

Infrastructure for research in Sri Lanka

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Recently, especially following policy declarations by the Government of Sri Lanka's Presidential Taskforce on University Reforms, research has assumed a very important position in the life of staff members in Sri Lanka's national universities. The Office of the Presidential Advisor on Science has formally tracked the output of seminal publications from Sri Lankan institutions, but these have not grown in number or significance since the enunciation of the reforms. In a companion paper we give our analysis of that report.

If our universities do not enhance the quality of their research, they are dead as universities. If we value our institutions, this problem of research being dead must engage our most serious attention. In this paper, taking a constructivist more than positivist approach, through a structured oral survey using 10 questions worked into conversations with 25 senior academic staff members we identify the usually stated obstacles to doing good research. These cited obstacles to research based on these surveys of senior academic staff are: 1. Absence of research money; 2. Absence of a good library; 3. High teaching loads and administrative work; 4. Lack of opportunity for conference travel; 5. Administrative and Statutory Hurdles; 6. Time rules on attendance register; 7. Difficulties with External Contract Administration; 8. Quality of Degree; 9. Absence of Reward for Performance; and 10. Local Publications Skewing Objective Metrics of Quality.

We analyse these stated obstacles, and based on our experience and data available show whether they are real or imagined, and, where they are real, suggest mechanisms for their removal. In conclusion upon an examination of these, we show that many of the obstacles to research are imagined while the obstacles that are real are easily addressed through policy and by administrative fiat. Our solution therefore is in our own hands and is a matter of firm policy from the authorities.