Open University of Sri Lanka

COL RIM Verification Report

This report has been checked for factual accuracy by the internal verification team and OUSL management as part of the process of ensuring a robust and complete report. Management’s comments in response to the findings are incorporated into the discussion where appropriate.

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introducing the COL RIM

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) conducted a trial at the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) in December 2010 of an institutional quality improvement model. This follows a first trial of the model at the University of Technology in Jamaica in September 2009. At the time of writing, the third trial is underway at the University of Calabar in Nigeria. Following the completion of the three trials, COL will finalise the model for implementation across its member nations.

The model, known as the COL RIM (Commonwealth of Learning Review and Improvement Model), uses a structured series of steps beginning with an initiation stage, an internal staff survey followed by self review, verification to answer thematic questions about an institution’s performance and finally, a follow up stage. The model is primarily for the institution’s own use, for improvement and capacity building, and can be used to meet external quality assurance requirements.

Underpinning the thematic questions are enabler (leadership and processes) indicators and results (outcomes) indicators, used as the basis for a staff survey to surface both issues of concern and areas of good practice. These indicators, 48 in total, are grouped into ten performance areas and align to six overarching themes: Communication, Needs Orientation, Engagement, Innovation and Creativity, Capacity Building and Quality Management. Each theme has a key evaluative question that subsequent steps of the model aim to answer.

Once the initiation stage is completed, culminating in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between COL and the institution, COL administers the COL RIM Staff Survey to all staff. Staff are asked to rate each indicator at one of three levels, based on performance descriptors, according to how they perceive practices in their own area of work. The survey results are analysed and reported on with COL’s assistance, and used by the institution’s management as a key input into the self review.

Self review is the third step and the core of the model. The self review relies on a team of generally senior staff members to scope and investigate outcomes of the institution, focusing on the results areas and looking to enabler areas where cause and effect of poor results – or good practice – needs to be determined. The self review exercise produces a report that aims to answer the key thematic questions, making evidence based judgments and recommendations for improvement.

The fourth step of the model is verification of the self review, led by an external (lead) verifier and involving a separate team of internal staff (the internal verifiers) who receive training in quality assurance methods during a preparation visit that takes place prior to the commencement of the self review stage. The verification has three key aims: the first is to verify the rigour of the methods, findings and recommendations of the self review, and in doing so, make a summative judgment about the extent to which the institution can be considered a ‘COL RIM verified’ institution. Possible ratings are ‘not verified’, ‘threshold’ and ‘verified’. The second aim is to extend the capacity of staff in quality assurance through training in methods of scoping, evidence collection and forming judgments. A third aim is to expand recommendations for action where appropriate, based on the cause and effect analysis of the verification team.

The model concludes with a follow up stage where recommendations made in the self review and verified, expanded or modified through the verification exercise are implemented. Institutions have the opportunity to feed back to COL on the effectiveness of the model. COL will report to stakeholders periodically on collective outcomes of institutions who have implemented the model, and on refinements to the model.

1.2 Summative outcome of the verification

The verification exercise took place at OUSL over 6 – 13 December 2010. There are three possible ratings given to the quality of the institution’s self review: COL RIM Not Verified, COL RIM Threshold and COL RIM Verified, which are explained in detail in Sections 3 and 4 of this report.
The summative outcome of the COL RIM is the external verification of the institution’s self review report. The profile of a COL RIM Verified institution is one that demonstrates the capacity to respond to a changing environment, and strives to meet stakeholders’ needs and expectations. COL RIM verified means that the institution has the skill and capacity to conduct a robust self review with methodical scoping and rigorous investigation that results in evidence based judgments and sound recommendations. COL RIM Threshold means that the institution demonstrates some of these aspects while COL RIM Not Verified means that the self review was lacking in rigour and credibility in most aspects.

The outcome of the verification at OUSL is that OUSL was rated **COL RIM Threshold**, based on the following evaluation of OUSL’s self review:

- Scope inclusive of all key issues though not explicitly inclusive of all results (outcomes) of the institution; limited identification of areas of focus
- Rigorous academic methodology applied to internal surveys
- Appropriate sampling techniques demonstrated
- Investigation rigorous in some areas only
- Limited analysis of cause and effect, tending to focus on the operation of processes (enablers)
- Many judgments evidence based but with heavy reliance on triangulation between interviews, surveys and focus groups in preference to other sources of evidence
- Most key internal stakeholders included; external groups such as industry and graduates not considered for direct evidence-gathering
- Views of interviewees actively sought on strategies for improvement

The summative outcome of the verification is discussed in more detail in Section 4 of this report.

### 1.3 Key findings and recommendations

In the process of arriving at the summative outcome, the verification reports on substantive findings. Key findings and recommendations by theme are reported on here, with a detailed discussion of evidence and findings in **Section 5 – Findings by theme**.

#### 1.3.1 Systems perspective of quality issues

The COL RIM is a systems-thinking model, meaning that all parts of the model interrelate to create one picture of the system that is the institution. By definition, all themes are intertwined and all draw from the findings and judgments of other teams to arrive at their own conclusions.

The systems diagram portrayed in Figure 1 below has evolved from the debates and discussions of the verification team and most importantly, from their final synthesis of all the issues at hand. The diagram begins and ends with the key issue, from the verification team’s perspective, that is at the heart of OUSL’s identified quality issues. This is the ability of the institution to fill its vacancies and to implement the right mechanisms to ensure that all staff are performing to the expected levels.

Many factors relating to the vacancy issue are external, driven by University Grants Commission (UGC) recruitment criteria and policies, while OUSL has more control and influence over staff performance. It is important to note that while the verification team found clear evidence of key vacancies, many of them effectively permanent (e.g. unfilled for 15 years), the team did not find (nor explicitly seek) evidence of poorly performing staff. What the team did find was evidence that the performance management system is compliance oriented and cannot adequately identify or be responsive to issues of poor performance. This is explained further under the relevant theme, Needs Orientation.
What the diagram is showing then is the relationship between issues, including likely future effects, stemming from the staffing situation. In brief, insufficient staff and/or not enough high performing staff mean that staff currently struggle to meet optimum research and teaching outputs. There are impacts on the workload of individuals, on staff ability to meet student needs for quality and timely communication, and on the ability of the organisation as a whole to be innovative and responsive to change. It is evident from interview results that some staff are disaffected (disgruntled) by the situation and this could be leading to poor performance in areas.

Considering OUSL’s goals for development throughout Asia, and the expectation that competition from offshore universities for the domestic market is expected to increase, the potential for increased vulnerability to competition is significant. Losing competitive advantage could result in either stagnating or declining student numbers, which will further impact on OUSL’s ability to attract and retain high performing staff.

**Figure 1 – Systems diagram of key quality issues at OUSL**

The next section provides a summary by theme of the key findings and recommendations from the self review and the extent to which the verification was able to verify the findings. Being able to verify a finding means that the verification was able to triangulate multiple sources of evidence in support of the finding. Being unable to verify a finding means that the verification either did not find enough evidence in support of the finding; found evidence to the contrary; or chose not to pursue a certain line of enquiry. In the latter case, this is generally due to other issues taking priority, and does not materially impact on the team’s rating of the self review as COL RIM Not Verified, COL RIM Threshold or COL RIM Verified.

Discussion is reserved for Section 5 – Findings by theme.

1.3.2 Needs Orientation

**Key thematic question**

- How well does the institution provide the outcomes that its stakeholders need and value?

The verification team rated the Needs Orientation self review COL RIM Threshold.

The verification was able to verify the following key findings of the self review:

- Staff are aware of the Vision and Mission and their appropriateness, but are not always able to recall the content
- OUSL meets the needs of its stakeholders in the types of programmes it offers
• Students are generally satisfied with the ODL method of teaching and learning – *but there is substantial room for improvement*

• Student scholarships and bursaries are under-utilised although money is available

• Students are confident about securing employment after graduation and progressing in their careers

It was unable to verify the following findings of the self review:

• Physical and learning resources are insufficient – *but there was indicative evidence of resource issues, as follows:*
  ▪ Student interviews indicate issues with quality and capacity of temporary residences (not verified)
  ▪ Further issues indicated with timeliness and quality of printed material (this aspect was verified) and space for day classes
  ▪ Inadequate or poor student facilities and inadequate opportunities for social and personal development for students

• OUSL graduates are performing better than those from other universities (this finding was made by the self review team based on student interviews; there was no comparative evidence or other documentation used by the self review team to triangulate the finding)

• No mechanism to get feedback from stakeholders, and seeking formal feedback is intermittently practiced

• In general programmes are not reviewed regularly across the university to ensure that they remain current

**Recommendations**

**NO1** Investigate apparent misalignment between students’ expectations and what is offered.

**NO2** Ensure that resource planning is in alignment with current needs and with goals for expansion
  ▪ Timeliness of print & distribution
  ▪ Quality, maintenance and availability of equipment such as computers

**NO3** Revise criteria for scholarships and university bursaries to ensure full utilisation

1.3.3 Capacity Building

**Key thematic question**

> How effectively does the institution develop the capacity of its people to provide valued outcomes for stakeholders?

The verification team rated the Capacity Building self review **COL RIM Threshold.**

The verification was able to verify the following key findings of the self review:

• Establishment figures are insufficient for the needs of the university, exacerbated by academics on study leave

• Low salary scales discourage recruitment of suitably qualified and experienced staff

• Allocation of workload is neither fair nor transparent

• Performance targets are established by “norms” for academic staff but generally speaking, staff performance is not regularly reviewed

It was unable to verify the following findings of the self review:
- There is little encouragement of research – cause and effect analysis shows that incentives and budget exists but staffing issues affect uptake
- There is no formal process for recognising and rewarding excellence – evidence indicates that processes exist for research but not for teaching; and the process is almost entirely reliant on self nomination

Recommendations

**CB1** Develop mechanisms for identifying training needs in under-performing staff members, in accordance with international good practice
  - Expand concept of professional development beyond emphasis on initial training
  - Develop norms for administrative, non-academic and technical staff members
  - Find culturally appropriate feedback mechanism

**CB2** Develop a policy for the fair allocation of workload and link this to performance management

**CB3** Collect cumulative data concerning the effects of UGC’s scheme of promotional criteria and policies, and make convincing recommendations to the UGC for implementation at the OUSL.

1.3.4 Communication

**Key thematic question**

- **How effectively does the institution communicate with its stakeholders?**

The verification team rated the Communication self review COL RIM Threshold.

The verification was able to verify the following key findings of the self review:

- Information is not properly communicated to students about classroom changes and exam timetable information
- Advertisements often do not reflect the actual start dates of programmes, i.e. Programmes may start later than planned and prospective students lose interest
- Internal communications are not very effective in some areas – receptionists not well informed about programmes; not everyone has email or receives the newsletter

It was unable to verify the following findings of the self review:

- OUSL does not communicate well with industry about the skills industry requires
- There are no formal links / channels between departments and faculties
- Communication between regional centres could be strengthened *(insufficient triangulation to make a judgment)*
- Lack of communication links with external stakeholders, e.g., visiting academics *(insufficient triangulation to make a judgment)*

**Recommendations**

**C1** Develop a communications strategy and protocols for all of OUSL’s internal and external communication requirements
  - Do not just limit to public relations
  - Specific and prompt attention needs to be given to communication issues with students
  - External strategy should ensure that all faculties are consistent in their engagement with industry
  - Internal strategy should ensure that all internal staff hold current knowledge about OUSL’s
The development and implementation of a comprehensive communication policy is further recommended to facilitate efficiency, accountability and transparency of organisational communication.

1.3.5 Innovation & Creativity

The verification team rated the Innovation & Creativity self review COL RIM Not Verified.

The verification was able to verify the following key findings of the self review:

- One of OUSL’s strengths is its innovative collaboration with other institutions
- OUSL is slow in responding to change, in terms of the lead in time for innovation in course design and delivery
- Slow implementation of research findings and recommendations from committees

It was unable to verify the following findings of the self review:

- Students are satisfied with the level of creativity and innovation in teaching and learning methods, including the use of technology (insufficient evidence to make a judgment)
- The mentoring scheme in place for new lecturers is innovative (insufficient evidence to make a judgment on its effectiveness)

Recommendations

IC1 Explicitly consider incentives and rewards for innovation and creativity within the capacity building recommendations, i.e. in addressing workload and performance issues

- Cause and effect analysis shows that it is addressing the capacity and performance-related issues that will enable staff to be more innovative and respond to change faster

1.3.6 Quality Management

Key thematic question

- How well does the institution monitor and improve its performance?

The verification team rated the Quality Management self review COL RIM Threshold.

The verification was able to verify the following key findings of the self review:

- No systematic mechanism for monitoring staff performance, or for rewards
- Information on learner achievement is not systematically collected, analysed and used to inform decision-making processes
- No systematic and equitable process for allocating workload to academic staff
- No well developed and structured system in operation to regularly collect information from stakeholders

It was unable to verify the following findings of the self review:

- Staff are uncertain or ambiguous as to whether programmes meet the contemporary needs of a knowledge society – we found substantial examples of basing programme development and review on needs of society
- There is no clarity in the system for integrating educators into the university (insufficient evidence to make a judgment)
Recommendations

QM1 Implement an overarching framework to manage quality feedback mechanisms, including systematically capturing quantitative and qualitative data from all key stakeholder types; synthesising data from more than one source (e.g. elements of student evaluations and staff feedback that both relate to resources); and capturing and following through on actions to improve outcomes.

QM2 Implement a formal, well structured system for tracking student type (age, ethnicity, employment status etc), achievement (formative and summative) and retention across all faculties, used to inform programme development and review, and resource management.

