



# PROGRAM REVIEW 2017

University of Colombo  
Faculty of Arts  
Cluster - C



**Programme Review Report  
Cluster C  
BA (Honours) Degree Programme**

- **Buddhist Studies**
  - **Sinhala**
  - **English**

**Faculty of Arts  
University of Colombo  
Sri Lanka  
2017**

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## **Section 1- Brief introduction to the programme/s**

The Self Evaluation Report (SER) on which the present review report is based includes three study programmes: BA (Hons) in Buddhist Studies, BA (Hons) in English, and BA (Hons) in Sinhala. The first degree programme has been in operation since 2012, and it was administered by a Unit attached to the Department of Sinhala, until the Department of Buddhist Studies was established in 2016. Thus, that degree programme is the youngest and smallest in the cluster with two professors, two senior lecturers and two temporary lecturers teaching 59 students across three years. The BA (Hons) in English has been established in 1976 and run by the Department of English that has existed since early 1960s. One senior professor, two professors, three senior lecturers, one probationary lecturer and three assistant lecturers teach 23 students across three years. BA (Hons) in Sinhala has been established in 1972, and it is run by the Department of Sinhala (Established in 1963) which currently has four professors, six senior lecturers, two lecturers and eight assistant lecturers. The Department of Sinhala teaches 140 students taking BA (Hons) in Sinhala across three years.

Since the Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, has adopted the Course Unit System in 1998 all these degree programmes use that system. Although three departments also contribute to the General Degree Programme of the faculty that aspect was not considered in this report.

## **Section 2 - Review Teams Observation on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER)**

The SER of this cluster has been written well incorporating all three programmes into one but still using considerable amount of evidence from all programmes in a clear and coherent manner. The report writing process has been inclusive, and several preparatory meetings involving the relevant programmes and the faculty have taken place. Before going into specific programmes, the SER report has given detailed yet succinct account of the institution and the faculty where the programmes are located.

The writer of the SER admits that the writing process was an important opportunity for the programmes for self-assessment. In addition, the writer points out that the writing process strengthened the capacity for teamwork at the faculty (*Programme Review. Faculty of Arts. Cluster. C. p. 107.*). The confidence about their own good practices and positive approach towards the self-evaluation process are reflected even in the style of SER.

The report, however, has one obvious weakness: much of evidence is related to a single department. A large amount of evidence is from BA (Hons) in English, while BA (Hons) in Buddhist Studies and BA (Hons) in Sinhala are distant second and third. For criteria seven (7) and eight (8), there was not a single piece of evidence from BA (Hons) in Sinhala i.e. the Department of Sinhala. This absence of evidence is at odds with the 'team work skills' celebrated in the SER itself. The reviewers found out at the site visit that the Department of Sinhala is primarily responsible for this omission. The lack of professionalism and a sense of responsibility at that department, specially one the part of the department's representative to the SER team, has contributed to receiving a low grade for the cluster, and, of course, for the programme- a point elaborated on later in the present report. The review team, however, found a set of files from the Department of Sinhala whose evidence could be used to give some marks for the last two criteria of the report. The Department of English, when consulted, graciously allowed the reviewers to use some common evidence compiled by that department, for awarding some marks to the two other departments.

The reviewers felt that it would have been better if the report had been compiled as three separate reports on the three degree programmes. Moreover, the present report treats the SER just as a point of departure in reviewing all aspects of the relevant degree programmes. Systematically organized and effectively administered review visit where the reviewers were able to meet with numerous people who provided important insights into the workings of the three degree programmes, the faculty, and the university significantly informed our report.

### **Section 3 - Brief Description of the review process**

Review visit began at 8am with a meeting with the Vice Chancellor who spoke enthusiastically about the university and the faculty. He claimed that he is personally concerned about the current status and the future of the Faculty of Arts because he himself is from that faculty. In addition, he maintained, it is the largest faculty in the university. The Vice Chancellor's explanation of the nature of the faculty and the steps he has taken to improve the faculty further took much of the allocated time, during the discussion that followed the reviewers also had important questions to ask for which the Vice Chancellor had confident and elaborate answers. For example, one of the reviewers from a different cluster inquired about alleged plans to remove the university from its present location and to use the land for more profitable commercial pursuits. In responding to that question, the Vice Chancellor affirmed that the university must remain its present location.

Since the reviewers of other four clusters were also present at the meeting, the discussion was mostly about general aspects of administering degree programmes, the unique mission and vision of the University of Colombo. The four reviewers of the cluster C were not able to focus on any cluster- specific matters during this meeting though what was said and discussed provided insights into various aspects of the degree programmes to be reviewed later.

