

# SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT

**DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE STUDIES**



**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND  
SOCIAL SCIENCES  
OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA**

17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> February 2010

**Review Team :**

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Commission (UGC) and the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Directors (CVCD), the Quality Assurance Mechanism for national universities was introduced to the system in 2002. Divided as Subject and Institutional Reviews, the process incorporates internal and external assessment of Universities/Departments of study, promoting and safeguarding public confidence in the country's system of higher education.

The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council (QAAC) of the UGC/Ministry of Higher Education bear the overall responsibility for the conduct and sustenance of quality assurance activities in universities.

Subject Reviews, which deal with individual academic departments of national universities, consider eight key aspects in reaching judgements on the maintaining of quality within such departments. These relate to Curriculum Design, Content and Review, Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods, Quality of students (including Student Progress and Achievement), the Extent and Use of Student Feedback (Qualitative and Quantitative), Postgraduate Studies, Peer Observation, Skills Development, Academic Guidance and Counselling.

A Panel of Reviewers appointed by the QAAC reviewed the Department of Language Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Open University of Sri Lanka, 17-19 February 2010. This was the 266<sup>th</sup> Review conducted by the QAAC within the University System.

The Review Team comprised of:

Prof. Udaya Meddegama, University of Peradeniya

Dr. Dushyanthi Mendis, University of Colombo

Dr. Maithree Wickramasinghe, University of Kelaniya

Mr. Chandana Dissanayake, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

## **2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY, FACULTY AND THE DEPARTMENT**

### **The University**

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) is unique within the national university system in being the only University to offer programmes of study leading to a certificate, diploma, degree, postgraduate diploma and postgraduate degree through the Distance Mode. The University was set up by the Government of Sri Lanka under the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978, for the purpose of providing higher educational opportunities to working adults - providing them the road to success, surpassing age, vocation, gender, race, ethnicity and religion. The Open University was formed by amalgamating two institutions- Sri Lanka Institute of Distance Education (SLIDE) and the External Services Agency (ESA) which offered degree courses in various subjects.

The Open University was officially declared open on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1980 by the late JR Jayewardene, the first Executive President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. Initially, the University was housed in the Curriculum Development Center at Buller's Road, Colombo 07 and later came into residence at Nawala in a temporary building. The first Vice Chancellor was Prof. P.D. Gunatilake.

As the University caters to a heterogeneous population in their pursuance of higher education. The University person to register at the lowest 'Level' with mere basic literacy and then climb up to the postgraduate level.

The concept of Distance Education makes this institution a “University without walls”, functioning through a dynamic network of regional and study centres, with knowledge imparted through multiple media. Furthermore, the students need not disrupt their work commitments to pursue their studies, as they can interact with specially designed self-instructional material where the material functions as a “Tutor in Print”. Hence, the Open University system provides the learner with the best possible learning opportunities for them to balance their personal, work- related and academic obligations.

### **Vision and Mission Statements of the University**

#### **Vision**

*‘Our vision is to be a leader in Open and Distance Learning renowned for excellence in human resource development and empowerment of people to achieve their potential’*

#### **Mission**

*‘Our mission is to enhance opportunities for life-long learning of adults through Open and Distance Learning and support excellence in research and scholarship’*

#### **The Faculty**

The Open University of Sri Lanka had initially only two Boards of Study-the Board of Study for Humanities and Social Sciences and the Board of Study for Management, Science and Technology.

The branches of learning in the Board of Study for Humanities and Social Sciences were:

Humanities

Social Sciences

Educational Studies

In 1990, Humanities and Social Sciences was recognized as one Faculty with the following Departments:

Education

Legal Studies

Language Studies

Management Studies

Social Studies

The Department of Education was separated as a new Faculty on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2003.

As at present, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences has the largest number of students enrolled for the different study programmes of its four Departments.

