

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287488933>

# Programme Accreditation Accreditation of Public Universities and Private Institutions in Sri Lanka : Impact of Different Procedures

Conference Paper · April 2015

CITATIONS

0

READS

262

1 author:



**Samanthi Wickramasinghe**  
Horizon Campus

25 PUBLICATIONS 11 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



A study on finding the Effectiveness of Online Teaching & Learning during Covid-19 Pandemic [View project](#)



Designed and maintaining a website of the Cap Net Lanka, Postgraduate Institute of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka [View project](#)

**Theme: Globalization and Diversification of Quality Assurance of Higher Education**

**Sub-theme: Programme Accreditation**

**Accreditation of Public Universities and Private Institutions in Sri Lanka : Impact of Different Procedures**

**Colin N. Peiris<sup>1</sup>, Samanthi Wickramasinghe<sup>2</sup> and Sriyani E. Peiris<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> *Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council of the University Grants Commission, Sri Lanka*

<sup>2</sup> *Horizon College of Business and Technology (Horizon Campus), Sri Lanka*

<sup>3</sup> *University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka*

**ABSTRACT**

Public higher education institutions have resisted national accreditation processes in many countries arguing that the process should be limited to private institutions. These public institutions are often listed as “accredited” by the government or the University Grants Commission.

In Sri Lanka only private institutions were subject to accreditation and public higher education institutions were exempted when accreditation began. However, the law was changed in 2010 and now public institutions are subject to accreditation introducing a separate accreditation process.

Recently, however, most public universities have realized that they benefit from accreditation in terms of the value of the external perspective provided by peer reviews and site visits, the international recognition that results, the need for accreditation for many international credit transfers, and its importance in attracting foreign students seeking study abroad opportunities. It also proves useful in obtaining recognition of the degrees of students seeking admission for advanced study outside the country.

In the long run, it is hard to imagine an effective national quality assurance system that excludes public institutions – some of which are badly in need of quality improvement themselves. Sri Lanka needs to develop a single “comprehensive and standardized accreditation system that covers all stakeholders: public and private. In the face of the inability of many public institutions to confront the problem of quality directly, a system of accreditation which is external to the universities seems essential. Quality assurance in tertiary education, if it is to be effective, legitimate, and in the public interest, must include both public and private institutions under a single accreditation procedure.

## INTRODUCTION

In Sri Lanka two types of accreditation procedures were introduced to evaluate public and private Universities/ Institutes separately. The purpose of introducing procedures has many folds.

Accreditation is a type of quality assurance process under which a facility's or institution's services and operations are examined by a third-party accrediting agency to determine if applicable standards are met. Should the facility meet the accrediting agency's standards, the facility receives accredited status from the accrediting agency.

In most countries in the world, the function of accreditation for educational institutions is conducted by a government ministry of education/Higher Education. In the United States, however, educational accreditation is performed by private nonprofit membership associations.

### **Purpose of Accreditation**

Creates confidence and encourages trust in the quality of higher education institutions and programs for students, parents, government, taxpayers and others in the public.

Accredited status serves as a powerful signal that institutions and programs are competent in at least five core areas:

- Academic Quality
- Value for Money
- Efficiency and Effectiveness
- Student Protection
- Transparency

Accreditation has two fundamental purposes: to assure the quality of the institution or program and to assist in the improvement of the institution or program.

In fulfilling its two purposes, quality assurance, and institutional and program improvement, accreditation provides service of value to several constituencies:

To the **PUBLIC**, the values of accreditation include:

- a. an assurance of external evaluation of the institution or program, and a finding that there is conformity to general expectations in higher education or the professional field;
- b. an identification of institutions and programs which have voluntarily undertaken explicit activities directed at improving the quality of the institution and its professional programs, and are carrying them out successfully;

To **STUDENTS**, accreditation provides:

- a. an assurance that the educational activities of an accredited institution or program have been found to be satisfactory, and therefore meet the needs of students;
- b. assistance in the transfer of credits between institutions, or in the admission of students to advanced degrees through the general acceptance of credits among accredited institutions when the performance of the student has been satisfactory and the credits to be transferred are appropriate to the receiving institution;
- c. a prerequisite in many cases for entering a profession.

**INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION** benefit from accreditation through:

- a. the stimulus provided for self-evaluation and self-directed institutional and program improvement;
- b. the strengthening of institutional and program self-evaluation by the review and counsel provided through the accrediting agency;

Accreditation serves the **PROFESSIONS** by:

- a. providing a means for the participation of practitioners in setting the requirements for preparation to enter the professions;
- b. contributing to the unity of the professions by bringing together practitioners, teachers and students in an activity directed at improving professional preparation and professional practice.

In Sri Lanka, 15 public universities attached to the University Grants Commission (UGC) and eight (8) Private Higher Education Institutes recognized/accredited as Degree Awarding Institutes. There are two types of Programme Accreditation Process are conducting for public universities and private universities in Sri Lanka.