QM3 Implement a formal and well structured performance management system for all staff, including academic, non-academic and technical, that includes implementation and monitoring (refer also to CB1 and CB2)

QM4 Review formal communication structures to ensure that relevant information, such as that on programme approval, makes it down the chain as well as upwards. In other words, this is about creating the channels for effective communication flow, not about methods or content of communication. This is about the infrastructure that enables decision-making to be carried out and the results flow to staff and stakeholders as required, with no parties left uninformed.
2. The five steps of the COL RIM

This section introduces the Commonwealth of Learning Review and Improvement Model (the COL RIM).

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning/distance education knowledge, resources and technologies. COL’s mission is to help developing nations improve access to quality education and training.

In 2008, following trial audits at universities in South Africa and Ghana, COL commissioned the development of a low cost quality audit model for use throughout the commonwealth. This model was first trialled at the University of Technology in Jamaica in 2009.

The model has five key steps, displayed in Figure 2. The quality improvement cycle is then completed with feedback to COL by the institution on the process and outcomes of implementing the model and feedback to all stakeholders by COL on the performance of the model and any plans for its improvement.

**Figure 2 – Key steps of the COL RIM**

The model commences with an initiation step where the institution indicates its interest to COL in implementing the model. COL and the institution negotiate a memorandum of understanding which sets out key dates, roles and responsibilities. Following the first trial, this step was strengthened to ensure that verification did not proceed without adherence to the key dates and commitments by the institution. The optional preparation visit, part of the initiation step, seeks to train self reviewers to carry out their review and to familiarise internal verifiers with their later step in the process. Unless an institution is particularly confident, it is likely that the preparation visit will become a standard step.

Once the memorandum is signed, COL initiates the staff survey. This seeks to gather staff perceptions on the performance of the institution against a set of 48 indicators, designated as either enablers (leadership and processes) or results (outcomes) indicators. Enabler and results indicators are organised into ten performance areas, with a number of cross-cutting themes. A rating system allocates a score of 0, 1 or 2 to each indicator, as follows:
Survey participants are asked to rate each indicator according to their perceptions of practices in their area of work. An example of rating an indicator is given below, using a results indicator from the performance area of “Teaching and learning outcomes”:

Survey results are aggregated to produce an overall rating per indicator, providing a basis for scoping the self review, which is the core of the model. The self review, the third step and the core of the model, aims to substantiate (or disprove) perceptions of the staff survey, in relation to both the issues raised and the areas of good practice. The self review should focus on results or outcomes, with areas of horizontal focus (e.g. across faculties or services) and vertical focus (drilling down into a particular area) as determined by the survey analysis and other relevant inputs, including feedback from key stakeholder groups, institutional performance data, and wider environmental data gathered for strategic planning. The self review team is likely to include management representatives from both academic and service divisions, and is a dedicated team of 4-10 reviewers, depending on the size of the institution.

The self review team makes judgements about the performance of the institution in relation to the key evaluative questions posed for each of the cross-cutting themes:

### Figure 5 - Six critical thematic questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>RESULTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>How effectively does the institution communicate with its stakeholders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs orientation</td>
<td>How well does the institution provide the outcomes that its stakeholders need and value?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>How effectively does the institution engage with local and international communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation and creativity</td>
<td>How effective are the institution’s innovative and creative responses to a changing environment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity Building</td>
<td>How effectively does the institution develop the capacity of its people to provide valued outcomes for stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Management</td>
<td>How well does the institution monitor and improve its performance?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The fourth step of the COL RIM is the verification of the self review. An organisation-wide verification team, entirely separate to the team that carried out the self review, uses the self review report to scope and carry out an internal evaluative exercise that verifies the self review. The verification involves reviewing the methods and the evidence that supports the findings of the self review. Verification has the optional element of involving external people, which assists with organisational capacity building in review and audit methods. Verification could include one or more education specialists, independent auditors or quality professionals from partner institutions. The purpose of involving an external party is to benefit from independent, objective expertise. An external lead verifier is required for making a judgment of COL RIM Verified, COL RIM Threshold or COL RIM Not Verified (refer Sections 3.4 and 4.1). The outcome of the verification is a report that can be used to refine plans for improvement.

The fifth step, follow up, is the engagement of COL with the institution to develop a realistic plan for improvement and to act upon this plan. There is the optional step of a return visit from the lead verifier or other member of COL to verify progress with improvement plans and assist where possible. In the COL RIM first trial, no follow up visit has occurred to date as the institution has indicated that it wishes to repeat the COL RIM in due course.

In summary then, the aims of the institution are (i) to apply a rigorous approach to self review, identifying both good practice and recommendations to address verified issues; (ii) to strengthen internal systems and build capacity; and (iii) to become a COL RIM Verified institution in the process (possible only with a COL-appointed external verifier). COL RIM Verified status signals to stakeholders that the institution has the capacity to rigorously investigate and address issues of quality in the achievement of its goals and objectives.
3. Trialling the COL RIM at OUSL

This section introduces the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) and describes how the first four steps of the COL RIM have been carried out.

3.1 Step One - Initiation

In early 2010, COL began negotiating with OUSL to participate in a second trial of the COL RIM. OUSL is one of 15 national universities and has been unique within Sri Lanka’s national university system in being the only university to offer programmes of study leading to certificates, diplomas, degrees and postgraduate qualifications through the distance mode. OUSL is the country’s only nationally-owned and operated open and distance learning (ODL) institution, established under the direction of the government in 1978. At its outset in 1980, OUSL had just over 3000 students, rising to nearly 30,000 today.

OUSL offers over 50 programmes and 1000 courses from Certificate to Doctoral level. There are four faculties (Education, Engineering Technology, Humanities & Social Sciences and Natural Sciences) with 19 departments. The university has a central campus in Nawala, Nugegoda (Colombo district), six regional centres (Colombo, Kandy, Matara, Jaffna, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa) and a network of over 20 study and teaching centres throughout the country.

Regional centres are sizable centres offering blended delivery options (distance learning combined with labs and day school) while study centres are smaller but still owned and operated by OUSL, and teaching centres are temporary leased sites without a permanent OUSL presence.

Vision and strategy

OUSL is headed by a new Vice Chancellor who was appointed in June 2009 and who has initiated some changes to the institution’s vision and mission to represent a strategic shift towards expansion in the regions.

OUSL’s vision has evolved over the past five years to reflect a desire for progression and expansion:

Vision 2005
To be a leader in Open and Distance Learning, renowned for excellence, for human resource development and empowerment of people to achieve their full potential (OUSL handbook 2005/6).

Vision 2011
To be the premier ODL institution in South Asia through excellence, efficiency and equity in learning, research and scholarship (OUSL draft Corporate Plan 2011 – 2016).

High level goals for 2011 – 2016 are:

- Be the lead institution in Asia providing high quality and relevant higher education through open and distance learning.
- Be a centre of excellence in scholarship, research and innovation.
- Ensure quality in the provision of teaching and learner support services.
- Enhance institutional capacity to achieve efficiency and effectiveness in all operations.
- Widen access to higher education through ODL and provide ladders of opportunity for learners.
- Enhance institutional capacity for resource generation to ensure sustainability.
- Establish and improve physical and social environment in the university.
These goals are set against an environment of increasing competition. According to conversations with OUSL staff, offshore or private (non-governmental) universities have been delivering in Sri Lanka for some time but are not recognised by the Ministry of Higher Education and the University Grants Commission or included in the mandatory quality assurance regime.

However, about 26 “world renowned” international universities have now formalised arrangements with the government to commence higher education programmes in Sri Lanka from next April (Sri Lanka Daily News, Friday 10 December 2010). These universities will be subject to government-imposed conditions which include that 20 percent of the total intake must be granted to local students as scholarships. Further conditions include proper standards for the existing private higher education institutions in the country. The Higher Education Minister noted that this initiative would broaden the free education system and could strengthen local universities (such as OUSL). However, this was not further explained and it is possible, in the view of the verifiers, that greater choice for students could impinge on OUSL’s local market and on its expansion plans.

In early 2010, OUSL initiated the COL RIM with COL as a result of the following key drivers:

- A change in strategic direction based on expansion in the regions due to having reached saturation point in Colombo. Leadership of the institution believes that attaining a positive COL RIM outcome will provide credibility that assists the expansion.
- The organisation’s next institutional self evaluation (a requirement of its quality assurance body, the UGC) is scheduled for 2011 and OUSL is looking to the COL RIM to provide an international benchmark.

OUSL aims to offer all level 1 and 2 programmes at regional centres within the next two years, building up to 38,000 students. This aim arises in part from the recent end to the long running civil disturbances which is seeing greater numbers of students in northern and eastern regions gaining access to education. To assist the expansion, OUSL is concentrating on decentralising certain administrative activities from the central campus to the regions, to free up academics to concentrate on the quality of course development, research and strategic activities eg. strengthening collaboration with industry.

**Preparatory visit**

In August 2010, the COL team undertook a preparatory visit to OUSL at the university’s request as part of the initiation phase of the COL RIM. The preparatory visit took place over 9-13 August and consisted of one day’s preparation between the team (combined with representing COL at the International Quality Assurance Roundtable, organised by the OUSL and where OUSL had a significant presence) followed by three days of meeting and training of management, self reviewers and verifiers. The fifth day consisted of a visit to the Kandy township where OUSL has its second largest regional centre.

The preparatory visit was an opportunity for the COL team to refine the structure, format and materials to ensure effective training of self reviewers in particular. While the preparatory visit for the first trial included six repeated introductory sessions on the COL RIM for all staff, the nature of the training at OUSL focused on going more indepth into self review methodology. In particular, exploring issues raised in the staff survey and how to use these to scope the self review, followed by use of the indicators to answer the critical questions.

Following the third trial, it is expected that COL will standardise the training programme for the preparatory visit.

**3.2 Step Two - Staff Survey results**

Prior to the preparatory visit, in mid 2010 the COL team administered the survey to all 1031 staff at OUSL. There were 196 responses of which 91 were complete, which amounts to a 9% response rate. While this is well below the target of a 25% response rate, it is noted that the proportion of academic staff is around 300 of the figure of 1031 and the response rate was substantially higher amongst this population (70 of the 91 complete responses, or 23% of the academic staff).
A detailed survey report was completed and distributed to senior management and the self review team. The report organised survey findings by theme, with detailed comments and ratings per performance area, discussing both quantitative and qualitative comments. The report identified areas of strengths and weaknesses as indicated through staff perception, and highlighted indicators that were rated particularly low. The themes themselves had overall ratings of between 0.80 and 0.88, which is approaching ‘threshold’ level on a scale of 0 (opportunity for improvement) to 2 (good practice).

The survey results were then used extensively during the preparatory visit in assisting teams to scope the self review, including selection of relevant enabler and results indicators.

### 3.3 Step Three - Self Review

OUSL carried out the self review exercise over September and October 2010. The team consisted of 19 staff divided into teams of three to five people, each of whom carried out a review under one of the themes of Communication, Needs Orientation, Capacity Building, Innovation & Creativity and Quality Management. Originally Engagement was included but was dropped when it became evident that this team could not meet timeframes.

All teams met soon after the preparatory visit to complete their scoping. Each team presented their intended scope in terms of the relevant indicators that supported their theme, and there was wider discussion before each scope was confirmed.

Some individual teams made explicit reference to the staff survey report in their discussion of scoping. For example, Needs Orientation made a link between key survey issues and question style for their self review student surveys and focus group discussions. One team, Capacity Building, made reference to horizontal and vertical focus areas although the actual areas were not detailed.

Teams then carried out separate reviews and produced a separate report per team, with an overall report produced by a nominated team leader. The verification confirmed that there was no actual leader of the wider self review team from beginning to end and this was notable in the lack of cohesion of the overall self review report, in particular a lack of triangulation between teams’ findings. In most cases, individual team reports provided considerable further detail which was utilised heavily during the verification to extract key information per theme.

Because COL RIM is a systems-thinking model, the themes are by definition interrelated and a thorough self review must share, debate and triangulate evidence between teams, utilising each other’s evidence to substantiate own findings. The OUSL self review would have been much stronger had teams engaged with each other throughout the review and this is discussed in more detail under Section 4.

### 3.4 Step Four - Verification

The COL team carried out the verification exercise at OUSL over 6-13 December 2010. The verification was led by Caroline Donovan (Lead Verifier), with three verifiers-in-training and a team of six OUSL staff:

**COL RIM team**

- Caroline Donovan, Lead Verifier and Manager, Strategy & Business Delivery at the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. Co-developer of model and Lead Verifier of the first trial at the University of Technology, Jamaica in 2009
- Colin Carson, verifier-in-training and Assessment & Moderation Facilitator at the New Zealand Qualifications Authority
- Violet Nomalanga Essilfie, verifier-in-training and tertiary education quality assurance specialist at the Tertiary Education Council in Botswana
- Pamela Dottin, verifier-in-training and accreditation specialist at the University of West Indies, Barbados campus
OUSL internal verifiers

The OUSL internal verifiers were the six members of the Quality Assurance Committee, a cross-faculty committee established in 2004 to oversee aspects of quality management at the university. They are:

- Dr. Gayathri Jayatilleke, Secretary of QA Committee and Senior Lecturer in Educational Technology
- Professor Sirimevan Colombage, Chair of QA Committee and Professor of Social Studies (Economics)
- Mr. Rohana Ratnayake, representative from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and Senior Lecturer in Law
- Dr. Bandunee Liyanage, representative from the Faculty of Engineering Technology and Senior Lecturer in Civil Engineering
- Professor Lilani Senaratna, representative from the Faculty of Natural Science and Professor, Department of Botany
- Mr. T. Thanaraj, representative from the Faculty of Education and Senior Lecturer in Secondary and Tertiary Education

The nine members of the COL RIM Verification Team (the team) were then paired up to represent the themes covered by the self review, namely:

- Capacity Building – Colin Carson and T. Thanaraj
- Needs Orientation – Violet Essilfie and Bandunee Liyanage
- Quality Management – Rohana Ratnayake and Pamela Dottin
- Innovation & Creativity – Lilani Senaratna and Sirimevan Colombage
- Communication – Gayathri Jayatilleke

Each team produced a report at the end of the verification exercise, and are contributors to this document.

