

# BUSINESS DIALOGUE



JANUARY - JUNE 2020

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

2020

ISSUE 01



NEED OF THE HOUR:  
EMPOWER THE LOCAL  
EDUCATIONAL  
INSTITUTIONS

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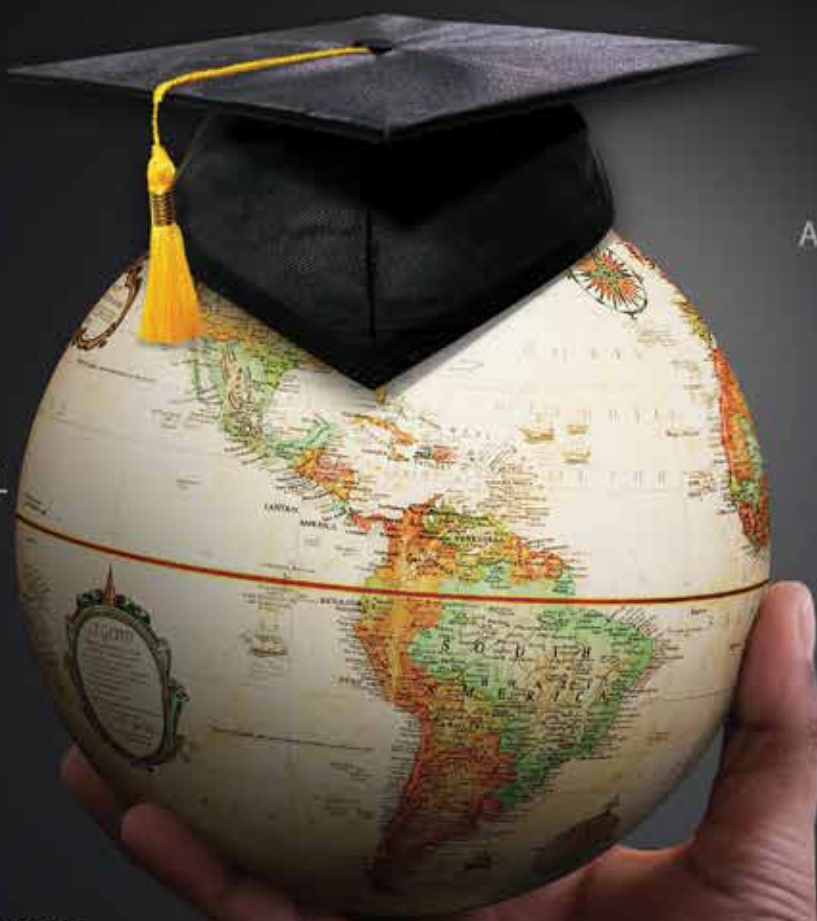


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## BUSINESS

### DIPLOMA PROGRAMMES

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- AUG-20** Executive Diploma in Business Management (EDBM)
- AUG-20** Executive Diploma in Human Resource Management (EDHRM)
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NSBM has designed world class degree programmes merged leadership, ethics, global thinking, core management skills and leading edge technological innovations. It mainly focuses on producing graduates and postgraduate

professionals in the above fields. It is defined by its mission as a creative and innovative school of future generations. NSBM is driven by the themes of Innovation, entrepreneurship, technology and globalization to direct the country towards knowledge based globalized economy, while creating synergies with existing body of knowledge after considering the needs of 21st century in the fields of Management, Computing and Engineering Education. As a forward thinking school in higher education, NSBM assures the vital need to make learning relevant to industry expectations. NSBM has forged strategic collaborations with leading universities such as University College of Dublin, Ireland, University of Victoria, Australia and University of Plymouth, UK which enable its students to expose themselves to global thinking and best practices in global industries.

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  - B2 Library Building
  - B3 Administration Building
  - C1 School of Business
  - C2 School of Computing
  - C3 School of Engineering
  - D1 Students' Accommodation
  - D2 Staff Accommodation
  - E1 Recreational Buildings
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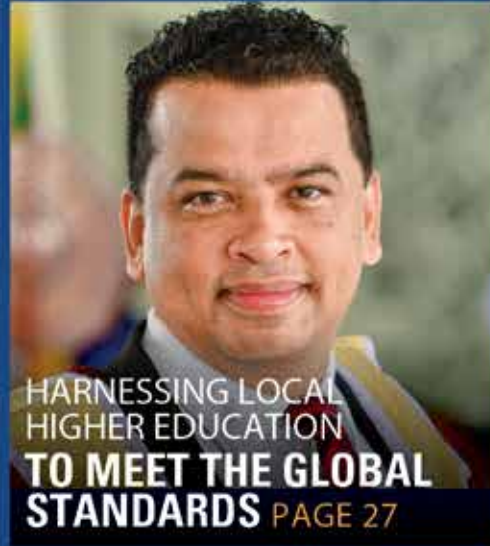
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## VICE-CHANCELLOR'S MESSAGE

NSBM Business Dialogue magazine on its sixth consecutive publication, has proven to be a resilient and valuable source of timely topics and intriguing conversations, adding yet another notch of achievement for the institute. Taking into consideration the current landscape across the globe, with educators inevitably at the front lines of tackling novel approaches to education systems and policies, this issue vehemently addresses the new normal in the higher education arena. With NSBM constantly at the forefront of innovative educational solutions, with the aim of producing ideal leaders to the nation who harbor the ability to understand the ground realities of the world, this issue, with its collection of ideologies on the educational sphere, is yet another attempt at such a feat.

Thus, I extend my heartiest congratulations to the Business Dialogue magazine team on the success of this issue embedded with great value. This outstanding endeavor provides a foundation for educators, education experts and enthusiasts to discuss the ever-evolving nature of the current education arena, whilst garnering the attention of students, academics and policy makers alike.

At NSBM, we staunchly believe in ensuring that our undergraduates sharpen their soft skills whilst strengthening their core academic abilities. Therefore, we provide the best facilities, for both conventional and digital modes of study, via our modern, technology equipped classrooms, talented lecture panels, international exposure and user-friendly digital platforms. Moreover, by forging ties with the industry and its networks, we provide them ample opportunities for a secure and dynamic future.

Thus, with this vision in mind, NSBM will continue to engage in such endeavors to provide timely and pertinent exposure to its undergraduates. I would like to take this opportunity, to thank the NSBM team who is always committed towards maintaining the highest quality in all their undertakings.

Wishing this magazine and its editorial committee, continued success!

**Prof. E. A. Weerasinghe**  
**Vice Chancellor**  
**NSBM Green University Town**



# MY DREAM IS TO BE A CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

“ WHEN I WAS SMALL, I WAS DREAMING OF BECOMING A WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR WHO RUNS HER OWN BUSINESS. I HOPE I CAN ACHIEVE MY GOAL. NSBM PROVIDES US ALL THE OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW AS VISIONARY LEADERS ”





## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



With immense contentment, I add my thoughts to the message in the Business Dialogue magazine which comes to you under the theme, "Future Prospects in Higher Education". This issue, which is the sixth issue of Business Dialogue, brings you insights of a treasured troupe of intellectuals who have proven themselves worthy to contribute to the magazine. Being a university

which turned a new chapter in the Sri Lankan higher education system, we believe that it is our utmost responsibility to discuss and disseminate knowledge into the higher education sector of the country which has attracted the pivotal attention of all policy makers and leaders in directing the whole country to rise up as a nation.

In recent times, there have been many changes in the broader landscape of higher education. Covid-19 pandemic has had a great impact on higher education throughout the world and it could in a way be considered as a blessing in disguise. This opened our eyes to new realities and opportunities in university education. NSBM Green University Town faced this challenge in a more optimistic manner and was able to be benefited by it. From the day of inception and throughout this journey NSBM Green University Town hurdled many mounds and braved many storms. She has always managed to hold her ground as a strong independent entity. Today, she soars steady and victorious high in the higher education sector in the country and has become an example that the rest could always look up to. Thus, we decided that it is time for us to revisit the future prospects in higher education.

The continuous hard work of the Business Dialogue committee should indeed be much appreciated since they made enduring efforts to bring this issue to your hands. Further, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to all contributors including the intellectuals who devoted their valuable time to promulgate their knowledge to all the readers of this Business Dialogue Magazine. I believe that the experiences, and the perspectives put forth in this issue, will provide a worthy insight to all its readers.

**Prof. J. Baratha Dodankotuwa,**  
Editor-in- Chief,  
Business Dialogue

# BUSINESS DIALOGUE

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF  
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“ THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS AN UNEXPECTED AND COMMON ENEMY AND WE ARE ALL PITTED AGAINST IT, FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL. MEDICAL AND HEALTH CARE HAS BECOME AMONG THE TOP PRIORITIES OF THE WORLD, WHILE THE OTHER SECTORS HALT ITS PROCESSES, UNTIL SOCIETY IS DEEMED NORMAL AGAIN. HOWEVER, DUE TO THE IMPACTS OF COVID, THE EDUCATION SECTOR TOO, IS FACING MANY RAPID CHANGES. MOST OF THEM HEAVILY CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTER-COMMUNICATION METHODS AND FACILITATE DISTANCE LEARNING. ”

learning, with little to no attention or resources allocated to technologically mediated education methodologies. Thus, the swift adaptation of technologically mediated teaching and learning was indeed a revolutionary step in the education sector especially in third world countries. Sri Lanka as a fast-developing country, under

normal circumstances, would have taken more time to shift to online and distance teaching from its original form of face to face teaching and learning. However, because of this pandemic, the paradigm shift from face to face teaching to online teaching was rapid and educators and learners were forced to adopt themselves, to teach and learn on

various online platforms. Necessity certainly is the mother of invention; thus, the local education sector gained a strong advantage, regardless of the worldwide adversity. The positive impact was less palpable in the west, however, as they had already established a good practice in this distance teaching and were well equipped with advanced

“ MOST OF THE TEACHERS AND FACILITATORS ARE STILL UNDER THE CATEGORY OF DIGITAL IMMIGRANTS WHO HAVE MANY PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS IN ADOPTING TO ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES. DIGITAL NATIVES VERY EASILY ABSORB AND HANDLE SMART DEVICES AND TECHNOLOGIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS ARE NOT A CHALLENGE TO THEM BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE ABILITY TO SEAMLESSLY UNDERSTAND AND UTILIZE THEM FOR THEIR NEEDS ”



tele-communication facilities, with their people well integrated netizens, with networks across the globe through online platforms, thus, this context became a minor influential factor in the education sector, in that part of the world.

Taking into consideration the current learning trends, blended teaching is becoming more popular among young learners and academics and many reputed universities have transformed their delivery mode into blended teaching and learning techniques. Blended learning facilitates face to face collaboration plus online, distance learning. The perfect blend of both mediums generates many advantages. In terms of the curriculum, there are certain parts which could be delivered undoubtedly through online teaching platforms and those subject areas do not require in class presence or practical sessions. Blended teaching and learning could create more collaborations than face to face because it enables networking across the world. Furthermore, this method conserves time, enabling learners to engage in various other activities and skills building whilst gaining an education. Thus, the use of digital technologies, digital tools and integrated techniques in teaching and

learning are fast becoming popular in this era.

Students are digital natives and they are born and raised in an era with advanced technological features. But most of the teachers and facilitators are still under the category of digital immigrants who have many physical and psychological barriers in adopting to advanced technologies. Digital natives very easily absorb and handle smart devices and technologies and the development of information and communication systems are not a challenge to them because they have the ability to seamlessly understand and utilize them for their needs. On the other hand, digital immigrants take more time to understand and absorb technology and this fact creates a barrier between the learner and the facilitator. This scenario is rather different in the western context as their digital literacy is at a higher standard. However, now we have commenced shifting our teaching paradigm to blended learning and Covid-19 was a blessing in disguise to the education sector.

The anatomy of education has started to change, and it is evolving day by day. The learning needs of students are also becoming more complicated. Furthermore, the environment in which we have to teach and learn also creates many challenges. The satisfaction of the students on their learning outcomes in blended learning platforms are debatable, and the real outcomes are yet to be determined. It is undoubtedly true that social interaction is also an inseparable part of education. The learner will never develop with theoretical knowledge alone. The learning process is enhanced through reflection in action. Therefore, social interaction, balance between extracurricular activities and education play a vital role in creating a competent graduate. Therefore, we cannot rely completely on distance teaching, we, as educators have a responsibility to strike a balance and establish a middle ground to educate our novice learners and help them become real knowledge icons in this revolutionary era.