The Vice Chancellor talked at length about enhancing employability, soft skills and the like in arts graduates assuming that much of the review was about those aspects of education. He mentioned steps he had recently taken to improve soft skills of students by involving private sector. An annual job fair organized by the Career Guidance Unit has been a great opportunity for the graduates to secure jobs and internships. In order to improve the quality of General Degree Programme, several 'streams' have been introduced allowing general degree students to major in one stream and to be housed at one specific department. With that, they will be primarily attached to department that offers their 'major stream.' According to the Vice Chancellor the University of Colombo and the Faculty of Arts are currently going through a process of large infrastructure development in the areas of building, solid waste management, solar power systems, biogas facilities, and so on. Vice Chancellor ended his long and satisfied explanation by mentioning the fact that the Faculty of Arts has been made out of bound for students because an incident of violent clash between two students groups, and he stressed that university administration is strict about disciplinary matters. He apologized for the difficulties that might be faced by the reviewers for the unavailability of students.

Lively discussion with the Vice Chancellor stretched into the next item in the agenda, a meeting with the Director IQAU, who was also present in the previous meeting. The Director had planned and efficiently organized the review process for the three days.

The next meeting was with the Dean, who was extremely energetic, enthusiastic, and articulate about the nearly every aspect of his faculty. He demonstrated that he was aware of the significance of the Humanities and Social Sciences education for human society, the challenges

The subjects face in contemporary times, and the steps need to be taken in facing those challenges. The Dean, more importantly, was concerned about maintaining quality and had put in place a system of faculty revision that takes place every three years, and the revisions have been done in 2012 and 2015. In order to enhance the quality of graduates the faculty made level 1 and 2 of English as a Second Language (ESL) compulsory for graduation. As all panelists for other clusters were also present at this meeting, we, the panelists of cluster C, had very little time to raise questions specially related to the cluster. In responding to one of our general questions the Dean maintained that the Humanities subjects are crucial in creating an “overall human being rather than a mere employee.” With such a vision, it was clear to the reviews that the three degree programmes in the Humanities to be reviewed had sufficient institutional attention and support.

Then the Heads of the Departments met with the review team/s. Though all heads were present at the meeting only a few expressed their views. Responding to a question by reviewers, some heads pointed out that the SER process had numerous positive aspects that helped them assess their activities. And it had helped them reflect on subject bench marks, possible inter-disciplinary approaches and the like. Some heads also felt that the arbitrary nature clustering of degree programmes restricted them during the writing process. The reviewers of the Cluster C wanted the heads to reflect on the threats and challenges faced by the Humanities, some heads argued that the Humanities must be redefined and diversified in terms of its curriculum. Philosophy, ethics and ethical reasoning were mentioned as aspects that would have lasting significance within the field of the humanities.

The review process, they thought, could make them confident about things they were already doing. But they felt there were certain aspects of university education not covered in the standards in the eight criteria spelled out in the manual. For example, numerous mentoring activities academics are informally engaged in are difficult to include in the report since those encounters may not leave any documentary evidence.

The Heads were happy about the attention and support of the administrators of the university. They admitted that the institution and faculty provide due support and resources to the degree programmes in the Humanities and the Social Sciences.

One of the troubling factors was the silence of many Heads of Departments, who did not use the opportunity to articulate the significance of their own subjects for Sri Lankan society, education or humanity at large. This silence was quite obvious compared to passionate contribution made by the Heads of Departments such as English, Sociology, Economics, and Buddhist Studies.

The meeting with academic staff of the three departments in the cluster yielded so much information about the degree programmes. Several academics eloquently talked about the meaning of university education and the special challenges the Humanities face. They maintained that though the SER manual contained many good criteria and standards attempting to direct university academics and administrators towards enhancing quality, the manual was too structured and did not leave space for numerous informal elements in university life. More importantly, they argued that the manual was more suitable to evaluate natural and social

science subjects. With reference to that comment the reviewers (the chairperson) pointed out that standards and expected evidence could be creatively used, by treating them as points of departure, to incorporate any form of practice or evidence that are unique to individual programmes. The Chairperson pointed out further that BA (Hons) in English i.e. the Department of English had been excellent in using its own evidence to demonstrate its good practices – a point made in the Section 2 of the present report.

Requested to elaborate on what they take to be the mission of a Humanities scholar, one senior lecturer in English said, “to cultivate ethical imagination of students;” and, for another, “to change someone life and thinking” was her mission. Another academic thought “to inspire students to learn to create” was her mission as a teacher. These responses attested to the fact that many of the academics were deeply conscious of the significance of the humanities in university education. As the present report will demonstrate later, in realization these great goals they need to be translated into concrete activities, and in that some programmes and academics are better than others.

Even though a clash between two student groups had resulted in closure of the faculty, a group of students had been invited to meet the reviewers. Though the group of students was relatively inclusive, made of male, female, Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim students, the unavailability of student union left an immense gap in our process of information gathering. The reviewers strongly feel that the present review is far from complete without the views of the student union and those of other student societies. In addition, the closure of the faculty did not allow the reviewers to meet students informally and to garner information, which could, arguably, have given some unique insights.