Objectives of the verification

The verification exercise had three key objectives:

- **To verify the self review report.** This involves verifiers scoping the exercise with reference to the issues raised in the survey report and the scoping and findings of the self review report. Verifiers then carry out an investigation that is focused on verifying the findings of the self review and supporting its recommendations.

- **To build quality management capacity at OUSL.** Verifiers are trained by the COL RIM team in methods of investigation, including necessary skills and qualities to carry out the role, and methods employed such as interview techniques, sampling and triangulation of evidence. The aim is to build staff capacity in the wider implementation of appropriate recommendations.

- **To make recommendations for improvement actions.** The team seeks to add further value by making recommendations based on defensible judgements on the institution’s performance in relation to the six thematic questions.

The summative outcome of the COL RIM is the external verification of the institution’s self review report. The profile of a COL RIM Verified institution is one that demonstrates the capacity to respond to a changing environment, and strives to meet stakeholders’ needs and expectations.
The summative outcome of the verification is discussed in Section 4 below, while detailed findings by theme are discussed in Section 5.

Scoping the verification

The verification team met with the self reviewers and the wider senior management team on Day One, Monday 6 December, for the presentation of the self review report. Discussion ensued on the approach taken and scope of the self review, with some probing as to methods of synthesis of findings, if any.

The verification team commenced scoping on Day One, and completed this on Day Two followed by detailed planning of the types of evidence to be obtained to answer the evaluative question (also referred to as thematic or critical question) set for each theme. Scoping began with an analysis of the themes and indicators covered in the self review report and whether these were fully representative of issues raised in the survey. Each team completed a scoping document, using several different formats.

An example of a scoping document, for the Communication theme, is presented as Appendix 3. It focuses on the key findings and recommendations of the self review report and details plans to verify them. This document is supported by notes on survey issues and the appropriateness of the indicators used to support the self review. It is important to emphasise that there are many ways to scope an activity; in the case of verification, the important elements are the main points of the self review and its approach to drawing conclusions. This is a slightly different approach than in the first trial where the emphasis was on understanding the indicators selected by the self review team. In this trial, we attempted to take a more holistic view and ensure we kept challenging the findings, asking how effective the process in question was (as findings generally related to processes more than outcomes), and how did we know.

Carrying out the verification

Day Two through to the end of Day Five was spent actively interviewing OUSL staff and looking at documentary evidence, including plans, studies, data, records and so on. The Lead Verifier’s role was to coordinate all teams and maintain an overview of what each team was finding and how it all linked together from a systems perspective. By Friday afternoon, the team was beginning to synthesise findings both within and between teams. Each theme was written up on a large sheet in terms of the key findings of the self review, and all verification team members contributed to analysing the evidence obtained to support each finding and make a judgment as to whether that finding could be verified.

COL RIM team members met on Sunday afternoon to complete the exercise. The Lead Verifier drafted a presentation for senior management and the wider verification team went through this presentation in detail on Monday morning (the final day of the visit). Individual teams rated their own theme’s self review using the rubric outlined in Section 4, and the wider team then agreed on the final COL RIM rating for OUSL.

Individual teams then prepared commentary on their theme for the OUSL team member to present. The purposes of having the OUSL staff member deliver the findings for each theme rather than the COL RIM member were to demonstrate the capacity-building objective of the verification and to add further credibility to the results as they were delivered to senior management and the self review team by their own colleagues.

**Verification is the summative outcome of the COL RIM process**
The outcome of verification will be positive, even if self review identifies multiple quality problems to be addressed, if the self review demonstrates:
- Thorough investigation with a high degree of integrity and rigour
- Good analysis and reasonable evidence-based judgments
- Honest conclusions and sound recommendations that will be effective in improving outcomes.

Conversely a negative outcome will result if the self review misses key issues from the staff survey and other sources, conducts inadequate sampling and triangulation, considers anecdotal evidence and comes to conclusions that are not evidence-based.
4. Verification outcome

This section describes the verification team’s rating of OUSL under the COL RIM; and observations from self reviewers and verifiers on their experiences in implementing the model.

4.1 Summative outcome

The verification team sought to answer a number of questions about the self review as a whole. Namely, to what extent did the self review:

- Use reliable methods to scope the self review?
- Use reliable methods to make defensible judgements?
- Involve the right stakeholders?
- Establish the degree of change required to effect improvement, and the impact of that change?

During the first trial the team refined a rubric developed to make a judgment about the institution as COL RIM Not Verified, COL RIM Threshold or COL RIM Verified in relation to the COL RIM:

**Figure 6 – Rubric of descriptors for making a judgment about the institution in relation to the COL RIM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not verified</th>
<th>Threshold</th>
<th>Verified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Incomplete investigation of the issues</td>
<td>• Scope limited to some key issues only</td>
<td>• Scope inclusive of all results and identified issues of concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inadequate analysis of cause and effect</td>
<td>• Investigation rigorous in some areas only</td>
<td>• Thorough investigation with a high degree of integrity and rigour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Findings and conclusions based primarily on anecdote and opinion</td>
<td>• Some analysis of cause and effects</td>
<td>• Good analysis and reasonable evidence-based judgments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of involvement of key stakeholder groups</td>
<td>• Most judgments evidence based and recommendations are improvement oriented</td>
<td>• Honest conclusions and sound recommendations that will be effective in improving outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recommendations have a limited evidence base</td>
<td>• Most key stakeholder groups included</td>
<td>• Inclusive of feedback from all key stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The verification exercise was unable to verify the self review in its entirety. The outcome is that the OUSL has been rated COL RIM Threshold under the COL RIM. The reasons for this rating are discussed below.

Firstly, there were a number of good points about the self review which balanced its weaknesses:

**Figure 7 – Strengths and weaknesses of OUSL’s self review**

**Good points**

- Collective scoping meant teams were aware of and understood the scope of each theme
- Process of a panel approving the scope was appropriate (though no detail was provided)
- Interviews and surveys were carried out using a rigorous methodology
- Appropriate sampling techniques were demonstrated (even if actual numbers of respondents did not eventuate)
• Some team reports were explicit about conclusions drawn from a range of evidence
• Some team reports actively sought the views of interviewees on strategies for improvement

Weaknesses
• The review lacked an overall leader and this was evident in the wide variability in quality between the team reports, including methods of applying ratings to the indicators
• Focus of each review was heavily weighted towards *enablers* (processes) rather than *results*
• Lack of cohesion between teams evident in the final report (no triangulation of findings)
• Most team reports relied heavily on interview and survey findings and did not make triangulation with other sources of evidence explicit
• A number of conclusions and recommendations not adequately substantiated
• Some key stakeholders seemed to be left out of the process, eg. senior management; and industry

Use reliable methods to scope the self review

The self review team used reliable methods to scope the self review which involved each team meeting to determine important issues arising from the survey and which indicators would assist in the review; then coming together as a wider team for discussion and debate. The scope of each individual review was then approved by a panel. The verification team noted that one team, Needs Orientation, made an explicit link between key survey issues and question style for their self review student surveys and focus group discussions. Another team, Capacity Building, made reference to horizontal and vertical focus areas although the actual areas were not detailed.

Sampling was also generally well considered in terms of direct interviews, surveys and focus groups as teams sought to cover breadth and depth of staff and student groups across the institution within the time available.

It was noted by the verification team that individual review team’s scopes were very process-oriented when the COL RIM calls for a focus on outcomes (results). The five results areas under the COL RIM are: Impact on society outcomes, Teaching and learning outcomes, Research, innovation and entrepreneurial outcomes, Staff outcomes and Support system outcomes. The model directs that the self review should focus on results (“Are we achieving what we want to achieve?”) and look to enablers (processes) where *cause and effect* need to be determined in relation to poor results (and sometimes to good practice also).

Based on the table on page 7 of the overall self review report, it is evident that the self review focused more on processes. A total of 23 out of 28 enabler indicators were selected under the five themes (over 80% of enablers) while only 10 of 20 results indicators (50%) were covered.

The emphasis on process was further demonstrated in the scope of the Communications theme which developed research questions based on the thematic question. The four research questions were:

- What are the different communication and information needs of all the stakeholders of the university?
- What are the processes and systems in place that hinder or facilitate effective communication?
- What are the types and sources of information stakeholders need?
- What are the different processes in place to monitor the effectiveness of communication between the university and its stakeholders?

While these questions elicited much useful information, the focus on *inputs* (needs, processes and systems) is at the expense of *outputs* (what results are we actually getting and are these effective in meeting the needs?). Shifting thinking to a focus on outcomes does require practice and is often contrary to established quality assurance mechanisms, as may be the case at OUSL.
Finally, references to time constraints and being “burdened with academic work and other mandatory duties” meant that individual review teams trimmed down their scope in terms of the range of stakeholders accessed to provide information and evidence. Notable omissions in some areas were senior management; and external stakeholders such as industry and graduates.

**Use reliable methods to make defensible judgements**

Most reports outlined robust methodology in designing and administering surveys and analysing results. It is interesting to note that there was a heavy emphasis on surveys, interviews and focus groups, considered to be ‘primary evidence’, and limited reference to supporting this primary evidence with other sources. In other words, a heavy reliance on the statements of individuals and limited evidence of triangulation with other sources such as documents, records and data. Although other sources were mentioned in several reports, it was not made explicit which judgments they were used to support.

Two team reports, Innovation & Creativity and Quality Management, did not list any documentary evidence sighted, but the verification found that the Quality Management team did in fact triangulate with a wide range of other evidence. The Innovation & Creativity team appeared to follow a somewhat different approach to other teams which was to administer a survey on selected indicators to the four faculties, and support this survey with interviews and observation only (no documentary evidence). To a large extent then, this team repeated the COL RIM Staff Survey which sought the views of individuals on all indicators of the COL RIM. Consequently, the Innovation & Creativity team report outlined interview comments but did not actually detail any evidence-based findings made through the self review.

The COL RIM is very clear that statements by individuals are perceptions only, and the purpose of the COL RIM Staff Survey was to surface such perceptions that would then be investigated by the self review. There are many good reasons for a self review to use a survey tool but OUSL’s self review may have over-utilised this tool at the expense of getting in-depth to many of the actual issues raised.

It has been mentioned that OUSL did not appoint one overall leader for the self review and this is evident in the substantial variation in quality and rigour between the individual self review teams’ approaches, methods, scoping and findings. In addition, the Engagement theme was dropped at a late stage when it became evident that this team would not meet the timeframe.

The final self review report was collated by a member of one of the teams and emailed to all the members of the teams. Due to time pressures, a number of judgments in the final report were made solely by the author, based on the evidence presented by each team, and certain clarifications were made with the help of the team leaders, However, there are some discrepancies between the final report and individual team reports. The final report is also less thorough than individual reports and frequently does not provide an evidence base for its judgments.

Robust methods for reaching judgments were demonstrated in parts of the self review. However, evidence of triangulation is generally not evident within the overall report as the findings from interviews and document analysis are discussed or listed individually by theme and it is not clear how these are drawn together to form judgments. Triangulation is referred to in places as occurring between interviews, surveys and focus groups, which is weak triangulation when not supported by data, documents, records or observations. The verification teams found, during their investigation, that the self review often had a firmer basis for their judgments than their reports suggested. This was particularly evident with Needs Orientation, Capacity Building and Quality Management.

**Involve the right stakeholders**

A robust self review as defined under the COL RIM is an in-depth investigation of statements and issues arising, with findings clearly related to a synthesis of evidence. This includes involvement of a range of stakeholders as appropriate, including senior management, and external stakeholders, which were notable omissions in OUSL’s self review.
When determining whom to survey or interview, consideration must be given to the range of stakeholders, and justification provided for who was selected and who was omitted. Stakeholders involved in the self review were largely confined to academic staff and students. Some clerical and technical staff were referred to as providing information via questionnaire or telephone conversation (e.g., Capacity Building). One notable omission, particularly in a theme such as Needs Orientation, was external stakeholders (industry).

Senior management, essential to many of the issues under investigation including staff workload and relationships with industry, did not feature in most parts of the self review (Needs Orientation an exception).

Establish the degree of change required to effect improvement, and the impact of that change

The nature of recommendations varies considerably across the different teams. Most are clearly improvement oriented and reflect considerable thought and analysis of the issues. Some do not clearly reflect the evidence base, i.e. the basis for the recommendation is unclear or is solely representative of staff perceptions. Most recommendations do not include specific timeframes and measures but they do include defined outcomes. For the recommendations to be implemented with effect they need to be specific and measurable, detailing the specific actions required, the degree of change expected and the impacts that will have. This will be the focus of the fifth and final stage of the COL RIM.

Summary

In conclusion, the self review team made considerable effort at conducting a review, based on the self-identified limitations and constraints of the team. The scoping stage was fairly rigorous and made appropriate links to issues raised in the COL RIM Staff Survey. The scope of the self review would have been enhanced by focusing more on outcomes than processes, less emphasis on surveys and questionnaires and widening stakeholder involvement.

Appointing a leader of the wider self review team was emphasised as necessary during the preparatory visit and it remains unclear why this advice was not followed. All themes interrelate by definition, and the final report reflects the lack of synthesis and triangulation between the findings of each team.

Extensive interviews with each self review team, possible in four of five cases, proved that supporting documentary evidence was considered in more depth than most review reports would suggest. The verification would have been facilitated by clearer triangulation of evidence represented in self review reports.

Because the self review teams carried out their reviews entirely independently after the scoping stage, the verification team initially carried out separate ratings. Four self review teams were rated COL RIM Threshold while Innovation & Capacity Building was rated COL RIM Not Verified.