#### **The Department of Language Studies**

Established in 1980, the Department of Language Studies was guided in its initial stages by two senior Academics - Prof. Chitra Wickramasooriya and Prof. Kamal De Abrew, between 1980-1990.

Dr. Ryhana Raheem was appointed Head of Department in 1990 and continued in that capacity till 1999. Dr. Hemamala Ratwatte served as Head from 1999 till 2003 followed by the present Head, Mrs. Padma Abeysooriya, appointed in 2003.

### 3. AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

#### 3.1 Aims

The traditional approach to English as an academic subject tends to focus mainly on the range and variety of English literature. The Department believes that obtaining a comprehensive knowledge of English as an academic subject requires a mastery of a complex range of skills and a grasp of theories, issues and practices in a number of related disciplines. At the Department, therefore, the study of English involves the examination of not only its literature, but also of aspects of linguistics, which are crucial to the understanding of English as a modern language and as a tool of pedagogic and contemporary relevance.

In drawing up programmes of study in English, the Department has kept in mind the sociolinguistic realities of English within the Sri Lankan context, and paid attention in particular to the needs of those who disseminate the knowledge of English, such as teachers.

In this context, the Department aims to provide:

- a range of academic programmes that enables students to develop their academic skills, knowledge and potential in a systematic manner
- encouragement to students to develop a knowledge base, cognitive abilities and transferable skills to contribute effectively to the teaching of English (both language and literature) in Sri Lanka
- a variety of challenging learning opportunities within the Distance Education (DE) mode, favoured by the Open University
- opportunities for the students to develop the aptitude and enthusiasm necessary for lifelong learning
- a friendly and supportive academic environment that encourages a commitment to high standards and independent learning
- rigorous, yet fair-minded evaluation that promotes effective learning
- exposure to learning through the use of contemporary technology so as to broaden students' horizons and encourage awareness and synthesis of knowledge from multiple sources.

#### 3.2 Learning Outcomes

The programmes offered form a 'ladder of opportunity' for students to progress from an Advanced Certificate of proficiency to a Diploma and to a Bachelor's Degree. Each programme, though complete in itself, also offers a pathway to the next level of achievement. Thus, those who successfully complete the Advanced Certificate in English can proceed to the Diploma in English and are given credit for courses completed at the Certificate level. The Diploma mandatorily forms the first two levels of the Bachelor's Degree in English and ELT and hence has to be completed before proceeding to studies at the BA level.

Learning outcomes therefore vary with each programme. Given below are the outcomes of the programmes that lead up to the Bachelor's degree. These include the

É Advanced Certificate in English (ACE)

É Diploma in English (Dip)

É BA in English and English Language Teaching (BA /ELT)

### (E)

knowledge of the basic features of the main genres of (poetry). They would also have developed the skills necessary for coping with academic reading as well as writing in a formal, academic environment, and demonstrated these skills through projects.

### **Diploma in English (Dip)**

As with the ACE, students who complete this programme would have mastered the skills of academic reading and writing. They would also have knowledge of the basic structure, phonology, sociolinguistic features of English (including Sri Lankan English) and of the social history and development of the English language with special reference to how language change has resulted in features that tend to cause learner difficulties.

Furthermore, they would have examined and analysed a variety of literary texts (from Shakespeare to modern times) and hence would have knowledge and understanding of the main genres of literature through a study of texts ranging from those of the Elizabethan period through the Romantic and Victorian periods to modern times, along with the study of examples of postcolonial and contemporary literature. Students who complete the Diploma would also have a grasp of analytical techniques which include traditional approaches to practical criticism, as well as more contemporary modes of analysis such as stylistics.

### **BA in English and English Language Teaching**

The objectives of the BA in English and ELT programme are to provide a practical knowledge of relevant areas of English Language, English Language Teaching, English Literature and to develop competence in a wide range of pedagogical skills. The BA programme also introduces basic research skills to enable students to carry out research in the field of ELT.

