Institutional Review
The Open University of Sri Lanka

Self-evaluation Report
April 2013
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1. University Goals and Corporate Planning

1.1 Establishment and unique characteristics

The Government of Sri Lanka, recognizing the need to ensure life-long learning and considering access to Higher Education as a right of every citizen, established the Open university of Sri Lanka (OUSL) under the Universities Act No 16 of 1978 under a separate Ordinance, Ordinance No 3 of 1980 having the same legal and academic status as any other national university and thus comes under the purview of the University Grants Commission (UGC).

Initially it incorporated within its system, the External Services Agency (ESA) and the Sri Lanka Institute of Distance Education (SLIDE). At the inception the academic programmes of the OUSL were conducted by two boards of study namely the Board of Study for Management, Science and Technology and the Board of Study for Humanities and Social Sciences.

These two boards of study were serviced by the Library, the Audio/visual Section, Data Processing Unit, the Printing Press and the Regional and Study Centres administered by Regional Education Service (RES).

A major change in the University resulted from the OUSL Ordinance No. 1 of 1987, This new ordinance provided for three (03) Faculties to replace the two boards of study. The new Faculties that were established and their divisions were as follows:

- Faculty of Engineering Technology (Eng. Tech.)
  Divisions - Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical, Electronic and Computer Science & Engineering

- Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS)
  Divisions - Education, Management and Social Sciences, Legal Studies.

- Faculty of Natural Sciences (NSc)
  Divisions - Mathematics, Physical and Chemical Sciences and life Sciences.
The **OUSL ordinance No. 1, 1990** resulted in further changes. The main feature of this new ordinance was the establishment of five (05) academic divisions in each Faculty as follows:

- Faculty of Engineering Technology  
  Divisions - Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Textile Technology, Mathematics
- Faculty of HSS  
  Divisions – Education, Management Studies, Social Studies, Legal Studies and Language Studies
- Faculty of N.Sc.  
  Divisions – Botany, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics and Zoology

In 1996 the academic divisions became Departments.

At present there are 4 Faculties. The latest addition was the Faculty of Education in 2003. The Faculty of Education commenced with 2 departments viz. Department of Education and the Department of Early Childhood Education.

The Faculties of Engineering Technology and N.Sc. now have 6 Departments each, the new Departments being Agriculture and Plantation Engineering and Health Sciences respectively. The latest addition to the Faculty of Education is the Department of Special Needs Education.

Although the OUSL is governed by the Universities Act No 16 of 1978 it has several unique characteristics that other conventional universities do not usually share. They are as follows:

**Use of Distance mode for teaching and learning** – The teacher and student is not in close proximity in time and space and, as a result learners are engaged in self study of course material provided to them and have opportunities to study at their own pace and time.

**Principle of open learning** - Learners above 18 years of age can enroll to courses, and programmes of study, of their choice provided basic entry qualification are fulfilled without the requirement to have an acceptable Z score like in conventional universities.
Provision of a ladder for educational progression - Many of its programmes are structured at different levels so that learners have the opportunity to proceed from Foundation level, through Diploma, Degree to Postgraduate degrees levels with the possibility of exit points.

Recognition of prior learning experiences for admission – Prior learning experience either at the OUSL or at other recognized higher educational institutes allows lateral entry to programmes of study promoting life long learning.

Large percentage of employed students – Open entry and distance mode of teaching and learning allows employed students to enroll and complete higher educational opportunities they missed or fulfill requirement for promotion.

Net work of Regional and Study centres - Programmes and courses are delivered at regional and study centres distributed throughout the island, supporting a large number of off campus students, unlike in conventional universities.

Extensive learner / student support service – The university is faced with the challenge to develop infrastructure and other student services at all regional and study centres with close collaborations with regional higher educational institutions to achieve excellence, equity and efficiency in Open Distance Learning (ODL).

Thus being primarily a university catering to employed students and providing opportunities to any one interested in pursuing higher education, OUSL needs to have a study system and programmes of study different to those found in conventional universities.

Study System

The system of study is designed to support a distance learner through multiple media which includes specially designed printed course material for a self learner, audio visual aids, discussion and day classes, seminars, workshops, tutor clinics and laboratory and field work, Factory /Industry visits, e-mail and internet. The printed course material offers the student the equivalent of lectures and tutorials. Students are provided the course material at the point of registration. In case of online courses access for students to OUMOODLE LMS is provided after registration.
All course materials are specially designed to facilitate **Student Centered Approach** where students take the responsibility of learning and teachers are facilitating their learning process.

All courses have a well designed assessment component. The OUSL adopts both Continuous Assessment (CA) and Final examinations to evaluate the student performance in the courses. The CA components vary according to the courses and in many instances CA includes Home Assignments, Tests, Projects, Field visits, Laboratories etc. These assessments have a dual purpose viz. a teaching tool as well as a means of helping the student to assess their own progress. Assignments are marked and returned to the student with the marks, tutors comments and observations. The continuous assessment component also forms a part of the final grade of the courses. To ensure quality, senate approved examination manual is followed in conducting CA and final examinations.

The OUSL is meant primarily for working students. Therefore, it is possible for a student to study while working, without much difficulty. While the University is making every effort to schedule as many activities as possible during weekends and public holidays, certain activities such as laboratory classes and examinations may have to be scheduled during weekdays. Since the activity schedule for the whole year is given to the students at the beginning of the academic year, it is hoped that they can plan their work well in advance.

**Study Programmes**

OUSL meets the needs of all interested in education by offering its own programmes of study leading to Certificates, Advanced Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Postgraduate Diplomas and Postgraduate Degrees. In addition to these main academic programmes, there are continuing education courses, beginner’s courses and awareness programmes. The OUSL is also fully equipped to support postgraduate research studies leading to Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees. Any person who is above 18 years of age can enrol at the OUSL. The OUSL is one of the pioneer ODL Universities to offer a Bachelor of Science Degree award and a Bachelor of Engineering Technology award.
Having programmes at Foundation, Certificate, Diploma, Degree and Postgraduate provide an opportunity of entry at different levels. It provides a readily accessible and progressive ladder of opportunity through its lateral entry / exit system. The Foundation level has been introduced as an alternative to G.C.E. (Advanced Level) to assist students to acquire a qualification to enter the degree or diploma programmes.

1.2 Current Context

Since OUSL comes under the purview of the University Grants Commission (UGC) it has an administrative structure similar to other national universities. The staff has the same responsibilities and stick to the same recruitment/ promotional schemes as conventional university staff. Although such an arrangement poses many obstacles in OUSL’ progress it still remains so since OUSL is serving a national need of providing Higher Education for all at an affordable cost. This can only be achieved by support from state for human resources and part funding for expansion and maintenance.

The administrative structure underwent many changes since 2003 and some of these changes were recommendations of the previous institutional review. They include the appointment of a Deputy Vice-Chancellor in 2009, Creation of Staff Development Centre and Career guidance unit led by two Directors.

The Postgraduate Institute of English (PGIE) which was assigned to provide higher educational opportunities in the field of English and English Language teaching to all in Sri Lanka was housed in the OUSL premises from 2006. A senior academic from OUSL, currently serves as the Director of this institute.

Furthermore. Educational Technology Division was renamed as the Centre for Educational Technology and Media (CETMe) in 2012 and is now equipped with two units: Academic and Research Unit and the Production Unit.
Training academic staff on course design and development both print and online, transforming course materials into ODL format, reviewing online courses before delivery, administering online courses through NODES and conducting ODL research are the main functions of the Academic and Research Unit of the CETMe. Production Unit assists the production of educational audio-visual programmes related to course material, designing graphics for print and for audio-visual productions, multiplying CDs and DVDs. In addition, act as a business centre by lending the facilities of the studio complex for external productions. The betacam equipment of the studio complex were upgraded to high-definition digital equipment under the DEM Project.

During last few year the University printing press has enhanced its capacity to deal with the increasing student numbers and number of course materials to be printed. The press acquired high capacity modern printing machines under the ADB project and has integrated its inventory system with the OMIS for smooth operation. Further, it has shown an improvement in undertaking outside work for additional income generation through the CERC.

The OUSL Library is one of the pioneer libraries in Sri Lanka that achieved fully automated status. The Library commenced the automation of the catalogue in 1990 using the CDS/ISIS software system developed by UNESCO distributed by NSF, Sri Lanka. In the year 2000, Alice for Windows, integrated Library Managements Software (LMS) system was introduced to accelerate the automation process. Gradually, all the back office and front office functions of the library, namely; circulation, acquisition, cataloguing, periodical control etc. are automated within the period from 2000-2005. The next major step that library initiated in the arena of automation, is integrating the LMS with the University OUSL’s Management Information System (OMIS). To achieve this goal the library shifted to a new LMS called Libsys. Currently, Library is working on a project for automating the Regional Libraries using a customized LMS developed based on an open source software system.
Yet another task undertaken by the quality assurance committee established at OUSL in 2004 was to put in place a quality assurance framework, for programmes and institutions having ODL as their main method of teaching and learning.

This was done by our university and is presently accepted by all Higher Educational institutions having ODL methodologies world over. The Master of Arts in Teacher Education and BSc degree programme were chosen to pilot this quality assurance framework in 2006 and both programmes received a good ratings.

More recently the university decided to look into its own internal quality assurance practices with a view to review the entire system as a whole, and to ascertain whether the OUSL is achieving its set goals and targets. A review mechanism internationally known as COL-RIM was conducted at OUSL in 2010 and OUSL has identified many shortcomings which are now in the process of being addressed.

OUSL’s academic activities and administrative activities are not limited to the Nawala main central campus. It extend to 31 centres, regional centers, study centers and other teaching units of the Regional Education Service (RES), currently led by Acting Director, RES. Minimum requirements of human resources are still not available for some of these centres and presently the OUSL has strategic plans to fulfill these requirements in order to have up to date quality learner support services in all of its centres.

Over the years, the programmes of study offered by departments and faculties have increased in correspondence to the demands of the economy and wider society. University has initiated 69 programmes of study up to December 2012, and currently there are 35,647 students enrolled in 57 of these study programmes. Since 2003, 16 new programmes of study has been initiated and they include, 2 foundation programmes, 3 certificate programmes, 1 advance Certificate program, 1 advance Diploma program, 2 Diploma programmes, 1 degree programme and 6 postgraduate programmes of study. Since 2003 there have been a 1.5 fold increase in the number of enrolled students, and an increase in the number of students enrolling into the 9 degree programmes offered by the university. All in all 61.9% of the students enrolled up to December, 2012 are following undergraduate and postgraduate programmed offered by the OUSL.
and this proves that OUSL has kept up to its mission, to serve the higher educational aspirations of those who missed such opportunities due to many reasons.

Two masters programmes and two new degree programmes already advertised in 2013, will further serve those seeking higher educational qualifications in important fields such as health and legal studies.

The output of the OUSL graduates has also steadily increased from 2003 up to 2011. However the number of students completing programmes of study is low compared to the number that enroll annually. This is a phenomenon that has been observed in many ODL institutes throughout the world and occurs due to the flexible mode of learning which allows students to study at their own pace while working. However OUSL to maintain the quality of graduates, by enforcing many restrictions in awards criteria, set limits to the duration of the programmes of study and restricts postponing of sitting the final examinations.

International donor agencies have generously assisted the OUSL to improve its infrastructure and other resources. Prominent among them since 2003 was the Asian Development Bank (ADB). OUSL received considerable amount of funds from ADB’s Distance Education Modernization Project (DEMP). Funds were provided to develop and improve infrastructure at some regional / study centers, three faculties of OUSL, develop the Infrastructure for networking all the centres, establish OMIS and to improve library facilities. Further, assistance for teaching was provided in the design and development of course material both print and online, establish delivery of online courses through NODES and for much needed laboratory equipment. Research grants for local research and overseas postgraduate studies for some staff members were also funded by ADB (DEMP).

Funding from ADB (DEMP) has greatly benefitted the university as a whole and all its staff and students. OUSL underwent tremendous transfer with regard to access to new technology. The Improvements to infrastructure facilities and laboratory facilities to science and engineering laboratories at regional centres and the main campus allowed us to expand our academic activities and provided a more conducive environment for staff and students. The provision of computer facilities to senior academic staff helped them to engage in...
development/revision of course material and research with much enthusiasm than before.