***Criterion of Programme Accreditation***

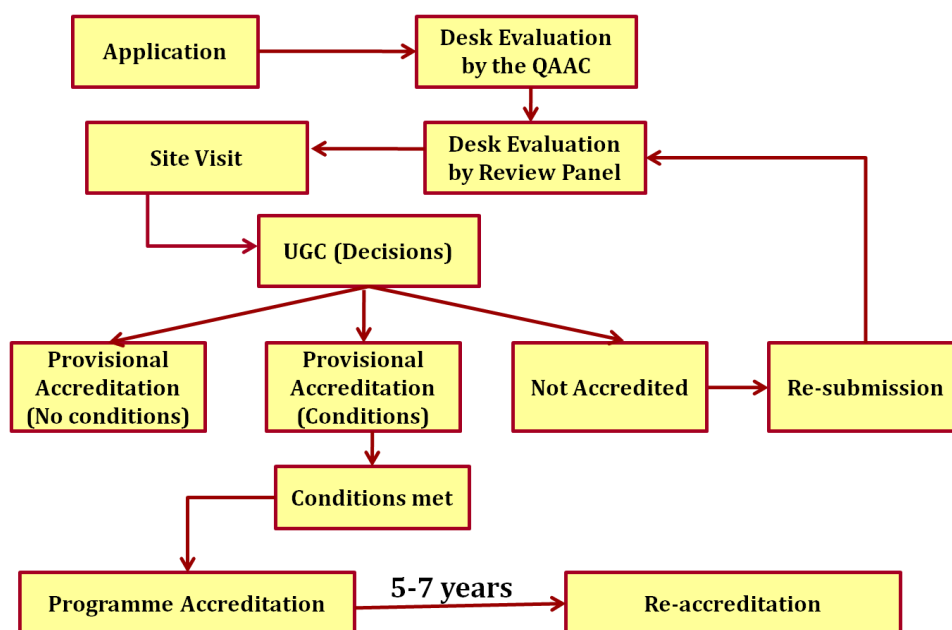
| <b>Public Universities</b>  | <b>Private Universities</b>   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strength and Quality of Faculty and Staff</li> <li>2. Curriculum Design, Content and Review</li> <li>3. Teaching and Learning Strategies</li> <li>4. Learning Resources and Physical Infrastructure</li> <li>5. Student Assessments, Policies and Procedures</li> <li>6. Research Outreach, Consultancy, Postgraduate Programmes and National Contribution</li> <li>7. Student Services and Progression</li> <li>8. Internal QA and Good Practices</li> <li>9. Governance and Management</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Admission Criteria and Procedure</li> <li>2. Academic Programme</li> <li>3. Standards and Quality Assurance</li> <li>4. Academic and Research Competencies of Staff (specific to the study programme and discipline)</li> <li>5. Teaching/Training/Hospital Facilities Specific to the Study Programme.</li> <li>6. Student Support Services and Welfare</li> </ol> |

**1) Programme Accreditation – Public Universities**

**A. Accreditation Process**

1. Preparation and self-examination: The University, or other institution seeking accreditation status prepares materials that effectively display the institution's accomplishments. The institution must also create a written report of its accomplishments according to the standards set by the accreditation organization.
2. Peer review: Administrative and faculty peers conduct an intensive review of the prepared materials, written reports, and the general workings of the university, or other institution seeking accreditation status. Teams of peer reviewers visit the institution. Most accreditation boards are populated by faculty and administrative peers in the field.

3. Visit and examination: In addition to the visits made by the peer reviewers, a visiting team from the QAAC/UGC will visit the University, or other institution seeking accreditation status.
4. Judgment made by QAAC/UGC: After the previous steps are completed, the QAAC will affirm or deny accreditation status for the college, university, or other institution under scrutiny.
5. Continuous review: By accepting accreditation status, University, or other institution agrees to undergo a review on a rotating basis every few years. An institution is usually required to go through all the steps of the accreditation process each time it is reviewed. The purpose of the continuous review is to ensure that the accredited institution continues to maintain the required accreditation standards.



*Figure 1 – Accreditation Process*

## **B. Checklist of Criteria and Standards**

A separate checklist has been prepared to minimize subjectivity and improves the efficiency and effectiveness of the process. Each aspect was categorized and listed in a document which is given to the panel members during the site visit.

## **2) Programme Accreditation – Private Universities**

### **A. Purpose of Review**

This evaluates the quality of the student learning experiences at program level. It is about management and assurance of quality at programme, rather than institutional level. Internal evaluation of the quality of education at subject level is normally part of a university's quality assurance scheme.

## B. Key Features

- Teaching staff conduct analytical self-evaluation according to pre-set review aspects and submit report
- External peer review conducted by academic staff with significant experience as subject practitioners
- Site visit enables external review team to:
  - Review relevant supporting documents such as : examples of student work, student handbooks, statistics covering student progress and achievement, external examiner's reports, minutes of subject committees
  - Observing teaching and hold discussions with subject staff to discuss statements made in the self-evaluation and supporting documents
  - Hold discussions with support and administrative staff concerning university quality assurance and resources matters
  - Obtain students' views on the quality of learning experience in their programme of study

## C. Review Judgements:

There will be three options open to the review team in making the overall judgement.