**By Archt. Upeksha Hettithanthri**

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# NEED OF THE HOUR: EMPOWER THE LOCAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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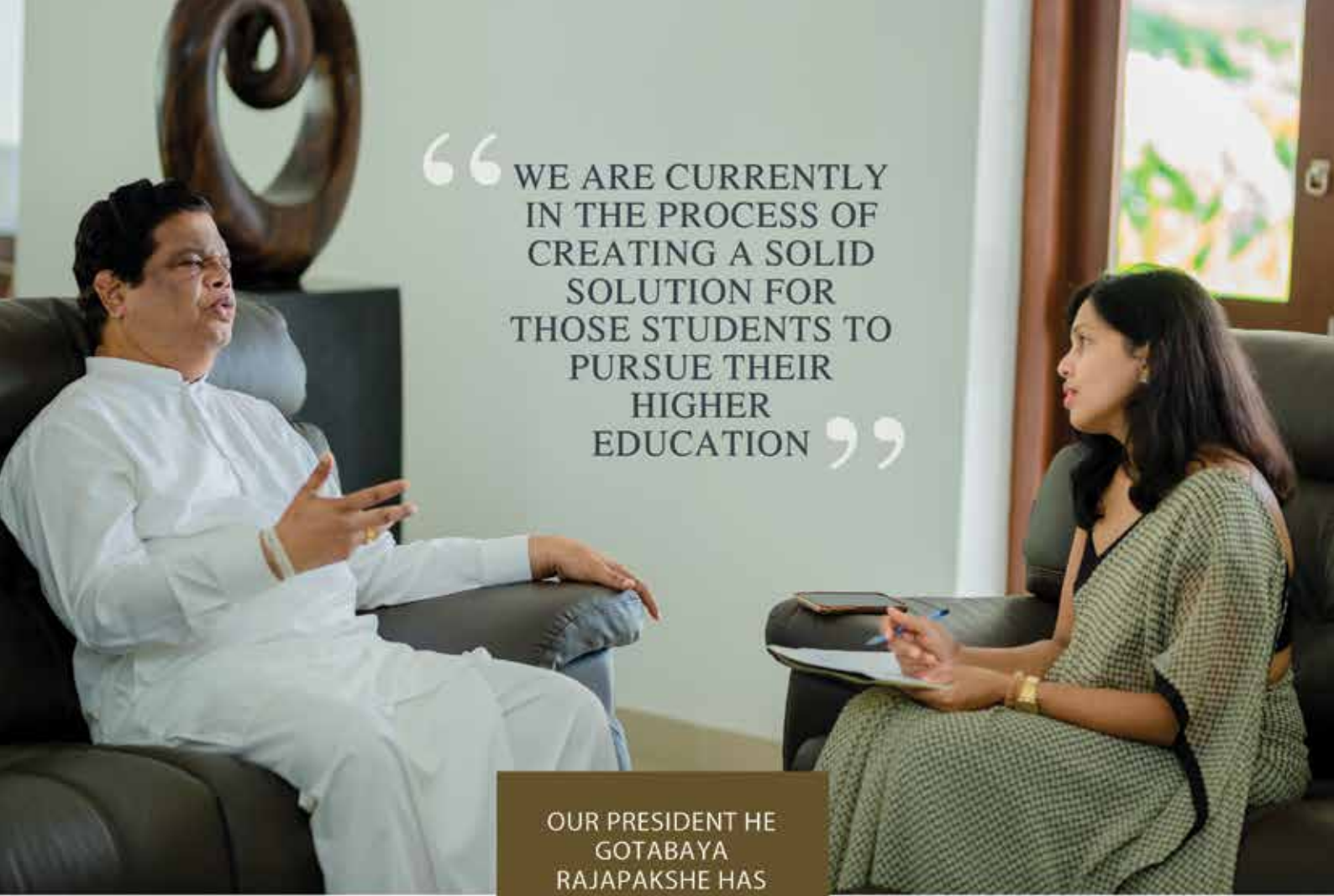
HON. DR. BANDULA GUNAWARDANA

MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

**A** RENOWNED SRI LANKAN POLITICIAN AND A GOVERNMENT MINISTER, AS WELL AS THE FORMER MINISTER OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY, HIGHER EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATIONS, FONDLY KNOWN AS A POPULAR UNIVERSITY TUTOR HIMSELF IN HIS EARLY DAYS, MINISTER GUNAWARDANA HAS DAPPLIED IN ACADEMIA AND HAS ALWAYS PROCURED GREAT INTEREST IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SRI LANKAN EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE. THUS, NSBM WAS BESTOWED THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONVERSE WITH HIM REGARDING HIS THOUGHTS AND VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN OUR MOTHERLAND.

## **What is the current situation of tertiary education in Sri Lanka?**

In Sri Lanka, 180,000 students annually qualify to enter into a university for tertiary education. But due to the lack of capacity in universities, only 30,000 students get the opportunity to enter to a university to pursue their tertiary education. So, 150,000 qualified students are left behind without university entrance. So, as a government, we are very conscious about this potential group, who are left behind due



“ WE ARE CURRENTLY IN THE PROCESS OF CREATING A SOLID SOLUTION FOR THOSE STUDENTS TO PURSUE THEIR HIGHER EDUCATION ”

to lack of facilities. We are currently in the process of creating a solid solution for those students to pursue their higher education.

### **What are the procedures currently being implemented to uplift the tertiary education in Sri Lanka?**

Our President HE Gotabaya Rajapakse has created an educational uplifting program called “Saubhagye Dakma”- vision for prosperity. Through this program we are planning to increase the number of students entering university through four methodologies. Firstly, we plan to open up chartered universities with a non-profit structure, with the sole focus on improving the spectrum of learning in tertiary education. Those Chartered universities will enroll a certain amount of those students who seek university entries.

OUR PRESIDENT HE GOTABAYA RAJAPAKSHE HAS CREATED AN EDUCATIONAL UPLIFTING PROGRAM CALLED “SAUBHAGYE DAKMA”- VISION FOR PROSPERITY. THROUGH THIS PROGRAM WE ARE PLANNING TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENTERING UNIVERSITY THROUGH FOUR METHODOLOGIES. FIRSTLY, WE PLAN TO OPEN UP CHARTERED UNIVERSITIES WITH A NON-PROFIT STRUCTURE, WITH THE SOLE FOCUS ON IMPROVING THE SPECTRUM OF LEARNING IN TERTIARY EDUCATION. THOSE CHARTERED UNIVERSITIES WILL ENROLL A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF THOSE STUDENTS WHO SEEK UNIVERSITY ENTRIES

Secondly, we plan to increase the number of degree programs offered by the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL). The OUSL is currently offering a limited scope of degree programs, however we will have to generate more focus on increasing its potential through increasing the number of new degree programs, so this mechanism will open a variety of options for potential candidates to choose from.

Thirdly, we hope to offer the opportunity to students reading for Diplomas and Higher Diplomas to pursue a degree, on completion. In the current situation, there are lot of institutes that offer diplomas and higher diplomas, but students who follow those courses do not enter the degree level due to lack of opportunities. Through this methodology, those diploma holders will receive the opportunity to carry forward their education up to a degree level and further.





## Where do you see the future of Tertiary education in Sri Lanka heading?

We have to admit, that the current education system is exam centric which unfortunately heavily strains and pressurizes our students, increasing, in most cases unhealthy levels of competition. Our aim, however, is to create more competent graduates, with more focus on research and innovation. The ugly truth is Sri Lanka is still far behind and has been unable to achieve a higher-ranking among global universities. The reason behind this is the lack of research and innovations. We need to create a platform for more scientific research and innovation. Then we can gradually reach the standards of the global ranking index. For this task, we will follow the mechanisms implemented in best ranked western universities and we plan to implement those in the local level to empower more research. What we need to create is, globally recognized degrees at local level and then our graduates will be well geared to obtain and sustain opportunities across the globe.

Finally, our state universities will be developed within the next 10 years to cater to the student numbers from 30,000 to 60,000. This will provide more learning opportunities to potential candidates within the state universities to build up their education. The facilities will be further increased and improved on par with global standards, and human resources allocated to those universities will be further increased providing more opportunities to educate young professionals to join the academic sector to

deliver a service to the nation. Nowadays, the opportunity to enter a state university as an undergraduate is limited; therefore, there is a rigorous selection process for those universities. Not getting an entry to a state university, does not mean that those students are incapable. They are rejected only due to the lack of infrastructure; thus, our aim is to develop the infrastructure and to increase the capacities of the state sector universities to cater to more student cohorts under various disciplines.

NSBM is delivering a great job by affiliating with many foreign universities and by offering several UGC approved degrees. This model gives the opportunity to study foreign degrees while staying in your mother country, which is a huge saving for our nation. With our "Saubhagye Dekma" program all the state and non-state sector educational institutes and universities will be empowered to deliver more service to the nation by catering to higher student numbers in a global manner.

■ **By Archt. Upeksha Hettithanthri**

# ELEVATING SRI LANKAN HIGHER EDUCATION TO MEET GLOBAL STANDARDS

ARCHT. VIDYA JOTHY  
PROF. NIMAL DE SILVA



PROFESSOR NIMAL DE SILVA IS AN EMERITUS PROFESSOR IN THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE, UNIVERSITY OF MORATUWA AND IS ALSO THE DIRECTOR OF THE POSTGRADUATE INSTITUTE OF ARCHEOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF KELANIYA. PROFESSOR DE SILVA IS THE DIRECTOR FOR THE CENTRE FOR HERITAGE AND CULTURAL STUDIES. HE IS ALSO THE FORMER CHAIRMAN OF THE UDA AND THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL DESIGN CENTRE. ([HTTP://THENATIONALTRUST.LK/BOOKS/HERITAGE-BUILDINGS-OF-SRI-LANKA/](http://thenationaltrust.lk/books/heritage-buildings-of-sri-lanka/))

## What is your opinion about Sri Lankan Tertiary education?

**S**ri Lankan tertiary education is hampered without having a proper national policy which suits the country. For many decades we have been blindly following a European model which is not compatible for the local students. The need to have a national policy for tertiary education has been a

vital requirement for a long time and has never been addressed properly. The system we follow now is an age-old model and it needs to be changed and updated in order to suit the present learning requirements. Some of the degrees are outdated and their content do not cater to the industry requirements which ultimately results in unemployment. Therefore my suggestion is that we need to analyze the current situation in depth and bring changes to the

tertiary education system without further due.

## Looking at the swift changes in the education systems around the world, where should we position our higher education in the next 10 years?

We need to do a thorough analysis about the graduates we have

produced for years and how they have accomplished new innovations and set new standards for the industries. After that we will be able to identify what we are lacking right now. A country's higher education should not be aimed at creating an industrial slave but a capable and talented human being with wisdom. Especially being a developing country, our graduates should be capable of innovating and creating new and positive trends instead of just adopting to the existing industry requirements. If the capable university graduates don't push the existing limitations the industries will soon collapse without having any innovative developments.



### **What is your take on the current global teaching and learning trends?**

There are many global trends that are emerging due to new technological advancements, varied and complex human requirements. Yet we should not be following all these trends as we have to consider to what extent these trends are applicable to the Sri Lankan context. Global teaching and learning trends are to be considered only as a guide but not as a rule to follow blindly.

We should identify the areas in teaching and learning which needs change through some research and surveys and always analyze our requirements in our education system. Once we have this information, we will be able to come up with our own teaching and learning methods which are suitable for our context.

### **As a country with a high literacy rate, how could the educators contribute to the speedy development of the country?**

Yes, it is true that our literacy rates are higher compared to many developing countries. But the literacy rate is just another parameter and we cannot get the holistic idea about how educators could contribute for a rapid development through that. I believe that for speedy development of the country it is necessary to widen the opportunities and facilities for innovative research. When the opportunities are created for research, a culture for exploring new research areas will be created providing new opportunities for innovative developments.

### **According to your point of view what will be the most trending fields for education in the coming 10 years?**

The trends in education fields changes with global needs, human behavior, and technological advancements. Few decades ago, industries like software engineering were at a peak with the advancement of technological developments but with the massive supply that happened afterwards the trends have

changed over a few years. Presently I believe the most trending fields for education to be agriculture, food technology, fisheries and indigeneous medicine, by considering science and information technology as a tool. However, this could change again with global pandemics and human requirements.

### **What are the possible changes you could suggest in amending the Sri Lankan higher education sector according to the global needs?**

As a country we should first give priority to identifying the local talent and capabilities. Sri Lankan higher education sector should first consider local needs while understanding capabilities, opportunities and resources to cater for international needs. When we are certain about what we can offer to the global context we can perform well and it will be more effective.

■ **By Lakruwani Wimalarathne**

# WE ARE THE LIGHTHOUSES IN THE DARK SEA OF INTELLECTUAL LAZINESS AND PURE IGNORANCE

SIRKKU MÄNNIKKÖ BARBUTIU, PHD

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR  
DIRECTOR OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES  
DEPARTMENT OF COMPUTER AND SYSTEMS SCIENCES  
STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY

## Reflecting back, how has the field of higher education changed in the last few decades?

I think that the changes in HE reflect the changes in our societies as a whole. I want to emphasise that my perspective is that of Scandinavia and Europe even though we might recognize common global trends. Educational institutions tend to be - despite the global influences - deeply rooted into the local culture and history.