Similarly provision of computer facilities to administrative staff boosted their moral and streamlined many activities. The establishment of the OMIS enabled greater efficiency in most of the administrative service so that learner support service was positively enhanced while more time consuming tasks of administrative staff were now less of a burden.

To improve staff capacity ADB (DEMP) supported study visits and training for OUSL staff. The training programmes and the study visits for staff members at different levels have made majority of staff aware of the importance of their work and was helpful to put in new thinking into their work they are performing. However like in all processes there were shortcomings that are unavoidable. Some among them are transfers/promotions of trained staff to jobs outside OUSL, academics not returning after postgraduate studies funded by ADB, replacement of much needed computer facilities that are outdated etc.

The OUSL has stepped now beyond its teaching task which claimed its attention at the beginning and is now seriously engaged in research and dissemination of knowledge. Since 2003 OUSL Annual Academic sessions have been started and international research session on ODL coincided with the OUSL’ 30th anniversary in 2010.

Furthermore, OUSL during this period co funded and organized many International workshops and conferences.
**Vision and mission of the OUSL**

Current vision of the OUSL is

“To be the premier Open Distance Learning Institution in Asia through excellence, efficiency and equity in lifelong learning”.

Based on this the OUSL Mission is as follows:

“to enhance access to high quality, affordable and relevant education through Open Distance Education and ensure lifelong learning opportunities to face challenge in a knowledge society” (Corporate Plan 2011-2016)

**1.3 Corporate planning procedures**

The current Corporate plan (2011 – 2016) is the third in a series from our first Corporate plan (2000- 2005). With the implementation of each corporate plan, OUSL gathered more knowledge to improve our plans, implement strategies and carry out appropriate actions plans.

The OUSL officially appointed a retired Emeritus Professor of the OUSL to draw up the Corporate plan and she was facilitated by a Senior Professor in the field of Management, who had experience in drawing up such plans. Before the corporate plan was drafted extensive consultations were made with staff in faculties, regional centres, administrative divisions, RES, CETMe, Operations and Information Technology divisions and students.

Faculty boards appointed corporate plan formulating committees and such committees had representatives from all departments. Similarly committees and groups of individuals were identified in other divisions and units. Pervious plans were reviewed and proposals for the new corporate plan were drafted. This activity was facilitated by our OUSL’s internal facilitator and the Vice-Chancellor. Sometimes the process was further supported by experts from other organizations who were invited to carry out presentations for staff on corporate planning and identifying goals.

Goals, objectives, strategies and action plans to implement strategies were identified and an extensive draft document was prepared by the external facilitator and was presented to the Senior Management, OUSL Senate and Council for further discussion and clarifications. After obtaining consensus from all staff and approval from the Senate and the Council, the bound volume of the Corporate plan (2011 – 2016) was printed and the Vice-Chancellor forwarded copies of the
corporate plan to all heads of departments and divisions, Directors of different units, Senate members and Council members requesting all to take appropriate action to implement action plans.

Unlike the previous two, the present corporate plan has the following additions:

- Most actions plans focus on outcomes and many action plans identified have well defined targets
- Corporate planning has also been based on a clear policy framework identified by the Vice-Chancellor and approved by the Council.
- Attempts have been made to identify financial implications of action plans.
- Key performance indicators which will be useful in monitoring the implementation of the corporate plan have been identified.

Over the years implementation of action plans have been monitored bi-annually by departments of study, faculties administrative units, and the final document has been submitted to the OUSL Council. The progress is reviewed by a sub committee of the Council and a feedback is given to the implementers at a special meeting with council members. Although these meetings were arranged sometime ago it has not happened in the very recent past due to lull period of academic activities we have been having within the last two years. But the university recognizes that it is a worthwhile exercise that needs to be continued since it increases the confidence of the staff on the system and it also provides a forum for discussion between university management directly with staff implementing actions plans.

1.4 Future Direction

- Strengthening the regional services for course delivery by providing more autonomy to sustain independently.
- All the courses will be delivered using blended format with considerable online component.
- Increase the internships for the undergraduates by strengthening the public-private partnerships ensuring 100% employability of OUSL graduates.
Supporting documents

- Enhancing local and international partnerships and collaborations for teaching, capacity building of staff and for research to achieve its vision.
2. Financial Resources and Management

2.1 Introduction

The available resources and their efficient use determine the developmental options of university. In Sri Lanka share of GDP allocation for higher education has been low and inadequate. Currently the OUSL is financed by the Ministry of Finance, through the ministry of Higher Education and the University Grants Commission based on discussion between these organizations.

Since OUSL is a national university 70% of its expenditure is financed by the Ministry of Finance, through the Ministry of Higher Education and the University of Grants Commission. It covers only the personal emoluments of the permanent staff. All other items of recurrent expenditure have to be met by income generated by the OUSL.

The remaining 30% is raised from:

- mainly by student fees
- sale of OUSL course materials
- application for study programmes
- interest received from loans and investments
- ancillary activities such as hiring of OUSL facilities
- service through CERC (Media productions by the CETMe, Printing assignments undertaken by the Press, services undertaken by laboratories, short term courses by faculties)
- research grants, grants from donor agencies for Infrastructure Development and Programme Development.

As stated in Corporate Plan (2011-2016), the current goal related to financial resources and management is as follows:

Goal 6: Enhance institutional capacity for resource generation to ensure financial sustainability.

Objective 6.4 Enhance financial self-reliance of the OUSL by increasing the share of generated funds and ensuring consistency of cash-flows.
2.2 Resource allocation procedures

The Annual Budget in any organization falls into two broad categories:

- **Capital Expenditure**: Capital Expenditure is met entirely by the government grant.
- **Recurrent Expenditure**: Recurrent Expenditure includes personal emoluments, travelling expenses, supplies, maintenance, contractual services, utilities, preparation and printing of course materials and preparation of Audio-visual Material, and other recurrent expenses.

All such monies are required to be paid in the University Fund and all monies are spent for the purpose for which they were allocated according to the approved budget.

The University at present has a policy of increasing its fees by 10% per annum, to match the general inflation of the Country. However, the OUSL finds difficult to meet the escalating prices of

- goods and services, such as electricity and other utilities including private security charges
- payments of visiting academic staff
- expenditure related to examinations
- other payments related to preventive maintenance including IT infrastructure and
- payments related to the maintenance of the RES.

Therefore, the university strongly encourages the academic departments and other divisions like Press and CETMe to generate funds.

2.3 Executive responsibilities

Funds are administered by the Bursar subject to the provisions of the Universities Act and its appropriate instruments and such directions as may be given by the Commission, the Council, the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar. Monthly Reports on Income and...
Expenditure and Quarterly Reports on Capital Expenditure are submitted to the Council and the University Grants Commission.

Annual Accounts and Annual Reports related to activities of the University are submitted to the Auditor General within two months of close of such accounts. The Auditor General’s Reports after the examination of the accounts are placed before the Council. The Council is required within a stipulated period to inform the Auditor General of the action taken or proposed to be taken with regard to matters raised by him in the Report.

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.

The University is also required to transmit the report to the University Grants Commission and the Minister with any comments made by the Council together with the Statement of Accounts to which the Report relates. The Minister will table the comments in Parliament before the end of the year succeeding the year to which these relate. The Vice-Chancellor and the Council are required to be present before the Parliamentary Committee on Public Enterprise (COPE) when the Auditor General’s Report is discussed to answer any question arising from the discussion.

2.4 Academic planning and resource allocation – Additional sources of finance

It was brought to the notice of the Senior Management Committee 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. One of the recommendations of the institutional review (2003), was to costs courses and, programmes and determine cost per Department and cost per Faculty. However, this has not been carried out yet. At present academic coordinators of the programmes calculate the cost per programme based on the guidelines and in certain cases like undergraduate and above are sent to UGC for approval.
Department/Faculty/Division requests for financial allocation for infrastructure development, stationary and other supplies, and special services from the university through finance and planning and development committees. Audit committee of the university oversees the effective use of resources with respect to university objectives.

The following measures have been taken to improve the existence financial situation at the OUSL and to enhance its productivity:

- Additional cadre positions have been created as Assistant Bursar in the finance division, in the press and regional centres by giving more autonomy to the finance division, Press and RES
- Increase the amount for approval Deans and Directors
- Increase the Petty cash allowance in the regional and study centres
- Steps have been taken to release Rs. 50,000.00 float for Regional and Study Centres to meet their utilities and urgent preventive maintenance activities.
- It is also being planned to introduce Debit/Credit cards for students with the negotiation of a Bank in order to facilitate the students.
- University is planning to develop the Regional Centres as profit centres by assigning delivery of courses to the staff in the RES under the supervision of the senior management.
- OMIS for staff pay roll, staff and visiting payments, student enrolments and all vouchers.
- The OUSL is assessing the financial viability of taking the ownership of the National Online Distance Education Services (NODES) to the OUSL to strengthen the delivery of online courses.

DEM Project provided financial assistance by providing computers for most of the staff and accessories to the division. Introduction of OMIS, streamline most of the financial functions. However, certain functions of the OMIS cannot provide the anticipated outputs.
2.5 Constraints

- There have been problems with the cash flow, which hinders the smooth functioning of the University.
- The stringent bureaucratic procedures laid down by the Government related to procurement contribute to the inability of procure goods and render services on time.
- Poor monitoring mechanism to monitor the expenditure related to courses against the budgets.
3. Research

3.1 Introduction

At the OUSL, research is necessarily two-fold; discipline-based research and ODL research. The former is essential for the academic development of individual staff members, and the latter is indispensable for improvement of the OUSL as an ODL system. Thus, the university has put in place mechanisms and procedures to support and promote both discipline-based and ODL research at all levels.

3.2 Setting university objectives and policy

The Mission statement of the OUSL continues to emphasize the importance of research, in both ODL/Institutional research and discipline-based, in the OUSL.

In the Corporate Plan 2006-2010,

“One mission is to enhance opportunities for life-long learning of adults through Open and Distance Learning and support excellence in research and scholarship”

One of the seven goals set by the OUSL in the Corporate Plan (2006-2010) is to “Enhance institutional capacity to achieve excellence in teaching/learning, research and scholarship” (Goal 4, Corporate Plan, 2006-2010).

Goal 2 of the current Corporate Plan (2011-2016) is completely dedicated to research emphasizing; “Be a centre of excellence in scholarship, research and innovation”. All the four objectives are related to research (2.1-2.4).

Two of the objectives clearly indicated the targets:

Objective 2.2: Ensure that academic staff present a minimum of one research communication/monograph/textbook/referred journal article per annum.

Objective 2.3: Ensure that Senior Lecturers/Professors publish at least one research article per annum in a refereed journal.

Academics are engaged in both discipline-based research and ODL research.
It is recognized that while ODL research is vital for an ODL institution like OUSL, to revise and improve the quality in development and delivery of courses and study programmes and the output, its graduates, discipline-based research is important for the OUSL in terms of overall recognition among local and international higher education institutions as well as the individual academic in his/her career progression in the discipline.

Equal recognition is given to both in terms of confirmation and promotion, however, the registration path for carrying out postgraduate studies on ODL is not clear.

The OUSL Senate has identified research areas based on national research priorities including OUSL research priorities. This includes both discipline-based and ODL research areas.

Research project forms an integral part of some undergraduate, certificate and diploma level programmes; students carry out research projects which are in most instances a compulsory activity for completion of the final awards (e.g. in Engineering Technology, Certificate courses in Wildlife and Environmental Science). Often some of these research projects were upgraded/extended to research investigations for M.Phil. and Ph.D.

**ODL Research**

The official policy statement on Distance Education research adopted by the Senate and the Council in 1997 is as follows;

"The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) is committed to undertake continuing research on distance education to achieve its mission of increasing access to and success in adult learning at university level and to enhance the quality of equal opportunities for adult Sri Lankans. Distance Education research is an indispensable tool in the OUSL’ efforts towards excellence in teaching and scholarship while ensuring social equity".