- Recognized
- Provisionally Recognized
- Recognition Declined

As indicated in the following table the review team will summarize their findings in each criterion. The collective statements on each of the six criteria will lead the team to their overall judgement giving evidence.

| <b>Criterion</b>  | <b>Rating<br/>(1-3)</b> | <b>Areas need improvement</b> |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Admission Criteria and Procedure   |                         |                               |
| 2. Academic Programme   |                         |                               |
| 3. Standards and Quality Assurance  |                         |                               |
| 4. Academic and Research Competencies of Staff (specific to the study programme and discipline) |                         |                               |
| 5. Teaching/Training/Hospital Facilities Specific to the Study Programme.                       |                         |                               |
| 6. Student Support Services and Welfare   |                         |                               |

Judgements are awarded on each review aspects using the following scale to rate specified criteria and standards given in the checklist in relation to each aspect

| <b>RATING</b>       | <b>ABBREVIATION</b> | <b>DESCRIPTOR</b>   | <b>NUMERICAL WEIGHT</b> |
|---------------------|---------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Highly Satisfactory | HS                  | <b>No</b> shortcomings in the operation's achievement of its objectives, in its efficiency or in its relevance    | 3                       |
| Satisfactory        | S                   | <b>Minor</b> shortcomings in the operation's achievement of its objectives, in its efficiency or in its relevance | 2                       |
| Unsatisfactory      | U                   | <b>Major</b> shortcomings in the operation's achievement of its objectives, in its efficiency or in its relevance | 1                       |

#### **D. Checklist of Criteria and Standards**

A checklist of criteria and standards has been developed in relation to each of the six educational aspects under review. It is given in the following tables as a **guide** for reviewers to check if they have collected the necessary information and have covered all the areas pertinent to each review aspect.

Reviewers are **not** expected to verify all of the criteria and standards given in the list, but to check on as many as possible during the review visit.

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

Public universities and institutions have often been among the strongest proponents of accreditation for private tertiary institutions and they have argued that the public must be protected from fraud and excessive entrepreneurialism that they see as a common problem with private tertiary institutions, especially those that operate for-profit. They see accreditation of private tertiary institutions as an appropriate mechanism to set minimal standards and guarantee quality in private institutions. These arguments seem disingenuous in the context of declining quality and the lack of coherent quality assessment at many public institutions. They also ignore the success and quality of a number of private tertiary institutions including some with religious affiliations and newly established ones.

Private tertiary institutions often view their inclusion in the process as an unfair intrusion into free enterprise. As one proprietor put it, "the market will decide." Sadly, this market does not operate in a context of perfect information, or in most cases, good information, and thus needs some kind of autonomous external evaluation to protect the public, students, and their families. Some private providers argue that public universities are using accreditation to limit competition from private institutions which are often more flexible and thus better able to respond to business needs and public demand than public institutions. While there is little hard evidence to support that claim, it seems clear that public institutions in some countries

particularly in Sri Lanka have been able to deny private institutions permission to offer new programs which they saw as competing with their own. The real issue however, is the importance of quality assessment and quality improvement for all higher education institutions.

It is in the interest of both public and private tertiary institutions to be part of an accreditation process. Those institutions that are accredited gain an important kind of recognition nationally and internationally for having achieved standards of quality recognized nationally and demonstrating a commitment to continuing quality improvement.

## CONCLUSION

The University Grants Commission has introduced a procedure to review public universities in terms of the institution and then to review departments and programmes. The scope of the institutional review is largely determined by the extent of the powers and responsibilities held by Institutions for quality standards. Both the procedures for evaluation of public and private higher educational Institutions have developed by the UGC;

- a) The University Grants Commission has adopted a two-step review procedure and prepared guidelines for evaluating applications for non-state degree awarding higher educational institutions and to determine the degrees to be awarded by such institutions. Those guidelines were subsequently published by way of a Gazette notification by the Ministry of Higher Education.
- b) The purposes of these two procedures are different. The Institutional Review (IR) in State Universities is to observe the on-going processes of already approved higher education Institution and the IR/PR procedures in private Institution are to recognize institutions as a degree awarding institute and the approval of new programs. Therefore it is inappropriate to compare two procedures developed for two different purposes.
- c) There are slight variations between the two procedures based on the need of the recognition process. The public sector institutions are evaluated ex-post basis while the private higher educational institutions are evaluated prior to granting the approval.

The comparison between the public and private sector as indicated in two procedures are subjective. Unlike in the state sector, a rigorous evaluation is being done in the case of non-state higher educational institutions. More importantly those reviews are been done exclusively by senior academics as well as by senior officials of the UGC and these reviews are assigned to a team headed by a very senior professor and they are not hesitant to turndown an application even for mundane reasons.

Statistics proves this point some of the degree programmes offered by private higher education Institution are subject to market scrutiny. Informed students and their parents will not subscribe to a programme offered by a private sector Higher Education Institution which has no market acceptance. Besides degrees such as engineering, Medicine, Quantity surveying and even Accountancy are subject to accredit by the professional bodies.