On balance, taking a holistic view across the self review, the verification team was unanimous that OUSL’s self review met the criteria for COL RIM Threshold.

It is clear that in future, OUSL will need to make some changes to ensure that the self review team has the time and resources necessary to ensure sufficient scope and depth of investigation, including involvement of a wider range of stakeholders, with more time and attention given to the rigour of evidence-based judgments.

4.2 Observations from self reviewers

Observations made by the self reviewers on the self review experience are directly quoted below:

Needs Orientation

- The process gave us training in how to do the scoping when resources required for a self review process [are] limited
- The process strengthened the knowledge in preparing questionnaires and conducting a student feedback survey.
- The process gave us training in preparing for and conducting a Focus Group Discussion.
• The process gave us learning in making judgments based on evidence coming from various sources.
• The skills obtained from this exercise are useful to prepare self review reports for various other purposes.
• It was challenging for the team members to cope with the review process along with their routine duties.

It was found that the necessity for the self review process had not been adequately felt by the key stakeholders in the University. As a result, there was less cooperation in providing evidence and taking part in the discussions / interviews. Therefore, in the future, key stakeholders should be convinced about the need for the periodic self evaluation.

Communication
As a team we felt that conducting this research first gave all of us a good glimpse of the whole university and its many valuable assets and the experiences of some of the people who work and study in the university. The team felt that something was radically wrong specially in the field of communication. Another important lesson was that need for self review for any institution. If not done regularly and institution will lose its relevance and become a white elephant wasting valuable resources.

Capacity-building
This was a great learning experience [for] all team members as this was a new approach in reviewing the performance of the university. Each team member was playing the role assigned to them although they were very busy with day to day activities.

Quality management
No comments.

Innovation & creativity
From the process we learned how the concepts of innovation and creativity [have] emerged from the [three] perspectives, namely institute-wise, faculty-wise and individually. It helped us to understand how OUSL [is] engaging in creativity and innovation and how this can be improved in the future.

4.3 Observations from verifiers

Lead verifier observations
This trial, the second of the COL RIM, involved three verifiers-in-training accompanying the lead verifier. This had both pros and cons; it allowed faster scoping and getting underway as the verifiers-in-training had greater understanding and familiarity with evaluative enquiry methods than did the university staff. However, it meant that OUSL staff in this case were able to comfortably avoid taking the lead in the beginning (for three out of five themes), relying on the COL team member. It also meant more complexities for the Lead Verifier in assigning teams while trying to ensure that the capacity building objective of the verification was met; and monitoring the performance of three verifiers-in-training in order to provide an assessment to COL.

In summary, it worked out very well as the verifiers-in-training utilised their leadership skills to build up the confidence and performance of their OUSL team members over the week. By the end of the week, the OUSL staff were firmly taking the lead in their themes and this was extremely positive to see.

As regards the make up of the verifier team, it was extremely beneficial from the Lead Verifier’s perspective to have volunteers who were motivated to see quality improvement in their workplace and who also had relevant prior experience. Unlike the first trial, OUSL verifiers were committed to being available for the full period, less one or two essential commitments, and this really made a positive difference to the effectiveness of the exercise. It helped that the six verifiers were part of a well established Quality Assurance Committee and therefore the natural choice for the role.
The preparation visit in August was useful to meet the internal verifiers and conduct some preliminary training in investigative methods and principles. It also enabled the COL team and verifiers to spend some time together, building interest in the COL RIM which is likely to have influenced the retention of all of the verifiers for the verification which was approximately four months later.

The scoping exercise was simpler than in the first trial, aided by the spontaneous development of a different method of scoping. This was done by each team, using different templates (refer Appendix Two for an example), and did not belabour indicators. This is because the verification aims to answer thematic questions per theme, lifting the investigation up from the level of the indicator. After the first exercise we decided to simplify the relationship between themes and indicators by removing the pre-mapping of indicators to selected themes, encouraging the institution to use the indicators as prompts in the scoping of its investigation into each thematic question. This has worked better in the second trial.

A specific report template was provided to verifiers this time, with moderate success. Because each report template was filled out rather differently, this made the writing of Section 5 quite difficult. Where information was lacking, the Lead Verifier relied on notes and memory – information which needs to be checked by the verifiers. However, much useful information was gathered from these reports and in the Lead Verifier’s opinion it was overall more useful, more expedient and more effective to have each team complete their own report. For future implementations it is recommended that COL streamline this report and make it as easy as possible for verifiers to supply the key information that will facilitate the writing of the overall report.

COL RIM verifier team observations

With four COL RIM verifiers in total, a number of ideas emerged about refinements to the model and the process.

Ratings

To what extent do we expect the self review team to rate supporting indicators as a means to arriving at a numerical rating for each theme? Should we direct the self reviewers to apply a holistic rating to each theme, ie. Opportunity for Improvement, Threshold and Good Practice? Or should they derive a numerical rating based on an aggregation of scores per indicators per theme? Much discussion ensued on these points, bearing in mind that we are continually trying to lift the level of inquiry up to the level of the theme so that performance is considered holistically and in terms of effectiveness.

Support for self review

Following the first trial at UTech, COL added an element to the self review process which was to make a COL RIM team member available to assist with and comment on the scope of the self review. The purpose of this is to help ensure that the self review is well framed from the outset, giving it every chance to be verified. A self review with a narrow scope would be unlikely to achieve verification before the review even begins.

At OUSL, only one team interacted on COL’s Basecamp and only briefly. COL was unable to assist the scoping in any practical way. COL did advise that the self review should have a team leader as the resulting lack of cohesion between team approaches and results was foreseen. The COL RIM handbook refers to the author of the self review report but does not stipulate that the self review team should have a designated leader. We suggest that this becomes a mandatory feature of the model.

Operating at the level of theme

The self review report template was enhanced after the first trial to emphasise discussion at the level of the thematic question rather than indicators. Predefined mapping of indicators to each theme was also removed, allowing the institution to make its own determination as to the use of indicators in answering the key evaluative question that sits under each theme.
The self review report template was followed fairly closely by some of the OUSL teams. None however provided any narrative on the thematic question itself; this featured only in the final self review report where each was accorded a numerical rating. Individual team reports worked through findings by indicator and did not pull the information together to form a holistic judgment on how well or how effectively the intent of the theme was achieved. It may be useful to modify the final report template to emphasise that the thematic question needs to be answered, drawing together the evidence supplied by the investigation. It also may be useful to supply a suggested outline for individual team reports for both the self review and verification.

Verifier handbook

The team agreed that in finalising the COL RIM for wider implementation, consideration should be given to the development of a practitioner’s handbook for verifiers. This is distinct from the COL RIM Handbook as it would not be a description of the model but a procedural and training guide for verifiers. It would outline the training programme for the preparation visit, guide the verifier in structuring the verification itself and cover relevant cultural considerations. It would help ensure that the verification meets its aims and objectives.

Support for lead verifier

The team discussed the effect of having several verifiers-in-training on this visit as opposed to the expected one or none on a typical visit. It was agreed that there was substantial value for the lead verifier in having a second verifier, whether in training or fully fledged. Capacity-building takes considerable extra time and it is difficult to see on either visit (UTech or OUSL) how we would have completed a thorough job in the timeframe without a second COL RIM team member. There is the further consideration of the value of “COL RIM Verified” as perceived by an institution’s external stakeholders when the exercise is led by only one person as opposed to the standard model of an accreditation panel which is widely understood. Is it therefore practical for COL to consider having a second person attend the verification as a standard feature of the model while still meeting the key objective of being a low cost exercise?

Triangulation between teams

When the exercise is structured by forming a designated team per theme, as was the practice at both UTech and OUSL, triangulation of evidence between teams becomes particularly important. This is not emphasised in the evidence-gathering, decision-making and reporting steps of either the self review or verification sections in the handbook. Triangulation between teams is a particularly crucial step because the COL RIM is a systems-thinking model, meaning that all themes necessarily interrelate and there is the potential for significant areas of overlap. Teams must discuss their evidence and formative findings and recommendations collectively, regularly and systematically throughout the review or verification in order to substantiate their judgments appropriately utilising their own and other teams’ evidence. This could usefully be expanded on in the handbook and the onsite training programme, with appropriate examples.
5. Findings by theme

This section provides a detailed discussion of the findings of the verification by theme, expanding on the executive summary. It provides the key issues raised in the survey for context, and discusses both areas of good practice and critical issues that were confirmed through verification of the self review.

5.1 Introduction to detailed findings

The verification team investigated a number of areas in more depth than the self review in order to substantiate the range of findings and recommendations. In addition, the team expanded the scope where indicators had been misinterpreted. Due to a slightly wider scope and also lack of availability of some key self reviewers (e.g. Innovation & Creativity) and wider staff, sample sizes across the board are smaller than is desirable. Therefore, some findings and recommendations are based on indicative evidence (e.g. sampling student retention data in only one or two departments) rather than representative (a sufficient sample to draw conclusions across the institution).

Some findings or recommendations of the self review could not be fully investigated in the time available, sometimes due to insufficient information within the self review itself about the evidential basis for the findings / recommendations. Any areas worthy of focus in a future review are noted.

Each theme starts with a definition of the theme, followed by a synopsis of key survey and verified self review findings, collective recommendations and finally a detailed discussion of evidence by the respective verification team. Whereas in the first trial we included all self review findings and only self review recommendations in the table, the nature of the OUSL self review is such that individual teams approached the documentation of findings and recommendations very differently. Some had numerous, extensive findings and recommendations while others did not make these explicit and the verification team had to “extract” both findings and recommendations from the report narrative. Therefore in the interests of being representative, the overall recommendations as represented in the executive summary are reproduced and discussed here.

5.2 Needs Orientation

Orienting the organisation to serving the needs of stakeholders. In particular, this theme focuses on the needs of the learners and national and institutional imperatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key survey issues</th>
<th>Verified self review findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of systematic feedback from stakeholders</td>
<td>• Staff are aware of the Vision and Mission and their appropriateness, but are not always able to recall the content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of regular reporting on student outcomes (retention and success) and using this information for decision-making</td>
<td>• Obtaining student feedback is not standard practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No alignment between planning and resource allocation</td>
<td>• Lack of regular reporting on student outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In general, OUSL meets the needs of its stakeholders in the types of programmes it offers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students are generally satisfied with the ODL method of teaching and learning – but there is substantial room for improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student scholarships and bursaries are under-utilised although money is available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students are confident about securing employment after graduation and progressing in their careers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
▪ Timeliness of print & distribution
▪ Quality, maintenance and availability of equipment such as computers

**NO3** Revise criteria for scholarships and university bursaries to ensure full utilisation

### Areas recommended for further investigation

There were several other significant areas which could not be verified and/or further investigated because of lack of sufficient information and documents to support the statements made. These are as follows:

- Key stakeholders did not feel the necessity for the self-review and were therefore less cooperative. This is a leadership issue and is up to OUSL’s senior management to address. All staff should ideally be well aware of and support the implementation of the COL RIM for the model to be most effective.
- Eligibility of students to sit for examinations is variable between faculties and slows up registration for exams.
- Students drop out of OUSL programmes for several reasons but a segment does persist and finish. No statistics were provided for retention and/or mitigations for cohorts or programmes with high drop out rates. Not enough triangulation was able to be performed.

The rating of the verification team for the Needs Orientation theme was **COL RIM Threshold**.

### Comments on approach and method

The approach adopted by the self review team was similar to that of the COL RIM Staff Survey in that it took a research-based, survey type of approach. The verification judged it to be thorough and defensible except where there was not enough triangulation of evidence to substantiate the judgments made. One major stakeholder was omitted from the review and that is the employer. As a result there is a big gap in that area. The ratings used were not consistent and were not arrived at in a scientific and systematic manner. Not enough documents were looked at to provide the necessary supporting evidence. It was not indicated in the team report how the listed documents were used to provide evidence or were triangulated between when forming judgments.

### Comments on scope

Through the self review scoping process it was decided to consider most relevant twelve quality indicators (ten enablers and two outcome indicators) under this theme. Therefore the findings were focused on processes and not outcomes. It was clear to the reader of the self review report whether the processes worked or not. The issues identified though were representative of the staff and student concerns as per the survey results. But in – depth investigation as to the cause and effect was not done. As a result a number of issues were left hanging. That also meant the verification team had to do a lot to uncover what was left out. It was like doing the self review itself instead of focusing on just verifying the methods and the evidence that supports the findings of the self-review.

### Comments on findings and recommendations

The verification found that OUSL generally meets the needs of stakeholders in the types of programmes it offers. This was verified through student interviews, through documented examples of collaborative programmes and through examples of industry needs assessments completed by a number of departments before commencing course design. Interviews and documents show that faculties have policies and guidelines on programme review and how to introduce new programmes. There are Senate approved guidelines and mechanisms for course design and development, and faculties seem to rely on their own procedures. On the basis of our investigation this seems to be working, but there may be room to strengthen the process. This variability between faculties lies behind the statement from the self review that programmes are not reviewed regularly. One faculty reviews 20% of content each year for five years until all the material is reviewed; another faculty conducts reviews per level of study per year.
In addition, the verification team was provided with a Tracer Study of Graduates of 2009 which had just been completed and was still in draft form. This study used a questionnaire to determine the background characteristics of students and the extent to which obtaining academic qualifications had benefited them in terms of employment, income and other rewards as well as their feedback on the quality of programmes and other services received from the university. The 2009 study followed earlier studies in 1995 and 1996, and was more extensive.