Today, ODL embraces Open Learning, Distance Education, Flexible Learning and Online Learning and e-learning (Commonwealth of Learning website – www. col.org). In this context the term ODL is used instead of Distance Education.
A special UNESCO/COL Chair for ODL was created in March 2010. The objective here was to create a research culture, promote publications and carry out at least three major studies each year.

So far over 139 studies on ODL have been carried out since 2003 by academic staff of faculties.

Research has been conducted with OUSL graduates from time to time. However, from 2009 onwards, the findings of the graduates who passed out during the period of 2009-11 has been published for three consecutive years.

**Postgraduate Research**

The number of students seeking training leading to research degrees has increased steadily and the prospects look promising. With more academic staff securing research grants from outside agencies (National Science Foundation, National Research Council, and industry) and some postgraduate students who are academic staff members themselves applying for funds from university and UGC, there is an environment conducive for research.

Link programs with industry such as, Link Natural Products and other research institutes like the Institute of Fundamental Studies, are established for training of postgraduate students in research with the initiatives taken by the academics themselves.

The quality of research carried out by postgraduate students under the supervision of senior academic is assured by the University Research Committee which monitors the research activities. The University Research Committee derives membership from the Faculty Research Committees and receives submissions from the latter and the former recommends to the Senate admission of students to research degree (M.Phil. and Ph.D.) programmes, the titles of their dissertations/theses, and the supervisors to be appointed.

The postgraduate students, who are provisionally registered for degrees, are required to make a successful presentation of the research proposal after six months to the Faculty for the confirmation of candidature. The progress of research degree
students is regularly monitored by the Faculty Research Committees which then reports to the University Research Committee.

The Rules and Regulations governing the award of M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees prescribe the eligibility, award criteria and other requirements related to these degrees.

In the case of academic staff proceeding to universities overseas for their postgraduate qualifications, the Probationary Study Leave Committee of the University recommends/grants approval of study leave and monitors progress of their research work. Several academic staff members were given research attachments both locally and overseas on split-site assignments by ADB-DEMP funds and they have joined the fold.

Arising out of postgraduate studies two applications on cost effective hydroponic had been patented by one academic staff member and was presented at a seminar on research commercialization of research in universities, projects and innovations in November 2011.

**Discipline-based Research**

With the improvement in research infra-structure and enhancement of capacity of staff with the ADB-DEMP in 2003-2009, has shown a tremendous increase in research involvement in terms of the number of staff involved in research, number of research grants attracted by them, number of students engaged in research and the number of publications including those in refereed journals. The period from 2003-2012 has seen about a three-fold increase in research output.

The period under review has seen a growth in the number of inter-departmental, inter-faculty and inter-university research studies being initiated and completed. Among the funding organizations are ADB – DEM Project, COL, National Science Foundation (NSF), National Research Council (NRC).
International collaboration with University of Lund, Sweden on microfinance for poverty alleviation in partnership with the development agencies with Sarvodaya and Development Finance institutions countrywide. This programme paved the way for a major educational initiative in training personnel for microfinance administration in collaboration with Central Bank and COL.

3.3 Research centres or units

Since 1994, the Research Cell of the Educational Technology Division (now CETMe) has been involved in ODL research with limited human and infrastructure facilities. Presently, the Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU) of OUSL has also proposed to strengthen this research cell for institutional research under the direct leadership of the Academic Head of Educational Technology in CETMe.

3.4 Provision of support for staff

Resources

Research, in general, and discipline-based type in particular, received a boost from the ADB-DEMP project from 2003 to 2009. It provided considerable financial support for research carried out by staff in terms of funds for postgraduate research and for discipline-based research. All departments of Faculties of Natural Sciences and Engineering Technology received advanced research laboratories, up-to-date laboratory equipment for research and computers and peripherals. These laboratory facilities are being used by staff and postgraduate/undergraduate students they supervise.

The OUSL in its futuristic approach allocates generous funds for research annually from its generated income; this is in addition to what it receives from the UGC. The funds are allocated to the four Faculties which in turn disburse their share to staff members. Applications are received along with project proposals from the academics and the proposals are evaluated by either internal or external subject specialists before the grant is made available. The allocation of funds for research has increased, yet the number of applications has risen as well.
The University Research Committee, formerly known as Higher Degrees Research Committee, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor performs the function of recommending to the Senate M.Phil. and Ph.D. registration, monitoring the progress of students so registered, allocating funds for Faculty research, staff development activities and short travel grants for attending conferences, thus supporting research among both staff and students.

The Faculty Research Committees that are established in all four faculties carry out activities adhering to the policies and guidelines laid down by the University Research Committee. They are responsible for recommending to the University Research Committee registration of students, some of whom are our own academic staff for M.Phil. and Ph.D., recommending funds for research carried out by staff and monitoring such research.

**Travel Grants for Research**

The academic staff is encouraged to attend conferences overseas by making available a modest travel grant up to Rs. 40,000.00 every five years. They are also supported by way of payment up to Rs. 10,000.00 in part of fee for publication of work in reputed peer-reviewed journals. Though the five year gap is too long a wait for an active researcher, this gives an opportunity for a newly recruited staff member to attend the conference and interact with experts and peers in the field.

The staff members also seek funding from other sources such as the National Science Foundation (NSF). Furthermore, academic staff members are encouraged to participate in local conferences and workshops by granting registration fee.

**Research allowance**

The introduction of a research allowance to academic staff in 2012 has encouraged research in the university as evident in the marked increase in the number of research publications since 2011 with almost 100% of the academic staff being involved in research.
Recently the Faculty Research Committees have taken a new responsibility wherein they peruse applications from academic staff for the research allowance, according to the guidelines laid down by the OUSL and Ministry of Higher Education recommending payment.

Training

The Staff Development Centre (SDC) periodically provides training for academic staff on Research Methodology in both ODL and discipline-based research, in areas such as, Writing Project Proposals, Research methodology, Statistics for social sciences and scientific research, etc. The research methodology is a compulsory module in the Certificate in Teaching Higher Education (CTHE) for lecturer probationary. The university provides a substantial allocation of funds to conduct these training sessions.

Initiatives have been taken to support the junior staff by involving them in the research teams under the supervision of the lead researcher.

Research Awards

Since the Senate approval in 2003 of the proposal to institute a Research Awards Scheme to promote research activities of OUSL staff, Senate-appointed Panels have been involved in the process of evaluating the research work submitted by academics of respective Faculties. These Research Awards carry a certificate and prize money and have been formally presented to the recipients at the OUSL Annual Academic Sessions since November, 2003.

In addition to these awards, the OUSL academic staff has also received many prestigious research awards such as the Presidential Awards for Research and the Committee for Vice-Chancellors and Directors (CVCD) Excellence Award for the Most Outstanding Researcher in Physical Sciences in 2013.

3.5 Completion of projects and external recognition

From more than two decades OUSL has shown a remarkable improvement in research output and consequently in dissemination of research findings.
There are three journals published in the OUSL:

- Journal of the Engineering Research Unit (ERU) published since 1983 has been replaced by Journal of Engineering and Technology since 2013.

- OUSL Journal (ODL Research) since 1997. It is a refereed journal with a Senate-appointed Editorial Board and a Panel of Reviewers who select articles for publication.


The OUSL Annual Academic Sessions have been held since September, 2003 and the extended abstracts are published in a bound volume with ISBN. The number of presentations has risen during this 9 year period, having a total of 95 abstracts in 2011 and 69 abstracts in 2012.

Both ODL and discipline-based research studies completed and in progress, are documented in Annual Reports.

### 3.6 Monitoring and evaluation

Findings of research are disseminated through presentations at research seminars for discussion by Faculty for giving constructive feedback for progress monitoring. In the Faculty of Natural Sciences, the recipients of grants from the Faculty Research Funds are required to submit a report and make a presentation on the work completed.

Most of the findings of the ODL research related to teaching and learning are incorporated when revising course materials and delivery of the instruction.
3.7 Constraints

- The constraints that challenge the academic staff are related to the heavy work-load which is innate to the OUSL system. The academic staff of the OUSL are burdened with delivery of courses (in addition to the course design and development), orientation, academic counseling and registration of students.

- The situation is acute in departments which offer a large number of courses and where there is a shortage of academic staff. This problem will be somewhat alleviated if the delivery of courses/programmes be handed over/franchised to external staff; however, the even greater challenge is to find suitable external (Visiting) staff with adequate educational qualifications and competency in ODL methodology. Some Faculties have managed to overcome this challenge extensively by recruiting Visiting staff from the regions and giving them the necessary training. They have retained a pool of staff in the regions to provide the required services.

- The academic staff newly recruited at both senior and junior levels to the OUSL need to be trained in ODL research. Being devoid of such training the academic staff members tend to drift away from ODL research and find it more convenient to carry out discipline-based research which is more familiar to most.

- Often funds allocated by the University for Faculty research are not effectively utilized in all faculties. This arises out of the delays in procurement of instruments and consumables. These delays prevent the grantee from acquiring physical resources on time as well as depriving another from gaining access to an increased amount of funding and thereby completing the work, because the under-utilized funds will become known only towards the end of the calendar year.

- Importance of ODL research for the development of the OUSL is not as focused as it should be.

- The OUSL lacks an Ethics Committee for research.

- The delay to implement recommendations from research findings to improve the system greatly discourages research.
4. Quality Management and Administration

4.1 Introduction

This section specifically addresses the quality aspects of administrative and management as there is another specific section dealing with the quality assurance related to academic standards of courses and awards.

Quality Management is a systematic and organised approach to processing information and ensuring quality outcomes [Commonwealth of Learning Review and Implementation Model (COL-RIM), 2010, pg. 36].

In order to work towards quality management in any institution, it should include all the activities that organizations use to direct, control, and coordinate quality. These activities include formulating a quality policy and setting quality objectives. They also include quality planning, quality control, quality assurance, and quality improvement (Praxiom Research Group Limited, 2001, pg.13).

Accordingly quality management can be broadly categorized into three areas:

- formulating quality policies and setting quality objectives
- implementing these policies and
- monitoring of the effectiveness of these quality policies, objectives, process and procedures with respect to expected outcomes.

The mandate of the university can be clearly highlighted by its mission statement in the current corporate plan (2011-2016), emphasizing its fullest dedication towards quality of the education offered through Open and Distance Learning (ODL).

*to enhance access to high quality, affordable and relevant education through Open Distance Education and ensure life-long learning opportunities to face challenges in a knowledge society* 

(Corporate Plan 2011-2016, pg. 3).
Furthermore, to reach its mission, three out of seven goals of the corporate plan are directly related to quality management and administration.

Goal 1 – Be the lead institution in Asia providing high quality and relevant education through open and distance learning.

Goal 3 – Ensure quality and timeliness in the provision of open and distance teaching and learner support services.

Goal 5 – Enhance institutional capacity to achieve efficiency and effectiveness in all operations.

The next section will discuss the major areas in detail.

4.2 University quality strategy

Objectives

To achieve above three Goals (1, 3 and 5), two objectives (1.1, and 1.2) and two strategies (1.1.1 and 1.2.1) were specifically devoted to quality in Goal 1 and all five objectives are related to quality in Goal 3. In addition, Goal 5 is related to enhance institutional capacity by recruiting and retaining qualified staff (objective 5.1), strengthen infrastructure facilities by utilizing the expertise of the academic staff of the Faculty of Engineering (objective 5.2) and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of all operations through the use of the Open University Management Information System (OMIS) – (objective 5.4).

Procedures

Since its inception, the OUSL has developed detailed by-laws, procedural manuals, schemes, and standards to cover most of its activities with a view to standardizing matters. The established procedures to maintain the quality standards of all operations in the university are given below:

- Procedure for planning activities for all the study programs of the OUSL (Operational plan) – relevant academic and administrative staff meet and plan the operational schedule of the study programmes annually.
Procedure for introducing new programmes by getting approval by the faculty, curriculum programme development committee and by-laws committee, the Senate and the Council.