Thus, a student who completes the BA in English and English Language Teaching (ELT) at OUSL should have

- Knowledge of concepts, theories and recent advances in General Linguistics, aspects of Applied Linguistics, Sociolinguistics and Psycholinguistics especially as they relate to the English language
- Knowledge and understanding of the role, history and development of English in general, and in Sri Lanka with special emphasis on pedagogical and classroom related problems and concerns
- Knowledge of the approaches to and issues involved in teaching Literature in a second language context
- Knowledge of the theories, concepts, methods and pedagogical issues that underlie teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language
- Knowledge and understanding of the principles, theories and practical applications underlying Language Testing and Evaluation
- Knowledge of the principles of general education and of the concepts and theories that form the psychology of learning
- Developed and demonstrated in practice pedagogic skills and knowledge that would equip them to be effective teachers of English
- Acquired basic intellectual and analytical skills necessary for research (including computer skills)
- Developed a range of personal and transferable skills (e.g. critical ability, analytical ability, time management, independence of thought, ability to handle academic reading and writing etc) that would permit them to pursue further academic studies and/or enhance their careers as teachers of English

ledge and understanding of certain pedagogic skills such as the ability to develop a syllabus and select appropriate materials as well as teaching literature.

To help achieve the outcomes listed above, the Department's programmes offer learning experiences that are intended to enable students to

- build upon their potential at entry by progressively developing skills, knowledge and understanding based on a comprehensive approach to English studies
- benefit from a curriculum in which the design and teaching are enhanced by the collective efforts of LSD teachers as well as by academics from other institutions
- learn from study programmes that pay attention not only to areas traditionally associated with the academic study of English, but also to contemporary approaches and branches of learning and pragmatic skills that support academic learning, pedagogic ability and basic research
- be provided with clear guidelines to programme content, objectives and assessment methods
- interact with staff committed to teaching and learning in a DE environment, and who value the challenges and opportunities provided by Open/Distance education
- have access to friendly and adequate academic support.
- receive fair and appropriate assessment, feedback and guidance for progress.

Additionally, LSD strives to ensure that learning experiences are interesting, modern and relevant to the needs of adult learners in a Sri Lankan environment.

### **Programme Details**

Programmes are offered at three levels:

- **Certificate Level**
- **Diploma Level**
- **Degree Level**

Details of the programmes of study offered by the Department of Language Studies are given below:

### **Core Programmes**

Programs in General English

Certificate in Professional English ó 478 students

Certificate in Basic English ó 945 students

Advanced Certificate in English ó 76 students

Diploma in English ó 97 students

BA in English and English Language

Teaching (ELT) ó 48 students

### **Support Programmes**

English for Science/ B. Ed 1583

English for B/Tech and Diploma in Technology 2958

English for Foundation in Social Studies 870



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	169
	440
urpose	
- Legal Studies	1240
Certificate in English for Academic Purposes	
- Management Studies	691
Beginner Courses in English, Sinhala and Tamil for the MA in Teacher Education	100
<b><u>Courses in other languages</u></b>	
Korean for Beginners	50
Certificate in Basic Sinhala	105
Beginner's course in Sinhala	165
Beginner's course in Tamil	300