The study was based on around 600 responses from graduates who completed bachelors’ degrees, postgraduate certificates/diplomas or masters degrees in 2009. Graduates of 2009 were 62.3% female although masters’ graduates were 76.9% male. The predominant age group was 31-35 yrs (33%), followed by 20% of graduates aged 26-30 yrs and 13% aged from 41-50 yrs. The majority of respondents were employed in the government sector (around 70%). The study provided data on a comprehensive range of aspects of course design, delivery and assessment as well as employment opportunities and advancement experienced by graduates. The results were very positive in demonstrating that for the majority of respondents, OUSL’s programmes met their needs.

Regarding the finding that there is a “Lack of regular reporting on student outcomes”, OUSL management responded to this report by stating that “Student completion rate and performance are reported to the Senate and the Council regularly. Students’ outcomes on completion and graduation rates are regularly done and included in the Annual Report every year, which goes to the Parliament. Although the outcomes were reported on the Vice Chancellor’s convocation report. Retention studies are limited.” The verification did not find evidence of regular reporting on student outcomes. If there is an Annual Report that details outcomes on completion and graduation rates, it was not presented to the verifiers by any staff they spoke with during the investigation. The Needs Orientation team queried lecturers in a sample of departments about retention, completion and qualification achievement data and was provided with limited information in response.

The verification also found that students were generally satisfied with the ODL method of teaching and learning, based on interviews and some formal student evaluations, but that there is substantial room for improvement. The latter part of this judgment is based on two main factors: student expectations, and the management of resources.

Student expectations are curiously misaligned in several fundamental ways with the ODL delivery method that has provided OUSL’s point of difference to date. Some students interviewed during the verification were of the opinion that more contact lessons should be introduced even though current “day classes” (lab sessions and discussion forums) are not attended by the majority. Heads of Departments and Deans were of the opinion that ODL is sufficient to meet students’ needs and suits the working students who are in the majority. School leavers however may find it difficult because they are used to the school system which is based on face to face delivery and high teacher interaction. Also those students who do practical subjects (e.g. engineering) have compulsory day classes, and those interviewed tended to want more. Students’ views confirmed the above. However, those students who participated in the interviews may have been mainly non-working young learners and not representative of the views of the majority.

Students at the Engineering Technology & Natural Sciences Faculties further mentioned that they do not have opportunities to work at the well equipped advanced research laboratories, and yet those are underutilised. The verification team’s investigations sampled a faculty and found that it has a well structured faculty research committee with procedures for research funds allocation. The team has visited research laboratories and confirmed they are well equipped, but was unable to get the view of academics from any other faculty on this particular point due to time constraints. However, it is clear that OUSL needs to find a way of utilising its advanced research laboratories for the benefit of its stakeholders (e.g. students, staff and industry).

Students and staff were also interviewed about the adequacy of student facilities, namely space available on campus for self study; the quality of hostels for out of town students coming for day classes; and sporting facilities. Students talked about a lack of empty rooms to work in and that they were not allowed to use classrooms. They also talked about Temporary Residential Facilities not having enough beds, and a lack of sporting facilities. However, staff members were not of the same opinion with students - they emphasise this is an ODL institution and not a conventional university.
The verification team did not pursue this line of enquiry in enough depth to reconcile the apparent desire of students for traditional facilities to support greater staff to student contact with the fact that OUSL is very clearly an ODL institution. Hence we have made a recommendation to investigate the apparent misalignment between students’ expectations and what is offered – is it school leavers, or a different age group or a broader range of students? Why do they hold these expectations? Does OUSL unintentionally create the expectation that delivery is a blend of ODL and traditional methods? We feel that students who are substantially disaffected by any element of delivery may erode the university’s reputation over time. OUSL needs to decide for itself what mode of learning it is really encouraging and communicate effectively with students concerning their expectations.

OUSL management responded to the above comments with “OUSL teaching methodology is distance learning mode. This includes self-learning through the course package provided together with support through contact sessions which are not mandatory traditional lectures but optional discussion sessions. Where a course is science based laboratory sessions and field visits are mandatory. The teaching methodology, study time and support facilities to be expected are conveyed to the students through faculty handbooks at the time of application and well ahead of registration. Thus although these [are] communicated to the students before enrolment their mindset is that of rote learning (school system, tuition and university system).” The verification team would agree with management’s comments; the point is that some students arrive with expectations that are misaligned to the mode of delivery, and this is a real issue that OUSL needs to think creatively about in order to avoid students quickly becoming disaffected.

The second contributing factor to our finding that there is “substantial room for improvement” in meeting students’ needs concerns resources. We interviewed students and staff, including the Director of Operations, with particular reference to the late delivery of course materials. The Printing and Delivery centre is responsible for the bulk of printing for the central campus and the regional centres and we observed that some machines were not working which were responsible for both packaging and delivery of course materials. We were also told of shortage of staff at times when needed and that the two vehicles that are used to deliver materials around the regions are not enough. The Director of Operations said that sometimes staff present manuscripts late, compounding the issues, which we were able to verify through some academic staff interviews.

Further comments concerned the availability of basic equipment such as laboratory chemicals and computers, both at the central campus and regional centres. We were informed that the Asian Development Bank had funded a bulk computer purchase during 2006 – 2009 but that this was not supported by an upgrade plan and many of the computers were not well maintained. We did however verify via the Assistant Bursar that funds from the Distance Education Modernisation Project (DEMP) had substantially upgraded facilities at regional centres after 2009. It was not possible during the limited verification period to pursue strategic planning documents or evidence of how resource allocation is managed, and therefore cannot conclude that resources are insufficient to meet needs. We can conclude that the issues raised are indicative of quality issues and thus recommend that senior management place further focus on the management of resources and in particular, OUSL’s ability to meet its goals for expansion.

Regarding the finding that “Obtaining student feedback is not standard practice”, OUSL management’s response to this report was that it has “established student unions institution and faculty-wide; [and there are] student representations in the faculty Boards (meeting monthly) and student (bi-monthly) Forum with senior management, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, [where] the issues raised at these are attended to at times across the table.” They also commented that “Institution wide formal questionnaire based on student satisfaction is not being done through regular surveys. However, student feedback on various aspects are being conducted by faculties/departments and feedback frequently used for Improvements”. The verification team found little evidence that the university systematically sought student feedback and used it for improvement purposes, beyond the anecdotal.
A final point of significance was the finding of the self review that student scholarships and bursaries are under-utilised although money is available. On interviewing the Assistant Bursar, the verification team confirmed that in 2008-2009, only 177 students qualified to be offered the Mahapola scholarship out of a total of 400 available. In 2007, 133 students qualified. The issue of the scholarships seems to be aggravated by the age limit put on eligibility to apply. The scholarships are only open to students below the age of 30. We have seen from the tracer study that OUSL’s target market is more likely to be older than 30. The requirements for these scholarships are stipulated by the UGC for the conventional students and the same criteria are applied for OUSL, despite OUSL not having conventional (face to face) students. It was therefore unclear to us who the scholarships were targeting.

Bursaries which are offered by the university are based on merit in academic performance plus need. The various faculties determine who qualifies. It was mentioned by several staff that the application forms made it difficult for students to determine which scholarships or bursaries applied to their programme of study and therefore what they should apply for. One faculty, Natural Sciences, has already started revising the application forms to make it easier for students to apply. It is clear that here, OUSL has a wasted opportunity. Students need to fully understand what they can apply for and be motivated to do so, based on the knowledge that they have a fair and equitable chance of success. We recommend that OUSL review the criteria for the award of these scholarships and bursaries, insofar as they are not solely determined by external parties, and make them more accessible and relevant to their target market.

Finally, interviews confirmed that students are confident about securing employment after graduation and progressing in their careers. Both staff and students felt that the skills learnt and the mode of learning, which is mainly self driven, produces individuals who are disciplined and can do independent work. These skills and attributes are transferred to the world of work.

5.3 Capacity Building

Developing the capacity of the institution through the development of its staff, including capacity for quality management, research, teaching and learning and engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key survey issues</th>
<th>Verified self review findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Strong perception that staff establishment (i.e. number of positions) does not meet the needs of the University, especially in terms of technical and administrative support</td>
<td>• Establishment figures are insufficient for the needs of the university, exacerbated by academics on study leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Allocation of workload unreasonably burdens some staff</td>
<td>• Low salary scales discourage recruitment of suitably qualified and experienced staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• People’s performance is not consistently managed</td>
<td>• Allocation of workload is neither fair nor transparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There may be lack of adequate training to support staff to make best use of the equipment and technologies available</td>
<td>• Performance targets are established by “norms” for academic staff but generally speaking, staff performance is not regularly reviewed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CB1</th>
<th>Develop mechanisms for identifying training needs in under-performing staff members, in accordance with international good practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expand concept of professional development beyond emphasis on initial training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop norms for administrative, non-academic and technical staff members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Find culturally appropriate feedback mechanism</td>
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<tr>
<td>CB2</td>
<td>Develop a policy for the fair allocation of workload and link this to performance management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB3</td>
<td>Collect cumulative data concerning the effects of UGC’s scheme of promotional criteria and policies, and make convincing recommendations to the UGC for implementation at the OUSL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Areas recommended for further investigation**
• Research how other ODL or blended delivery institutions allocate and manage academic staff workload
• Research international good practice in performance management and associated professional development in order to determine what will suit OUSL’s culture

The rating of the verification team for the Capacity Building theme was COL RIM Threshold.

Comments on approach and method
The methods chosen for research into the above indicators relied heavily on interviews and questionnaire. Because the majority of the indicators relate to people-related topics this appears on the surface to be an appropriate method. However, as a viable basis for judgments, there is a marked lack of documented evidence. While the majority of findings are verified, many are done so from a circumstantial (experiential) basis and the fact that few findings are spelled out in any detail means the verifiers had to elicit findings from among the report discussion.

The verification team began by checking the staff survey results and identified 14 indicators that related to capacity building. We cross checked with the review team report and with the team itself and found they identified 13, of which they focussed on eight. We decided to interview the review team in some depth before listing questions and sources of evidence we decided we needed to see or witness.

Comments on scope
The verifiers almost agreed with the review team on the indicators that could have been explored but there was not complete agreement between the two teams over the rationale for short listing 14 from the COL RIM Staff Survey where there were issues related to this theme, to eight for investigation. For example, 9.1 *Staff are retained and empowered to achieve performance targets and progress their careers within the institution* (a results indicator) was initially selected by the review team for investigation but later dropped for no reason they could explain, apart from the need to reduce the scope to a manageable size. The verifier team felt this was an important indicator for investigation. Reasons given for excluding other indicators included lack of perceived relevance; covered by another review team; or simply that practical constraints meant they had to narrow the scope. However, it is noted that the eight indicators included only one results indicator and seven enabler (process) indicators, whereas the COL RIM directs a focus on results / outcomes.

The verification team decided to focus on the eight indicators chosen by the review team and establish the findings they had taken from their review of those. We first verified with the team that we had the findings correct and then began gathering evidence to support (or not) these findings. We added to our list of questions as each interview or evidence search concluded, depending on what we found. At each step we attempted to triangulate our evidence and found that the Quality Management verifiers were a rich source of evidence that corroborated our effort. Following that, we began identifying areas where value could be added.

Comments on findings and recommendations
The first key finding is around the adequacy of staff numbers for the size and scale of the institution. The self review found that establishment figures are insufficient for the needs of the university and that the deficit situation is exacerbated by academics on study leave. The UGC sets overarching recruitment policies, salary scales and criteria for all national universities and OUSL has limited ability to be flexible within this framework. Vacancies exist in all faculties although there are some departments with current high rates of occupancy eg. the Zoology Department is nearly full. The verification found evidence, however, that some vacancies are effectively permanent, eg. vacant for the last 15 years because OUSL cannot find suitably qualified applicants as determined by the UGC.
UGC will allow academic staff to be appointed as lecturers and these staff are expected to obtain a postgraduate degree within eight years. This has had no bearing on the overarching problem of insufficient staff and shortages are exacerbated by staff on leave for various reasons. Some staff expressed the belief that the need to fill cadre positions (full-time equivalents) first was an imperative because the belief was that UGC and OUSL use unfilled positions as a reason to justify low establishment figures. OUSL management further commented, in response to this report, that “Positions unique to the OUSL are not attracting suitable applicants because of other reasons including [that] positions are more demanding and require multi-tasks skills compared to a conventional system; the salaries stipulated by the UGC are not attractive; [and that] …UGC Procedures for appointment for specialised cadre take for a long time and hence candidates lose interests and take up new appointments elsewhere. This leads to problems in filling such cadre positions.”

Related to this issue was one of workload. The verification found that staff members at all levels report workload issues, both in terms of uneven workload where those who demonstrate greater work ethic receive more work to do, and in terms of overwork. Anecdotally there is a view held at the senior management level that 20% of the staff perform 80% of the work and therefore an emphasis on filling vacancies isn’t necessarily going to alleviate staff workload issues.

OUSL has no formal policy on workload; contact hours have less relevance as the institution is ODL, though as we have seen, the delivery method is somewhat blended with practical laboratory sessions and other day classes. All staff questioned referred to the professional norms document as the only mechanism for work allocation. This is a document with elements of a job description – it sets out expected duties and scope of the role but does not determine the volume or complexity of responsibilities.

Equally, all staff in management positions began their response with the words, “we try to allocate fairly” but agreed that in the absence of a formal policy it was difficult to quantify how it happens in reality. Regarding transparency, most acknowledged that they usually did not make public the rationale for all workload allocation decisions. One pointed out that specialist subject areas and limited staff options made it more difficult to be open-handed about the process of allocating work in those areas. A review of academic workload allocation models in 13 Commonwealth universities in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Africa (conducted by Quality Works in 2008) show that academic staff time is commonly allocated to each of teaching and teaching-related activity, research and service (including service to the university and service to the community). Many workload models allocate workload as a percentage of total workload, however contact hours are commonly used as the basic ‘currency’ for discussing teaching and teaching related workload. Clearly then, OUSL needs to determine the optimal balance for its academic staff in terms of teaching, teaching-related activity, research and service, within an ODL context.