In spite of the fact that the university’s location is conducive for co-curricular activities, students complained that they find it difficult to use resources within the university for those activities. For example, a student pointed out that New Arts Theater (NAT), only one of that kind, is almost impossible to reserve for students’ activities on weekdays except on Wednesday, and many student groups/societies compete to reserve the New Arts Theater (NAT) which sometimes leads even to conflicts among groups. For this very reason, students have given up on numerous programmes. Therefore, several mini-theatres or another main theater must be built, the students claimed. The reviewers also felt that the university/faculty needs much larger theater facilities.

The students also mentioned that University of Colombo must have a cultural center that teaches short courses in Fine Arts such as dancing, music, and painting. The existing ‘cultural center’ is under- resourced, and it does not have any basic music instruments in usable condition. Related to this theme, it was pointed out that Sripali Campus with its focus on the Fine Arts and the like should ideally be located within the premises of University of Colombo.

Some students appreciated newly introduced programme, Dean’s Awards, by which students’ creative talents are recognized and rewarded. The course unit system, according to students,

puts too much pressure on students, and that pressure only results in 'mechanically produced' assignments rather than true self-learning.

Students representing the Department of Sinhala thought new subjects such as translation studies should be introduced to the curriculum which is, for them, rather outdated.

The students from the Buddhist Studies pointed out that the only lecture room of the department was not adequate for their learning activities. And they claimed further that the main library does not have enough books related to Buddhist Studies – a point the reviewers themselves were able to notice.

#### **Section 4 - Overview of the faculty's/Institute's approach to Quality and Standards**

The senior management of the faculty/degree programme is fully committed to improving quality of the three programmes in the cluster. And senior administrators of the degree programme have been able to convince their staff members that quality-related matters are important in achieving excellence. The all three degree programmes had sent their representatives for SER related activities.

No	Criteria	Weighted Minimum Score	Actual Criteria Wise Score			
			Overall	ENG	SLG	BSD
1	Programme Management	75	133	144	113	126
2	Human and Physical Resources	50	61	94	53	36
3	Programme Design and Development	75	96	142	69	77
4	Course Module Design and Development	75	116	139	113	92
5	Teaching and Learning	75	107	142	84	97
6	Learning Environment, Student Support and Progression	50	67	96	53	50
7	Student Assessment and Awards	75	126	47	126	106
8	Innovative and Healthy Practices	25	27	44	19	17

## **Section 5 - Judgment on the eight criteria of Programme Review**

### ***Criterion 1: Programme Management***

University/Faculty/Departments have a well-established organizational structure and by-laws, ToRs and the like that are required to effectively manage a high quality academic programme. At all levels, the Faculty of Arts has administered its academic programmes in participatory manner. Faculty has also put in place a system of management that takes the views of all stakeholders into account. The reviewers were able to observe a set of carefully documented committee minutes related to diverse activities of programme management throughout the last five years. For example, the Faculty Board minutes demonstrated the inclusive nature of administration, and the reviewers could find from the Faculty Board minutes many pieces of evidence that had not clearly documented at some study programmes in the cluster. The faculty/Institute publishes and distributes an appealingly printed Student Handbook that includes all information useful for the new entrants and academic and non-academic staff. Some information regarding the student Code of conduct was included in the undergraduate prospectus which is widely circulated. In addition, the students are informed of the codes of conduct through relevant committees and orientation programme. The reviewers were unable to meet the representatives of the student union to verify any of these aspects since the faculty had been made out of bound for students.

Faculty does not have at the moment a system of rewarding best performing academics other than the letters of appreciation by the Dean and the verbal appreciation at the Faculty Board.

At the department level, only the Department of English practices formal appreciation of the achievements by its staff.

While the Department of English has a somewhat established system of international collaboration where student exchange happens regularly, the Department of Sinhala has only occasional international collaboration of which documentary evidence and reporting are barely sufficient.

Student counseling system at the faculty/university is nearly perfect, and each department actively takes part in counseling activities, and there are numerous mentoring programmes in place. The student counseling office functions in a professional manner.

Peer review of teaching activities at departments had not been done. Even the best performing department in the cluster, Department of English, is somewhat weak in this aspect even though it has taken some significant steps in that direction.

Students' safety and security seem to be taken care of in a commendable manner. But the reviewers were unable to meet marshals or hostel wardens to garner any information on this aspect. The students themselves were somewhat inconclusive in commenting on this aspect of the faculty. When they insisted that University of Colombo must be a fully residential university, they perhaps implied some issues related to students' safety. To be fair by the administrators we must state that it is a daunting task for anyone to guarantee the safety of all students in a situation where some hostels are located nearly twenty kilometers away from the main university. On the topic of students' safety the reviewers could not make any conclusive observations without any input from the Student Union. Given the nature and number of high rising buildings being built in the vicinity of the university, one wonders why residential facilities cannot be made available within the campus.

Employer surveys have not been done even though the Department of English has some information about its former graduates. The Dean mentioned about an informal tracer study done on convocation day which had taken place about a month after graduation, and, according to the Dean 30 % of graduates were already employed by that time i.e. within a month. The reviewers, however, are not sure whether those 30% included students belong to this particular cluster.