	Status	Qualifications
Ms. B.K.P. Abeysooriya	HOD, Senior Lecturer Gr. I	BA (Hons)(Kelaniya) MA (Colombo)
Prof. R. Raheem	Professor of English	BA (Ceylon) PhD (Leeds)
Dr. H. Ratwatte	Senior Lecturer ó Gr. I	BA (Hons) (Peradeniya) PhD (London )
Dr. K. Warnapala	Senior Lecturer ó Gr. II	BA (Hons.) (Peradeniya) PhD (Michigan State)
Ms. D.E. Devendra	Senior Lecturer Gr. II	BA (Hons) (Sydney) MA (Colombo)
Ms. V. Medawattegedara	Senior Lecturer ó Gr. II	BA (Hons) (Kelaniya) MA (Ulster)
Ms. M. Kodithuwakku	Lecturer (Prob)	BA (Hons) (Monash) LLB LLM (Colombo)
Ms. J. Pullenayagam	Lecturer (Prob)	BA/ ELT (Hons) (OUSL)
Ms. S. Wijesinghe	Lecturer	BSc (Special) Agriculture (Peradeniya) MA (Kelaniya)
Ms. N.Abeyssekara	Lecturer	BA (Andhra University) MA (Kelaniya)
Ms. K. R.M. de Silva	Lecturer (Prob)	BSc (OUSL) MEd (Colombo)
Ms. P. Fernando	Lecturer	BA (Peradeniya) MA (Kelaniya)
Ms. K. Pathmanathan	Lecturer	BA (Hons) (Peradeniya) PGDE (OUSL)
Mr. L. Medawattegedara	Lecturer (Prob)	BA/ ELT (OUSL)
Ms. I.N.J, Bogamuwa	Lecturer (Prob)	B A(Hons) (SUSL)
Ms. S.A.A.K. Satharasinghe	Lecturer	BSc (Peradeniya) MA (Kelaniya)
<b>2. Non Academic Staff</b>		
K.K.M.R. Malkanthi	Senior Staff Assistant ( clerical)	01
N.L.D.T.D. Krishnaratne	Clerk cum /DEO Gr. II	01
H.P.D.R.U.M. Gunasekara	DEO	01
H.P.L.D. Gunawardena	Typist Gr. II	01
<b>3. Support Staff</b>		
K.K.S.M. Ranaweera	Gr. III	01
K.V.N. Rohana	Gr. III	01
<b>4. Project Assistants</b>		
	<b>Service</b>	
Ms. C.N. Kawirathna	17 months	
Ms. H.G.C. Dilrukshi	08 months	
Ms. S. Palaninathan	07 months	
Ms. M. Yogendrakumari	05 months	



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of 13 Visiting Academics for its undergraduate

### **Consultants**

The Department employs 10 Consultants who serve its academic programmes.

### **Visiting Tutors for General English, ESP Courses and other Languages**

The Department currently employs a total of 239 Visiting Tutors in conducting its programmes.

## **4. FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW TEAM**

**NB: the Subject Review conducted at the Department of Language Studies, OUSL, (17-19 February 2010) was based on the SER submitted by the Department and the evaluation criteria were applied in keeping with its content. It is clear that although the Department conducts programmes in more than one language, the main focus of the SER has been its English programmes. Further, during the visit, the Reviewers were facilitated mainly to evaluate the Department's programmes in English and access to documentary and other evidence with regard to programmes in other languages (Sinhala, Tamil, Korean) was minimal. The findings that appear below may not therefore reflect the status quo of the entire range of academic programmes conducted by the Department.**

Following its deliberations, the Team of Reviewers was able to come to the conclusions indicated below:

### **4.1 Curriculum Design, Content and Review**

#### **Strengths**

- The Course Content of the Advanced Diploma in English and the Diploma in English is comprehensive and the students expressed their satisfaction with the course content. They also reported instances of being able to use what they had learnt in the Diploma Courses, in their own classrooms as teachers.
- The curricula of the Advanced Diploma in English, the Diploma in English and the BA in English appear to have been carefully planned, with a step-by-step or ladder approach in mind. Flexibility can be seen in the possibility of direct entry into the Diploma without a student having to go through all the lower levels.
- Curricula have been revised periodically, the last revision having been carried out in 2006.
- The Vice Chancellor, OUSL, informed the Team of Reviewers that the system of awarding credits at the University/Department is currently being revised; the awarding of a GPA shall be practiced forthwith.

#### **Weaknesses and Recommendations**

- There is no evidence of a syllabus for any of the courses although individual course descriptions are available in the Handbook.

has been carried out in 2006, it is not clear as to how reviewed and revised except for individual interventions and feedback.