- Procedure for course design and development (Print and Online)
  - Senate approved mechanism for course design and development
  - Manuals (Bridging the gap and House Style) to facilitate the course design and development process
  - Standard templates for print and online to maintain the standards across faculties
  - Procedure for printing manuscripts using the Senate approved QA checklist by the representative of the IQAU, Head of the relevant Department, Dean and the Director/Operations.

- Procedure for conduct of examination according to the Senate approved Procedural Manual.
- Procedures for student enrollment starting from advertising and student registration.
- Procedures for learner support - There are procedures and manuals specific to the respective faculties on academic counselling, day schools, etc.
- Procedures for dissemination of research at the annual academic sessions.
- Procedures for recognition of excellence in teaching and learning and research by awarding annual awards.

Also, steps have been taken to streamline procedures for purchasing materials, printing textbooks, delivery of study programmes including days schools, laboratory sessions, field visits etc. using infrastructure facilities at the regional and study Centres. Almost all the procedures have been streamlined using the OMIS from 2009 namely parallel online registration at different centres, online application, communication related to examination matters, MyOUSL for students to view course information, all payments,
reservation of facilities for academic activities at CRC and maintaining student and staff databases.

Council approval was granted to obtain the services of the Hatton National Bank to provide “Online payment gateway” facility for our students to make their payments online, using credit/debit cards.

Also, prospective students can submit their Applications online, using this facility. The facility will be made available; no sooner the Treasury gives its consent.

In addition, the OUSL has also set up different Units within the OUSL to regularize different aspects such as training and retraining academic and non-academic staff members by the Staff Development Centre (SDC) and providing career advice, guidance on obtaining career advancement or career opportunities for OUSL students and training them at various areas including soft skills by the Career Guidance Unit.

The CETMe (earlier Educational Technology Division) was responsible for training and retraining academic staff members on ODL methodologies, writing course materials, producing audio-visual materials and introducing new technologies including online learning since 1990s. With the establishment of SDC in all national universities in 2002, staff training; both for academic and non-academic staff is carried out by the SDC. However, capacity building of academic staff related to Educational Technology is still carried out by the CETMe with collaboration with the SDC.

**Monitoring and review**

At the apex level is the **University Council** chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, which is responsible for its overall management. The Council of the OUSL consists of eight OUSL members and thirteen outside members which include the Secretary to the Ministry of Higher Education or his nominee, nominee of CVCD, Secretary to Ministry in charge of the subject of Media (Mass communication) or the nominee of such Secretary and 8 others appointed by the UGC from among persons who have rendered distinguished service in educational, professional, commercial, industrial, scientific or administrative spheres.
The OUSL has its academic and administrative arms, which are responsible for quality management and administration. The overall responsibility for ‘quality assurance and management’ of academic programmes rests with the University Senate.

In the context of ODL where programme delivery and administration play a significant role, there is a greater demand for ‘administrative and service quality’ improvements. This is something unique to ‘ODL institutions’ and hence it differentiates the OUSL from the other Conventional Universities.

‘A Committee Structure’ is in place where different committees meet regularly to monitor and evaluate academic and administrative operations of the University. Having considered the diverse needs related to administration and management of the OUSL, there are two Boards of Study; RES and CETMe and IT and Operations Divisions related to unique functions of the OUSL. OUSL Senate is also responsible for quality assurance of these boards and divisions.

Academic responsibilities are finally decentralized to the Faculties, the Faculty Boards are operationally responsible and accountable for ensuring quality at the lowest levels. The OUSL has four faculties each of which are headed by a Dean of Faculty. Within this structure the Faculties are conceived as the main building blocks of planning, implementation and monitoring of academic activities and administration.

Apart from the academic departments, there are other divisions/units that are under the guidance of the Registrar of the University. The overall management quality of the OUSL is excessively dependent on the capacity and efficacy of these divisions. The Registrar of the University manages administrative functions including student affairs, finances, examination, human resources and Press.

It also has a number of directors overseeing the regional administration, educational technology and media, operations, information technology, staff development activities, career guidance and public relations.
Course development committees have been established at departmental, faculty and university level to oversee the development of course materials (print) since 1996, before establishing QA committee. **University Course Development Committee** is the apex committee which is responsible for formulating guidelines, QA mechanisms and templates necessary for course design and development with respect to all media (print and online). **Faculty Course Development Committees** (FCDC) and **Departmental** representative along with the Head of the department are responsible for monitoring course design and development and quality assurance at the faculty and departmental level respectively. The **Course Teams** appointed by the academic departments are accountable for maintaining the standards of the respective courses.

The Chair of the FCDC reports the progress at the Faculty Boards. The representative of the respective department or Chair of the relevant course team ensures the standards of the course material by going through the QA checklist before sending the manuscript to the press for printing.

UCDC has reviewed the earlier House Style (1997) and incorporated the suggestions from all the FCDC and published the new version of the House Style in 2012.

In order to formulate institutional guidelines, to adopt national and international guidelines and, to ensure and monitor quality, on the recommendation of the UGC Quality Assurance Accreditation Council (QAAC), **QA committee** was formed in 2004 comprising of five members each representing one faculty and one from Educational Technology.

Having considered the unique functionality of the OUSL, the QA committee was expanded further to represent administrative divisions in 2012. This new committee comprising the Chairperson, Vice-Chancellor, Deans, Directors of PGIE, CETMe and RES, Registrar, Bursar and Faculty Representatives - to formulate and adopt accepted guidelines and to ensure overall quality of the university. In addition, the initiatives have taken place to establish “quality cells” in the administrative divisions of the OUSL.
Faculty QA sub-committees (FCDC) comprising Heads of Departments and other members have been formulated in each of the four faculties to ensure the implementation of quality mechanisms. The Monitoring of QA activities is carried out at three levels; at Senate, Faculty Boards, and Faculty QA Committees. At the Senate and Faculty Boards QA is taken up monthly as an Agenda item.

In order to address issues pertaining to administrative and service quality, the IQAU has developed an action plan and strategies based on the recommendations made by Commonwealth of Learning Review and Implementation Model (COL – RIM) in their Verification Report 2011 for the OUSL. The Strategies have been broadly categorized as major themes which are common across faculties: Communication, Needs Orientation, Innovation, Capacity Building and Quality Management.

Hence, the OUSL has taken efforts to create ‘a culture of quality improvement and management’, which permeate all levels including the academic and administrative leadership of the University. It has strengthened quality procedures and monitoring mechanisms, which now cut across functional departments and divisions as given in Table 1 (Appendix III).

### 4.3 Quality management

**Definition of responsibilities**

DVC has been assigned additional responsibilities of all operational activities including monitoring and implementation of RES, Operational Division, Library, Information Technology Division and CETMe in addition to student related activities.

The Senate of the OUSL after prolonged deliberations have agreed to accept a document outlining the norms for teachers and was implemented in 2010. It covers a whole range of activities including teaching, research, community and national service obligations of the teachers. Self evaluation reports of academic staff are based on this document. Monitoring is carried out by the respective heads and the dean of the faculty.
Same UGC guidelines and procedures are adhered to when duties and responsibilities are drafted for Administrative and Non-academic staff.

Director/Staff Development Centre is responsible for conducting capacity building workshop for academic, administrative and non-academic staff members of the OUSL.

Director/Career Guidance unit (CGU) is responsible for organizing workshop for OUSL students on soft skills. Senate recently approved the zero credit course on “Soft skills for personality development” which will be offered in collaboration with the faculty of Eng. Technology for which HETC funding is available.

**Financial and related resource management in support of academic quality**

Financial allocations are made for improvement of academic quality of study programmes annually. Recently allocation from the generated income, allocations were made to staff development, staff research activities and promotional activities mainly for the purpose of enhancing academic quality of the OUSL. In addition Postgraduate Research Fund for probationary lecturers and incentive schemes for the faculty and RES centres have been initiated.

The DEM Project funded by the ADB is regarded as one of the most important initiative taken in recent times towards improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the OUSL. The OUSL has expanded tremendously in relation to infrastructure, capacity building of all staff academic, administrative and non-academic, streamlining of the administrative and financial processes using OMIS.

The importance of income generation is clearly illustrated in Goal 6 of the Corporate Plan 2011-2016.

In order to generate a much higher proportion of its expenditure, an initiative has been taken to institute ‘strategic business units’ such as CETMe and the Press to “guarantee financial sustainability and the quality parameters of the university” (Corporate Plan 2011-2016, pg. 12).
Activities of these two units have been further streamlined to improve the efficiency and the productivity since 2003.

The Consultancy and External Resource Centre (CERC) which was established to facilitate the university resource generating activities and to monitor those activities. During this period, mechanism for offering short courses and certificate courses were proposed and implemented by CRC. 70% of the earnings are given to the respective departments and divisions to strengthen their capacity to acquire services and procure items subject to financial regulations, without having to wait for funding from traditional sources which are fast depleting.

**Reporting and accountability arrangements**

The OUSL while considering quality of management and administration as a priority aspect of the teaching and learning has concentrated on a number of spheres in which quality improvements would have a direct impact on the fitness of its products and services in the eyes of our clientele. These areas include auxiliary services such as operations, library, regional administration, student affairs, educational technology, finances, information systems and human resource development. Each of the above activities is performed by a separate unit and under the guidance of a Head of Division/unit. These functions are integrally connected with the quality of services offered by the OUSL, and therefore cross-functional linkages are absolutely necessary to assure quality standards. It is for this that a system of Council or Senate appointed Committees and Sub committees chaired by the Vice-Chancellor/Deputy Vice-Chancellor is established to coordinate, document, and monitor activities of these Departments.

**4.4 Constraints**

There were twelve recommendations stated in the institutional review report (2004) and two have been implemented and others have been partly addressed. Some of the recommendations did not materialize due to limitations and restrictions in financial and human resources which are beyond the control of the university. Issues arising from those not addressed have been stated under constraints.
• The OUSL is governed by the **rules, regulations, and policies** formulated and adopted by the UGC of Sri Lanka. A number of these regulations and rules are based on the needs of the conventional university system and hence prevent the OUSL from exercising its authority to cater to its own unique demands. A case in point is the scheme of staff recruitment and promotion. The key permanent cadre positions of the OUSL such as Director RES, Director CETMe, Director Operations and Director Public Relations are vacant for **more than 10 years**. Most of the Regional and Study Centres are headed by temporary or contract staff which severely affects the expansion of the centres and the delivery of quality study programmes.

• The current **administrative structure** which is based on the conventional system is not appropriate for management of ODL. It has contributed to placing an undue burden of administrative work on the academic staff which in turn affects the retention of them in the system. The service delivery requirements of the distance mode with national level access to the student population demand a different approach. Recommendations of the institutional review report of 2004 also emphasized the importance of major structural changes related RES, Operations and Information Technology. In addition re-organisation of administrative and financial division which are similar to the conventional universities (Institutional review report, 2004, 16-17). However, the OUSL is still functioning under these restrictions.

• **Allocation of Cadre positions** by the UGC does not reflect or cater to the needs and realities of work at OUSL. Cadre approved by the UGC does not keep pace with the diversity of the study programmes, the large number of students and the expansion of the regional/study centres. Most of the regional and study centres are understaffed, under funded and headed by temporary or contract personnel due to the lack of cadre positions. Even CETMe, IT, Operations as well as academic divisions are understaffed and present staff are heavily loaded with work. It has severely hampered the progress of the university and in turn severely affects the quality of study programmes. In spite of the efforts taken on the part of the OUSL to achieve the goals set out in the Corporate Plan for the next five years, if additional cadre is not provided by the...
UGC to meet the expected expansion, it will be very difficult to realize the set goals substantially.

- **Absence of an official policy related to ODL at the UGC** to provide appropriate financial support for the multifaceted and complex ODL institution like OUSL.

- **Official budgetary restrictions imposed on spending** with respect to all activities. These constraints have had a damaging impact on the OUSL’s ability to provide its services and also to improve the quality of overall management. One of the recommendations of the Institutional Review 2004 also stressed that financial and administrative authority should be given to the OUSL “enabling it to deliver the services expected more effectively” (Institutional review report, 2004, 16).

