

Some implications of the expansion of the university system in Sri Lanka

Dhanapali Kottahachchi*

No. 4, Wijayamangalarama Road, Kohuwela, Nugegoda

The formal university education commenced in Sri Lanka in 1942 with the establishment of the University of Ceylon. The number of students seeking admission to a university increased and this led to the expansion of the number of universities. The university system expanded to 8 traditional universities and one open university by 1986. A rapid expansion took place since 1995 with the establishment of 6 more traditional universities: three in 1995 (Sabaragamuwa, Rajarata and South Eastern), one in 1999 (Wayamba) and two in 2005 (Uva Wellassa and University of Performing Arts). The latter are referred to as new universities while those established prior to 1995 are old universities.

The objective of the research is to examine the implications of this expansion by analysing the teaching resources. Hence the staff/student ratios were computed and compared with the accepted norms which had been published in the Corporate Plan of the University Grants Commission.

Major findings are:

1. The medical faculties lack qualified teaching staff. The district hospitals too with the exception of Colombo do not have sufficient number of consultants to supplement the academic input. However, two new faculties at Eastern and Rajarata Universities had been created apparently without considering the availability of suitable manpower. Students selected with GCE AL 2005 had already been allocated.
2. An engineering faculty had been established at Ruhuna University when the oldest faculty at Peradeniya university is heavily under staffed having a ratio of 57:1 when the benchmark is 10:1.
3. The Agriculture faculty at Peradeniya University having a staff student ratio 9:1 is a rare exception which conforms with the norm of 10:1.
4. The Law faculty at Colombo is highly understaffed (72:1). Notwithstanding, a new faculty at Jaffna University has commenced to admit students selected with GCE AL 2004.

Most of the existing universities do not have adequate skilled staff and the student staff ratios do not conform to the accepted norms. A few exceptions are the Agriculture faculty at Peradeniya, Science faculty at Sri Jayewardenepura and the Arts faculties at Peradeniya and Kelaniya. The old universities (pre 1995) in comparison to the new ones have more students and staff.

The amalgamation of courses to a few universities should be studied before embarking on new faculties/universities since the output from the Open University and external degree programmes is very small in comparison to their enrolment.

* dhanapali@kottahachchi.net

Tel: 011-2853528 (R)