- Although the SER states that almost all academics who write course material have had formal training in DE, only one academic that the team met acknowledged such formal training (more than 12 years ago). Some members mentioned having attended a few workshops including an audio-visual training, and others had only read the DE manuals but not received any training.
- Study Guides are not available for all courses (e.g. Out of seven courses in Diploma Level 5, only two courses have study guides), and it is hoped that this situation would be remedied soon.

### ***Level of judgement: Satisfactory***

## **4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods**

### **Strengths**

- Students of the Advanced Diploma in English, Diploma Level 3, 4, 5, and 6 are very satisfied with the teaching. Some of the ACE students stated that their Lecturers were good role models. However, no teaching sessions had been arranged for the Review Team to observe; thus, pedagogical methods, use of technology, classroom interaction etc. cannot be evaluated.
- All the students interviewed commented on the effectiveness and usefulness of Day-Schools. ACE students requested that the number of Day Schools offered for the Literature component of the course be increased.
- The feedback given on assignments (CAs) was reported by students to be very comprehensive and detailed, and therefore very useful. The detailed feedback given was also observed by the Review Team when perusing samples of student assignments.
- Diploma Level 4 and 5 students rated the Library as excellent.
- The inclusion of an online learning component in the literature syllabus is commendable, and points to excellent use of technology to enhance learning. However, it is unfortunate that only three students had availed themselves of the opportunity of interacting with the Lecturer and the material thus in 2010. It is recommended that the Department orients its students towards this type of learning through advice and counseling and markets this component more actively.
- Around 150 VHS recordings which are relevant to the Department's curricula are being used in teaching/learning (this material is now being converted to the DVD mode). The Media House of the University produces electronic teaching material for the Department when requested.
- The Main Library of the University has adequate collections in the Lending and Reference sections to cater to the needs of the Department of Language Studies. While borrowing facilities have been made available to the BA students, it is clear that many students prefer to photocopy the required material.
- The Main Library maintains a good collection of online journals for students' staff's reference purposes, facilitated by the Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI). The print journal collection at this venue is equally impressive.

### **Weaknesses and Recommendations**

Laboratory of the Department is more than 20 years old. The equipment available for such laboratories needs to be acquired if innovative interaction at this facility.

- Classroom space available for the Department is clearly inadequate for the parallel sessions conducted in Day Schools.
- A major concern is the dearth of office space for the Department's Academic Staff. Particularly, the Probationary Lecturers are made to serve in congested rooms with minimal facilities.
- Office space for the Non-academic staff too is inadequate. The Lunch Room available for them is a substandard facility and needs improvement.
- An urgent necessity is the purchase of an adequate number of computers for all staff. The Probationary Lecturers are compelled to use computer facilities outside the OU for their teaching activities and this is totally unacceptable given the fact that unlike similar staff in many conventional universities (that are well-equipped), they generate an income for the institution and are deprived of essential facilities.
- Lists of official duties/job descriptions for the Non-academic staff are not available at present.
- Around 8-9 months pass between calling for applications and the commencement of courses thus advertised. Such delay would discourage the prospective students. It was revealed that frequent delays that occur in the IT Department at the OU are mainly responsible for this situation.
- Diploma Levels 3,4,5 and 6 stated that (a) CAs are scheduled too close together and that (b) often the 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment is due before feedback on the 1<sup>st</sup> has been given. Such a delay in giving feedback defeats the purpose of the practice of Continuous Assessment. Given that the OU has a rule pertaining to eligibility based on 40% of the CA marks, it is very important that students receive feedback in a timely manner.
- The Department is at times unable to release the results of Final Examinations on time. This situation too has arisen partly due to the insufficient co-operation extended to the Department by the University's IT Department. Further, it is presumed that once the OU de-centralization process takes place, especially with marking being undertaken by the regional centers, the Department will have more free time to restructure itself vis-à-vis its administrative work allocation, marking schedules, etc.
- The Review Team noticed that not all Handbooks are consistent in stating the method of assessment and the eligibility criteria clearly, and it is recommended that this be addressed. (One Diploma Level 4 student commented that the Credit System is not clearly stated in the Handbook, and that even the Lecturers could not explain it satisfactorily.)