If we think of major happenings within HE, we need to talk about two main phenomena: move from Industrial Societies to Knowledge Societies and Universities becoming institutions of mass education

“ HIGHER EDUCATION IS INCREASINGLY DYNAMIC AND IS REALLY COMPETITIVE. THERE IS A HUGE RANGE OF DISCIPLINES, MODES OF STUDY AND TYPES OF INSTITUTIONS AVAILABLE THROUGH GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS ”

instead of being reserved for few. These two phenomena are of course related to one another, perhaps we could even say that the second one is – at least partially – a consequence of the first. The intensive technological

developments after the Second World War have contributed to a transformation of our societies where conditions of production and economy have radically changed leading to new requirements as individuals and citizens. New competences and skills are required. New types of knowledge emerge.

As conditions of production change, the question of employability of individuals becomes crucial. How do we guarantee that individuals have the competences and skills required? In Europe, the answer has been education: opening the secondary and tertiary education to an increasing number of people.

Increasing the number of students within HE has brought a lot of



I WORK AT A DEPARTMENT WHERE WE DEVELOP NEW EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES AND IT HAS NEVER OCCURRED TO ME THAT WE SHOULD BE REPLACING TEACHERS WITH TECHNOLOGIES. IN MY UNDERSTANDING LEARNING IS MAINLY A SOCIAL ACTIVITY. WE AS HUMANS LEARN IN INTERACTION WITH OTHERS, WITH PEERS AND WITH TEACHERS. A TEACHER HAS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN DESIGNING AND LEADING THE LEARNING PROCESS. NO MACHINE IS CAPABLE OF UNDERTAKING THAT KIND OF AN INTRICATE ROLE

challenges and I think that HE is struggling with these challenges today. Heterogeneous background of the student population requires a new mind set from the teacher: individualization and flexibility in education have become central for the success.

### **What would be the role of research and development in the future higher education field?**

My firm conviction is – and has always been – that research and development needs to go hand-in-hand with education. Education requires research and vice

versa. Education that is based on results of current research can be defined as quality education, and research that can be discussed, and critically examined within the academic context of HE, can develop its rigour. I think that it is of utmost importance that every teacher in HE is allowed to participate in research regularly. Own research activities will give the teacher a chance to stay connected with latest developments in the research field which then can be fed to the teaching. This is the way to guarantee good quality teaching which is informed by the latest research developments.

### **Do you believe technology can replace the human elements**

### **such as teaching from higher education completely? What would be the role of technology in Future Higher education?**

I work at a department where we develop new educational technologies and it has never occurred to me that we should be replacing teachers with technologies. In my understanding learning is mainly a social activity. We as humans learn in interaction with others, with peers and with teachers. A teacher has a crucial role in designing and leading the learning process. No machine is capable of undertaking that kind of an intricate role.



We may develop further educational technologies that support processes of collaboration and creativity within education and these technologies may have even a bigger role in the future. There is also a lot of discussion about further personalization of education and the learning experience with the emphasis on individual's needs and requirements. We are also developing diagnostic algorithms to assist teachers in their work. I would however be quite apprehensive regarding the application of machine learning in the educational context. We need to be very careful with the application of AI as our experience is still limited. We do not fully understand all the consequences yet. We have the responsibility to investigate all the ethical issues and establish sustainable procedures based on universal human values (if we can agree upon such). I can see that we have started the discussions in several aspects; for example, European Union has established Ethics & Guidelines for Trustworthy AI. (<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single->

**WE MAY DEVELOP FURTHER EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES THAT SUPPORT PROCESSES OF COLLABORATION AND CREATIVITY WITHIN EDUCATION AND THESE TECHNOLOGIES MAY HAVE EVEN A BIGGER ROLE IN THE FUTURE**

*market/en/news/ethics-guidelines-trustworthy-ai*) I find this as an important development. We should not pause here thinking of guidelines. Ethic is an area that requires constant debate and reflection, as the technological development places us in new situations where ethical considerations are necessary.

**Do you think universities have a more critical role in the sustainable development agenda?**

I certainly believe that universities could play a more central role and of course even provide a critical perspective to the current discourse on sustainability. Research findings should inform political decision making and societal development. There I think every individual researcher has a great responsibility to reach out and make their research known in the society. Especially we in public universities using public funding for our research have the ethical responsibility to make our research useful for the society.

**Cross collaborations between universities in developed countries and developing countries are increasing. In what ways will this help the developing world to revamp their education systems?**

Development of HE needs to be done in all societies. Developing countries need to find their own unique ways

“ I THINK THAT IN THE PRESENT WORLD, WE REALLY NEED TO TAKE UP THE FIGHT AGAINST IGNORANCE, FAKE NEWS, AND FILTER BUBBLES. RESEARCH SHOWS THAT THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA AMPLIFY CERTAIN HUMAN TENDENCIES TO RESIST INFORMATION AND FACTS THAT ARE AGAINST OUR EXISTING BELIEFS. PEOPLE SEEM TO GROUP WITH THOSE WHO HAVE SIMILAR IDEAS AND ATTITUDES. RESISTANCE TO FACTS CAN BE FOUND IN SO CALLED ECHO CHAMBERS AND FILTER BUBBLES WHERE THOSE WITH SIMILAR IDEAS ENFORCE THEIR OWN POSITION AGAINST DIFFERING IDEAS. THIS IS A VERY WORRYING DEVELOPMENT. AND HERE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AT ALL LEVELS HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY ”

of education and research, based on the local culture and history. In the enthusiasm of globalization we need to remember who we are and where we come from, because the knowledge of past builds a better future.

I am a friend of international collaboration and I have been working with colleagues in African and Asian countries. I think that mutual respect is a key to success. Western educational legacy lays heavily on HE institutions in many countries worldwide and I would really like to see a more critical positioning among academics in the global South. I think there is more room for academic diversity, and alternative knowledge systems. Particularly, if we think in terms of sustainability, we really need to draw on local and indigenous knowledge systems based on centuries of practice.

**In your view, what would be the key challenges faced by universities?**

I think that in the present world, we really need to take up the fight against ignorance, fake news, and filter bubbles. Research shows that the Internet and social media amplify certain human tendencies to resist information and facts that are against our existing beliefs. People seem to group with those who have similar ideas and attitudes. Resistance to facts can be found in so called echo chambers and filter bubbles where those with similar ideas enforce their own position against differing ideas. This is a very worrying development. And here educational institutions at all levels have an important role to play.

We are the lighthouses in the dark sea of intellectual laziness and pure ignorance. Xenophobic denial of the difference and the fear of unknown are unfortunately widely spread in today's world. This is why it is so important that we within academia act and react.

Our weapon in this fight is critical thinking; applying critical thinking in our everyday work and teaching critical thinking to our students.

## What competencies are needed by academics to face these challenges?

Here I will turn to my intellectual roots: "Humboldtian tradition" and the "German concept of Bildung"; which says that universities and academics are the keepers of knowledge, keepers of "Bildung" (education).

I do this as a reaction to the present day tendency with HE institutions to follow neo-liberal principles where visibility, commodification and instrumentalization of knowledge make us part of a culture of performance rather than that of intellectual inquiry.

Humboldt's original idea of Bildung emphasized a process of holistic growth, self-realization of the individual as an entirety, freedom, and self-understanding. Further it brings a sense of social responsibility, which puts the development of the individual's unique potential and self at the center of educational processes. These ideas have been very much lost along the way but I think it is important at present crisis of knowledge to turn back to the original ideas of holistic growth of the individual freedom and social responsibility. Cultivating these within ourselves as academics and cultivating these within our students, I am convinced that we will be able to meet the challenges of the future and will be much better equipped to resist ignorance with tools of critical thinking, rigour of research methodologies and a knowledge base in "Bildung".

And, of course, we need to meet each of our students with compassion, recognising their uniqueness as human beings with own history and own preconditions.

■ *By Sulakshana De Alwis*

# REFLECTIONS ON SRI LANKAN HIGHER EDUCATION FROM A PEACEFUL WARRIOR

GENERAL R. M. DAYA RATNAYAKE  
WWV RWP RSP USP NDU PSC

CHAIRPERSON OF SRI LANKA PORTS AUTHORITY,  
THE 20TH COMMANDER OF THE SRI LANKA ARMY



## What do you think about Sri Lankan higher education?

**U**niversity education in Sri Lanka compared to other countries is extremely competitive and rigid. As a country, we are

producing many graduates per year. But, now our higher education system needs out of the box thinking to foster rapid development of the country. Other than mainly focusing on textbook readings, pencil-paper exams we need to think more on personality development. I think it is a must

because students, soon after their higher education, need to face the real world, which is competitive, demanding, and stressful. This is where personality development matters to complement their knowledge on academic subject matter in whatever career they are going to pursue.





It is undoubtedly a fact that the country needs more competent graduates mainly from scientific, technological, and engineering and mathematical (STEM) backgrounds. Today, in Sri Lanka, we can see a saturated quantity of art stream graduates who comparatively contribute less to the development of the country. To be aligned with the contemporary global need towards advanced development, the structure of some degree programs must be reengineered. English literacy, due to globalization and digitalization, should be made mandatory in tertiary education. New knowledge is constantly available not in our mother tongue but in English. I personally feel that Sri Lankan education system should focus on developing language skills at the secondary education level, thus enabling tertiary education providers more time and space to focus on academic excellence with practical and research work. Our current education structure needs

“ SRI LANKA IS ASPIRING TO BE AN INTERNATIONAL HUB FOR EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION BY 2020. THIS IS THE VISION OF THE STATE ACCORDING TO THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION (WWW.MOHE.GOV.LK) NOW, WE HAVE REACHED 2020, THE QUESTION IS WHETHER WE HAVE, AT LEAST, REACHED THE TOP IN THE SOUTH ASIAN REGION. MY ANSWER IS, WE HAVE NOT ”

to be strengthened with STEM. Knowledge on digital media should go beyond the theoretical framework. Our graduates are burdened with heavy sacks of theories with lesser understanding on practical implications. This happens due to the lack of practical knowledge on the latest science and technology fundamentals.

**Where should we position our higher education in next 10 years?**

Sri Lanka is aspiring to be an international hub for excellence in higher education by 2020. This is the vision of the state according to the Ministry of Higher Education (www.mohe.gov.lk). Now, we have reached 2020, the question is whether we have, at least, reached the top in the South Asian region. My answer is, we have not.

The world is fast moving with new innovations and discoveries.



Education is the pillar of strength in a knowledge-based economy. However, to reach global standards and global educational heights, we need to empower our young generation to understand the form of disruptive technologies that is confronting contemporary job culture. In some fields, the technological knowledge is dynamic and changing. As for me at the ports' authority, we are more reluctant to recruit individuals with strong technical background and prefer the ones who only possess high academic qualifications. In Sri Lanka, employability of graduates has become a national issue. You can see many graduates are protesting and demanding for job opportunities. I think the mindset of graduates needs to be changed and directed towards entrepreneurship and creativity. More graduates, with the relevant skills, can be nurtured to match with industrial needs rather than depending on the government to provide them with jobs. Our youths must focus on innovative risk-taking mindsets with an 'out of box' mentality. They must not be dependent on a single job and must be prepared to be

'self-starters'.

### **What do you think about global teaching and learning trends?**

I think there is a high demand for technological and scientific streams. Not only that innovations and IT industries are recognized as fields with high demand, but this is a must for economic dynamism. In this context, we should remember always that teaching and learning cannot be separated. I, as a person with a strong military background, never recruit individuals simply for their paper qualifications, but for the correct attitude and skills. In military education, we give 40% for skills development and 60% for personality development. More than that, our main focus is on individual personal development and to nurture each one in the organization to be a complete person. Inner peace and the knowledge are always reflected through the personality and attitudes of an individual. Therefore, our military education is mainly focusing on developing those aspects along with the subject knowledge which is

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relevant to the field.

I admit that we live in a rapidly changing world. So, the higher education providers should prepare their students for this century in such a way that they are able to cope with emerging challenges. Transferring information from the lecturer to the student using traditional methods such as formal lecture sessions or via classroom discussions are now obsolete. Educators should also understand that the student population in this century is diverse and we need to incorporate new learning and teaching approaches. Advent of technology in this context is shaping the world especially during and after the Global Covid-19 crisis. Gig economy, service industry, healthcare, pharmacy, finance, agriculture, and other relevant industry will absolutely be transformed. The construction, aviation, tourism, leisure and other crisis hit industries will create a vacuum in the job and capital market. MNCs and SMEs will suffer great losses.

The entire job culture will change drastically according to emerging supply and demand scenario. Are our graduates prepared and ready for this unprecedented situation for the next decade? Are our Sri Lankan tertiary educational syllabus and pedagogy prepared to face this challenge?

