centre should be improved. Steps should be taken to decentralize activities rather than to bring them to the main campus at Nawala.
- n) The possibility of providing improved and wider community services through the network of regional/study centres should be explored considering the relative advantage the OUSL has, in its access to a heterogeneous clientele of learners

compared to conventional universities and other private educational institutions in Sri Lanka.

13. Summary

- 13.1 The review and assessment of the corporate plan shows that the plan has to a very large extent been complied with and wherever such compliance has not been possible, it has largely been due to circumstances beyond the control of the University.
- 13.2 Government provides capital funds and 65% of the recurrent expenditure, which covers only the personal emoluments of permanent staff. The rest, i.e. 35% of the recurrent expenditure has to be met by the income generated by the university. The institutional mechanism to manage the funds is in place and there is evidence to show that the procedures have been followed in allocation and disbursement of funds. In respect of the financial management of the University, the Auditor General's Reports for the last few years do not contain adverse comments of a substantial nature and therefore it could be said that the funds of the University have been well managed.
- 13.3 Higher Degree and Research Committees of Faculties have the necessary mechanisms to ensure the quality of research undertaken by postgraduate students. The establishment and functioning of the distance education research unit CRADE can be viewed as a very progressive development in the research agenda of the university.
- 13.4 In general adequate research effort in the areas of Sciences/Natural Sciences was not visible. The laboratories of the science department are not at all equipped for research. The number of research publications as seen in the annual reports in the university are not adequate and fall below the level expected of the university. However constraints outlined in the SER report such as resource limitations and the heavy workload of academic staff may explain this situation.
- 13.5 It is evident that the appropriate procedures and practices to ensure quality have been adopted by the OUSL. Faculty Boards, the Senate and the appropriate senate sub-committees are in place and are functioning well in order to achieve the objectives for which those subcommittees have been created.
- 13.6 The OUSL has developed detailed By Laws, procedural manuals, schemes, house styles, and standards to cover most of its activities, to standardize matters pertaining to the design and development of study programmes, development of study materials, conducting of examinations and certification including award of degrees. There are other manuals and procedures specific to the respective faculties on student registration, academic counseling, day schools etc. to deal specifically with quality assurance of the respective study programmes. The time tables and forward planning is done in advance for almost all the programmes.

- 13.7. Though meticulous planning and procedures are in place, there is evidence to show that there are inordinate delays in implementation. There are numerous shortcomings in delivering the services to the students. Inability to deliver teaching materials to the students, hold examinations and release results in time have been the major shortcomings. The overall coordination of all the Faculties and other service centres of the main campus are essential for the effective service delivery from the Operations division. The Panel noted that this division is presently headed by a Deputy Director, is severely under-staffed, lack the authority it requires to request the services from different faculties/ divisions/units of the University. This has seriously affected the quality of education services provided by the OUSL. The Panel strongly feels that a structural change is required to strengthen the Operations Division with necessary institutional arrangements to improve the services to be provided by the OUSL.
- 13.8. Educational Technology Division (ETD) facilitates the production of instructional audio-visual materials of the OUSL. Subject specialists from academic departments who underwent AV training from the ETD carry out the production of instructional AV programmes, with the ETD providing technical assistance. However, with the introduction of new study programmes the academic staff finds it difficult to get involved with AV production due to heavy academic workload.
- 13.9. Printing press is one of the important Resource Centres of the University. Within the constraints, the service provided by the printing press is satisfactory. However, there appears to be tremendous potential for improvement in services associated with the press. Though there are a large number of good quality teaching materials available, there is no pro-active intervention to improve their sales. The Panel is of the view that the Printing press, ETD, along with the purchasing Centre for teaching materials could be re-organized as a single unit that functions more on the lines of private sector organizations so that the University would be able to generate adequate funds for its sustenance.
- 13.10. Lack of adequate academic staff due to the large number of un-filled vacancies was given as a reason for various shortcomings in the delivery of the academic programme. In certain instances, the numbers admitted to some academic programmes, though they were in very high demand, were restricted due to this reason.
- 13.11. All appointments, confirmation and promotion of staff conform to the national policies and are made in accordance with the scheme of recruitment prescribed by the University Act and ordinances/Rules made by the UGC.
- 13.12. There appears to be a grievance on the part of the academic support staff in their demand for promotional schemes and privileges enjoyed by the Academic staff. A reasonable solution to this problem and steps to accommodate them fully in the delivery of academic services to the students is urgently called for.

- 13.13. Consultancy and External Resource Centre (CERC) is mandated to facilitate the interaction between the University and Industry. The consultancies especially help to generate much needed funds for the University and also remunerate staff who get involved in the projects. Lack of adequate staff and the restrictions imposed as a result of strict financial regulations were quoted as two major reasons for less number of activities undertaken by the CERC.
- 13.14. The provision of educational facilities to students in remote and rural areas through a network of 27 centres spread island-wide is a great community service. English language and Information Technology courses offered at these centres have been very popular in the past. It is sad to note that this service has not been continued with intensity due to resource constraints.
- 13.15. The OUSL has many advantages over the conventional universities to offer active community and extension services, mainly due to its network of centres and its mandate to cater to a diverse group of students. This advantageous position should be capitalized on, mainly by removing the institutional and resource constraints and strengthening the centres.
- 13.16. The panel is of the opinion that the OUSL can be given an overall judgement of CONFIDENCE on its quality assurance arrangements. The Panel agrees that the University has attempted its best to deliver a quality service to the client. The limitations/constraints with regard to a) the institutional arrangements, b) regulations imposed by the government and the UGC limiting the administrative and financial autonomy, c) limited funds available to implement the corporate plan, and to deliver a quality services were beyond the control of the University authorities. The Panel has arrived at their judgements considering all the above factors into account.