- Another area of concern has been the **politicisation of student and staff activities**, which interferes with improvement of accountability, and productivity.

- There are **delays in implementing** external review recommendations of the Institutional Review and other recommendations due to poor commitment of some members of staff and this interferes with the overall quality of the institution.
5 Quality Assurance (QA)

5.1 Introduction

QA refers to the processes and procedures that systematically monitor different aspects of a service, process or facility to detect, correct and ensure that quality standards are being met. In terms of the activities of the OUSL, QA 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 effectiveness, maintain standards and improve the quality of learning among the learners in order to achieve the desired objectives for which the OUSL was established.

The OUSL is totally committed to assure quality in all its activities and it is enshrined in its Corporate Plan (2011-2016). The following five goals out of seven goals explicitly express the dedication of the University to QA.

Goal 1: Be the lead institution in Asia providing high quality and relevant education through open and distance learning.

Goal 3: Ensure quality and timeliness in the provision of open and distance teaching and learner support services.

Goal 5: Enhance institutional capacity of achieving efficiency and effectiveness in all operations.

Goal 6: Enhance institutional capacity for resource generation to ensure financial sustainability.

Goal 7: Enhance the physical environment to create a conducive ambience in the university.

Goal 1, 3 and 5 are directly related to QA and Goal 6 and 7 are indirectly related but have a very strong impact on QA as financial stability and conducive environment for learning are two very crucial quality indicators.

From its inception in 1980, modelled on the organizational and operational characteristics of the Open University of the United Kingdom, OUSL has adopted appropriate procedures and practices to ensure quality in its various aspects of the system.
The quality assurance mechanisms were further enhanced and refined through the DfID Project 1995-1998 on “Enhancing Distance Education at OUSL”. Further the Institutional Review/Subject Reviews/ Library review conducted by the UGC as well as the COL-RIM review conducted by COL and the Institutional review based on ODL framework, enabled OUSL to get new useful inputs and facilitated it to modify and transform its QA processes.

5.2 Academic Standards of Programmes and Awards

Entry Qualifications and Admission of Students

Unlike in conventional universities, the OUSL adopts flexibility in admission criteria in line with its Vision and Mission and opening up avenues by removing barriers of age and educational qualifications. However, the OUSL is strictly adhering to the Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework of the UGC and maintaining the quality standard of its study programmes.

Entry qualifications and other requirements are documented in Rules and Regulations for each programme of study. These are drawn up based on guidelines already set for offering programmes of study at OUSL in By law No 1.

The University also recognizes previous qualifications/work experience and offer appropriate credit exemptions or credit transfers as prescribed by the respective Faculty Boards through faculty exemption committees, Curriculum and Programme Development Committee (CPD) and approved by the Senate. Such lateral entry facility to programmes of study if required is incorporated in the Rules and Regulations of a programme of study and leads to providing career advancement for mostly employed students.

Even though OUSL adopts flexibility in admission criteria (not limiting to A/Level results and Z scores) all such admission criteria identified as suitable by the faculties and academic departments need to be incorporated in a memo and submitted by the respective departments for faculty approval. Then the approved document forwards to the CPD to evaluate the curriculum and to the By Laws Committee for assess the rules and regulations for the respective study programme.
Then the approved document along with rules and regulations forwards to the OUSL Senate for approval and lastly for the approval from the Council. The process of admitting the students begins only after the approval is sought from the Council.

Deputy Registrar of the University is the custodian of Rules and Regulations for programmes of study approved by the OUSL Council and these copies are available in the Academic Division and in the OUSL Central Library.

Admission to programmes is announced well in advance through advertisement in the National Press with a set deadline. Presently the home page of OUSL website displays information about programmes of study for which applications are being called.

Application forms and Prospectus/Brochures/Student Guide Books with information in clear terms on admission criteria, study system and time requirements, student support services, assessments and examination etc. are made available in all the centres of the University.

The OUSL uses a single application format for all OUSL study programmes. This has streamlined entry of student information and has made the process less of a burden. It has also made possible for regional officers to enter student information at their centres rather than operating at the central campus.

**Regulatory Framework**

The same regulatory framework used by the conventional universities, is used for maintaining academic standards of courses and study programmes. The Council, Senate and the four Faculty Boards along with number of sub-committees are responsible for this.

Most of the recommendations of the Senate are based on the reports originating from the Faculty Boards which in turn are deliberations from their Sub-Committees such as, Faculty advisory committees, Exemption Committee, Faculty Information Technology Committee, Faculty Course Development Committee, Faculty Research Committee, Faculty ET Committee, Registration Committee and Bursary Committee.
Faculty Boards implement and regulate all academic activities such as course/programme development, teaching, examinations as well as student and staff research.

**Approval of New programmes / revision of existing programmes**

The approval of new programmes will follow the same procedure as stated above, i.e. a memo which is first submitted at the relevant Faculty by the relevant Head of Department and the approved document is sent to the Curriculum and Programme Development Committee, By Laws Committee and then to the OUSL Senate, the Council.

The OUSL follows the general guidelines formulated by the UGC and sends its proposals to get the approval for introduction of new degree programmes and postgraduate programmes on the basis of a needs assessment.

A strong justification for the introduction of the new course/s will be expected by the higher authorities for giving approval. The basic features of course validation and approval process remain unchanged for some time at the OUSL.

Revisions to existing programmes have been practiced in most faculties to incorporate new information to courses of the programme or restructure programmes to suit the changing needs and expectations of OUSL’s learners based on the feedback. The procedure for approval for the revised / restructured programmes followed by Faculties is similar to those set for introduction of new programmes of study.

**Monitoring, Evaluation and Review**

Monitoring, evaluation and review of courses and study programmes are basically the responsibility of the academic departments. Through regular departmental staff meetings, Faculty Advisory Board meetings and Faculty Board meetings, the implementation of programmes and courses are monitored, evaluated and reviewed. The Senate and the Council have their turn to scrutinize when the results are submitted for awards.
The OUSL develops self study learning material considering the needs of its learners. Such course material development is monitored by the Chair of the respective Course Team appointed by the relevant Department. The departmental representatives of the Faculty QA committee scrutinize the final manuscripts to check whether it is designed and developed according to the senate approved manuals ‘Bridging the Gap’; the manual for writing effective self-instructional materials and OUSL ‘House Style’, manual for formatting the manuscripts. The above procedure existed since 1995 and further strengthened by streamlining the procedure and introducing the QA mechanism for print and online. Review of online material is carried out by academic members of CETMe before delivery of courses through NODES to learners and the latter was introduced during the capacity enhancement project of the ADB-DEMP that spanned from 2003-2009.

Feedback from learners is also obtained on course contents, delivery methods, assessments etc. by course coorodinators and QA representatives in academic departments. However, analysis of such data where large numbers of students are involved take time to complete as academic staff are heavily involved in routine academic and administrative work. The findings of these feedback constitute an integral part of course revision which takes place from time to time in all programmes of study.

External reviews of two study programmes, i.e. Master of Arts in Teacher Education and Bachelor of Science programmes, took place during the review period based on the Quality Assurance Toolkit prepared for Distance Higher Education Institutions and Programmes under the ADB/DEM Project. Some of the major recommendations were implemented in both programmes. Consistency in some practices was not visible among departments.

Further all subjects review were conducted by UGC-QAAC and the library review was completed. Many reviews have satisfactory or good indicators according to the evaluation teams. Most of the recommendations are already implemented.
Department of Social Studies was successful in obtaining a competitive grant from HETC, to modernize and revise the BA in Social Sciences integrating interdisciplinary subjects and ICT and communication skills to promote employability among OUSL arts graduates.

In addition to these external reviews, Departments / Faculties continuously improve their study programmes by conducting internal reviews. Faculty of Education completed course revision of PGDE programme in 2011, and has commenced course revision of MA in Teacher Education and Master of Education Programmes in 2012. Faculty of Natural Sciences has commenced course revision of B.Sc programme in December, 2011.

**Student Assessment**

It is integral to every teaching and learning process to include formative, diagnostic and summative Assessments.

In view of this, the OUSL adopts continuous assignments/assessments as formative assessments and a minimum continuous assessment mark is required by students to obtain ‘eligibility’ to sit the final examination in a particular course.

Senate ensures that students are assessed fairly and equitably in all Faculties/Departments and a common approach is adopted for approval of examiners for continuous assessments, final examination and for any selection test held by the university by the Senate in every programme of study.

Student assessments are carried out simultaneously in many regional and study centres of OUSL. In order to maintain standards and uniformity external supervisors are recruited when required and regional centre staff carry out training programmes for these external supervisors based on the guidelines in the procedural manual.

Similarly, when large numbers of answer scripts needs to be assessed, OUSL engages the services of external examiners and clear and comprehensive briefing workshops or conference marking procedures are followed.
Use of External Examiners

There are effective university procedures for appointment of examiners, supervisors and invigilators. External examiners are appointed as moderators for all final examination question papers and as second marking examiners for courses at level 6 and upwards and for post-graduate degree courses.

Both internal and external examiners are appointed for each course by the relevant Faculty Board and approved by the Senate and Council as laid down in the Manual of Procedure for Continuous Assessment and Final Examination. Detailed guidelines are provided to all external examiners which clearly state the expected responses to questions, the range of acceptable solutions, and how marks/grades are to be awarded.

Postgraduate students and Research students

Postgraduate (for Masters degree programmes) and research students (MPhil and PhD) are also admitted regularly through approved procedures. Postgraduate students and research students are registered only in the Nawala central campus. Research students are admitted on the recommendations of the OUSL Research Committee and with the approval of the Senate. The performance of such students is regularly monitored by the Research Committee. In most cases, the research output is evaluated by a foreign examiner.

5.2 Staffing

Appointments

All appointments, confirmation and promotion conform to the national policies and made in accordance with schemes of recruitment as prescribed by the University Act and by the rules made by the University Grants Commission. Any variation from such schemes is made with prior written approval of the UGC. A copy of the University Establishment Code which prescribes these has been made available at the offices of the Deans, Registrar, Bursar and Heads of the relevant Units in the Administrative sector, so that all staff are informed of them. However, most staff are not familiar with the provisions.
**Induction and Probation**

Human resource is the most important asset of the OUSL and the OUSL uses a combination of incentives and training to develop the quality of its staff. Staff Orientation workshops are conducted by the SDC of the OUSL for all staff periodically. These workshops give training and awareness on the unique characteristic features and practices of the OUSL as an ODL Institution.

Additionally a Lecturer (Probationary) is required to complete 24 weeks capacity building Certificate Course on Teaching in Higher Education (CTHE), within a period of one year from the date of first appointment as a pre-requisite for study leave and confirmation in the post.

**Staff Development**

The differences in teaching methodology and the way curriculum is presented in the form of course material in ODL system demands different roles from the teaching staff such as planners, curriculum developers, writers, editors, script writers, evaluators, monitors, tutors, co-ordinators, trainers, demonstrators, managers, researchers, reviewers, supervisors, team leaders, etc.

With the latest development of ICT and Online learning the role of teachers will further be revolutionized. Various training programmes are conducted by the SDC and the CETMe to fill the gap between the existing skills of the human resources of the OUSL and the required skills to enhance the capacity of the university.

Having considered the multi-faceted roles of the academic staff of the OUSL, the work norms have been formulated and approved by the Senate.

Visiting Academic Staff are regularly exposed to briefing/training sessions in the various aspects of ODL. Some of the Faculties have made it compulsory that visiting academic staff attend their training/briefing sessions to continue their service to OUSL.
The University conscientiously support in full or in part training, study visits, attendance at conferences and seminars both in Sri Lanka and abroad. Identification of individual needs of staff for updating and skills enhancement as well as institution-wide requirement is the responsibility of the head of the relevant unit. University support towards course fee and duty leave is available for all non-academic staff up to two programmes of study at an institution approved by the University.

**Recognition and Reward**

Like all other universities long service and meritorious award for all staff at the end of 10, 25, 30 and 40 years of university service stipulated by the UGC guidelines.