### **As a country with a high literacy rate, how could the educators contribute to the speedy development of the country?**

When people can read and write effectively as well as possess a reasonable education level, it is a plus point for any country to attain speedy development. Education can provide people with the skills they need to come out of poverty. Prosperity is a dream with illiterate people. The most effective tool to eradicate poverty is relevant EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE. This is the global mantra. Global and national demand for skilled and

educated human resource is the new order of the world. So, we can be proud of ourselves as a nation since we have a good literacy rate compared to many developing countries in the world. However, this is not sufficient. Educators have a great responsibility now to provide people with critical knowledge to mature as a developed nation. Development is not only about overcoming economic poverty. The human factor is the core.

As I mentioned earlier, literacy is not merely about reading and writing. It can be defined in many ways; entrepreneurial literacy, science and technological literacy, IT literacy, social literacy and emotional literacy. These are the main elements defining literacy in real terms. From my point of view, among these elements, social and emotional literacies are the most important but the least prioritized elements in our education system. To achieve development, there needs to be discipline. In military education, discipline is a must and we use 5 pillars to establish a well-disciplined



personality. The 5 pillars are character, competence, courage, comradeship (selflessness) and culture. These pillars play vital roles in handling any kind of battle, emotional or physical situations with improved capacity, competence, and readiness. Teachers are the essence for these values to develop.

Coming back to your question, as a country, I believe that we have not properly utilized our educated cohort to get the maximum benefit for development. When a country is unstable with no vision and strategy, the worst situation we could experience is brain drain. Many educated young professionals left the country in the last few years because of not having any opportunities. But now the situation has changed. We now have a visionary leader. He values education with a promise to take educated people onboard in his efforts towards the development. We need to establish proper strategies in the educational, social and economic sectors, because our

visionary leadership is focusing on it. So, we now have a hope!

### **According to your point of view, what will be the most trending fields for education in coming 10 years?**

I think there will be many trending fields of education in the coming 10 years and among them science and technology, information technology, business management studies, medicine, economics, law, engineering, arts and humanities and mindfulness training will be significant. As I said before, Covid-19 crisis has rewritten the entire global social, economic, financial, and technological sectors. Our youth will face a new challenging world. Their preparedness and resilience will be important to survive and prosper.

Also, it is important to think of how the world will be by the year 2030/40. Our world will have 8.5 billion people by 2030. The world will then be home to a sizable

elderly population. It is estimated that there will be more than 1 billion people above 65 years. So, our physical work force will be less, compared to the overall global aged population of dependent. Our breaks of pandemic, epidemic, health, and environmental concerns ensure that medicine will still be important academic field of study. Digital, social media and information-related academic fields will also be in high demand. An overcrowded world will have more conflicts than today. So, the conflict prevention and resolution will be an important field of study to ensure that the world is safe from armed conflicts and wars in the future. Finance management will always be an important component of our economy, and career prospects for this sector is perpetual.

### **We identify you as a peaceful warrior. What is your advice to our undergraduates in shaping their future?**

As soldiers, we have trained ourselves to face severe conditions and stay calm but act spontaneously in any situation, with the right thinking without any fuss. Developing endurance to stay steady and constant in any unfavorable condition has been a part of our training and daily life. Positive attitude, energy wrapped with empathy and courage are our key fundamentals of mental steadiness. We, as soldiers, are even prepared to accept death at any point of time if it is inevitable. However, it is not considered as an option resorting to bravery on behalf of nation. The secret behind this attitude is the strong, hard, physical, and mental training given to a soldier. It helps to train the mind to face unsurmountable emotional and physical battles with focus and calmness. The entire military training is based upon this simple practice, and that is why a soldier is competent to carry out tasks which are beyond the capacity and capabilities of an average person.

I have my own understanding on my personality, and it is interesting and happy to know about your perception of me as a peaceful warrior. I have a military background and I started my career as a professional infantry officer; so, a combatant by profession. I am proud to have been a warrior in the battlefields for a considerable period in my life. I have faced death many times and am grateful to the nature or someone above for his blessings to keep peace and harmony within me. It is a professional job and I learned many life skills.

Coming back to your categorization, I would like to say that a peaceful warrior is an individual who is willing to fight for their rights but is also willing to do it with peace and love. The calling was for duty but never in anger or hatred. Sri Lanka saw the end of nearly a thirty year-long armed conflict by mid-2009. We had ample of real-life experiences in

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fighting a known ruthless terror group in the world. But, we always had our hands warm to receive the disgruntled youth and to rescue civilians entrapped. I realized that the best victory can be achieved without fighting and just by caring for humanity. We fought with arms only at times, when our people, national security and territorial integrity were endangered.

When I was appointed as the Rehabilitation Commissioner General to rehabilitate ex-LTTE combatants soon after we defeated the LTTE militarily, I found it as an opportunity to educate those misled youths to fight for their rights peacefully without resorting to violence and killing innocent people. Now, I happily watch the way all of them have successfully reintegrated to their own societies, while some continue to pursue their

individual and collective rights in mainstream politics abiding by democratic traditions. This is the new vision of Sri Lanka.

Our undergraduates should be multi-skilled. They should understand that conflict is part and parcel of any society. They should not stop fighting for their rights. They should find the best realistic and workable approaches to pursue rights and then, they will need to develop skills in other peripheries concurrently, as they develop skills in their academic field. This is my advice to undergraduates.

As soldiers, we have been trained to face severe conditions by staying calm, focused on our five senses and to act spontaneously in any given situation. Soldiering develops endurance to stay steady and calm. These inbuilt characteristics enable the soldier to face any condition confidently. Positive attitude, energy wrapped with empathy and courage are our key fundamentals of mental steadiness and strength. As I have mentioned earlier, soldiers are prepared to face even death at any point when it is inevitable. They will do so to carry out their duties in safeguarding others. The secret behind this attitude is the tough physical and mental training given to a soldier. It aids them in the process of training their mindset to face severe emotional and physical battles with calmness. The entire military system is based upon this simple practice.

Students and educators can emulate these fundamental human endurance capabilities of soldiers to prepare themselves to face a world that will be full of turmoil. Inner strength can be nurtured in many ways and various methodologies, in accordance to our individual abilities.

By Archt. Upeksha Hettithanthri & Gayanthi Mendis

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# COPING WITHIN A DYNAMIC AND COMPETITIVE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

DR ORNA O'BRIEN

DIRECTOR AT THE CENTRE FOR DISTANCE LEARNING,  
UCD COLLEGE OF BUSINESS



In conversation with the Director at the Centre for Distance Learning, UCD College of Business, where she oversees the domestic part-time programmes

and the College's significant overseas operations in Hong Kong, Singapore and Sri Lanka. Dr O'Brien joined UCD in 2002 and has established expertise in programme

governance, teaching excellence, transnational education, blended learning and the undergraduate research experience. Orna completed her doctorate at University of Edinburgh (2010) in the field of tertiary educational policy development. She holds a Graduate Diploma in University Teaching and Learning (UCD), a Certificate in Training and Continuing Education (NUI, Maynooth) and a Certificate in Education Technology (UCD). She is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (Advance HE -UK).

With her extensive experience and knowledge within the higher education sphere, here are a few gems we had the opportunity to learn.

## When and how did your association with University College Dublin begin?

I was bitten by the UCD bug early on. I was really interested in the world around me and undertook a

Bachelor of Social Science in 1997 after secondary school. I studied social policy and politics. As I progressed with my studies, I became more interested in the social dynamic of people at work. I later went on to undertake a Master of Science in Human Resource Management at the UCD Michael

Smurfit Graduate Business School. This really helped me to excel in my conceptual thinking and my career opportunities. A job opportunity arose at the college directly after this programme of study and I jumped at the opportunity to stay on campus and work with students from the other side of the lectern.





**With your many years of experience especially with foreign partnerships in Higher Education, how do you see the development in higher education and global partnerships within and outside UK and Ireland?**

Higher education is increasingly dynamic and is really competitive. There is a huge range of disciplines, modes of study and types of institutions available through global partnerships. With social media and search tools, applicants have access to so much information as they look for possible programmes of study. Thankfully, applicants are also more aware of the important quality criteria such as the triple crown of

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accreditation we have at UCD College of Business and ensuring they are investing in a quality programme which will benefit their career long term. It is important to be aware of the hallmarks of quality which are internationally recognized like the Association of American

Collegiate Business Schools, EQUIS (the European business school quality mark) and the Association of MBAs.

**You are with many Asian Universities providing quality education for a number of years. What is your experience so far in these partnerships?**

UCD College of Business was always an innovator and it was this leadership quality which attracted me to work here. We have over 30 years' experience in transnational education and this international strategy has been a very good experience for both students and faculty. We are very proud of the long and productive partnerships we have experienced with our campus in Hong Kong, Singapore and Sri



Lanka and also the partnerships with our Erasmus networks and international study abroad partnerships with institutions like Cornell and Yale.

UCD College of Business has a large alumni population of over 8,000 graduates in the region now who are visibly contributing to the economic and social fabrics of Asia. As well as managing the international portfolio, I have taught on these programmes. I am so impressed by the work ethic and work experiences of our students. They have such a breath of experience and I find I learn so much from them.

### **What do you think about the collaboration in higher education with Sri Lanka?**

There are many opportunities in Sri Lanka to collaborate. We are delighted to have had such a strong collaboration with National School of Business Management and to see the institution grow in strength,

particularly with the move to the green campus. This Green University Campus is a fantastic facility for students and staff alike. I really enjoy my time on campus there.

### **The partnership with UCD and National School of Business Management has been for years, what are your future prospects?**

The partnership dates back from 1987. It has been a long and close partnership which has allowed a strategic positioning for UCD in Asia. We continue to update the curricula there to ensure that the programmes stay relevant for the students there and allow us to continue to produce strong engaging graduates.

### **What do you think about Sri Lankan higher education?**

It is wonderful to have the opportunity to experience Sri Lanka

higher education. The students we have on our programmes are so dedicated and engaging. In particular, I am really proud of the digital business module research expo which mirrors our undergraduate research expo on campus for our part-time students. It is an event which demonstrates to us the really strong, bright students in the Sri Lankan higher education system who are literally shaping the economy there.

### **Sri Lanka is a country with high literacy rate. Where do you reckon we should position our higher education in the next 10 years?**

Sri Lanka is really well placed to continue to leverage developments in technology, fintech, digital business and production. From my own experience, I think Sri Lanka has a huge advantage in tourism. The very naturally beautiful county and wonderfully welcoming people make it a fantastic tourist destination - I



*SRI LANKA IS REALLY WELL PLACED TO CONTINUE TO LEVERAGE DEVELOPMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY, FINTECH, DIGITAL BUSINESS AND PRODUCTION. FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE, I THINK SRI LANKA HAS A HUGE ADVANTAGE IN TOURISM. THE VERY NATURALLY BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY AND WONDERFULLY WELCOMING PEOPLE MAKE IT A FANTASTIC TOURIST DESTINATION - I CANNOT WAIT FOR MY NEXT TRIP BACK TO SRI LANKA.*

cannot wait for my next trip back to Sri Lanka. So there are also many key economic strengths in technology, digital business and manufacturing which can help to focus the curricula of higher education institutions to ensure there are plenty of bright graduates who can manage and innovate in these sectors. Undergraduate education has been very popular and I think as these specialist sectors continue to grow you will see a shift to more specialist postgraduate programmes to support skills development as the economy grows

### **According to your point of view how can educators contribute to the speedy development of the country?**

Learning drives adaptability and creativity. With a rapidly growing economy, educators can really help students with some key skills to support the ability to adapt to new work environments and business opportunities. Academic skills such

as critical thinking and creativity are important in all facades of life to step back from a student and think objectively about the evidence presented. Educators can help to support important collaboration and team working skills through projects and assessment. Work is increasingly shaped by our ability to work with people. This focus on collaboration has been a key focus of the new extension on campus at the College of Business -

<https://www.ucd.ie/newsandopinion/news/2019/september/01/ucdmoorecentreopensforbusinessasquinnsschoolunveils20mextension/> *The facilities are designed to help students to tackle complex ideas, with extensive co working zones and the latest advances in learning technology.*

### **What are the global trends in teaching and learning in higher education?**

Technology will increasingly play a role. The accessibility of enhanced online platforms will shape the mode of delivery and expectations of our students who are increasingly digital natives. Technology enhanced learning will continue to play a greater role in traditional full-time and part-time provisions with tools such as online teaching simulations and we are likely to see increasing cross pollination of programmes. Where traditionally, for example, there might be a diploma or degree in technology or finance, disciplines

are working together to respond to changes in industry and a specialism like fintech is growing in demand. This reflects the nature of business today and the dynamic nature of industry. University will be closely watching trends in micro credentials and looking to give bite size awards which are industry relevant.