The faculty has made considerable effort to raise awareness of gender related issues by implementing numerous programmes. The departments in the cluster too has put significant emphasis on gender-related course content, and the BA (Hons) in English in particular includes significant course content pertaining to gender and related matters, and BA (Hons) in Sinhala too has some course-content about that theme but that course content can be strengthened by adding theoretical and conceptual rigor. BA (Hons) in Sinhala and BA (Hons) in Buddhist Studies contain topics related to gender but they seem to be lacking in the awareness of rich theoretical discourse on the issues around gender.

## ***Criterion 2: Human and Physical Resources***

Academic staff profile of all three departments looks impressive. The Department of English, however, is obviously above the other two in this aspect: Academic staff at that department has received postgraduate qualifications from different international universities. In it, generational gap in qualification seems minimal since its senior professor is a quailed and published scholar there are some others in the next generation who are either accomplished or promising. Same observation cannot be made about the Department of Sinhala where only a couple of academics has considerable international exposure. In that department, many lecturers seem to have stopped self-improvement after a Master's Degree from the same department. Several lecturers in their forties and fifties yet without any doctoral training do not make an attractive staff profile. The Department of Buddhist Studies looks relatively better. It too, however, will find itself failing in staff profile after the retirement of its renowned senior professor. Among the three departments, English is easily the best in maintaining internationally comparable staff profile. Better skills in English and the kind of social and educational backgrounds of the staff members may have put them in an advantageous position in securing opportunities for higher education, but the success of the department in the areas in question should not be attributed to social backgrounds of the personnel alone. Better vision for the future on the part of leadership at the department has made it stand out. The other departments, especially Sinhala, seem to have failed in its vision for future – something that was obvious to the reviewers.

All three departments ensure that all new recruits go through an induction programme. But it is a UGC/Institutional/faculty requirement even though individual departments adhere to it.

Faculty/Departments, admirably, prioritize the maintaining of quality of the programmes by regularly appointing visiting lecturers.

Staff Development Center at the university provides regular training to academic staff. However, the induction programme only covers course modules on teaching, assessment and evaluation. It is recommended to include course modules on counseling, strategic management plan, curriculum development, research methodology and ICT for teaching in their Induction Programme for probationary staff. Outcome Based Education has been an aspect that has recently drawn the attention of all three Departments. But in that too, the Department of English is ahead of the other two in both quantity and quality.

The library facilities at the university are impressive. But as the metropolitan university of the country, the main library could be much better in terms of the number of titles it holds and number activities it takes up in promoting reading and research. Air conditioned reading rooms, with appealing interior design, could make the impressive library building an inviting place for everyone. Departmental libraries are excellent at all three departments. Even in that English is far better in its collection and in management, and, according to students, that library should have more opening hours- a comment made by students about the Sinhala departmental library as well. The Department at Buddhist Studies too has constructed a very good departmental library.

ESL training at the faculty seems to be growing, and the students are required to pass at least level two for graduation. Young ESL teachers we met spoke enthusiastically about their work.

The students' views on the ESL programme were insufficient to make any conclusive remark on this aspect. The staff profile of ELTU looks quite impressive.

### ***Criterion 3: Programme Design and Development***

Faculty has given priority to regular curriculum revision, and the departments are aware of SLQF guidelines on curriculum. In the present cluster, the Department of English again leads in timely curriculum revision and maintaining records on those activities. The Department of Sinhala had initiated a curriculum revision process but it is quite weak in seeking the views of stakeholders and maintaining detailed records regarding these activities. Department of Buddhist Studies, established 2012, still has time for its first curriculum revision.

Department of English is far ahead of other two departments in every aspect of its curriculum design, management and revision, and the department seeks the opinions of different stakeholders regarding its curriculum. In addition, it is better in taking into account national needs and international standards. The Department of English, however, might benefit by considering the ways it can reach out to students who would not be typically able to enter its academic programmes. For example, at the time of review visit the Department of Sinhala, with two PhDs was teaching 140 students while the Department of English, with six PhDs was teaching only twenty three students. The disparity between the two departments in teacher-student ratio is quite obvious, and, arguably, the higher level of quality at the Department of English rests in part on the fact that it has lower number of students and the department has the luxury of being strict in selecting students for its special degree programme.

All three departments have incorporated some sort of fieldwork to their curriculum and internships have also been secured for the final year students. The internship programme at the Department of Sinhala has recently ceased to exist for some reasons the staff could not explain. The Department of Buddhist Studies needs to be innovative in securing internships. Compared to the university's metropolitan location, which is extremely conducive for having regular internship programmes, all three departments are below par in that aspect. Students themselves pointed out that a department such as Sinhala could pay better attention to securing internship and training opportunities at intuitions located at walking distance.