Various awards schemes have been initiated in 2003 in various areas such as discipline-based and ODL research to encourage the academic staff. Later, awards for video production, interactive multimedia and online production have been added to the awards list. At present, performance-based incentive scheme to all academic and non-academic staff is being considered by the Faculties.

**5.3 Communication Process**

**Informal and Formal Mechanisms**

Effective communication and information is imperative in the OUSL because the student population is diverse and many of them may visit the premises only occasionally. In addition, OUSL is heavily rely on the regional and visiting staff. Thus there are a number of mechanisms at OUSL which provide communication channels for students and staff. These include verbal (formal and informal), documentary, online and mobile communication (Figure 6).

The OUSL has an all-channel communication system bottom-up and top-down communication through formal and informal mechanisms via verbal or documentary communication channels. Decisions taken at departmental levels are channeled through the Faculty Boards, Senate and Councils and decisions taken at the Council level moves through the same channels to the bottom.
Documentary Communication is through

- hand books/prospectus/guide books prepared by the faculties and distributed to all prospective students at the time of application
- course information and schedules of academic activities distributed to all students
- notices on Notice Boards in the departments/faculties/divisions/units
- By-Laws relating to general discipline, examination, student elections, etc. at the Student Union Office.
- Staff memos and circulars.

Online and mobile Communication

- Staff communication through internet, email, and intranet (“ALLOU”). Other than sharing information, ALLOU also strengthens social bonds among the OUSL community.
- Student communication through internet, email, MyOUSL, virtual classes and online classes
- SMS facility is also used by the faculty of N.Sc.

Even though the OUSL has number of mechanisms for communication with all stakeholders, COL-RIM review highlighted the many short comings with respect to the effectiveness of these channels. Thus, an effective communication structure is developed by the IQAU and an action plan is being formulated and approved by the Senate and the Senor Management.

**Student Representation**

Opportunity for formal involvement in institutional arrangements is provided through elected representation in Unions/Associations; ex-officio presence at committees such as Canteen Committee, Temporary Residential Committee and Faculty Board Meetings; Forums such as staff meeting with Union Representatives.
Where formal meetings such as the Student Representative Meetings take place participants are provided with advance notice through the year planner and notice of meetings and accurate minutes/notes are circulated.

Ad hoc meetings are also held if and when required between students and Vice-Chancellor/Deans/Warden/Student Counselors or any other relevant staff.

**Student Complaints and Academic Appeals**

Individuals can identify and present problems so that complaints and grievances can be satisfactory resolved within an acceptable and agreed period of time. Complaints and appeals are first handled by Chief Student Counsellor who then may refer the students to the appropriate staff member/administrator.

Dates and venues of all meetings for a calendar year are circulated through a Year Planner which is provided to all senior academics. The University Diary is provided to all academic and administrative staff at the beginning of the year.

### 5.4 Constraints

- In spite of the fact that OUSL is part of the National State University system, the structure and delivery modes are significantly different with that of the conventional universities. ODL mode of delivery and the regional network are typical of OUSL only. Therefore the academic and non-academic cadre positions as well as the recruitment process should be in line with the different nature and functions of the OUSL. Unfortunately this is not positively considered by the relevant authorities and this situation is continuously detrimental for the effectiveness of the institution.

- Although QA procedures, mechanisms and relevant instruments are in place, staff shortage and dealing with large numbers of students catered in different programmes prevents the OUSL to implement many of the QA practices effectively.
6. Learning Infrastructure and Learner Support

6.1 Introduction

Learning infrastructure and student support services of the OUSL have been designed to cater to the students who are following the study programmes using ODL methodology. As students are off campus and are spread all over the country, effective and efficient means to keep the students motivated during their learning process is very crucial. Recognizing this OUSL makes every effort to maintain the contact with the student through various strategies that will also support their learning process.

In this section, the focus will be on the mechanisms, methods and strategies used to provide additional support for distance learners to mitigate their isolation and to succeed in their studies.

Corporate Plan (2011-2016) clearly identifies the importance of learner support services in order to ensure quality and effectiveness of its study programmes in Goal 3 (especially objective 3.2) and enabling access to education for all learners in Goal 4 (Objective 4.1).

Goal 3: Ensure quality and timeliness in the provision if open and distance teaching and learner support services (Corporate Plan, 2011-2016, pg. 11).

Objective 3.2 – Ensure that students receive the required course materials at the time of registration, assignment feedback within the 30 days of submission and examination results within 45 days of the examination.

Goal 4: Widen access to education through ODL and provide ladders of opportunity for learners.

Objective 4.1 – Expand geographical outreach of the OUSL by establishing a regional centre per province and a study centre per district by 2016.
6.2 Learning Support

Owing to the fact that OUSL students are studying at a distance various methods and strategies have been designed to facilitate their learning process and to avoid feeling of isolated from the peers and disintegration from the learning environment from its inception. Some mechanisms have been strengthened and incorporated into the curricula whereas some innovative approaches have been introduced lately.

However, incorporation of the findings from the feedback from students and staff to the development of policy and decisions related to resources are very limited or slow in implementing. This is due to the lack of feedback loop mechanism that feed to the decision making process.

**Self-instructional Material**

The central component of teaching is the printed material that offers the student the equivalent to lectures in a conventional university. So the course materials are especially designed for self-study. Rowntree (1990) refers to these materials as “tutorial-in-print” as they function as “tutorials” by incorporating different components such as

- user-friendly language
- stating learning objectives/outcomes
- introducing new concepts linking with already known concepts (advance organiser)
- carefully designed activities or self-assessment questions
- several examples or case studies
- summarising the content.

Most of the printed material is supplemented by audio-visual material and/or online component of the course. The latter is a recent addition of self-instructional material to a course unit.

**Orientation sessions**

The University from its inception conducts orientation sessions to new students as majority of students are not familiar with the study system adopted by the OUSL.
Having identified the difficulty of studying at OUSL, the Faculty of Engineering Technology initiated a new one day programme on “Learning to learn at a distance” in 2007 introducing best practices in studying at OUSL. Now it is converted to a compulsory course for all engineering students. This “best practice” is later adapted by the Faculty of Natural Science and a similar programme named “Path to Learning” has been offered to new science students since 2009.

**Contact sessions**

There are different types of contact sessions where students have the opportunity to meet their teachers.

Day schools are face to face discussions/clarification classes where students can discuss the course materials and clarify any doubts pertaining to one course with the teacher.

They are usually optional but some faculties have a few compulsory day schools to motivate especially the first year undergraduates.

In addition to day schools, tutor clinics at the end of the course has been introduced recently and where students have the flexibility of meeting any teacher of the study programme and clarify issues. Prescheduled Day-Schools and Tutor Clinics are conducted by the academic staff mainly at Colombo, Kandy, Matara, Jaffna, Anuradhapura Regional Centres for most of the study programmes.

For Science and Engineering Degree and postgraduate Programmes, compulsory laboratory classes are conducted for a period of 3-5 days for practical related courses to inculcate the necessary scientific skills and to build the competency of students. Field visits/work are also arranged to provide relevant exposure to students. Laboratories at many regional centres have been significantly upgraded under the DEMP during the period 2003-2009. With improved physical resources, some new centres were able to initiate laboratory sessions, while the established ones increased the laboratory sessions to cater to increased number of students registered at these centres, thus reducing the strain on the facilities in the CRC.
The faculties conduct feedback survey among the students on different aspects of course delivery, that include face to face sessions, course materials, lab classes, support services etc. and incorporate where necessary.

**Online courses**

Online courses have been introduced to provide additional support to students so that they can access the course online and contact the staff and peers instantly. Initially the OUSL used Manhattan Virtual Class to achieve this objective. Online courses using the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) is now being used in addition to Manhattan Virtual Class. There are 121 online courses offered at present where student can access the supplementary learning materials, past assignments, past question papers, quizzes etc and communicate with their academic staff and peers through online fora. The OUSL is planning to transform all the programmes to blended mode by 2016 (Corporate plan, 2011-16, Pg. 10).

**Communication with students**

The OUSL has been using post from its inception to communicate with students, but with the help of new technologies, digital communication have been widely used by the faculties as stated in the previous chapter. By this method all the students have the advantage of receiving information with respect to changes in scheduled activities promptly.

Email, university/faculty/departmental web pages, the forums in the online courses and MyOUSL are the most common at present. The newest one added is the SMS through mobile phones in the Faculty of Natural Science.

**Industrial training**

Industrial training is compulsory component in the Bachelor of Engineering Technology study programme from its inception. The University arranges the placements at various reputed organizations.
For engineering programmes, a training engineer attached to the faculty facilitates providing of industrial training and assessment.

**Library**

The OUSL library system is different to the conventional library system in that it caters to the needs of a large body of students dispersed throughout the country. Library network consists of a Main Library at Nawala campus and 5 Regional Libraries located at Kandy, Matara, Jaffna, Anuradhapura and Batticaloa Regional Centres together with mini libraries at the Study Centres.

OUSL Library is one of the pioneer libraries in Sri Lanka that achieved fully automated status. The Library commenced the automation of the catalogue in 1990 using the CDS/ISIS software system developed by UNESCO distributed by NSF, Sri Lanka. In the year 2000, Alice for Windows, integrated Library Managements Software (LMS) system was introduced to accelerate the automation process. Gradually, all the back office and front office functions of the library, namely; circulation, acquisition, cataloguing, periodical control etc. are automated within the period from 2000-2005.

The next major step that library initiated in the arena of automation, is integrating the LMS with the University OMIS system. To achieve this goal the library shifted to a new LMS called Libsys. Currently, Library is working on a project for automating the Regional Libraries using a customized LMS developed based on an open source software system.

The Main Library provides a wide-array of in-house services namely; reference facilities, lending (books and audio visual materials), inquiry service, interlibrary loan, document delivery, reservation of library materials, Wi-Fi zone, free Internet access, viewing and listening facilities for audiovisual materials, end-user training programs, current awareness services, library orientation programs, special services for researchers, scanning facilities and photocopying service.
A rich collection of over 100,000 reading materials and around 100 journal titles is available at the Main Library. Besides, the Main Library and Kandy and Matara Regional Libraries hold a collection of around 4000 audiovisual materials including the multiple copies. Out of them, 220 titles are OUSL productions. All the libraries in the network, particularly, Main Library and Regional Libraries possess compulsory recommended reading of different disciplines.

OUSL library network provides an array of online services and digital resources through its website. Besides, the website serves as an interactive interface where both staff and students can ask questions, place orders or make request by e-mailing or submitting online forms. Users can check their library account via the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and reserve materials that are on loan.

Another popular web service is the OUSL Digital Library, which allows students to download past question papers, theses abstracts, OUSL journal, research papers of OUSL academics etc.

6.3 Learner Support and Guidance

Unlike conventional students, the OUSL students need more support. Therefore, the OUSL has a well structured system for learner support and guidance. The support is available to learners from the time of pre-registration to the end of the final awards.

The support is available through various institutional establishments such as administrative divisions, departments, faculties through the network of Regional Centres.
**Academic counselling and guidance**

Every faculty of the OUSL publishes comprehensive student guidebooks or prospectus annually. All students are given the opportunity to discuss the selection of courses prior to registration with the academic staff members. This academic counselling coupled with registration is available in all Regional Centres. Some Faculties conduct pre-registration seminars to advice the applicants during enrolments.

All the registered students have unlimited access to talk with teachers of their academic problems on individual basis or as groups on prior appointment or in some instances at any time over telephone, email or in person. Faculty of Natural Science appoints personal tutors for all new students registering in the BSc degree programme.

The faculties have formally appointed student counsellors and regular meeting are held to discuss the problems forwarded by the student representatives. These meeting are chaired by the Dean of the faculty and are attended by all faculty Student Counsellors, Assistant Registrar and relevant Heads of Departments of the faculty.

At university level also regular meetings are held to receive the student feedback on various issues. These meetings are chaired by Deputy Vice-Chancellor and are attended by all Deans, Bursar, Librarian, Warden, all Student Counsellors; both in Colombo and Regional Centres and all relevant Directors.

Furthermore, two elected students from the Student Unions are also the members of the Faculty Board through which the faculties entertain the concerns of the students with regard to academic matters. Such feedback are taken into consideration when revising curricula and in making decision in operational matters in course delivery.