In recent years, there is also great demand for students to study in different locations for their studies. For the B Sc Programme in Sri Lanka we now offer the summer school programme which allows Stage 3 students to come to Dublin every August to undertake their 'Business Strategy' module on campus with our students from Ireland, Singapore and Hong Kong. This diversity in the classroom is a really rich learning environment for students and staff alike.

### **As you have been in the higher education sector for so long, what are the most trending fields for education in coming 10 years?**

Most likely more traditional fields will look to equip graduates with technology for their specialism. We are seeing an increase in technology with more traditionally defined disciplines such as agriculture, environmental technology, sustainability etc.

■ **By Sashini Gayanika**

# HARNESSING LOCAL HIGHER EDUCATION TO MEET THE GLOBAL STANDARDS

PROF. CHAMINDA RATHNAYAKE  
DEPUTY VICE CHANCELLOR OF NSBM



**P**rofessor Chaminda Rathnayake is the Deputy Vice Chancellor of NSBM Green University who also serves as a pioneer academic in the NSBM academic staff. Having numerous experiences in the Sri Lankan higher education system for over two decades he is keen to test the boundaries of higher educational trends in the country. His major areas of interests include multimedia, computer architecture, information systems, computer ethics and IT legislations. Professor Rathnayake, being exposed to various local and international training programs, possess a vast amount of experiences that he generously utilizes for the betterment of the higher education of the country. As an outstanding academic his contribution to the NSBM Green University is remarkable.

However his vision goes beyond the academia and has been an inspirational role model to the Sri Lankan youth. He takes a special interest in partaking in personality development activities of students and has an intense concern in youth development. He is the mastermind and the project

manager behind the Emerging Young Leader Award (EYLA), which was launched as a project to celebrate the United Nations International Year of the youth which has now become an annual national event.

Amid of his busy schedule,

Professor Ratnayake shared his views on the current trends in Sri Lankan higher education, the ways to meet the global higher educational standards and the expanding limitation of the educational methods in the present-day world.



### **What do you think about Sri Lankan tertiary education?**

There is a noticeable demand in the jobs in this field. This, we perceive in everyday life as we are finding it very hard to get the service of a quality technician for most of the essential work we do. The same issue is also discussed in business forums as many firms such as construction companies are struggling to find employees matching to their demand. Even if we find such people many of them lack practical and management skills. This is

precisely what we need to address in the tertiary education sector of the country.

Focus should be there in the number of students that enter tertiary education institutes in the country. In reality, these numbers are not compatible to cater to the demands of the country. We need to increase the amount of students who enter tertiary education institutions. But the issue is, majority of the youth are seeking for white collar jobs while these technical jobs are left vacant. We need to promote and attract youth to these career paths and ensure their

satisfaction.

We need to break the social stigma of people, including the perceptions parents have toward certain jobs, such as carpentry. It is about changing the mind-set of the students from the young age in a way they see the value and importance of every occupation beyond the stereotypical white collar jobs as doctors, engineers, etc. We need to show them the way forward and make them passionate about doing work which the country needs.

It is also important to ensure that these study areas are up to a level where they can be on par with main stream subject areas. For example, one should be able to start as a carpentry student and reach a level where his/her academic status is parallel to that of any other stream. We already have institutions where you can start off with a certificate course and ultimately reach the degree level but these are not widely known to the public. We need to promote this aspect of our tertiary education and create a positive attitude among the youth that they can realise their goals in any career path they are passionate about.

### **Where should we position our higher education in the next 10 years?**

In my opinion, we should possess a global level of thinking which



helps us to implement global education standards in the local education systems. The students, even the parents are well aware of the global standards of the current higher education systems. Gone are the days where the education was regionalized and was restricted to certain cultures. Now the universities are open to experiments as to how far they can go in terms of providing an education suit to the global requirements. For an instance there are universities which conduct degree programs where the students get the opportunity to learn each semester in a different country, providing a whole global experience. Virtual classrooms are swiftly becoming a trend connecting students across the globe. Some universities such as MIT is making their lectures publicly available via internet with unlimited access to anyone. Perhaps the qualifications may restrict to the students who have enrolled, but the knowledge gap is diminishing very quickly with these approaches and the synergy they make with technology.

The paradigms of higher education has shifted significantly compared to the education system we had 10 or 15 years ago.

THE PARADIGMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION HAS SHIFTED SIGNIFICANTLY COMPARED TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM WE HAD 10 OR 15 YEARS AGO. IN 10 YEARS' TIME, LECTURERS FROM VARIOUS COUNTRIES WILL BE ABLE TO TEACH IN A VIRTUAL CLASS OF STUDENTS WHO ARE SCATTERED ACROSS THE GLOBE

In 10 years' time, lecturers from various countries will be able to teach in a virtual class of students who are scattered across the globe. Technology will be playing an even more important role in future higher education than it does now. These trends give us the direction on where to focus on in terms of higher education in the future; setting and living up to the global standards. At the same

time I emphasize that no technology can comprise the quality and natural interaction. As a country we need to be ready to take on this challenge.

Having said that, I think, we also need to encourage and cultivate creative thinking in students. Most of the skills are becoming easy to be programmed with the modern technology and in the near future most of the jobs will be taken up by artificial intelligence. Therefore the universities should focus on forming graduates rich with creative and analytical thinking, developing skills which will not be fulfilled by the technological advancements.

## What do you think about global teaching and learning trends?

The answer I have for this question is similar to the answer I gave for the previous question. It is all about crossing the geographical boundaries and creating multinational, multicultural educational methods where the students can become a graduate who is aware of the global needs. For an



example, developing an app in this modern world means it is accessible to anyone across the globe irrespective of his or her nationality or mother tongue where as in the past it only focused on a particular set of people. So like I mentioned earlier, I believe global teaching and learning trends are all about building up meaningful connections among students across the globe while securing the future of the world.

**As a country with high literacy rate, how could the educators contribute to the speedy development of the country?**

As a country we have always been proud of the high literacy rate of the country, it is a huge achievement for a developing country like Sri Lanka. However, the number of students who continue their studies after passing GCE A/L is significantly low. In my opinion, this is one major area we need to focus on as educators. We need to make sure that every student is left with a choice to continue his or her studies beyond GCE A/L and they receive the necessary knowledge to embark on a career path they prefer.

Another important aspect I would like to bring out is that the educators should be well aware of the vacuum exists in the job market for certain job roles. Then

they can encourage the students to follow their studies in these paths and to take up the job roles that need to be filled, ultimately contributing to the development of the country.

**According to your point of view, what will be the most trending fields for education in coming 10 years?**

Since the world is changing rapidly under the influence of technology, it is difficult to assume the changes that will take place in as far as 10 years' time. However, looking at the current situation, I would say areas such as artificial intelligence will be highly

demanding fields. I also think that programs that provide global knowledge such as cross cultural and international management degree program will be very popular. The reason why I say that is, you can already see how the world is moving ahead as one big community rather than individual countries or communities. Globalization has already taken over people's lives, now it's a matter of strengthening the process.

Years back there were traditional department wise job roles which had specific tasks to deliver. Now individuals do not or rather cannot restrict him/her to a single job role but should have the ability to be flexible working in different areas. The world is changing rapidly in such a manner that the traditional department wise working style no longer exists. The industry demands employees to work more than in one field and possess a skill set that is not restricted to one particular area. In my opinion, we should equip the students with this ability. There should be degree programs that help them to become multi-talented in a few areas rather than one, then only

we can have a satisfactory output from the universities.

## **What are the possible changes you could suggest in amending local higher education sector according to the global needs?**

In my opinion, one of the first things that should be changed is the unnecessarily long time gap between the GCE A/L exam and university admission. This needs to be changed immediately as it demotivates the students to continue their studies. Secondly, we should provide the students with the freedom to choose a career path they are passionate about. Thirdly, we need to increase the number of students who are given the chance to enter the universities. At least, twice or thrice of the number we have now. It is not feasible to grant state university entrance to all of them but models like NSBM will be very important in that regard. The government can invest on the students by providing personal loans for them which helps

them to carry on their studies without a burden. This would result in competent individuals that contribute to the development of the country. Finally, I think, we need to upgrade our resources and systems. Although we are doing fairly well for a developing country, we can develop these aspects to be on par with global standards.

## **Finally, what is your message to the undergraduates in Sri Lanka?**

The most important message I can give is to find what you are passionate about one day when you grow as an adult. If you are not passionate about what you are doing, you will never give your hundred percent to the task. Once you know your passion, then select the field of studies and all the other necessary tools that take you there. Remember the key is finding your passion in very early stage in your life.

**By Jinandi Chathurya and Tharani Dakshina**





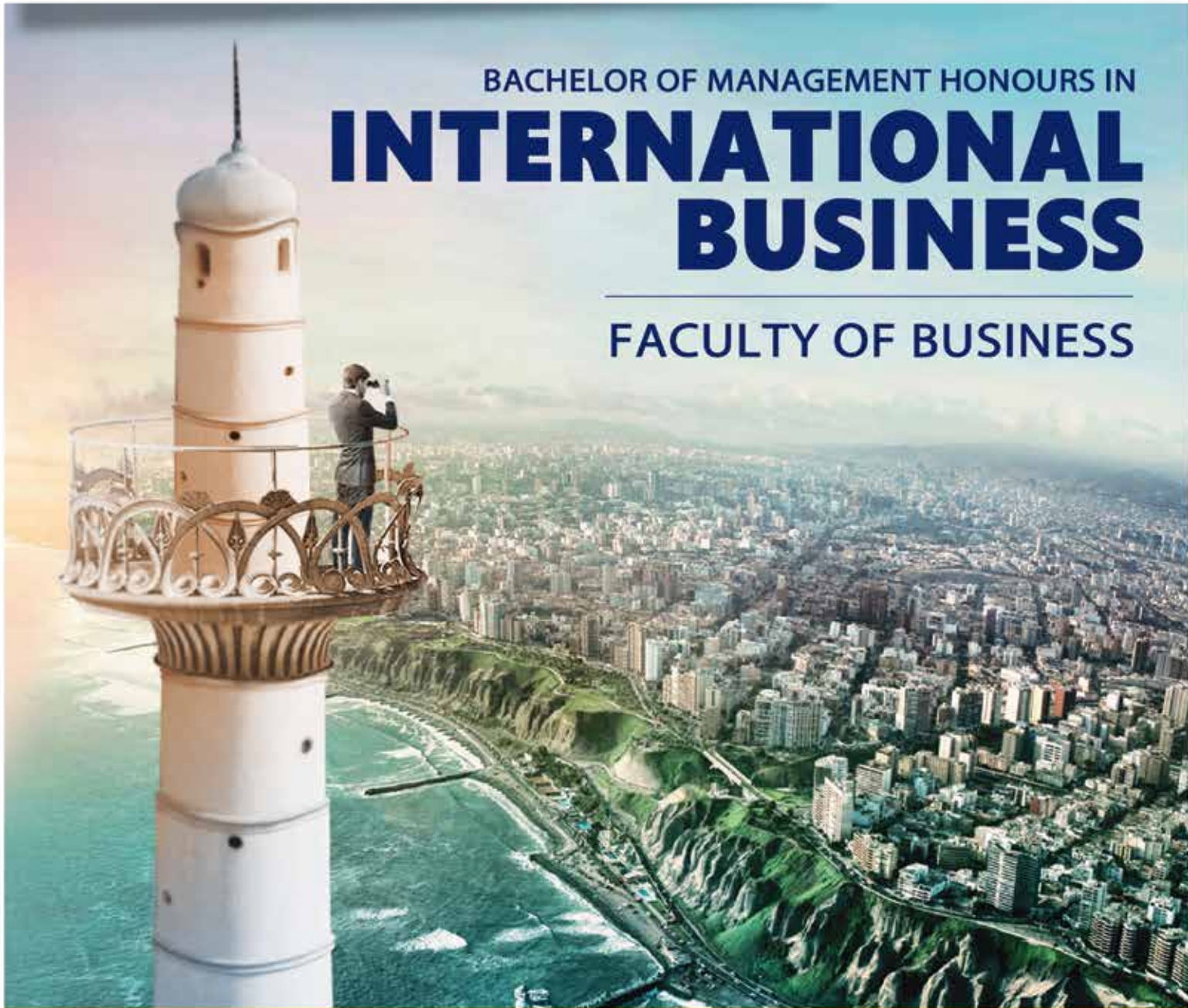
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# GLOBAL EXPANSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

## PROF. SIMON PAYNE

EMERITUS PROFESSOR

FORMER DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR INTERNATIONAL AND PLANNING  
UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH



**A**FTER UNDERTAKING HIS LLB(HONS) AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM AND LAW SOCIETY EXAMS AT THE COLLEGE OF LAW GUILDFORD, SIMON TRAINED AS A SOLICITOR WITH BOND PEARCE IN PLYMOUTH. HE SPECIALISED IN COMMERCIAL AND PROPERTY LITIGATION AS AN ASSISTANT SOLICITOR. IN 1992 HE WAS APPOINTED AS SENIOR LECTURER IN LAW AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH AND BECAME HEAD OF LAW IN 1999 AND HEAD OF SCHOOL IN 2004. SIMON WAS APPOINTED PROFESSOR OF PROPERTY AND ENVIRONMENTAL LAW IN 2005 TAKING ACCOUNT OF HIS PUBLICATION PROFILE PARTICULARLY IN POLLUTION REGULATION. IN 2012 SIMON WAS APPOINTED PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR (INTERNATIONAL) AND DEAN OF ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS. SIMON WAS APPOINTED DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR IN JANUARY 2015

### Reflecting back, how has the field of higher education changed in the last few decades?

Globally there has been a massive expansion in three key areas. First the number of universities has grown massively – in fact in almost all parts of the world this has been true but particularly in

the developing world. Secondly, the number of students who are undertaking university level qualifications with the array of subject areas and the percentage of school leavers participating in higher education have increased very substantially. Finally, globalization has affected all facets of life over the past 30 years – including higher education. The massive growth in internationally

mobile students who study overseas and the growth of transnational education are both related to globalization.