During the period under review, the Departments of English and Sinhala have regularly conducted guest lectures, seminars, workshops and so on to develop creative and critical thinking of the students. Flyers, posters, notices, emails related to those events are carefully documented at the Department of English while the Department of Sinhala is weak in keeping records of its good practices.

"Ability center," – we were struck by its politically correct and humane name -, at the faculty is a great resource for students with special needs. Some lecturers, however, stressed that they

need be trained better to teach this group of students. Since the closure of the faculty, we were unable to meet any student with special needs, which we consider a failure on our part.

#### ***Criterion 4: Course/Module Design and Development***

All three departments in the cluster involve both internal and external experts in designing courses, which takes into account current developments in relevant subjects. The Department of English is better in these practices as well. The Department of Sinhala has begun its curriculum revision, and the preparation for this SER seems to have motivated them to expedite the revision process. While all three departments are aware of the SLQF guidelines on curriculum design, the Department of English has evidence of sharing those guidelines with staff members.

Student centered teaching methods are utilized by all programmes. Independent research projects taken up by students are impressive, and, considerable thinking has gone into the planning of those projects. The Department of English is innovative in planning those projects. In the SER all evidence for this element are from English and the reviewers gave some marks for the other two programmes by looking at evidence files available at the site visit.

In preparing curriculum documents, all programmes are admirable and the faculty and the departments make relevant course specifications available for students. Attractively produced students' handbook/prospectus includes required information about courses.

The Departments of Sinhala and Buddhist Studies should consider adopting a variety of learning strategies at their forthcoming curriculum revision, and the Department of English should provide some guidance to the other two departments in this regard.

Course design at individual departments does not take into account specific needs of students with special needs. The ability center, however, attends to every aspect of learning/teaching activities of that student group. We feel that departments too must be considerate of those students.

All programmes in the cluster release results on time.

Staff members are given required training each time some innovations regarding curriculum, teaching and learning take place. Enthusiasm and dedication in acquiring such new knowledge may vary across the three programmes. The Department of English, as evidence suggests, appears to be the quickest in creatively adopting new methods of pedagogy, and, though the department's swiftness in innovation is facilitated largely by better language skills, it cannot be reduced to 'language factor' alone. Dedication and desire to make its programme comparable with similar programmes at national and internal universities have made the department's activities rise significantly above the rest

### ***Criterion 5: Teaching and Learning***

Faculty's vision/mission, which is clearly stated and distributed among the staff members and the students, guides the curricular at all three programmes. Monitoring mechanisms at the faculty level (i.e. Dean's office) are well-established, and departmental curriculum plans are discussed and reviewed at the Faculty Board. Students at all three departments have access to all required information about the curriculum, courses, teachers, assessment methods, required reading and so on. Department's "open day" programme, an innovative activity excellently put into practice by the Department of English, is an important opportunity for students to gather information and to meet staff.

Teaching and learning strategies are inclusive and flexible, and students with special needs receive careful attention in this regard. But this area could be developed further. For example, the main building of the faculty, with its labyrinthine design, is rather unwelcoming for students with disabilities, and the elevators too, it was learnt, are not always functional.

LMS has come to be used in teaching. In referring to LMS and Internet facilities, both staff and students claimed that better ICT facilities are needed. Technical staff too agreed that the ICT, Internet and the like are not sufficient to handle increasingly technology-driven teaching and learning. Dedication of technical staff, motivated by faculty administration, is one of the many bright spots in the present criterion. Personnel at computer labs seemed friendly, qualified, and dedicated. But the computer labs and other ICT facilities must be given more cadre positions.

Teachers integrate their own research and new knowledge to teaching. Evidence for this aspect was better presented by English and Buddhist Studies. About this aspect, reviewers were able to locate some evidence from the Department of Sinhala that were not included in the original SER. Lesson plans, course specification, and required reading lists attest to the fact that some teachers incorporate new knowledge to their teaching. Reviewers were able to see impressive number of publications by the staff at all three departments. But among them, 'research' in the strict sense of the word, was limited. Many lecturers, however, have been quite prolific in writing, which is an admirable fact, and it is a quality that helps inspire students.

Students are encouraged to publish their own research at all three departments. Collaborative research, both staff and students taking part in conducting and writing, seems to be area to which the programmes can pay attention. Perhaps with a small number of students, the Department of English finds it easier to engage in collective research.

Students are often directed to work in groups at all programmes. This practice can be seen in a sustained manner at the Department of English and the small number of students seems more conducive for such innovative pedagogy. All activities of learning and teaching are monitored mainly through student feedback and course evaluations. Two programmes, as the tables in this report show, are not systematic in keeping records of these practices.

All three programmes make an admirable effort to promote active/deep learning and personal wellbeing. The resource centers at the departments, if accessible always, are excellent facilities to promote engaged learning outside classroom. The career guidance unit at the faculty is sufficient to attend students' needs of personal development. No department has, however, any learning programmes conducted in collaboration with career guidance unit and other such entities.