**Course Material Distribution Centre**

The OUSL provides facility to students to collect the course materials from Course Material Distribution Centre located in the premises of the main campus at Nawala. In addition, students can obtain the necessary course materials from the respective Regional Centres where they have registered.
However, they are also allowed to obtain the course materials from the Course Material Distribution Centre located in the premises of the main campus at Nawala to ensure that all students get their course materials at the time of the registration (Objective 3.2, Corporate Plan, 2011-16, Pg. 11).

This decision was taken as a remedial measure to accelerate the process of printing as there were persistent complaints by the course co-coordinators and students for some time (COL-RIM verification report, 2010).

**Temporary Residential Facilities**

The University provides temporary residential facilities at Colombo, Kandy and Matara Regional Centres for a limited number of students attending approved academic activities. Sixty Male and 60 female students can be accommodated in the dormitories in Colombo and 40 each at Kandy and Matara. This facility is especially beneficial to students attending laboratory classes, examinations and even day schools.

**Bursaries**

The OUSL has a limited number of bursaries, including Mahapola Scholarships, and university bursaries, to help students who are in need of financial help to continue their studies as majority of them are employed. Unfortunately, above mentioned bursaries are not available during the first year of study at the University. Only students who have demonstrated a certain amount of commitment to their studies and achieved a measure of success during the first year can be considered for bursaries.

**Awards**

Certain departments on their own initiative have established societies and through theses societies awarding prizes and scholarships for OUSL students based on their performance. Bukyball Society (BBS) (established in 1996) and ZooNet Society (in 2006) have been able to
offer prizes to recognize outstanding academic performance of undergraduates and motivate them to excel in the respective disciplines from the first year of study and up to Level 5 at the OUSL.

In addition the BBS awards scholarships. The Bot Soc (established in 2010) has been able to awards eight prizes while recently established Spectrum (in 2012) has commenced raising funds to that effect.

In addition to the prizes and scholarships, these societies organize popular talks and workshops to enhance knowledge in the disciplines and fund raising activities. These societies provide an opportunity for students to develop their soft skills such as team work, leadership skills, communication skills, negotiating skills etc.

The OUSL established Dean’s List Awards in 2011 to recognize excellence in student performance and also to motivate students to perform better in their studies. The Faculty of Natural Sciences will present the awards for the academic year 2011/12 this month.

**Facilities provided by NODES**

National Online Distance Education Service (NODES) is a unit under the Ministry of Higher Education. The NODES has 26 Access Centres called National Access Centres (NAC). Twenty out of 26 NACs have been set up within the OUSL Regional and Study Centres covering many districts of the country. Two of the other six Centres are located in the premises of University of Colombo (Weligaththa and Colombo), one within the premises of University of Peradeniya, two within the premises of Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological studies (Badulla and Bandarawela) and one within the premises of Institute of Engineering Technology (Katunayake). The main purpose of the NACs is to provide access to all students registered for online programs offered by all partner institutions of NODES.

As OUSL is one of the partners of NODES the OUSL students have opportunity to access online material through NACs. Besides, students have the opportunity to use other facilities, such as internet, e-mail, video conferencing, photocopying, fax, scanning and printing at an affordable fee.
**Regional Educational Service (RES)**

OUSL students are spread all over the country and are served through the Regional Educational Service network of 31 Centres covering all parts of the island. The network consists of 6 Regional Centres (RCs) at Colombo, Kandy, Matara, Jaffna, Anuradhapura and Batticaloa, and 19 Study Centres (RSs) and 6 smaller units called Teaching Centres which have been established to cater to very specific programmes (Figure 8).

Anuradhapura and Batticaloa are the newest Regional Centres established by upgrading from Study Centres during the last two years.

The RES is headed by a Director (Acting). The Centres are administered under an Assistant Director (AD) or a Regional Officer (RO). Academic staff and Counsellors are also stationed at the Regional Centres to provide academic support. Students may use a Centre of their choice for registration and for academic activities. RES Board meetings are held bi-monthly, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor to make policy decisions and discuss operational issues in view of enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of student support through RES.

All regional centres provide facilities for counselling, distribution of course material, collection of information, conducting of examinations and viewing and listening facilities for videos and audios.

The OUSL has gradually increased the number of Centres in order to widen the access to education to the rural population (Goal 4, Corporate Plan, 2011-16). Three new centres are to be established in Mannar, Mulativu and Dambulla. A few centres (Badulla, Hatton, Kuliyapitiya and Trincomalee) are located in other government institutes like Technical colleges in the locality. The facilities at these Centres are very limited owing to the space restrictions.

Ratnapura, Kurunegala, Galle, Gampaha, Kalutara, Ampara, Puttalam, Monaragala, Vavuniya, Polonnaruwa, Ambalangoda and Ambalantota Centres were upgraded with the financial assistance from DEMP.

The computer laboratories at Centres are annually upgraded with new hardware. They service the practical component of the computer literacy programme as well as for the undergraduate programmes.
MyOUSL portal

Under the DEM project (2006 – 2010), the Open University Management Information System (OMIS) was established, and by which student support service has been enhanced to a greater extent. In the OMIS provision has been made for the students to access their records, such as payment status, examination results etc through MyOUSL portal.

Student Unions

The University has four Student Unions; one union for each faculty. University Students’ Union constituted by the faculty Student Unions. Two student representatives are members of the Faculty Board and they can use this forum to discuss any matters related to their study.

Health Care Centre

Staff and students have facilities to obtain medical assistance at the Health Centre which has a Doctor, a Nurse and other staff in attendance.

Banking facilities

Banking facilities are also available to students through the Open University Branch of the Peoples bank located at the Colombo Regional Centre.

Extra curricular activities

Even though the OUSL is an ODL institution, it encourages students to be involved in the extracurricular activities in view of inculcating soft skills and attitudes such as leadership, teamwork, communication, tolerance to challenging situations etc. To assist for such activities the OUSL has instituted university wide societies as well as subject related societies in the Faculties.

Some of the societies such as Buddhist society, sports society, Bot-soc, ZooNet, Bucky Ball Society, Computer Science Society and Art Circle where OUSL students engage in various activities under the guidance of the academic staff members
6.4 Career Guidance and Preparation

Career Guidance

Career Guidance Unit (CGU) of the OUSL established in 2009 and functions under the Director Career Guidance. It has been organising activities that will enhance the employability of OUSL graduates. Their requirements are mainly focused on promotions and improving soft skills for better performance in the world of work. Under this situation, CGU conducts workshops for OUSL students on different themes such as presentation skills, CV preparation, facing interviews etc. In addition to serving the OUSL students CGU involved in providing training to unemployed youth in the country under Education for Knowledge Society Project funded by the Ministry of Higher Education. Under this it has trained 700 students in the last year and further 500 are trained in current year.

Preparation

Recognising the importance of having industry collaborations some faculties are planning to establish industry liaison centres for the purpose of enhancing the graduate employability as well as to enrich the curricular with latest innovations in relevant fields of study. Lack of funds has been delayed the implementation of such initiatives.

The Faculty of Natural Sciences also provide limited opportunities in the industry for placements for graduates awaiting results and send them for internship/industrial training since 2008. Faculty also is pursuing links with industry, professional and research organisations to promote such placements.

The science and engineering faculties, from time to time, get feedback from the employers of the OUSL graduates in view of enhancing better promotional and employment prospects of the graduates. The suggestions and comments received from them are taken to consideration by the staff when courses/curricular are subject to major revisions.
6.5 Constraints

Student drop-out in the first year of joining study programmes, especially in science and engineering, shows that OUSL students need more support in their first year. The OUSL has taken several steps at Faculty levels, however, more support needed from the institution and from UGC to increase the student retention rate, through better learning support at the regional and study centres.
7. University/Industry/Community/Other Extension Activities

7.1 Introduction

The functionality of the OUSL is complex and diverse and it is completely different to other conventional universities. Various external stakeholders (audience) involve at different phases of the study programmes; as course/programme advisers at the planning stage, as course authors and editors at the course design and development stage, as visiting staff, moderators and/or examiners at the delivery stage of the study programme. Thus collaborations, partnerships and linkages through private and public sectors, universities and industries are integral aspects of the OUSL in achieving efficiency and effectiveness of all operations. Therefore, the importance is clearly highlighted in the Objective 5.3 of the Goal 5 of the current corporate plan (2011-2016).

Goal 5: Enhance institutional capacity of achieving efficiency and effectiveness in all operations.

Objective 5.3 Ensure resource sharing through linkages with industry service and other sectors.

The relevant external stakeholders are picked from the national university system and other professional bodies. Accordingly, the faculty of Engineering Technology and the faculty of Natural Sciences work very closely with those in scientific institutions, professional bodies and other allied institutions such as the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Sciences, Institute of Chemistry, the Institute of Engineers, Sri Lanka, Chartered Institute of Accountants, Sri Lanka, Institute of Accounting Technicians, Institute of Personnel Management, and also with members of faculties in the fifteen universities coming under the national university system. In addition, Faculty of Education work closely with Colombo, Peradeniya, Jaffna and Eastern universities, National Institute of Education and National colleges of Education.

These efforts are also facilitated by inviting individual practitioners of the discipline/professional area, from the industry at the planning stage of study programmes so that the current trends and developments could be incorporated with a futuristic vision.
Furthermore, representatives from universities, relevant professional bodies or industries are elected as members of the Faculty Boards in order to get their views and opinions.

The Course Development Team concept has been used effectively through the merits of academic networking, with members of the professional community expressing solidarity with specific needs confronted by their colleagues within the university system.

Induction sessions are conducted for course writers and visiting staff about the ODL methodologies and other relevant areas. However, a very few studies have been conducted to assess the effectiveness of these communication strategies.

### 7.2 External Communication

**Publicity and recruitment**

The thirty four years history of the OUSL also saw the emergence of a distinct culture of publicity and promotions with a mixture of methodologies that included the use of traditional and modern mass media. As for the traditional methods, the University used the Two Step Flow of communication by enlightening the potentially powerful public opinion leaders such as members of the clergy, the teachers at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, Grama Sevaka officers, members of the local bureaucracy working for divisional secretariats, social workers and social service clubs etc.

This method expects public opinion leaders so briefed, to carry the message through traditional and modern mass communication media. In addition, awareness programmes were conducted to specific groups such as Advance Level students, military officers, and nurses. These awareness programmes are either conducted by the central staff and/or by the regional staff. These programmes were facilitated by promotional material such as brochures, leaflets and posters which are distributed among the participants.
The recent past also witnessed a host of new methodologies used by the University by tapping the power of mass media; print, radio and television to disseminate information by way of feature articles, carefully designed advertisements, interviews etc, while the radio and television are used to disseminate information through special interviews and “TV news lines”. Furthermore, the university today positively exploits the World Wide Web with specially designed university, faculty and departmental web pages to provide current information on diverse frontiers of academic life. As such the rating of the OUSL has gone up in the webometrix since 2009.

As for the 30th Anniversary celebrations can be considered as a landmark achievement in maximizing the potential of a variety of communication channels along with exhibitions, Quiz programmes, “Open Days” held at the Colombo, Kandy, Matara, Batticaloa and Jaffna regional centres where community participation took place to a greater extent. These activities were some of promotion strategies used by the OUSL to project its image and brand “OUSL” both within and outside the country aligning with the Objective 6.1 under Goal 6 “with a view to garnering assistance of the private sector and donors by 2011/12 (Corporate Plan 2011-16, pg. 12).

As a result student recruitment was enhanced in most of the study programmes and at present there are 35,647 students following different study programmes at the OUSL.

**Links with Industry and commercial and other public service sectors**

The past decade recorded a number of major achievements in this broad sector as the OUSL became receptive to concerns of a heterogeneous Sri Lankan community in the national development process through the linkages and collaborations with private and public sectors, industries and with international organisations.
**Introducing New Programmes**

Considering the dearth of knowledge and skills in different fields of study among nationally importance areas like in health, legal profession and special needs education, the OUSL has taken steps to introduce new study programmes to cater to the needs of the country by analyzing the needs of the public and private sectors and industry.