### What would be the role of research and development in the future higher education field?

Universities are always going to be most successful when they are creating knowledge and pushing the boundaries of understanding as well as teaching. The UK higher education system has at its heart developing students to be independent learners and for students on undergraduate or postgraduate awards to be involved in research. UK universities have three key missions teaching, research and knowledge exchange applying the research. These are not separate activities but clearly symbiotic and each supports the other providing world class opportunities for students.

**Do you believe technology can replace the human elements such as teaching from higher education completely? What**

**would be the role of technology in Future Higher education?**

One of the things which has struck me over the last 20 years in higher education is how technology really has not transformed what we do especially in teaching. You can see some parts of the global economy truly transformed over the past 20 years – media and publishing or retail for example. The same has not been true of higher education. Sure technologies have enhanced how we teach – for example e books; online libraries; lecture capture; virtual learning environments – but transformation I don't think so. What does the future hold? Well, clearly as technologies develop and improve, there will be changes but I am doubtful that the basic model of school leaver age students wanting to study together in a community will change. There is so much personal

development as well as knowledge acquisition which takes place at university which cannot easily be replicated online, with feedback consistently re-inforcing the need for face to face teaching supported by wider teaching and learning activities. The world of postgraduate and continuing education is probably different. This is where I think we will see the change. Graduates who are typically working may well find that online learning will suit their needs. In those cases we may see the emergence of dominant global brands.

**Do you think universities have a more critical role in the sustainable development agenda?**

Definitely. The University of Plymouth has considerable expertise in sustainability and we





find that there is demand for our research and teaching from all over the world. Universities will have to evolve their role – from campaigning about the science (‘this is really happening’) where we have won the argument at least on climate to the next stage. The next stage for universities will be leveraging our knowledge and research to create technological innovation to meet the demands of sustainable development and as important holding governments to account for their progress. As communities of young people, (largely) we can expect that sustainability will be one of the big themes for universities over the next 20 years, which is a core mission for the University of Plymouth.

## Cross collaborations between universities in developed countries and developing

“ AS I MENTIONED GLOBAISATION HAS IMPACTED UNIVERSITIES AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS HAVE BEEN A CRITICAL AND VERY POSITIVE FEATURE. WHETHER FOR UNIVERSITIES IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD OR ELSEWHERE, BUILDING UNDERSTANDING ACROSS BORDERS AND CULTURES AND AS A RESULT CHALLENGING WAYS OF THINKING, IS A VERY POSITIVE FEATURE OF TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION AND COOPERATION. WE LEARN FROM EACH OTHER. INDEPENDENT LEARNING, RESEARCH LED TEACHING, A FOCUS ON EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AND THINKING FOR YOURSELF ARE ALL KEY FACETS OF THE UK, NORTH AMERICAN AND AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS ”

## countries are increasing. In what ways will this help the developing world to revamp their education systems?

As I mentioned, globalisation has impacted universities and international collaborations have been a critical and very positive feature. Whether for universities in the developing world or elsewhere, building understanding across borders and cultures and as a result challenging ways of thinking, is a very positive feature of transnational education and cooperation. We learn from each other. Independent learning, research led teaching, a focus on employability skills and thinking for yourself are all key facets of the UK, North American and Australian higher education systems. Robust peer based

quality assurance is also a key feature of the UK system. Any of these features are probably good challenges for a developing education system. Disruption breeds innovation. However, I do not believe in a colonial approach to education. Any transnational education should be based on a collaboration of equals; each bringing perspectives – from which a model of higher education can develop which is culturally sensitive, appropriate to the country where it is delivered and brings the best of each education system together. This is what we have sought to achieve at NSBM; a UK education but in a Sri Lankan context delivered by academic staff from the University of Plymouth and colleagues from NSBM.

**In your view, what would be the key challenges faced by universities?**

Universities need to remain relevant for the 21st century. Technology is driving an unprecedented pace of change. Many jobs will be automated over the next 10 to 20 years including major applications in medicine, law, accounting to name a few professions. Universities have to meet three key challenges of a hyper connected technological society. First to create graduates who are equipped to adapt their skills and knowledge for the many different jobs/careers they will undertake in their life. Less emphasis on training for a particular job more on core transferable skills, digital literacy and learning to learn? Secondly, climate change is now an accepted reality and universities have to help find the innovations which will help us all succeed. Finally, it is apparent already that individual and societal wellbeing



“ UNIVERSITIES NEED TO REMAIN RELEVANT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY. TECHNOLOGY IS DRIVING AN UNPRECEDENTED PACE OF CHANGE. MANY JOBS WILL BE AUTOMATED OVER THE NEXT 10 TO 20 YEARS INCLUDING MAJOR APPLICATIONS IN MEDICINE, LAW, ACCOUNTING TO NAME A FEW PROFESSIONS. UNIVERSITIES HAVE TO MEET THREE KEY CHALLENGES OF A HYPER CONNECTED TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY ”

and mental health is under strain because of our changing world especially with the rapid and continuous movement around digital media. Universities need to be finding ways to help individuals and societies become more resilient.

**What competencies are needed by academics to face these challenges?**

The 21st century academic needs the core characteristics which good academics have always demonstrated and more. Those core characteristics include an enquiring, questioning,

challenging mind; a determination and commitment to evidence based research and teaching; a personal dedication to excellence and constantly improving what we do as academics. The 21st century challenges now ask academics to increasingly be interdisciplinary in our thinking and approaches. Traditional disciplinary boundaries are likely to become much more fuzzy. In a world of fake news academics need to be stalwart defenders of truth prepared to challenge authority. Not much to ask! But it’s always been one of the most rewarding and interesting careers transforming lives!

■ *By Sulakshana De Alwis*



# TRANSFORMING TALENT TO ENSURE **GLOBAL EMPLOYMENT**

**M.Y.P.P BANDARA**  
PRINCIPAL, ISIPATHANA COLLEGE

## **How do you see the future of Sri Lankan Secondary Education?**

**T**here are more than 10 000 schools in our country. Many of these are primary schools. Accordingly, there are not enough schools in Sri Lanka that cater to grade six secondary education and upwards. Due to this reason, children have to be trapped in a single classroom in a limited number of schools today.

To provide a good education for children, there needs to be a free learning environment. If there are 20-25 children in a classroom, it is easier for the teacher to focus on each student. However, our inability to do so is a weakness in our country. This will have a profound impact on the future. However, we have a large group of teachers who are capable of carrying out the learning and teaching process with a personal focus, even though there are about 40-50 students in a classroom.

There is no need to fear about secondary education in our country until the authorities' work is done. But if we compare the classroom to international standards, it's important to note that the resources for learning should be improved so that it will create a learning environment that is conducive for studying.

**What are the possible changes we could do to**



## be aligned with the global learning trends?

As I mentioned before, we need to have classrooms comparable to international standards to keep up with global learning trends. Smart classrooms are an example for this.

We cannot bring all the schools in our country to this level at once. But if we can bring at least one of these schools in one city to this capacity, we can move forward fast.

Many would argue that the facilities offered to schools located in Colombo or in cities are not given to the schools in rural areas. There is an allegation like “Kolambata kiri gamata Kekiri”

There are schools in our poor villages, where there is no electricity and no proper infrastructure. There are children in these villages who have never seen a computer.

Therefore, we cannot bring this whole system to the international level at once. But I would suggest if at least one school can be established in each city with technical infrastructure, that will create a platform for the smart and competent kids in village schools to come forward through popular schools. This concept is similar to the establishment of central colleges

back then.

Our neighboring country, India has much lower facilities than we have in schools. But they are also involved in space exploration. If all schools are looking for equal facilities, none of the schools will have any technological advancements.

We also need to identify students’ needs and country’s needs and should develop the syllabi accordingly.

Until recently, the only thing we had to do, was to cram and learn everything by heart from books.

We must go beyond this and work on improving the children’s knowledge, attitudes and skills in education. For example, today the Ministry of Education is offering a wide range of subjects for students to choose for G.C.E. Advanced level. The Mahindodaya laboratory concept and the Thirteen-year continuing education concept that will continue to educate children after the Ordinary Level, could be seen as emerging trends for the betterment of our younger generation in our country.

If we continue this development, we will be able to align in a much better manner with global trends in relation to education.

## What are the challenges you are facing when engaging in this secondary education in schools?

One of the major challenges we face when it comes to teaching – learning process in secondary education is the deterioration of students’ attitudes. Because the modern society is so complex, and the child’s ability to be misled has increased. Misconducts by students at school have entered the school system, such as extortion. Students cannot also be punished since that violates the human rights law. Therefore teachers are reluctant to point out such improper misbehaviour. As a solution to this problem, I have implemented a disciplinary committee representing ten teachers from each section in my school. The prefects of the school monitor the disciplinary violations under the supervision of that disciplinary committee. In the event of a breach in discipline, they keep records and then the child is given the opportunity to correct himself. But that student’s behavior is always monitored by the prefects, because the name of the child is recorded in the discipline book that the leaders



have. Also, his behavior is monitored through the class teacher. If he is found guilty again, the child will be referred to Disciplinary Board. It is up to the disciplinary committee to decide whether he will be sent for counseling or to opt for another solution.

The next problem is poverty. Although, our school is a leading national school in Colombo, we too have this problem of poverty. To address this, we have setup a unit called the Student Support Unit. We provide facilities for education to the needy through it. These donations are actually made by generous children in the same grades.

At the same time, we need to talk about children with family background issues. Children from different family backgrounds come to this school. Some children come from wealthy families. But due to the parental problems, the child does not attend education properly. Furthermore, some others stem from difficult circumstances, thus their speech and behaviour would have to

be improved. That is why we have a strong counselling unit in our school.

The next major challenge is the drug addiction. Today the society that we live in is so corrupted that it has introduced school children to different types of drugs. This is the most difficult challenge we are facing at present. The child stays at school for 6 hours but, who is with the child for the remaining 18 hours? We don't know what's happening with the child during this period. Moreover, we are constantly working with the police to educate our children and I believe, if there is a subject named "Law and Coexistence" in our school education system that would be valuable.

The last challenge that we face on a daily basis is the poor teacher-student relationship. Although students are to be blamed for this situation most of the time, there have been situations where teachers have been responsible for the occurrence. It is a great mistake of the teacher to make the children see him only as a teacher in the classroom.

The teacher has to play a role where he connects with each and every student in the class. If the teacher understands his or her role properly, it will not be impossible to approach the student. I believe that activity-based education should be provided to enhance team collaboration among students and with the teacher.

The Isipathana College uses activity-based group education in the learning-teaching process up to grade 9. So, we have solved these challenges through student-centered education.

## **What are your thoughts on Sri Lankan tertiary education? Do we need any amendments?**

Tertiary education in our country is lower in standards compared to many other countries. This is because of the limited number of seats available for students for the tertiary education in our country.



WITH THE HELP OF FREE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN SRI LANKA, WE HAVE BECOME THE MOST LITERATE COUNTRY IN SOUTH ASIA. MANY EDUCATORS HAVE BEEN FORMED IN OUR COUNTRY AS A RESULT OF FREE EDUCATION WHICH WAS OFFERED THANKS TO MR. C.W.W.KANNANGARA. SO, HOW MUCH HAVE THESE EDUCATORS CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR COUNTRY? THIS PROBLEM EXISTS. SCHOLARS LEAVE THE COUNTRY AND DISPLAY THEIR TALENTS TO THE WORLD. IT WOULD BE PRICELESS IF WE COULD STOP THE MIND DRAIN, RETAIN THAT INTELLIGENCE WITHIN OUR COUNTRY. NEARLY 10% OF NASA'S ENGINEERS ARE SRI LANKANS.