Though the reviewers found evidence of students' feedback, the evidence of teachers discussing such feedback was minimal. In addition, the fact that the feedback is nearly always positive creates doubt whether the methods of collecting feedback has allowed students to express their views freely. About this aspect (i.e. student feedback) evidence from the Department of Sinhala was not in the SER and reviewers themselves had to locate some evidence at the site visit.

Allocation of work is ensured fair by adhering to the UGC guided work norms. Even duties related to examination are shared fairly but professors take large portion of supervisory activities of exams. At some programmes, evidence on these matters during the last three years was not available.

Individual departments, one better than the others, have some mechanism to identify and reward excellence in teaching. The faculty/university should have a set of well-defined attributes of excelling teaching and systematic methods to reward excellence.

### ***Criterion 6: Learning Environment, Student Support and Progression***

Faculty administration is setup in a student-friendly manner. Staff and students, judging by a number of activities they take up together, have numerous opportunities to interact. Moreover, students are provided with all required information in print and electronic forms.

Each degree programme in the cluster too maintains a welcoming atmosphere for students. Support staff at three departments has cordial relationships with students. But support staff needs more personnel, with knowledge and training in required technological apparatuses, at all three departments. While three programmes actively participate in faculty orientation activities, the individual programmes also have some activities for welcoming new entrants, and departmental handbooks, flyers, and brochures are important modes of disseminating information about programmes.

Information of the codes of conduct is widely circulated; and further elaboration on them is provided by student counselors. Counseling at the faculty looks nearly perfect. The faculty regularly monitors counseling activities. Students' feedback on all student services is regularly obtained.

Common learning resources (Library, ICT and so on) are maintained with considerable efficiency staffed by capable and committed personnel. The main library, however, does not seem to be closely connected with teaching and learning activities. In addition to conducting some activities during the orientation weeks, the library can be better integrated into teaching

activities by having parts of subject-related teaching at the library. ICT facilities at the library are excellently maintained. ICT at the faculty, however, needs to be improved. Internet connection, i.e. Wi-Fi, is hardly adequate for the faculty. The reviewers could not find any evidence of taking student's views into account when improving facilities such as ICT.

The records of students' results/grades were available among evidence files. In some programmes, there was evidence of teacher's giving feedback on students' learning activities. At other programmes, providing feedback for further improvement has not been a sustained and systematic practice. There were no regular feedback forms.

Some evidence of mentoring activities was found in all three programmes. Department of English has been excellent in developing close connections between students and staff through several activities that include mentoring and supervision. All departments do have some form of informal mentoring, and students spend considerable amount of time to access to such facilities available in departments and their vicinity. But at some departments there were no formal systems of mentoring. For example, there were no systematically appointed undergraduate advisors. But it must be said that informal mentoring activities take place routinely. Though there were productive interactions among peers, 'peer helpers' had not been appointed formally.

The three programmes have regular aesthetic activities. But the Department of Sinhala seems to be ahead of the other two in organizing events related to aesthetics and co- curricular activities. Students' participation in sports at these three programmes is not very impressive even though there were some students active in sports. One student claimed that encouragement for sports is rather minimal at the faculty. Since many of the hostels are located far away from the main campus, students find it difficult to attend sports activities. Department of Physical Education is staffed by qualified staff, and some lecturers, who themselves take part in some sports, work as mentors in sport activities.

Career Guidance Unit of the faculty is commendable. It runs several programmes geared towards improving skills that are deemed not provided in regular classrooms. The CGU organizes a career fair every year, which has become much-looked for event at the university. In addition, the CGU functions as the pivotal point that connects the academic activities with the 'industry.'

In developing students' career management skills, the Department of English organizes a series of guest lectures, and 'women's professional empowerment seminar' is an excellent and innovative activity.

### ***Criterion 7: Student assessment and awards***

Evidence for this criterion comes exclusively from the Department of English. Therefore, much of the following comments are based on information related to the BA (Hons) in English. In assessing students the programme adheres to the guidelines provided by the faculty, and the

examination rules and by-laws are made available to both staff and students. In curriculum revision and development the faculty has elaborate guidelines for the programme to follow. The intended learning outcomes are clearly mentioned in curriculum documents. The programme (English in this case) utilizes a set of diverse assessment methods which are conducive in capturing different aspects of learning and diverse characteristics of students. Though the programmes in Sinhala and Buddhist Studies had no evidence documented in the SER in relation to these aspects, reviewers could locate some documents from those two programmes at the site visit. Staff at all departments has received some training from the SDC about assessment. In the processes of assessment and examinations, the faculty takes admirable steps to accommodate students with special needs; and the ability center plays its part in this. As the SER clearly mentions, the Department of English maintains fairness and transparency in exams by meticulously using second marking for all exams. In order to assess the suitability of assessment methods, the Department of English obtains students feedback. In order to release results on time, the department (English) sets up internal deadlines and adheres to them. Since no evidence had been documented by the other two departments the reviewers had to assume they too had similar mechanism. Results sheets and transcripts are handled at the faculty level, and it is done in a professional manner. Departments and the faculty are swift in issuing transcripts.