In response to the above comments, OUSL management responded that “The OUSL academic staff are expected to be multi-tasked and expected to carry out an array of tasks such as curriculum design, development of multiple media course material, evaluation, academic counselling, institutional and disciplined research etc. Under such circumstances it is not possible to equate such a situation with the ‘models of 13 Commonwealth universities’ which may not be single mode ODL institutions.”

The verification concluded that allocation of workload is neither fair nor transparent and that a substantial proportion of staff members interviewed do not believe their activities reflect the mission, vision and goals of the institution.

Investigation into the performance management system for academics and wider staff was an interesting exercise due to the different perceptions of what constitutes performance management and particularly appraisal. The verification found that the only performance appraisal that occurs is through the compulsory annual increment application process (an exercise in self evaluation with the purpose of achieving a payrise), through peer appraisal and also student feedback. There is no formal process for managing performance, especially non-performance or low output. Performance targets are established by “norms” for academic staff which are quantifiable targets such as numbers of courses taught and publications accepted for print. Generally, individuals’ performance is not reviewed regularly and nor are personal improvement plans implemented or monitored.
The verification did not support the self review team’s finding that “there is little encouragement for research”. Cause and effect analysis shows that incentives and a budget exists but that staffing issues affect uptake. The interaction between these variables is significant because in fact the research budget is on average under-spent across departments. The Vice Chancellor spoke about the ongoing increases in budget allocation for research and also that some faculty budgets were under-spent – this was verified through document analysis. He suggested publicity might be lacking regarding getting the message of existing opportunities out to academic staff. He also said that if someone came up with a really good research proposal, they could “find the money” to allow it to happen.

The key recommendations of the self review team, like the findings, were not readily apparent within the report. However, the verification was able to elicit them through careful reading. Most of the recommendations do not spell out specifically how they will be measured in terms of time, quantity and quality; the lack of specific detail makes them little more than a set of guides for further exploratory investigation. Research however was handled much better in that the review team listed a number of activities for consideration. While lack of specificity was still an issue, they dealt with breadth of issues like funding, resources, leave, time, collaboration, stakeholders, infrastructure, publishing and training. This is an area that staff have firm ideas about developing, should other issues already mentioned be resolved.

The recommendations of the verification team support those of the self review and are focused on the big issues of recruitment and retention, workload and performance management. These are at the heart of OUSL’s identified quality issues as represented in the systems diagram (Figure 1) in section 1.3.

5.4 Communication

Managing the accuracy, comprehensiveness, flow and usefulness of information; and providing (and making accessible) the relevant information to the relevant internal and external stakeholders at the right time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key survey issues</th>
<th>Verified self review findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Non-management staff, and especially technical and administrative support staff, are not well informed about developments in the University</td>
<td>• Information is not properly communicated to students about classroom changes and exam timetable information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Infrastructure for communication flow within the University may be under-developed resulting in internal communication bottlenecks and dead-ends</td>
<td>• Advertisements often do not reflect the actual start dates of programmes, i.e. Programmes may start later than planned and prospective students lose interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff perceptions of weak relationships between leaders and both internal and external stakeholders. Communication with external stakeholders may not be a high enough priority for success in a competitive environment</td>
<td>• Internal communications are not very effective in some areas – receptionists not well informed about programmes; not everyone has email or receives the newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Processes and avenues for providing University information to external stakeholders appear to be minimal, with underdeveloped systems for eliciting and processing their feedback</td>
<td>• Stakeholder feedback systems are underdeveloped (refer Quality Management)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendations**

C1 Develop a communications strategy and protocols for all of OUSL’s internal and external communication requirements

- Do not just limit to public relations
- Specific and prompt attention needs to be given to communication issues with students
- External strategy should ensure that all faculties are consistent in their engagement with industry
- Internal strategy should ensure that all internal staff hold current knowledge about OUSL’s programmes
The development and implementation of a comprehensive communication policy is further recommended to facilitate efficiency, accountability and transparency of organisational communication.

### Areas recommended for further investigation

- Communication links between regional centres; and between regional centres and the main campus – are regional centres’ communication needs being met?
- Visiting academics – investigate the effectiveness of current measures to attract and look after visiting academics and determine ways in which these important relationships can be strengthened.

The rating of the verification team for the Communications theme was COL RIM Threshold.

### Comments on approach and method

The Communications team approached the self review by breaking down the thematic question into four research questions:

- What are the different communication and information needs of all the stakeholders of the university?
- What are the processes and systems in place that hinder or facilitate effective communication?
- What are the types and sources of information stakeholders need?
- What are the different processes in place to monitor the effectiveness of communication between the university and its stakeholders?

While these questions elicited much useful information, the focus on inputs (needs, processes and systems) is at the expense of outputs (what results are we actually getting and are these effective in meeting the needs?). Despite this, the Communications team selected a fairly balanced set of indicators to support their inquiry – six enablers and four results.

The rating method for all teams was unclear, and it appears the Communications team were quite harsh in their judgments as they rated two of their indicators 0.0 and four of them 0.1 on the 0 – 2 scale. This was substantially harsher than the equivalent COL RIM Staff Survey ratings for the same indicators, with the exception of 9.4 (staff are actively involved in the organisational, social/cultural and academic life of the institution) which was rated higher by the self review. The team could not provide any specific explanation for their own rating method.

### Comments on scope

The self review team prepared a questionnaire based on the four research questions, and gathered responses from a randomly selected 35 people across a number of sites including Jaffna, Kandy, Anuradhapura and Matara regional centres. There was no particular focus identified, so the scope was fairly broad. Internal interviewees included staff and students while some external stakeholders were included such as media.

The report states that the lengthy questionnaire was only a guide and that the team used casual conversations to identify both good and bad practices, probing as necessary. Some of the questions were more suitable than others for eliciting information that would contribute to a judgment about how effective communication is at OUSL, for example “Are you satisfied with the way OUSL communicates with you?” This style of question allows for a completely open answer which then leads the interviewer to any number of lines of inquiry.

The verification team began by drawing up a scoping document that grouped the key findings, all of which were contained within an extensive narrative at the beginning of the self review report, into categories – industry, internal communications, external communications (public, academics), regional centres, students and public relations. The team then extracted recommendations from similar sections of narratives, coded them and matched them to findings to determine whether there was a logical connection between findings and the resulting recommendations. Finally the team made a plan of whom to talk to about what specific issues in order to gather evidence to verify the findings.
Comments on findings and recommendations

The self review was quite thorough in exploring issues raised through the questionnaire, though there was little in the way of documentary evidence referred to. One of the key issues raised in the self review and supported by the verification was the finding that information is not properly communicated to students in key areas such as classroom changes and exam timetable information. This was found to be a contributing factor to poor attendance at day classes when there are room changes; when there are few maps and students unfamiliar with the central campus have great difficulty finding classrooms; resulting in students starting classes and even exams late.

Regarding examinations, the verification found that there was all manner of informing the Assistant Director/Colombo Regional Centre of room and timetable changes. Some lecturers used quite formal notification while others scribbled notes on bits of paper and the Assistant Director did not know whom to contact to confirm changes. This situation would be easy to rectify through a standardised notification procedure that would minimise confusion and disruption over essential changes.

The verification team found variation between departments in the way they track and maintain student contact data for the purpose of communicating important changes. For example, Languages maintains a database of all students while Social Studies does not have a functioning database. The Science department has access to SMS text messaging and uses this with some success, but this service is either not available or not utilised throughout the university.

Language was an issue looked into by the verification team, but did not form the subject of any key findings or recommendations. However, the self review noted that some information is only communicated in Sinhala, including internal news and events that affects the whole institution. As regards the language of instruction, staff stated that national policy is that the country’s official languages are Sinhala and Tamil. Higher education institutions have the freedom to choose their language of instruction and at OUSL, individual faculties set their own policies.

Generally, faculties conduct first year courses in all three languages and thereafter instruct and assess in English. The self review recommended that the “university should as far as possible use three languages or the English language as a link language”. It was unclear through our investigations exactly what needed to change, if anything. Referring back to the Tracer Study of graduates just completed, it is worth noting that an earlier study, conducted in 1996, found that while most graduates were not willing to study in the English medium, after graduation, the majority indicated their appreciation of having had to do so.

After students, the next most significant area was internal communications. The verification did not agree with the self review that there is “no visible relationship whatsoever between four faculties, and with different departments”, finding much evidence to the contrary, but agreed that internal communications are not very effective in some areas. These include the university’s central receptionists not being well informed about the university’s programmes; not all staff have email; and not everyone receives the quarterly newsletter.

There is an obvious drawback to the receptionists, being the university’s key customer-facing staff, being uninformed about the university’s products and services. The lack of email access for staff “further down the chain” coupled with poor distribution of the main institutional newsletter may be a strong contributing factor to the COL RIM Staff Survey perception that top down decisions are poorly communicated. Finally, while there are numerous formal meeting and committee channels both within and between departments and faculties, it is difficult to say how effective these channels are without going a lot more indepth than was possible during the time available.

The third key area of focus of the verification was around external communications. The self review found that OUSL does not communicate well with industry about the skills industry requires and that there are “many unqualified candidates in the private and public sector; their training needs are not properly addressed by OUSL.”. In this case the verification team found substantial evidence of industry involvement in course design. Examples include minutes of meetings with industry in the development of a Tourism course; and external resource persons involved in material development for a Public Policy course. It is possible however that all departments are not equally effective in their engagement with industry.
Due to the number of indicative issues with the quality, consistency and timeliness of communications with students, internally and with key external stakeholders, the recommendations under this theme are necessarily broad and begin with strategy. OUSL has a public relations officer but no communications manager; sufficient emphasis needs to be given to the multiple purposes of communication and not limit it primarily to marketing to prospective students. Adequate communication systems and structures must be in place to support these new students and all of the processes surrounding their teaching and learning in order to provide the outcomes that stakeholders need and require.

### 5.5 Innovation & Creativity

*Innovative and creative ways of responding to a changing environment and adapting to meet local and national needs; focussing on innovation and creativity in teaching and learning, and the development of products and services (COL RIM definition).*

In the context of an organization, the term *innovation* is often used to refer to the entire process by which an organization generates creative new ideas and converts them into novel, useful and viable commercial products, services, and business practices, while the term *creativity* is reserved to apply specifically to the generation of novel ideas by individuals or groups, as a necessary step within the innovation process. (from the Innovation and Creativity team report).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key survey issues</th>
<th>Verified self review findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Staff feel that they are not well supported to engage with local and international communities</td>
<td>• One of OUSL’s strengths is its innovative collaboration with other institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• While there is some support and satisfactory achievements for innovation and creativity in research there appears to be little, if any support for innovation and creativity in teaching and assessment, over and above support for open and distance modes of delivery</td>
<td>• OUSL is slow in responding to change, in terms of the lead in time for innovation in course design and delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Allocation of work-load appears to unreasonably burden some staff</td>
<td>• Slow implementation of research findings and recommendations from committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A common refrain in the comments and supported by the rating is that there is no system to ensure that plans and decisions are implemented</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Weak communication with staff and gaps in staff awareness of policy and strategy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of follow up after decisions have been made</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Regarding finances, perceptions of inequitable distribution, lack of accountability, and lack of resource support for some new initiatives.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendations**

**IC1** Explicitly consider incentives and rewards for innovation and creativity within the capacity building recommendations, ie. in addressing workload and performance issues

- Cause and effect analysis shows that it is addressing the capacity and performance-related issues that will enable staff to be more innovative and respond to change faster

**Areas recommended for further investigation**

- Develop a medium term strategy for improving internet access for students and the right conditions for staff to be able to conduct more teaching and learning via the online medium. Being able to interact in a timely and responsive manner online will become increasingly important in a competitive environment.

The rating of the verification team for the Innovation & Creativity theme was **COL RIM Not Verified.**
Comments on approach and method

The review team of four members initially met to scope the self review. Communication thereafter had been mostly electronic due to other commitments and problems with convening. Once the scope of the review was decided upon, a questionnaire appropriate to the scoping had been prepared and interviews had been carried out based on this with 37 interviewees from the four faculties including both staff and students. Interviewees were selected on a random basis but the verifiers note that these did not include any administrative staff and that there was a lack of any recorded evidence of the responses at these interviews. A further important observation was that the method of rating was not clear.

The verifiers, therefore, were not in a position to make any valid judgement.

Comments on scope

Scope of the review had been restricted to nine indicators, being six enablers and three outcomes, due to time constraints. There appeared to be some link to some of the COL RIM Staff Survey issues, but it was not explicit.

The verifiers are of the view that the inclusion of five more enablers could have been desirable from a process perspective. To determine an appropriate scope for the verification, we attempted to meet with the self review team but only one team member was available throughout the verification. This person was not the lead of the team, and was unable to explain the rating system or to provide any hard copy notes or evidence whatsoever that supported the findings of the self review.

The verification team worked through the final self review report by indicator, picking out findings and one recommendation related to the Innovation & Creativity theme. It was not practical to use the individual team report as with the other themes because it appeared to be entirely the compilation of questionnaire responses per faculty to selected indicators, with some subjective observations.

As with the Communications scoping approach, findings were categorised into topics:

- Collaboration in course development (keeping up with the needs of industry and students)
- Responding to change
- Rewarding creativity
- Innovation in teaching, learning and assessment
- Innovation in support mechanisms for both staff and students
- Innovative use of equipment and technology

Comments on findings and recommendations

The verification began with the finding that one of OUSL’s strengths is collaborative work with international institutions to develop and deliver a range of programmes. While not explicit, this has clear links to innovation and creativity.