Earlier, only a few were able to enroll in state universities and many joined the workforce. However, later on, there was an awakening in vocational training institutions, state universities, private universities and other institutions that offer degrees. Therefore, the path to tertiary education has opened up for many students in our country. This is good for the future of the country. However, there was a big argument regarding private universities. This may be due to the fact that some private universities create graduates based on financial benefits, instead of maintaining the standards. Anyhow it is my opinion that the universities which are approved by UGC are offering quality education with the right standards.

But our university system is still based on outdated knowledge, for our university system is not easily inclined to be updated. To improve the conditions of Sri Lankan tertiary education, opting for expansion with more number of seats is not adequate. We also need to update our knowledge, and establish science research institutions in our country. Otherwise, we will not be able to make good use of the wisdom of our children. In addition,

we should think about the rate of unemployment after being graduated. To eradicate that issue, I suggest that students should be provided employ-based education. Only children who are good at arts should be recruited for art subjects and other children should be provided with employ-based education. We cannot make progress without doing that.

### **As a country with a higher literacy rate, how could the educators contribute to the speedy development of the country?**

With the help of free education system in Sri Lanka, we have become the most literate country in South Asia. Many educators have been formed in our country as a result of free education which was offered thanks to Mr. C.W.W.Kannangara. So, how much have these educators contributed to the development of our country? This problem exists. Scholars leave the country and display their talents to the world. It would be priceless if we could stop the brain drain, retain that

intelligence within our country. Nearly 10% of NASA's engineers are Sri Lankans.

The land master was introduced to the world by Ray Wijewardana, a Sri Lankan. The video call technology was introduced to the world by Mahinda Pathegama, again a Sri Lankan. If scholars like this can contribute to the betterment of education, in Sri Lanka, our progression will be faster and efficient.

Having said that, it is important to keep in mind that we are not an ignorant country like India. Majority of Sri Lankans are educated. We can in fact, use them directly for our development.

But, as we have discussed, it is not only the graduate academics who need development. Although there is a business community that has succeeded, there is no proper standardised education. However, there are already a set of educated people in Sri Lanka. We should use them for the development of our country and that will create the pathway for our younger generation to be successful.

**By Archt. Upeksha Hettithanthri**

# HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

## KAREN PHANG

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR - ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT  
AT THE ASSOCIATION OF INTERNATIONAL CERTIFIED  
PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS (AICPA)



**K**aren Phang is an Associate Director at the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants (The Association) with 20 years of work experience in leadership roles across diverse businesses. She currently leads the Global CGMA University and Academic Center of Excellence.

Prior to this role, Karen had been appointed as one of the first ever global heads of departments outside the UK and had been involved in overseeing the accreditation strategy of universities and colleges around the world including introducing new strategic entry routes into the

Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) qualification. She was involved in setting up the CIMA Research Centre of Excellence in 3 regions - Australasia, Southeast Asia and Southern Africa.

She was also engaged in auditing for 10 years in both Malaysia and Singapore at KPMG and Deloitte where she specialised in the audit of corporates in manufacturing, telecommunication and insurance industry. Being an expert in her industry, we spoke to her on her thoughts on the current trends in higher education and its contribution to the business world.

### What do you think about global trends in higher education?

In an increasingly digital world, rapid changes in technology are creating challenges for the business models of organisations. It is also making it difficult for business leaders and employees to create and preserve sustainable values. I believe it is imperative that finance professionals possess relevant technical skills, a sound

understanding of their organisation, as well as the ability to influence and lead people. This will make them capable of providing the insight their organisations need to craft and successfully execute their strategies. If we operate with this in mind, higher education globally needs to relook at their syllabus in order to keep pace with the changes in skills and competencies required by employers.

### How do you explain the value of professional qualifications in higher education?

Today, finance professionals not only need to possess sound technical and financial skills, they must also understand how digitalization is fundamentally changing business models and apply this insight to influence, lead and craft strategies creating

value and long-term sustainability. CIMA offers the updated 2019 Professional Qualification which bridges the skills gap of newly qualified finance professionals worldwide or fresh university graduates, thus meeting the employability needs of both business and people. In designing the updated syllabus, CIMA has set out to enhance the relevance to employers to ensure the rigor of the related examinations and align the learning experience to the real world. The CIMA syllabus now covers digital topics such as cyber security, digital strategy, blockchain and data analytics, integrated reporting, digital costing etc, all of which have yet to be included in higher education finance and accounting syllabi.



### What do you think about Sri Lankan tertiary education?

During the October 2019 case study analysis workshop organized in CIMA Colombo for over 40 academic partners in Sri Lanka, the feedback we received was very positive: the participants noted that the workshop was timely and they appreciated the training session on digital topics while providing a perspective of what to be included into the universities' syllabi. They also appreciated the use of real life case studies since they help students understand work place issues better and encourage critical thinking which are essential attributes for career

ready finance graduates.

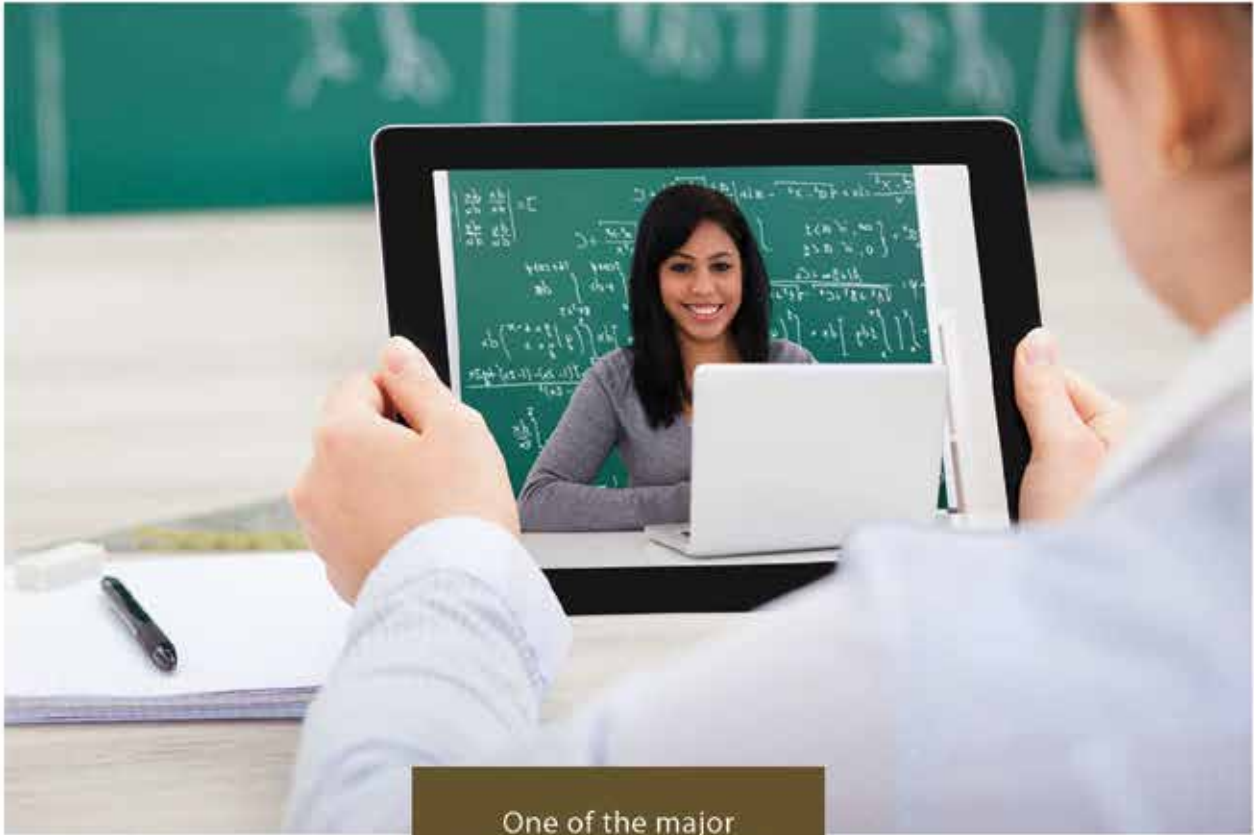
CIMA encourages the use of business games in the classroom and have a series of mini case studies that relates back to the syllabus and the real world. An example is the Blockbuster and Netflix case study:

### What are the challenges to the future of the higher education sector and do you have suggestions to overcome such challenges?

At the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants, Ash Noah, CPA, CGMA, Vice-President and

Managing Director of Learning, Education & Development said, "Finance has an unprecedented opportunity to shift from being a cost centre to becoming an architect of value for the enterprise. Finance can now spend more time supporting the business instead of spending time in production in the back office," emphasizing the fact that Higher education needs to embrace this change and overcome the challenges of the paradigm shift.

The changes brought on by technology are also driving a shift in the skills that finance department executives should be competent with. I would once again like to quote Noah here, I re-call he said that "It is essential for the finance professionals to understand the kind of capability that data science and data



engineering brings. The CGMA Competency Framework and the Finance Leadership Program address and build these competencies.”

And I have to agree with Michael Burns, CPA, CGMA from Covestro LLC, that softer skills are indeed more important, as it possesses the ability to influence people, to explain. That technical financial knowledge is therefore, still critical. We are the experts who understand that the processes that lead to financial results are how a company is measured. That’s all critical, and I don’t see the situation is changing in the near future.

## Where should we position our higher education in the next 10 years?

One of the major concerns of the

One of the major concerns of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is that of artificial intelligence and automation; robots will eliminate jobs, for both blue-collar and white-collar roles across a variety of sectors. However, robots can never replace living, breathing, thinking capacity of humans entirely in the workplace. And these humans must have bespoke skills and sharp problem-solving and decision-making abilities to fulfil these jobs

Fourth Industrial Revolution is that of artificial intelligence and automation; robots will eliminate jobs, for both blue-collar and white-collar roles across a variety of sectors. However, robots can

never replace living, breathing, thinking capacity of humans entirely in the workplace. And these humans must have bespoke skills and sharp problem-solving and decision-making abilities to fulfil these jobs. In my perspective, the real challenge of the Fourth Industrial Revolution isn’t the robots but the fact that we aren’t properly training humans for the available jobs.

As the World Economic Forum has noted, while the outlook for jobs is positive, on average, 42% of skills requirements are expected to change by 2022 alone. Re-skilling is one of the major necessities and challenges of our era.

Many of these skills can’t be learned in university lecture halls. The skills required to be employed at the auto factory aren’t taught in the traditional university and you can throw an intelligent, highly educated graduate with a

business or math degree on a commodities trading floor, and there's no guarantee they'll succeed.

But if you put the intelligent, intuitive individual on the factory floor or trading floor to learn the complex supply chain and shadow the most skilled in the business, then you not only give them a well-paying job with growth potential, but you also give them the bespoke skillset to flourish in the role and the industry.

This model isn't new. It's apprenticeship – which Swiss companies have been engaging in for a long time. I believe that looking at the way the world is moving forward, it's something global companies would be wise to consider, too.

### **Sri Lanka is a country which has a high literacy rate, how can educators contribute towards the speedy development of the country?**

I would say that the most strategic and feasible way for educators to contribute to the development of any country is to learn from your best; specially for a developing country like Sri Lanka. These are some lessons we can learn from the corporate sector that can help educators to contribute to the worthy course of developing the country through education.

For instance, if we consider the case study of one of Sri Lanka's conglomerates, John Keells Holdings. They have shown true metal in terms of portfolio realignment, where according to their ACMA, CGMA, deputy chairman and Group Finance Director, the company constantly realigns its business portfolio to suit the growth sectors of the

economy, commencing as a broking company that supports tea and morphing into running supermarket chains, and even owning iconic hotel brands.

Further, they believe in the truest essence the significance of investing in people and building a great working culture for its human resource, to the extent that anyone working within the group has the potential to become the next Chairman of JKH.

And ofcourse another practice we can all learn is that of ensuring continuous innovation and collaboration. Companies must absolutely stay ahead of technological changes despite any implementation challenges.

### **According to your point of view what will be the most trending fields for education in the coming 10 years?**

If we are to meet the global standards, we need to embrace the digital economy as soon as possible. All around the world, the business environment is undergoing significant change that will not let up anytime soon, given the ongoing global economic uncertainty and technological advances. To stay relevant now and into the future, and to maintain a key strategic position within companies, CFOs and finance functions must evolve. Our education also must evolve to fit the requirements of future businesses. To do that, educators must re-skill, up-skill, relearn and embrace the future that their graduates will need to build their career in.

### **What are the possible changes you could suggest in amending the Sri Lankan higher**

### **education sector according to global needs?**

I believe that any country that is willing to change according to global needs should be future ready. Learn, unlearn and relearn! Embrace the digital economy now. Collaborate with CIMA.