***NB:***

The Review Team was unable to meet all categories of staff who contribute to the academic and administrative activities of the Department. For instance, the Department had not arranged meetings with its Consultants and Project Assistants. The Review Team is therefore unable to assess their contribution to the Department's activities or comment on how the Department can make their work more productive/efficient.

Further, it is clear that some of the issues noted above are beyond the control of the Department, given the fact that matters related to examination results, purchase of computers, office space etc. require constant and competent support of the University's administrative setup. Nevertheless, the Department could actively pursue these issues via formal discussions with the relevant official arms of the University.

### 4.3 Quality of Students Including Student Progress and Achievements

According to the SER prepared by the Department, the students who take courses in the Language Studies Department are mature individuals. Due to this aspect as well as due to the fact that the G.C.E Advanced Level qualifications are not the prime criterion for enrolment, the quality of these students is not comparable with the quality of the students in conventional universities.

#### Strengths

- At the meeting with the Review Team, students expressed their candid views with confidence, understanding and awareness of their objectives and achievements in pursuing studies at the OU.
- The test for students at entry level is of a sufficient standard and allows the selection of competent persons.
- The Team met four batches of students of different levels. From the Certificate Course level up to the undergraduate level, it was observed that the students were mature enough to engage in education via the Distance Education mode.
- The Department has already recruited a few Lecturers from among the Graduates who had their university education at the OUSL.
- From the Assignments, Final Year Projects and answer scripts made available to them, the Reviewers noted that the quality of students is of a commendable standard.
- Most of the students the Team met were highly motivated and committed to learning.
- Students had no apprehension about employability as almost all of them are currently employed.
- With regard to the selection of students, the OUSL is unique as it does not depend on the G.C.E Advanced Level results, nor does it depend on the UGC with regard to the selection of students.

#### Weaknesses and Recommendations

- There are no publications or other evidence of research by BA students. More encouragement in this regard is needed. Publication of magazines or journals could be initiated to publish students' essays, poems etc.
- The Review Team did not find evidence of any extra-curricular activities where staff/student interaction could take place. In addition to the DE mode of teaching and Day Schools, it would be fruitful if the staff could organize artistic or social events to allow students to mingle with peers and teachers.

***Level of Judgment: Good***

### 4.4. Extent and Use of Students Feedback

The mechanism in use for receiving Student Feedback is stipulated in p. 23 of the SER. According to this, it is mainly through meeting the students when they visit the Department that the staff obtains feedback on the quality of teaching and courses. The Course Coordinators help the students with the questions on administrative matters. According to the

se matters related to academic studies at the HSS Faculty

Quantitative feedback is sought through student surveys. Some questionnaires prepared for this purpose were available for the perusal of the Team.

### **Strengths**

- The Faculty has created a mechanism to obtain and use student feedback. Documents formatted for this purpose are available at the Department. These forms, as the Team noted, have been used at different levels of teaching in the Department.
- One of the Research papers published by a member of the Academic Staff was based on an analysis of the Student Feedback survey.

### **Weaknesses and Recommendations**

- A systematic approach to obtain student feedback is currently not in place. There appears to be no regular mechanism in obtaining student feedback at every class or course level and a more positive approach in this regard is needed.
- Documents available to the Team indicated that some feedback had been obtained in response to the demands of research activities, yet the Team witnessed only a few filled forms used in data gathering.
- It would be advisable to use clearer and shorter questionnaires/forms to obtain student feedback rather than the lengthy questionnaires used at present. These forms should contain questions on the course content, methods of delivery, instructor's approach, whether the instructor is ready to answer students' questions, whether students are provided with sufficient reading material etc., that will reflect the students' views and responses on the course material, methods of instruction and the quality of teaching.