We found evidence to support the examples of collaborative course development cited in the final self review report, in addition to others. Some of these are:

- Sustainable Energy Engineering Worldwide MSc programme through online collaboration with Sweden
- Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Commonwealth Executive Master of Public Administration
- BSc in Nursing in collaboration with Athabasca University, Canada
- Master of Arts in Teacher Education in collaboration with Commonwealth of Learning
- Programmes in Special Needs Education

These programmes were not examined in any detail to attempt to determine exactly how innovative and creative they might be but rather, we took the industry collaboration as a proxy for keeping up with the needs of students and industry in innovative ways. Some programmes however did involve students going into industry for final training in order to emerge work-ready. Also the institution-wide course team for all faculties contains external members.

In addition there was evidence of collaborative research with other universities and institutions, both national and international.
In investigating OUSL’s ability to respond to change and be innovative, we found:

- Focus is on routine work making free-thinking and creativity restricted (this triangulates with Capacity Building findings on workload)
- Preparation of ODL course material takes longer than the commencement of a programme in the conventional system because external subject experts are unable to deliver material on time due to heavy commitments
- Approval for the commencement of a new programme takes time (UGC approval takes at least 6 months)
- An industry and prospective students’ Needs Analysis is required when commencing a new programme, and we cited some examples of it in use

The workload factor featured in discussions around this point. Staff gave examples of UGC circulars containing mandatory changes to processes which had to take priority over innovation and responding to change. Staff also implied that there was considerable effort to be made in convincing OUSL’s own staff of the need to change at times. How staff keep their own skills current through regular interaction and work experience with industry is a question outside the scope of this theme. Theoretically though, there should be reasonable consensus among staff on the need for new courses or substantial amendments in accordance with changing industry needs.

Workload and resource constraints were the main reasons given in support of the finding that OUSL is slow to implement recommendations from committees and research:

- Limited resources restricts speed of implementation; the main resource being the time factor, others being human resources and financial constraints.

The head of one department was able to provide an example of resource limitations stifling planned curriculum development for a new course. Other evidence included information that triangulates with the Capacity Building team’s findings on the research budget being under-spent. There was anecdotal information that funds from the Asian Development Bank for research had not been used because staff were too busy to do much research.

In looking at how creativity is rewarded, we found that there was a range of formal awards in place. Some of these are department or faculty specific while others are institutional-wide, but almost all rely on self nomination:

- Applications for the OUSL awards for research and innovation / creativity are received each year and the recipient is selected by an evaluation committee based on OUSL guidelines and criteria given for evaluation of the particular award. Any staff member of the OUSL is eligible to apply for this type of award but only those who apply will be considered (i.e. self nomination only). Evidence sighted by the verification team includes the award for Excellence in Research; for video production and for multimedia productions.
- Annual Academic Sessions provide a platform for the presentation and publication of such work. OUSL Annual Academic Sessions is a forum at which research papers are presented. These could be either discipline-based or on distance education. Here too the staff submit abstracts for considerations and those accepted are presented at the sessions. Subsequently the full paper is submitted for publication in the Proceedings of the OUSL Annual Academic Sessions.
- In addition to the OUSL Annual Academic Sessions there are also separate sessions held in the different faculties during the year. These presentations are separately published as in the case of the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

We looked at the finding that “students are moderately satisfied with the learning and teaching methods”, within the context of innovation and creativity. We were unable to verify this expanded statement as there was insufficient evidence that students thought that learning and teaching methods were innovative and creative. We did explore innovation in question type for examinations, of which there was some indication; and the extent of innovation online.
On this latter point, it is interesting that although OUSL is a longtime ODL institution, this is not synonymous with online delivery. Interviews suggest that students prefer to receive materials via hard copy delivery, and in a number of regions would have limited internet access. Staff are restricted in their ability to provide timely online responses to student queries because of issues previously cited and because it is clearly more time consuming to interact with a class of 20 on a one-to-one basis over the internet than it is to address a class of 20 in the traditional manner. However, staff are endeavouring to provide more services online where practical, for example one department administers multi choice examinations online to cohorts of fewer than 50 students.

Regional centres have modern computer centres known as NACs (NODES Access Centres; NODES - National Online Distance Education Service) such as the one sighted at Kandy during the preparatory visit. However, these centres suffer from low usage and it is not clear why from the student’s point of view – not enough training to use the equipment; slow staff responses; not enough willingness or ability from staff to interact online? From OUSL’s perspective, the use of these centres come with a direct cost per student and so, without having investigated this further, it would appear to the verification team that incentives do not currently exist to increase online activity. This will become increasingly important for OUSL as it enters other markets and the domestic market becomes more competitive.

On the topic of innovation in support mechanisms for both staff and students, we found some positive evidence in support of the following initiatives:

- Mentor scheme in place for new academics. New staff are assigned mentors in the preparation of learning agreements in their Orientation Programme.
- Students are mentored by personal tutors available for new registrants and programmes such as PASS (Peer-assisted student success) initiated to assist student progression, in the faculty of Natural Science.

We did not explore these areas further, but evidence indicates good practice.

### 5.6 Quality Management

*The development and deployment of an effective quality management system in all key performance areas.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key survey issues</th>
<th>Verified self review findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An overall impression of the results of the survey is that there is a lack of consistency across departments, with widely variable results, suggesting that each department has its own independent ways of doing things, with no coherent institution wide system for managing institutional performance.</td>
<td>No systematic mechanism for monitoring staff performance, or for rewards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There seems to be little dissemination of good practice within Faculties or across Faculties and support departments</td>
<td>Information on learner achievement and institutional performance is not systematically collected, analysed and used to inform decision-making processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A common refrain in the comments, and supported by the ratings, is that there is no system to ensure that plans and decisions are implemented.</td>
<td>No systematic and equitable process for allocating workload to academic staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality assurance of assessment appears to be quite robust, but in other areas there is little evidence of systematic institution wide processes for ensuring that policies are implemented to achieve the desired results.</td>
<td>No well developed and structured system in operation to regularly collect information from stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendations**
QM1 Implement an overarching framework to manage quality feedback mechanisms, including systematically capturing quantitative and qualitative data from all key stakeholder types; synthesising data from more than one source (eg. elements of student evaluations and staff feedback that both relate to resources); and capturing and following through on actions to improve outcomes.

QM2 Implement a formal, well structured system for tracking student type (age, employment status etc), achievement (formative and summative) and retention across all faculties, used to inform the teaching and learning process, and resource management.

QM3 Implement a formal and well structured performance management system for all staff, including academic, administrative, non-academic and technical that includes implementation and monitoring (refer also to CB1 and CB2)

QM4 Review formal communication structures to ensure that relevant information, such as that on programme approval, makes it down the chain as well as upwards. In other words, this is about creating the channels for effective communication flow, not about methods or content of communication. This is about the infrastructure that enables decision-making to be carried out and the results flow to staff and stakeholders as required, with no parties left uninformed.

Areas recommended for further investigation

• No further areas have been identified beyond the recommendations.

The rating of the verification team for the Quality Management theme was COL RIM Threshold.

Comments on approach and method

The self review team approached their review initially with a questionnaire based on the ten performance areas of the COL RIM. This was distributed to 40 academic staff and ten administrative officers, with a response rate of 31 people. In addition, the team conducted in depth interviews and considered documentary evidence – although no documents or records are specifically cited in support of any findings or recommendations. Like other teams, the Quality Management review team chose to repeat to a large extent parts of the COL RIM Staff Survey by conducting a questionnaire on key indicators.

Comments on scope

The self review team focused on seven enabler and four results indicators. At initial glance these appeared to be appropriate to the theme.

To develop the verification scope we considered the findings of the staff survey and the individual self review reports submitted by the institution, to identify key issues. We also considered the people and documentation that were interviewed or analysed by the reviewers and contemplated whether in our opinion the team’s scope was inclusive of the representative population. We concluded that additional people should be interviewed, including the Vice Chancellor, Bursar and newly appointed lecturers.

Also we obtained copies of the training programmes for new lecturers and we wanted to discuss the effectiveness of the training – bearing in mind the findings of the self-reviewers’ report which suggested that newly appointed lecturers were having difficulty in acclimatising to the environment at the university.

Additionally, we felt that quality assurance should be led from the highest position and this was another reason for interviewing the Vice Chancellor in light of the self-reviewers’ findings which suggested that there were no mechanisms for obtaining feedback from stakeholders, or for ascertaining whether the programmes were meeting the needs of learners and other stakeholders. The interviews with senior management were very beneficial as were given copies of a tracer study of persons graduating in 2009 (report is currently still in draft form). This was relevant to several themes.

Comments on findings and recommendations

• No systematic mechanism for monitoring staff performance, or for rewards
The staff performance appraisal mechanism and overall performance management system was discussed in detail under Capacity Building. Under Quality Management, it is the structure and effectiveness of the system that is of interest. Although many staff reiterated that there was a system in place, the findings of the Quality Management verification team support those of the Capacity Building team.

The verification found that staff appraisal for academic staff is restricted to the Annual Increment Application Form which covers (a) bio data; (b) work performed in relation to academic counselling, instructional materials development, evaluation and assessment, programme coordination; (c) research and publications including seminars, conferences, presentations attended; (d) administrative responsibilities including duties performed, other special services rendered to the university, participation in statutory meetings and national contributions.

Discussions with Deans, Heads of Departments and Faculty indicated that there were no performance indicators for staff. There is a norms document which includes specific quantitative targets for lecturers such as (a) every 4 years academic should write or carry out a major revision to a minimum of 16 study sessions of course materials; and (b) every year, each academic should be responsible for the delivery of 2-4 courses, totaling ½ - 5/6 credits.

Self evaluation reports on work carried out including course development and research form an integral part in staff appraisal in granting promotions to senior grades above Senior Lecturer Grade II. This is supported by a UGC circular relevant to promotions to Professor and Associate Professor and a circular relevant to promotion to Senior Lecturer Grade I which emphasise the necessity of submission of self assessment reports for consideration of promotions.

While these certainly combine to form a system of appraisal, it is not systematic in either being objective through appraisal from supervisors and/or peers in combination with self appraisal; and is primarily for the purposes of promotion. The annual increment application process is about proving that one has met targets and qualifies for the next increment on the pay scale, enabling staff to meet career development requirements. It does not identify instances of poor performance and seek to address them. The system as a whole does not enable poor performance to be identified and responded to, and does not include consideration of softer skills and desirable behaviours.

There are many international benchmarks in performance management for academics and we recommend that OUSL invest some time and effort in this area to see what value they can add to the process over and above what is required by the UGC and other mandates. Addressing this area for academic staff first may then provide guidance for introducing similar measures for non-academic staff, assuming that available benchmarks for these staff are fewer. This may require a substantial culture shift but ultimately may improve staff performance where it is identified to be lacking, which in turn may smooth out some of the workload issues and improve OUSL’s ability to attract qualified staff and to provide better services to students.

In response to the above comments, OUSL management noted that they were addressing workload issues “by alternate measures such [as] devolution of activities to the island-wide centres which is currently being done”.

- **Information on learner achievement and institutional performance is not systematically collected, analysed and used to inform decision-making processes**

- **No well developed and structured system in operation to regularly collect information from stakeholders**

OUSL has information from many sources, including staff and students, committees, external parties (evaluators, UGC) and the outputs from technology to inform it where performance is not optimal and where improvements are required. The verification found it difficult to connect these different structures and systems, and to determine how performance information was collated and used to define and follow through on improvements.
It was also found that performance information was missing, as different faculties and departments managed information differently. For example, data existed on student retention and achievement in some areas but was not aggregated to build a picture of the institution as a whole. OUSL, therefore, has the foundations of quality management in place but would benefit from a gap analysis to determine how to reach the desired state.

Monitoring and improving performance at an institutional level is about knowing the outcomes that stakeholders value, having clear performance targets that enable the achievement of these outcomes, and having structures in place to inform decision-makers how well the university is doing in relation to those outcomes. Quality information enables the analysis of poor performance, and facilitates the development of actions for improvement.

Recommendations QM1 and QM2 are about developing strategies to identify the information that is required to facilitate decision-making and keep important stakeholders informed; design systems and processes to implement the strategies; then putting these in place so that the information is collected and acted upon.

A specific example is determining what student retention (or ‘drop out’) data is going to tell you about how effectively courses are being run; then looking for any areas of good practice within the university where departments are doing this already. The next step is cause and effect – what is behind high drop out rates? Finally, the objective is to design a system that will regularly give you accurate information on the desired factor (the retention rate), collect this information, analyse it and address the causes. These could be specific to different departments (eg. quality of induction, organisation of courses, accurate start dates) or generic across the university (eg. resource issues, timeliness and accuracy of room changes).