Nearly all aspects of this criterion are either under the guidance, control or purview of the faculty and the university, and there are very few programme-specific elements. But all departments, English in particular, use innovative assessment methods.

### ***Criterion 8: Innovative and healthy Practices***

Staff and Student participation at regional / national level competitions are commendable. Several National awards have been received by the outstanding performers. All three departments have just started ICT- based platform (LMS) to facilitate multi-mode teaching delivery and learning. The departments recognize the fact that academic training, innovations, and community engagement are mutually complementary as the core duties of academics.

Both departments of Sinhala and Buddhist Studies have no proper coordinating and facilitating mechanisms for fostering research and innovation and promoting community engagement. The faculty/departments have some reward systems to encourage academics for achieving excellence in outreach activities. The annual award for the best researcher is an excellent mechanism to reward academic ranchers. But only two persons from the cluster had won that award.

The study programmes contain an undergraduate project/dissertation as a part of the teaching and learning strategy and encourage students to disseminate their findings. Annual research symposia provide students with opportunities to present their research.

Although the Departments of Buddhist Studies and Sinhala have established and operationalized strong links with various national, governmental and non-governmental

agencies for building the reputation of the university and to make students expose to various experiences at national level institutions, steps have to be taken for establishing links with international institutions to promote staff and student exchange. These departments have to diversify its sources of income to complement the grants received through government by engaging in income-generating activities. Department of English on other hand has already established an international student exchange programme with facilities of credit-transfer policy that allows students to move swiftly between national and international institutions. All departments promote students and staff engagement in a wide variety of co-curricular activities such as social, cultural and aesthetic pursuits, community related activities, and such pursuits are well supported by physical, financial and human resources.

The academic standards of the study programme are to be assured through regular revision of curriculum, close monitoring of its implementation and use of external examiners for moderation and second marking. The Faculty has to implement a mechanism for the students who do not complete the programme successfully to exit at a lower level with a diploma or certificate, depending on level of attained.

The Department of Sinhala is weak in documenting important activities it claims to take up.

## Section 6 - Grading Overall Performance of the Programme

No	Criteria	Weighted Minimum Score	Actual Criteria Wise Score			
			Overall	ENG	SLG	BSD
1	Programme Management	75	133	144	113	126
2	Human and Physical Resources	50	61	94	53	36
3	Programme Design and Development	75	96	142	69	77
4	Course Module Design and Development	75	116	139	113	92
5	Teaching and Learning	75	107	142	84	97
6	Learning Environment, Student Support and Progression	50	67	96	53	50
7	Student Assessment and Awards	75	126	47	126	106
8	Innovative and Healthy Practices	25	27	44	19	17
<b>Total on a thousand scale</b>			<b>733</b>	<b>949</b>	<b>648</b>	<b>601</b>
<b>Overall Marks (%)</b>			<b>73</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>60</b>

The table above needs little elaboration: **All three departments as a cluster receive a B grade. As separate programmes the Department of English receives an A while the other two receive Cs.** In terms of raw marks, however, the Department of Sinhala is significantly ahead of the Department of Buddhist Studies. Two departments receiving **Cs** could have performed so much better had they been systematic in keeping records. It must be stressed that the Department of Sinhala receives the present grade even without providing any form of evidence for criteria 7 and 8. Had it been better in compiling its evidence files and contributed better to the SER, the department of Sinhala would have received a higher grade.

## **Section 7 - Commendations and Recommendations**

Two departments in the cluster have a considerably long history of administering academic programmes, and they have produced a number of graduates who have contributed to nearly every field in the country. And many have excelled internationally. The reviewers, however, did not find sufficient information about alumni of the three degree programmes.

The departments such as English that has numerous excellent practices must give leadership in training the two other departments. For example, the Head of the Department of English, can be invited to conduct a workshop for younger and less experienced heads on running a high quality academic programme.

The university must aspire to become a fully residential university preferably having its hostel facilities at the main university premises where the Faculty of Arts is located.

Department of Sinhala, which is one of the most active departments in the faculty, seems to have lost its ability of playing a pivotal role in curricular and co-curricular activities at the faculty. The department must keep records of its important activities. It is commendable that the department caters to a large number of students.

All three departments in the cluster should conduct some form of tracer studies to find out the whereabouts of their alumni.

The Department of English, easily the best performer in the cluster, should consider mechanisms of reaching out to students who are not typical students of English.

Some heads (e.g. English) are very effective in sharing information about quality related matters with other staff members. At two other programmes written communication by heads with the staff was minimal. It was clear that certain members of the academic staff were unaware of elaborate criteria and standards of the SER manual.

Curriculum design and planning at all three programmes take into account national and international benchmarks. The BA (Hons) in English incorporates creative, critical thinking, independent thinking and so on to its courses. The other two programmes should improve in those aspects.