***Level of judgment: Satisfactory***

## **4.5. Postgraduate Studies**

The Department of Language Studies at the OUSL does not conduct postgraduate programs; hence, the Review Team focused on the postgraduate research and teaching undertaken by its Academic Staff.

### **Strengths**

- It is to the Department's credit that virtually all members have some form of postgraduate qualification (multidisciplinary) or are in the process of reading for a postgraduate degree (Out of 16 members of the Academic Staff, 14 have earned postgraduate qualifications at local and foreign universities).
- Some of the senior staff members of the OUSL Language Studies Department teach on the MA in TESL program conducted by the Postgraduate Institute of English (PGIE).

### **Weaknesses and Recommendations**

- Though the Academic Staff are involved in research and present their work at academic forums, there are severe constraints on staff time arising from the DE work format.

(i.e. regular discussions groups on research, theory and departmental research journal) could be good institutional other research. This would, however, require effective sharing of work and time management.

- Staff research expertise should be channeled to develop innovative postgraduate programs for their own Department in order to maximize the potential of the Department.

***Level of judgement: Satisfactory***

#### **4.6 Peer Observation**

##### **Weaknesses and Recommendations**

- Currently, peer observation is not practiced in the Department.
- A systematic process of Peer Observation should be initiated forthwith.

**Level of judgement: Unsatisfactory**

#### **4.7 Skills Development**

Skills development, as analysed below, has taken in to account skills applicable to the Students, the Academic Staff and the Non-academic Staff.

##### **Strengths**

- A positive factor was the high degree of satisfaction on the part of current students as well as graduates vis-à-vis the multiple skills developed through the comprehensive, multilevel programs.
- Interviews with students conveyed how they have strengthened their academic skills of critical reading / critical writing / critical analysis, support skills of computer software usage, presentation, research methodology, pedagogy and teaching over a period of time.
- Specific examples of how teaching methodology was reproduced in class were cited. Students' skills development thus seems a particular strength of the Department.
- Members of the Academic Staff have taken part in English-related evaluations at other Universities as part of the IRQUE Project.
- The Non-academic Staff have had access to external training programmes under ADB funding. Such training has been provided by the University of Colombo, NIBM and the State Printing Corporation.
- Members of the Academic and the Non-academic Staff use email in their official functions and encourage students to communicate in this mode. This is welcome, given the requirements of the DE programmes.
- The Data Entry Operator of the Department is highly computer literate and provides commendable assistance to the Academic Staff in designing and uploading e-material for online learning.

##### **Weaknesses and Recommendations**

- Only one member of the Academic Staff had obtained the Certification (Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education or equivalent) required by the UGC for all Academic Staff

Other members of staff did not even appear to be aware of it is recommended that the Head apprise all staff of this obtain the required certification as early as possible.

- It is also noted that the research output of the Department is somewhat top-heavy. It is therefore recommended that the newer staff members show more initiative in realizing and increasing their research potential.
- Lack of a ladder of employment for job positions such as Data Entry Operator within the System, even when they possess postgraduate qualifications, discourages skills development and enhancement of performance. While it is understood that this situation is beyond the Department's control, it needs to be stressed that issues such as this should be addressed through effective representations made at national forums on higher education.
- The provision of academic/methodology-related orientation for students when they transit from Diploma to undergraduate-level is a necessity.

*Level of judgement: Good*

#### **4.8 Academic Guidance and Counseling**

##### **Strengths**

- OU students are given DE orientations, academic instruction, methodology guidance and overall counseling at different points of the program.
- The Academic as well as Non-academic Staff deal with students' queries in a committed manner.