In this section, OUSL management disagreed with the accuracy of the bulleted findings. In particular, that the Senate as the highest academic authority requires all information on learner achievement and appropriate action being taken, therefore it is not factually correct that “Information on learner achievement and institutional performance is not systematically collected, analysed and used to inform decision-making processes”. The response of the verification team is that we found substantial evidence to support this finding. It may be true that the Senate requires this information, which would be an example of an established process, but the verification investigation starts with results and found many inconsistencies in the type of information that was recorded, collated and managed by faculties and departments. OUSL needs to take note of this and the recommendations that would assist them to manage such information in a way that better informs decision-making.
### Appendix One – Interviews and documentary evidence by theme

The following table records the key evidence considered under each theme. The key to abbreviations is:

- FET: Faculty of Engineering Technology
- FNS: Faculty of Natural Sciences
- FHSS: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
- SDC: Staff Development Centre
- HoD: Head of Department
- SAR: xx

#### Needs Orientation

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<td>2. Prof WA Wimalaweera, Dean/ FET</td>
<td>2. OUSL ordinance</td>
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<td>3. Prof GD Lekamge, Dean/Faculty of Education</td>
<td>3. OUSL Hand Book</td>
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<td>10. Mr A. Athapattu, Director/Regional Educational Services</td>
<td>10. House Style and Bridging the Gap</td>
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<td>11. Mr B. Abeysinghe, Regional Officer, Colombo Regional Centre</td>
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<td>18. Prof T Jayasooriya (Staff - NS)</td>
<td>18. Faculty of NS</td>
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<td>19. Dr Rasika Perera (Director/Staff Development Centre)</td>
<td>- Research grant application and evaluation form</td>
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<td>20. Students (14 numbers; Leading members of Student Union+3 FET +4 NS+5 HSS students)</td>
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<td>Mrs Anupama Pasqual – Assistant Bursar</td>
<td>Fund allocation and budget figures</td>
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<td>Dr Pakeer Jauffer – HoD Special Needs Education</td>
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### Communication

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<td>Faculty Memo: Designing a BA for Contemporary Needs (departmental programme)</td>
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<td>Minutes of the arts and culture circle of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) - meeting for social interaction</td>
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<td>Handout – A Collaborative Programme of the Open University of Sri Lanka and the Marga Institute (Course Team)</td>
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<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
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<td>Prof. Sudatta Ranasinghe, Chairman, OUSL Research Committee</td>
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<td>Dr. N. Morais, Coordinator, Short Course on Microfinance</td>
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<td>Dr. Shironika Karunanayake, Head, Secondary &amp; Tertiary Education</td>
<td>Leaflet on Certificate Course on Care and Protection of Children in collaboration with the Institute for Participatory Interaction and Development and Care and Protection of Children Learning Network – Sri Lanka.</td>
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<td>Ms. Ruvini Pathirana &amp; Ms. Dusantha Alwis, Newly recruited academic staff following Orientation Programme</td>
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<td>Prospectus on Microfinance for Poverty Eradication.</td>
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**Innovation & Creativity**

**Interviews**

- Dr. T Fernando – team leader/communication
- Ms. A. Wickramasinghe – member/communication

**Documentary evidence**

- Interview scripts, audio clip, email message regarding Gnyathra, etc
- Minutes of the Newsletter committee
- Old and New Advertisements
- Promotional Brochures (English and Sinhala)
- Paper - Write ups (Sinhala, English)
- Request for examinations documents (three letters to the IT) and actual date of getting information (two letters)
- Scheduled of examination - 2011
- Paying -in Voucher
- Letters – changing dates, requesting classrooms, No/wrong/inadequate instructions
- Timetable for students without any venue
- Timetable in Tamil only to reserve the classrooms
- “Help Desk” – information
- Activity Diary – Faculty of Engineering Technology
- Notices of the Notice Board
Ms. Ramani Tantrigoda, Head/Chemistry.
Ms. Geetha Kulasekera, Senior Lecturer, Educational Technology.
Dr. Gaya Ranawake, Dean/Faculty of Natural Sciences.
Ms. Gayathri Kanishka, OUSL graduate.
Prof. Thusita Jayasooriya, Chairman, ADB Capacity Development Grant, Counterpart Team Incorporating ICT into Teaching Committee.
Dr. Senanayake, Senior Lecturer, Mechanical Engineering.

* The Team did not get the opportunity to interview the Director /Information Technology and Director/Educational Technology within the time-frame of the verifications.

Prospectus of Education Faculty.
Excellence in Distance Education Award Category A 2008 at the 5th PAN Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in London.
Guidelines for Child Development Centres.
National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development.
Learning agreements prepared with mentor.
Orientation Programme schedule.
Promotion criteria.
Increment forms.
List of workshops attended by staff.
Copy of certificate received for Best Paper Award from The Cambridge International Conference on Open and Distance Learning, 2009.
Prospectus for Faculty of Natural Sciences.
Faculty Board Memoranda proposing new programmes.
Council Recommendations on direction for research at OUSL.
Information regarding NODES and NACs.
Information regarding SEEWorld.
On-line assessment procedure for the MSc.

Quality Management

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<td>Dr. L.P.S. Gamini, Senior Lecturer/Management Studies (Lead Self Reviewer) &amp; Mr. J.C.D.Prithiviraj, Member Self Review Team on Quality Management</td>
<td>Quality Assurance guidelines</td>
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<td>Prof. Gunaherath, Professor in Chemestry &amp; Mr. M.R.M.Haniffa, Senior Lecturer in Chemistry)</td>
<td>Job descriptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Dinali Devendra, Head / Language Studies,</td>
<td>Moderation documents – new programmes, examinations/assessment</td>
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<td>Dr. Shantha Abeysinghe, Head / Social Studies</td>
<td>Minutes – departmental, Faculty, Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. R.U. Thantigoda, Head / Chemistry</td>
<td>Various internal publications – (one from each of the five depts. seen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Shironika Karunanayake/ Head / Secondary and Tertiary Education,</td>
<td>Faculty publications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prof. U. Vidanapathirana, Vice Chancellor</td>
<td>Norms document for academic staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. K.M. Premaratne, Bursar</td>
<td>University Grants Commission Circular 723</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. K. Suresh Senior Assistant Registrar /Establishment/SAR</td>
<td>Feedback from moderators – content and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. D. Godagama, Deputy Registrar /Examinations</td>
<td>Senate reports</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Draft Tracer study 2009</td>
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<td></td>
<td>UGC application for new programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual increment application form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training programme for new lecturers</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPD training programme – not yet started</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moodle – saw the training platform used to</td>
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<tr>
<td>host the training for the new lecturers</td>
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<tr>
<td>UGC institutional self review reports</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(2003/2007)</td>
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<td>UGC reports to the OUSL (2)</td>
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</table>
### Communications – verification scoping document

Based on key findings and recommendations from Communications self review report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Topic of finding</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Plans</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 1. | Industry | Many unqualified candidates in the private and public sector; their training needs are not properly addressed by OUSL  
*Verbal – OUSL doesn’t interact with industry (no forum) to ask industry what courses / skills it wants.* | No rec | *What evidence did the Comms team find that supports this finding?*  
*ie. which documents and which interviews?*  
Speak with head/dean of 4 depts (1 per faculty) – How do they engage with industry to ensure their courses provide the skills that industry needs from their graduates?  
Evidence – minutes of meetings with industry; evidence of industry participation on advisory groups; documented evidence of reviewing courses with industry input. |
| 2. | Internal comms | No formal communications links / channels between depts / faculties (important events not well communicated; lack of links between academic and non-academic staff) | R1 - An information officer should be appointed at dept levels who will write info for newsletters etc.  
R2 - Dept heads should see that info about various courses etc should be communicated to the public info office, reception desk.  
R4 - Encourage the open day model with faculties (and between academics and non-academics) | *What evidence did the Comms team find that supports this finding?*  
All faculties have a rep on the Newsletter Committee – *how does this work?*  
Is there a communications strategy for the university? Ie. A strategy that details how depts and faculties will communicate with each other? If not, what is in place?  
Q. How do faculties and depts ensure good communication?  
Possible evidence – minutes, polices for comms, awareness of events etc.  
Q. How do you think that the open day model will work between faculties and depts? |
| 3. | External comms (public, academics) | Lack of communications links with external stakeholders (open days; visiting academics)  
*Verbal – media did not get any info about our 30th anniversary celebration* | R3 - An open day should be declared for all the students and interested public about our programmes, various opps | *What evidence did the Comms team find that supports this finding?*  
Q. How successful do you think an open day would be for prospective students, families and employers? (Testing the... |
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. Regional centres</strong></td>
<td>Communication between regional centres could be further strengthened</td>
<td>R8 – Strengthen comms between regional centres; organise an open day in each centre with the participation of the people from central campus</td>
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<td><strong>What evidence did the Comms team find that supports this finding?</strong> What evidence did the Comms team find that supports this finding? Who did they interview from regional centres? Read transcripts – what were the issues? What suggests that comms between regional centres needs to be strengthened? Telephone key staff at some regional centres. Q. How could we strengthen comms between regional centres?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Students</strong></td>
<td>Info is not properly communicated about classroom changes. Exam timetables are not sent on time. Some info is only communicated in Sinhala.</td>
<td>R5 - Proper info should be given to the students by the coordinator and a good electronic noticeboard is needed; we strongly recommend the use of a SMS system. R6 - University should as far as possible use three languages or the English language as a link language</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6. Public relations</strong></td>
<td>Target group for ODL is adults but this is not reflected in the advertisements of various courses. Big gap between info in the advertisements and the beginning of various academic courses.</td>
<td>R7 - The gap between advertisements and beginning of the courses should be minimised as far as possible.</td>
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<td><strong>What evidence did the Comms team find that supports this finding?</strong> Q. How do you advertise your courses? Whom do you target? How do you make your ads appeal to adults? Q. How do you ensure that you begin your courses on time as per the advertisements?</td>
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## Appendix Three – Example of Evidence Guide (Capacity Building theme)

### Capacity Building – Evidence Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Topic of finding</th>
<th>Findings of the self review</th>
<th>Evidence gathered during the verification</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1. | Staff establishment       | Establishment figures are insufficient for the needs of the university and that the deficit situation is exacerbated by academics on study leave.                          | **Verbal evidence** – staff members at all levels report workload issues (overwork). UGC and university set staff allocation levels. Vacancies exist in all faculties although some departments have high rates of occupancy eg Zoology Department is nearly full. Shortages are exacerbated by staff on leave for various reasons. Some staff expressed the belief that the need to fill cadre positions first was an imperative because the belief was that UGC and OUSL use unfilled positions as a reason to justify low establishment figures.  
**Physical evidence** – “Faculty Wide Academic Approved/Present Vacant Cadre – 03.11.2010”  
“Long Term Training Under ADB/DEMP Training Programme” |
| 2. | Performance review        | Performance targets are established by “norms” but generally levels of performance are not reviewed regularly nor are improvement plans implemented or monitored.                  | **Verbal evidence** – the only performance appraisal that occurs is through the compulsory annual increment application process, through peer appraisal and student feedback. There is no formal process for managing performance, especially non-performance or low output.  
**Physical evidence** – professional norms documents, incentive application, appointment letters spelling out some requirements but no specific job descriptions, student evaluation form examples |
| 3. | Encouragement of research | There is little encouragement of a research culture and it may even be discouraged.                                                                 | **Verbal evidence** – most verbal feedback supported the finding but this was not consistent with physical evidence gathered. VC spoke about the ongoing increases in budget allocation for research and also that some faculty budgets were under-spent – this was verified by the documents listed below. He suggested publicity might be lacking regarding getting the message of existing opportunities out to academic staff. He also said that if someone came up with a really good research proposal, they could “find the money” to allow it to happen.  
| 4. | Recruitment               | Low salary scales discourage the recruitment of suitably qualified and experienced staff members.                                                | **Verbal evidence** – UGC recruitment criteria bars many good academics without a high graded first degree from being easily recruited and while they may be recruited through Fourth Category criteria, the process is often slow and cumbersome. A dean mentioned there are 1500 vacancies nationally without qualified applicants. The only PhD-qualified staff returning to OUSL got their quals on scholarship and chose to come back for altruistic or family reasons. All academics spoken to agreed that university salaries are very low, ranging from one half what they might expect in the private sector to one sixth, in the case of engineering or maybe banking. Examples given include: a senior lecturer grade 1 left his post for a better position; a works engineer was recruited but turned down the job offer; few people apply for senior positions; junior lecturers going on scholarship and choosing to pay back their financial obligation in preference to returning and serving out their obligation at low salary; senior students who might be targeted for recruitment to junior roles are saying they do not want to work for such low salaries. |
5. Professional development
It is compulsory for new staff members to undergo training and for senior staff to receive induction training if promoted.

Verbal evidence – while the compulsory lecturer induction training for new academics is recognised by all as appropriate and acknowledge that it happens, the compulsory induction programme for academics being promoted to a first senior role is so new that it is not yet able to be evaluated. However, there is a perception that professional development could encompass so much more than these two programmes and that the absence of mechanisms for identifying training need in under-performing staff members means there is a potential gap in enhancing the workforce and, ultimately, productivity through targeted and personalised professional development. One manager pointed out that there are many opportunities for development overseas.

Physical evidence – documents outlining both compulsory programmes.

6. Workload
Allocation of workload is not fair and transparent and a majority of staff members do not believe their activities reflect the mission, vision and goals of the institution.

Verbal evidence – all staff questioned referred to the professional norms document as the only mechanism for work allocation. Equally, all staff in management positions began their response with the words, “we try to allocate fairly” but agreed that in the absence of a formal policy it was difficult to quantify how it happens in reality. Regarding transparency, most acknowledged that they usually did not make public the rationale for all workload allocation decisions. One pointed out that specialist subject areas and limited staff options made it more difficult to be open-handed about the process of allocating work in those areas.

Physical evidence – professional norms document (as that was the only document referred to.)

7. Resource allocation
Resources are not considered adequate for all the centres.

Verbal evidence – there was general agreement that resources are not adequate for all centres. Problems listed include: not enough and poorly maintained computers; difficulty of maintaining new equipment when it was purchased because trained technicians are not available (ADB loans have put in some new equipment); expensive chemicals are in short supply as are specimens for all centres (some sharing around of equipment on a rotating basis); many times students are required to share resources because of scarcity and often teachers plan their classes so not all students are working on the same topic at the same time.

Physical evidence – see evidence of Needs Orientation team

8. Recognition of excellence
There is no formal process for recognising and rewarding excellence.

Verbal evidence – the fact there are no formal processes for recognising excellence was acknowledged across the board but some spoke of the awards for which application must be made. While there are opportunities for some rewards, staff members report that the scarcity of them makes them almost non-existent. Some spoke of the following as examples of reward for excellence: formal awards; the opportunity to showcase work at department of faculty meetings; external awards (discipline areas or professional membership activity) that will be referred to at meetings at various levels; VC commendation letters;

Physical evidence – budget allocation document for awards which includes long service leave awards.