MSc in Medical Entomology and Applied Parasitology, LLM in Criminal Justice, BSc in Pharmacy, BSc in Medical Laboratory Science and BEd (Special Needs Education) are some of the initiatives taken by the OUSL and these programmes will be commenced for the first time in 2013 using ODL methodologies. BEd (Special Needs Education) is a joint study programme conducted by Faculty of Education and Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in enhancing the knowledge base of teachers scattered over the island on issues connected with professionalism and ethics among the teaching community.

There are number of certificate programmes in Food Science and Applied Earth Sciences to be formally offered to address the needs of the food technology industry and the Disaster Management sector.

The OUSL has further expanded its collaborations with industry and other local and foreign organisations. One such venture is the Bachelor of Software Engineering. The Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering of the Faculty of Engineering Technology has been offering BSE program since 2009. The curriculum of this programme has been carefully designed following the curriculum guidelines published by the IEEE Computer Society and ACM, and in consultation with the professionals in the software industry. At the stage of designing the curriculum and syllabi of courses the professionals of the software industry actively participated. The programme has been started after signing a MOU with Software Exporters Association (later named as Sri Lanka Association of Software and Service Companies - SLASSOM).

According to the MOU the students for the programme are selected after an interview. An expert from the software industry serves as one of the member of the panel to select the students who can cater for the demand in the software industry in future.
Further, some of the industry related courses are coordinated by the professionals from the industry. The SLASSCOM also provides the secure placement in the industry for the student.

Of the other vital fields of development, OUSL has also ventured into national level training in Tourism Operations and Management at a time the government has pledged to increase the number of tourist arrivals to more than thrice the current number. This course is an Advanced Certificate course started in 2009 and offered continuously for 3 years supplemented with online component. In addition, Diploma in Ecotourism and natural resources is being planned to offer this year.

Another venture is to train already employed nurses in the public and private health sectors (Hemas Hospital) and awarding them a Diploma in Nursing; an important national contribution in meeting the manpower needs in public and private health sectors.

**Existing programmes**

OUSL has provided career opportunities for all the strata of the community including both young and adult learners by providing ladders of opportunities via elementary to advanced Certificate, Diploma, Degree and Postgraduate Levels study programmes on career advancement and professional development programmes. The OUSL study programmes are designed in such a way to “have appropriate entry and exit points at different levels of academic qualifications to facilitate learner mobility (Objective 4.4 under Goal 4).

At an overall level, the country has also enormously benefited from these study programmes especially improving the capacity of the work force while retaining them in the respective work places. Some of the popular Certificate programmes are:

- Certificate in Early Childhood and Primary Education
- Certificate in Laboratory Technology which is a nationally felt need to cater to School Laboratory Assistants and other interested persons who aspire to work in this field
- Certificate programmes in Environmental Sciences and in Wildlife Conservation and Management for officers who need to fulfill efficiency bar requirements in the Ministry of Environment, the Department of Wild Life, and in Forestry
- Certificate in Applied Electronics
- Certificate in Computer Networks and Security, and a
- Certificate in Professional Computer Applications, which are at present in great demand among those gainfully employed in the computer field. The fact that the university is equipped to conduct practicals for these fields at regional level is a major reason behind the success of what is offered.

The Faculty of Education collaborated closely in the field of Aesthetic Studies with Tower Hall Theatre Foundation with a clear focus on skills development to maximize the human potential, resulting in the development of a BEd Degree Programme in Drama and Theater which is being offered from 2012.

BSc Nursing that is being offered from late 1990s with collaboration of the University of Athabaska in Canada and Bachelors Degree Programme in Law (LLB) are the most outstanding degree programmes. The LLB is one of the most significant entities within the OUSL System and has contributed immensely in providing academic training in law to those who cannot access formal academic studies in the field through the regions. This has significantly enhanced the quality of those who practice the law at regional judicial institutions.

The Department of Management Studies of the OUSL takes a very special interest in developing the concept of entrepreneurship and small business management, instilling in people the much needed expertise to maximize the potential of innovative and creative thinking. Hence, the Bachelors Degree in Management Studies has integrated the entrepreneurship and small business management as a subject. This has achieved the multiple objectives in creating a community of entrepreneurs in national development and in directing them towards other allied occupations and professions based on this applied knowledge base.
Collaborative programmes with international Organisations already on offer include the Commonwealth CEMBA/CEMPA programme, the Advanced Certificate in Laboratory Technology developed in conjunction with the COL, the BSc in Nursing developed with Athabasca University in Canada, the Commonwealth Diploma in Youth Development Work developed with assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat, the MA in Teacher Education Programme and Multi-grade Teaching Course developed in partnership with the COL and the MA in Teaching English developed with assistance from the British Council and the University of Reading, United Kingdom.

The Department of Language Studies of the OUSL continued with major initiatives in empowering teachers of English and those involved in curriculum development work in Teaching of English and English literature who have not been reached by the conventional institutions of tertiary education dedicated to language instruction. The contribution made in this manner with professional standards of teaching English as a Second Language has helped them to develop the foundation needed for the establishment of the Postgraduate Institute of English (PGIE) under the institutional banner of the OUSL as a separate institution under the UGC in 2006.

An equally competitive field of studies that attracted stakeholders was the short Certificate course in Child Care Development for child care professionals with international collaboration with the University of Columbia, Mailman Institute and national child protection authority as participants in 2012, with a view to produce Child Care professionals adequately receptive to child rights and to facilitate the organizational mission of the National Probation and Child Care Institute in providing expertise.

The OUSL has also embarked on offering professional and other programmes completely through online as a result of the initiative taken by the DEMP under the Ministry of Education. The Stand-Alone online course on Teacher Educator as an Educational Technologist was offered in 2008 as the first online course and thereafter two cycles were completed. This course is currently being revised with integration of Open Educational Resources (OER).
Continuing Professional Development programmes for Doctors were initiated in 2009 in collaboration with Monash University, Australia. These courses were offered three times with the facilitation of professional medical doctors as online tutors.

**Short courses**

In order to generate a much higher proportion of its expenditure to guarantee financial stability, more and more departments are encouraged to offer short courses in using traditional methods in accordance with Objective 6.4 under the Goal 6.

On the one hand, these short courses generate funds for the university on the other hand the departments are under pressure to generate income to sustain the programmes as stated in the Institutional Review (2004, pg. 11). This may indirectly affect the quality of the study programmes as additional workload is assigned to the academic staff members.

Nevertheless, the OUSL has conducted numerous short courses during this review period for the benefit of the general public.

**Professional Body Accreditation**

In embarking on an ambitious engineering technology programme through ODL methodologies for the first time in the world, the Faculty of Engineering Technology of the OUSL worked tirelessly towards professional recognition for their Diploma/Bachelors Degree Programmes in Engineering Technology with specializations in the fields mentioned below:

1. Agricultural Engineering Technology
2. Automobile Technology
3. Civil Technology
4. Communication Technology
5. Computer Technology
6. Electrical Technology
7. Electronic Technology
8. Manufacturing Technology
9. Textile Technology
The quality standards and benchmarks for assessment in all these specializations have been positively acclaimed by the professional community of engineers with a view to grant recipients the accreditation as Incorporated Engineers.

Similarly, the Legal Studies Department with its pioneering Law programme through ODL gained professional recognition from the Council of Legal Education for the LL.B degree programme. This was accomplished by developing a curriculum on par with the well established LL.B degree programme of the University of Colombo.

**Community involvement and service**

The provision of educational facilities to students in remote/rural areas through a network of 31 centres spread island wide, is in itself a valuable community service. In all these centres, students have the opportunity to learn communication skills in English and Information Technology.

Of the other short courses that have been offered in recent times, the courses in Beginners Tamil and Beginners Sinhala have caught the attention of the wider community specially in the context of national level reconciliation processes based on a tri-lingual policy. This direction is closely tied up with the Objective 4.5 “to enhance social harmony, integration and cohesion” (Corporate Plan, 2011-16, pg. 11).

Additionally, the department also took initiatives to extend its mandate by teaching Korean courses with a large mass of Sri Lankans pursuing employment opportunities in these countries in collaboration with the Embassy of Korea.

The community expectations were met over the last decade with a large number of professional teachers qualifying with the Postgraduate Diploma in Education; not only a credible entry point to the MEd but also contributing to the national development by nurturing the student population in the country by providing quality education. Furthermore, Masters of Arts in Teacher Education (MATE) launched in 2000 and MATE International in 2006, addressing a national need in the professional development of teacher educators, continue to fill the lacunae at the national level at a time there is a severe dearth of professionally trained teacher educators in our country.
Establishing ‘Model’ Pre-Schools and day care centres at some of the regional centres such as in Colombo, Kandy and Matara for the benefit of the children of OUSL employees and people of the area. These pre-schools are used as training centres for the students who are following the pre-school related study programmes at the OUSL. Thus, the OUSL has rendered a yeoman service to the country not only by providing professional pre-school and primary teachers who would undoubtedly help the nation by laying a solid foundation for pre-school children but also providing a community service to the respective regions.

The OUSL through the Department of Social Studies had been in the forefront of national level youth empowerment, working with the Ministry of Youth Affairs of the Republic of Sri Lanka developing national policy and programmers in this field. Accordingly, the government has also entrusted on them the task to evolve the National Policy Framework for youth development which is formally presented to the Cabinet Minister.

The OUSL has worked very closely with many international organizations to reach the unreached. Most significant contributor is the COL). There are three COL-funded projects at present in view of empowering rural farming community in Sri Lanka:

- Micro Credit administration in poverty eradication in collaboration with the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, aimed at empowering personnel in the development banking sector, in remote areas. This project is coordinated by Department of Social Studies
- Life-long learning for farmers using ODL Technologies co-ordinated by a very enthusiastic academic staff members
- Empowerment of rural women using mobile technology in collaboration with Mobitel (Pvt) limited and University of Jaffna covering two districts; Hambantota and Jaffna. This project is coordinated by the Centre for Educational Technology and Media (CETMe).
The Legal Studies Departments continued commitment towards community empowerment through legal literacy through its Free Legal Aid Clinics have not only strengthened the interests of downtrodden people island wide but also enhanced the capacities of its staff and students in relating themselves to community concerns both individually and collectively especially in under privileged areas.

The Department of Social Studies of the OUSL pursued the HSS mission within the national development process during the past decade through island wide workshops on Democracy and Good Governance in collaboration with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2003-2004. Here the work carried out was intended to empower elected local government representatives at grass root level who have entered the democratic process without having a formal training on fundamentals of governance.

The academic staff of the department of Civil also contributed immensely for the development of institutional infrastructure by providing their professional expertise and guidance in construction work so that the OUSL has managed to develop its infrastructure within a short period of time incurring minimal costs.

**7.3 Constraints**

- Absence of a full-fledged Public Relations Division with a Social Marketing Wing that can identify community needs in a more focused manner and intermediate relations between the faculties and the community (Internal and External Publics). This institutional deficiency also has a negative bearing on major promotional initiatives and branding “OUSL”.

- Even though the OUSL has many channels of communication to deal with internal and external stakeholders, to sustain effective communication throughout the teaching and learning process with limited infrastructure and human resources is a challenge.

- Non availability of qualified personnel to sustain the programmes launched in the regions and the absence of an incentive system with sufficient remuneration to attract and retain competent personnel in the OUSL.

- Poor in implementing the findings from the feedback in decision making process due to the absence of feedback loop mechanism.
References
Commonwealth of Learning website: [www.col.org](http://www.col.org)

Appendix I – Figures supporting self-evaluation analysis

![Regional Educational Service (RES) Outreach](image)

Figure 1 – Regional Educational Service (RES) Outreach
Figure 2 – Increase in OUSL Study Programmes – 2003-2012
Figure 3 – Total Student enrollments – 2002-2012

Figure 4 – Student enrollments in OUSL study programmes
Figure 5 – Completion Rates of Bachelors degree Programmes
Figure 6 – Communication channels for learners
## Appendix II – Tables supporting self-evaluation analysis

### Table 1 – General Management and Finances

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