##### **Weaknesses and Recommendations**

- While students expressed their satisfaction with regard to the academic counseling and guidance they receive during their academic span at the OUSL, this seems to be at great professional / personal cost to members of staff.
- Both Academic and Non-academic staff conveyed how dealing with a multitude of basic queries from the general public as well as program-related questions, academic problems and even personal crises of the students and parents (particularly on the telephone) was extremely time-consuming.
- The outcome for students in terms of academic counseling and guidance seems to be successful, yet the implementation process is questionable as far as the staff is concerned. Consequently, it may be worthwhile to consider restructuring and streamlining the guidance process by instituting set hours for academic counseling and a specific cadre position to deal with some of the more fundamental queries.
- Another problem is the felt sense of abandonment by students following the higher levels of the BA program that require more independent work. After the highly comprehensive support offered at the lower levels of the program, the transition to the degree level may require some form of orientation.
- As noted earlier, guidance through academic feedback on assignments is a problem due to the delay in students receiving marks and detailed comments for self-improvement. While this is understandable when considering the numbers involved and the workload of staff members, more effort is required to counter delayed feedback.
- Some students voiced the difficulty of communicating with Academic Staff and Coordinators because staff are not present when they call, or because not all staff members



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able to students (However, Diploma Level 6 students very accessibleö).

**Level of judgement: Good**

Aspect Reviewed	Judgment Given
Curriculum Design, Content and Review	Satisfactory
Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods	Good
Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements	Good
Extent and Use of Student feedback, Qualitative and Quantitative	Satisfactory
Postgraduate Studies	Satisfactory
Peer Observation	Unsatisfactory
Skills Development	Good
Academic Guidance and Counseling	Good

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Team of Reviewers wishes to recommend the following:

1. Establishing a systematic schedule of curriculum revision is recommended.
2. In preparing Course Guides/Handbooks, the system of awarding Credits should be clearly stipulated. Further, each such document should carry the date of publication.
3. Long delays between calling for applications and the commencement of courses thus advertised should be minimized in the future.
4. It is necessary to establish a mini library within the Department which shall provide its students greater access to study material.
5. Borrowing privileges at the Main Library should be extended to Advanced Certificates in English students.
6. It is recommended that the practice of delayed feedback on the CAs be reviewed immediately, and measures be taken to resolve this issue, perhaps by reducing the number of CAs in each semester.
7. Delays in releasing results of Final Examinations should be minimized, in collaboration with the University's Examinations Department and IT Department.
8. The Department should consult the Dean/Vice Chancellor regarding the allocation of more classroom and meeting space for its academic activities.
9. A list of official duties/job description (presently not available) should be prepared for the guidance of the Non-academic Staff so that they could serve in a more focused manner. Doing so would enable a systematic allocation of specific duties to each member of staff.
10. A specific cadre position for the Department to deal with some of the more fundamental administrative queries and emails is required, so that staff will have more time for academic pursuits.

ns should be put in place (i.e. regular discussions groups  
dology as well as a Departmental research journal) for

12. More training programmes should be accessed for the skills development of the Non-academic Staff annually.
13. Currently, the Department provides 12 computers for the Academic Staff and 5 for the Non-academic Staff. This number should be increased in view of the fact that Probationary Lecturers do not have sufficient access to computers in attending to their academic duties/functions. Availability of laptop computers too would further enhance the Department's quality of teaching/learning.
14. Only one photocopying machine, out of two available at the Department, is in working order. This facility too should be developed in view of the heavy workload of all Staff.
15. Only two computer printers out of four available at the Department are in working order. Repairs/replacement should be carried out to overcome this situation.
16. More multimedia projectors are needed for the Department's functions. Only one such projector is currently available.
17. As the two labourers available for the Department's functions are overloaded with work, recruitment of at least one more labourer is recommended.
18. There is no evidence that minutes are kept of Staff Meetings, and it is recommended that this practice be followed to monitor Departmental activities, assign tasks and duties, and institute changes etc. effectively.