The faculty should set up a sustained system to identify and reward excellence in teaching.

For providing feedback on students' work such as written assignments and oral presentations, each programme should develop specific forms, and use it whenever possible.

Student feedback is taken at all departments, which is an excellent practice, but some departments (Sinhala/Buddhist Studies) do not possess evidence showing the student feedback is taken into consideration when planning lessons or designing curriculum.

Newly established 'Dean's Award' is an excellent practice officially rewarding co-curricular activities and creativity of students at the faculty. The competitions related to the 'Dean's Award' must be popularized better among students and make it much more inclusive.

Faculty has some activities to create inter-ethnic harmony. At the Department of English, the student population is almost inherently multi-ethnic, and their curriculum has several courses that can contribute to creating better understanding among ethnicities. The Department of Sinhala occasionally organizes events that bring students from different ethnic or religious backgrounds together. But these activities are mostly organized at the request of the Dean.

Since the clustering of these departments was rather arbitrary we could not locate a graduate profile that covers all three programmes. All three departments had some clear statements of the kind of graduates they aim to produce, the reviewers wanted to see elaborate, holistic, and well-written graduate profiles. The Department of English can lead the other departments in that aspect if the present cluster remains intact after review process is over.

Fallback options and early exit points are next to nothing in all three programmes. Since the dropout rate is almost zero in these programmes, administrators may not have considered possible early exit points. But without making that option available one cannot be certain about students making use of the option.

As students suggested, the departments do not encourage students to take part in sports facilities available at university. Physical education unit/department at the faculty has been revitalized and senior lecturers who have been assigned to promote sports among students spoke enthusiastically about their work. The reviewers were convinced that in terms physical education and sports activities at the faculty are commendable. Perhaps, state of the art swimming pool facilities within the university premises will make sports facilities much more comprehensive.

The Department of Sinhala has a long history of rewarding excellence (awards, gold medals and so on) and Department of English has recently established such systems. The Department of Buddhist Studies too needs to consider establishing methods of rewarding outstanding students.

## Section 8 - Summary

Since each section above contains its own implied summary, this section only contains some salient points. University of Colombo is Sri Lanka's metropolitan university conveniently located to become a university of international standards and reputation. While the reviewers were able to find out some areas where the university's advantageous location being used better for teaching and learning activities, it was felt that the university/faculty is still to exploit tremendous advantages almost naturally presented by its location. The advantages of location are used better by academics at a personal level as exemplified by numerous engagements some academics have outside the university. Students too use that advantage to follow numerous other courses in addition to following their degrees. And, as the director of student counselor maintained, that fact has put students under some pleasure as well. However, the faculty must give some thoughts to use the advantages of the location for the benefits of the institution and the students.

Faculty is exemplary in the manner administrative activities are carried out: adherence to laws of governance, transparency, and the participatory nature of governance at the Dean's office were excellent. Beyond the excellence in administrative activities, the senior management of the faculty, dean and heads, were passionate about what do they do. The faculty, however, needs to think about making itself comprehensive in teaching and research in the Humanities by adding some new departments. For example, a Department of Philosophy, Psychology, Fine Arts, and so on will make the faculty pedagogically complete.

The university/faculty/departments have numerous collaborative activities involving national and international organizations. The Department of English is nearly perfect in that aspect. But it can consider initiating collective activities with other English departments in the country.

There were some issues related to adherence to the SLQF guidelines; but the reviewers learned that the senior administration of the faculty was aware of those issues (e.g. first year grades are not counted for GPA/Minimum GPA for a First Class is 3.5) and those issues stem from the unique history of the faculty's switching to 'semester system.'

The counseling and welfare facilities are excellent at the faculty. Those aspects are under the care of able and committed people. The reviewers, however, were unable to garner sufficient information from the students because of the closure of the faculty.

Since the clustering of these departments was rather arbitrary we could not locate a graduate profile that covers all three programmes. All three departments had some clear statements of the kind of graduates they aim to produce, the reviewers wanted to see elaborate, holistic, and well-written graduate profiles. The Department of English can lead the other departments in that aspect if the present cluster remains intact after review process is over.

The tracer studies have not been done systematically. A department like English, being relatively small, can easily trace the whereabouts of its alumni. Systematic records on that aspect are essential.

Curriculum design and planning at all three programmes take into account national and international benchmarks. The BA (Hons) in English incorporates creative, critical thinking, independent thinking and so on to its courses. The other two programmes should improve in those elements.

The impending retirement of the renowned senior professor at the Buddhist Studies will make it difficult to sustain the standards. Better physical and human resources must be included in its short- term/midterm plans.

The reviewers expect all three departments/programmes to aspire performs equally in all criteria taken into account at the present review. For much of the present disparity among the three programmes, the reviewers are convinced, individual departments and their leaders are primarily responsible. Perhaps, for various, mostly avoidable, reasons, each programme has not been able to equally contribute to the vision and mission of the faculty even though the faculty has paid equal attention to each programme.