### **Finally, what is your message to undergraduates of the Sri Lankan higher education sector?**

To succeed in a digital world, current and future students need digital skills and a digital mindset. According to my point of view they require three main skills:

1. Basic digital literacy: to work in a digital environment, students need to have confidence and capability using digital technology to complete tasks.
2. Technology know-how: this relates to the student's technical knowledge, specifically where a deeper level of expertise is required. Examples include cloud computing and cybersecurity. With deep technological expertise, students will be able to bring value to an organization in the future.
3. Mindset and behaviours: adopting a mindset that is a fusion of the abilities to confront complexity, to work in an agile and creative manner, and to harness curiosity in order to continually learn. The adoption of this mindset drives greater motivation and achievement.

By Kasun Dissanayake

# THE NEXT DESTINATION

## PROF. RANGIKA HALWATURA

PROFESSOR IN CIVIL ENGINEERING SCIENCE,  
FACULTY OF ENGINEERING,  
UNIVERSITY OF MORATUWA

**P**rof. Rangika Halwatura is a researcher, academic and inventor at the University of Moratuwa and currently the youngest professor in Civil Engineering Science in Sri Lanka. Prof. Halwatura is a member of Institution of Engineers, an associate member of Society of Structural Engineers, a member of Sri Lanka Association for Advancement of Science, a member of Society of Consulting Engineers, and a Green Associate Professional. In 2016, Prof. Halwatura received the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors' (CVCD) Most Outstanding Young Researcher award. He also won the Sri Lanka Energy Globe Award in 2016. Prof. Halwatura was nominated by the National Academy of Sciences and subsequently won the World Academy of Sciences Young Scientist Award in 2017.



### What is your general opinion about Sri Lankan University Education?

Although we have state universities and private universities, almost all these universities don't create sufficient new knowledge, they create-but those are not really up to

the international standards. They do a little bit but not up to the expected level. Because of that, the university ranking is going down every day and as a result, the country is going down every day. There is no sufficient knowledge creation, no innovation, no innovative thinking, and finally no new production, no new enterprises

starting in the country, and every day the country is going down economically, socially, and politically all because universities are not doing their prime duty.

When you say universities, they should be different from schools. A school is where the dissemination of

“ THERE HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN GLOBAL TEACHING AND LEARNING TRENDS. GLOBALLY, UNIVERSITIES HAVE CHANGED THEIR TEACHING SYSTEMS AND METHODOLOGIES, LEARNING METHODOLOGIES, AND TEACHING TOOLS. BUT FROM THE KINDERGARTEN TO THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL, EVEN UP TO THE POSTGRADUATE LEVELS, WE ARE STILL FOLLOWING THE SAME THING WHICH WAS THERE FOR 20, 30 YEARS ”



knowledge takes place. In a school, students just go there, learn and come. But when you go to a university, it is beyond knowledge dissemination; you need to create knowledge and disseminate. Furthermore, when you say innovation, we should have political innovation, social innovation and we should be able to come up with innovation in every discipline. So far, the primary focus of our universities has been on teaching. Therefore, everyone is not contributing enough to reach as a university. I believe that's one big issue we face as a country.

**According to your point of view, what would you think about the global teaching and learning**

### **trends that our universities need to catch up?**

There has been a significant change in global teaching and learning trends. Globally, universities have changed their teaching systems and methodologies, learning methodologies, and teaching tools. But from the kindergarten to the university level, even up to the postgraduate levels, we are still following the same thing which was there for 20, 30 years. When we were studying at the university, we followed the annual system which has been converted to semester now, but still, even within the semester system, we are trying to put everything which was there in the annual system. We don't get the real

sense of the semester system. This semester system was created targeting something else. Unfortunately, we have capped the semester system at a wrong point and finally, we are delivering the same annual system in two semesters.

Providing learning opportunities has moved from teacher-centered to student-centered in the world scenario. They have gone into problem-posing education and they are practicing many different teaching styles to match the changing learning styles. Knowledge is free and ubiquitous. You take your smartphone, you type whatever you want- it is there. You can't hide this knowledge. Knowledge is there. That knowledge is much broader than of a professional or of a high caliber professor in the university system. You have a lot of knowledge on the internet and in other IT platforms. So what we need to do is not to repeat the same content over and over. You should let the students find the knowledge and you should clear the path for them to go and find the knowledge.

Now, from kindergarten to the university, even the postgraduate levels what we do is we give a set of answers throughout the year or the semester, and finally, we will force the students to find the questions to match the answers. That is exactly what we do in this particular system. From the beginning to the end of a lecture, we continuously teach or



“ I FEEL IF OUR STUDENTS CAN FIND A BETTER LECTURE ONLINE, WE SHOULD LET THEM GO AHEAD AND LEARN IT. IF THE STUDENTS ARE COMING TO MY CLASS, I SHOULD BE ABLE TO GIVE THEM SOMETHING MORE THAN WHAT THEY CAN FIND FROM THE INTERNET. YOU TAKE YOUR SCHOOL TEACHERS, YOU WILL REMEMBER YOUR TEACHERS WHO HAVE TAUGHT YOU WITH LIFE EXPERIENCE MORE THAN THE CONTENT. IF YOU WANT TO CHANGE THIS PARTICULAR SET UP, MAKE THEM INDEPENDENT THINKERS, YOU NEED TO CLEAN THE PATHWAYS FOR THEM TO GO AND FIND THE KNOWLEDGE, YOU SHOW WHERE THE KNOWLEDGE IS RATHER THAN TRYING TO TEACH THROUGHOUT THE PERIOD. YOU TRY TO GIVE THEM THE FEEDBACK ON WHERE THEY HAVE GONE WRONG AND THE MISTAKES THEY HAVE MADE ”

pour the content with answers. So the students are loaded with answers and finally when they go to the exam, they try to find some questions to match the answers; that is exactly what is there in the education system now. So, no creativity, would take place, no new knowledge will be introduced; so, they will never go beyond the box to find knowledge, but are happy with whatever the content that is taken from the lecture. Therefore, I think we need to change the education culture in our system to ameliorate this situation.

## What are your suggestions for the current education system?

I feel if our students can find a better lecture online, we should let them go ahead and learn it. If the students are coming to my class, I should be able to give them something more than what they can find from the internet. You take your school teachers, you will remember your teachers who have taught you with life experience

more than the content. If you want to change this particular set up, make them independent thinkers, you need to clean the pathways for them to go and find the knowledge, you show where the knowledge is rather than trying to teach throughout the period. You try to give them the feedback on where they have gone wrong and the mistakes they have made.

You need to make the content online and make it free. This online education has been misinterpreted by this Sri Lankan system at the moment. Our people believe that transforming to an online platform is simply uploading PowerPoint presentations, recording their lectures and uploading them. No, that is not online education. You provide the links and pathways to go and find the knowledge. You don't have to create knowledge because it is there now. You just need to choose the appropriate resources to impart the knowledge. When you do that, you will get a lot of free time, then you can use this particular free time to create new knowledge. Lecturers are free

now, they can utilize this time to do research. Also, they will have time to share their life experience with students molding them to be real graduates, not just degree holders.

I think, we have to make our students independent thinkers. For them to be independent, they need to have that



particular platform and get experience from senior people. Not the content, but the experience. Then, we can bring a positive change to our existing education system.

### According to your point of view, what will be the most trending fields in Education in the upcoming next 10 years?

I feel technology. Unfortunately, I am sorry to say that we have well recognized, well stated, “job titles”, that were created by the society or the community. We have failed to recognize the real contribution made by a human to society. Society values the people based on their income, their social status and we need to change that. We need to start valuing not the external appearance, but the internal appearance. We have to value the person based on his or her real contribution to the upliftment of the community.

Let’s say that the whole society has changed to that particular context, I am sure whatever you do, then you will be valued and recognized. Sadly, our society is not like that, our societies always go behind money –I can’t say it is bad but this is the high time to understand that the money is not life. There are a lot of ways of satisfying yourself.

You can be an Arts graduate, a Commerce graduate or an IT graduate, or you can be an engineer or a doctor, you need to understand that there are ways and means of being happy. For you to be satisfied, you have to find your own way. You have to find who you really are inside, then take your passion, and you need to start valuing yourself. If I can’t value myself I will not be able to value you, If I can’t identify the talents which I have in me, I will not be able to value the talents you have. So, I should be able to recognize myself. I should be able to value myself. Then I will be able to value you. If we can build this



culture among our graduates, they will be satisfied and happy. After Covid19, I am sure that the world cross-section will drastically change and you will start feeling the value of life.

### As a well-experienced educator in the country, can you explain how the educators contribute to the speedy development of this country?

You have to understand that there is a huge difference between knowledge and intelligence. Unfortunately, our education system is mainly aiming at providing knowledge, not intelligence. I will put that as a comment than answering your question. The real contribution that needs to be made by these educated people is they have to be intelligent. Intelligence can be acquired by being in the society. You can’t be an intelligent person by reading for a PhD. You can’t be an intelligent person by getting a degree. You can be a well-educated person with a lot of degree certificates; a lot of letters are after your name, but you can’t recognize your self as an intelligent person. If you want to be an

“ LET’S SAY THAT THE WHOLE SOCIETY WAS CHANGED TO THAT PARTICULAR CONTEXT, I AM SURE WHATEVER YOU DO, THEN YOU WILL BE VALUED AND RECOGNIZED. SADLY, OUR SOCIETY IS NOT LIKE THAT, OUR SOCIETIES ALWAYS GO BEHIND MONEY –I CAN’T SAY IT IS BAD BUT THIS IS THE HIGH TIME TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE MONEY IS NOT LIFE. THERE ARE A LOT OF WAYS OF SATISFYING YOURSELF ”

intelligent person, you have to get that from society and nature. The real science is there in nature and society. You get the questions from society and you start feeling society, then you will be an intelligent person. Intelligent persons can change the world, not educated people.

Educated people are very selfish and narrow-minded. If you want to create educated people and if you want them to change the country- I am sorry to say that is not going to happen. They will be very very selfish, they will start earning more and more sacrificing the people who have spent on their education, disregarding all the people who helped them. They will ruin the whole world. This is high time for us to pray and request the people to be intelligent than educated. If you try to force them to be educated, I am sure that we don’t have a future as a world and as a country. So make them intelligent. For them to be intelligent they need to go to society and be with that. All the real science is there in nature and society. If you make educated people intelligent then we can have a better future.

**By Dileepa Jayamanne & Chalani Oruthotaarachchi**

# FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

## AN OPINION FROM SOUTH AFRICA

### PROF. KRISHNA GOVENDER

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR AT THE ASSOCIATION OF  
INTERNATIONAL CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS



Business, after completing a 4-year (B. Pedagogics- Commerce) professional teaching degree. After almost 7 years, and having completed two part-time post-graduate qualifications (B Ed. and B Com. Hons.), he joined the then University of Transkei as a lecturer in 1986, where he lectured marketing and business management for almost 14 years. In 2000, after completing his PhD, he was appointed as Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences. In 2001, he was appointed full Professor and Executive Dean, Faculty of Business Management at the then Technikon Witwatersrand (TWR), a multi campus faculty with over 8000 students, 6 schools and 14 departments.

In terms of research and publications, his personal output took a back-seat from 2001-2010, since he focused his energies on developing researchers and establishing a research culture in

the various institutions he led. He, however, kick-started his research and publications profile in 2010, which resulted in him not only supervising several masters and doctoral students, but producing quality research which resulted in several papers and, being published in both accredited and peer-reviewed national and international journals.

Although he was most recently (2016) selected and appointed to provide leadership as the Executive Dean and Head of a specialized private undergraduate higher education institution (AAA School of Advertising) in SA, Professor Krishna is still very research-active (supervision, examination and publication), since he is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of KZN. He was listed among UKZN's top researchers in 2016. Thus, NSBM was privileged to engage in an intellectual conversation with this most humble veteran in the education sphere.

**P**rof. Krishna started his career in 1979 as a high school teacher of Accountancy and



## What do you think about global trends in higher education and trends specific to Africa?

Education seems not to focus on the 'greater purpose', namely to contribute to the development of the individual and the advancement of society. The focus on rote learning seems to be still prevailing, whereas what is required are critical thinkers, good communicators and entrepreneurs/innovators who are socially responsible and cognizant of national and international dynamics. Innovation and the ability to navigate the digitally disrupted world is very important. Moreover, at postgraduate level, the focus should be on the micro, macro, and meso environments and thinking should shift to collaborative learning and working. Looking at the current trends of the world we can say that merely being co-operative is not

IN THE AFRICAN REGION IN GENERAL AND SOUTH AFRICA IN PARTICULAR, THERE IS A MOVE TOWARDS BLENDED (TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED) LEARNING, TOGETHER WITH ON-LINE AND DISTANCE LEARNING. HOWEVER THERE IS STILL A HUGE DIVIDE BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS PRIMARILY DUE TO THE LIMITED RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION.

enough to survive in the new order/4th industrial revolution. Thinking and knowledge production should be trans-disciplinary. I believe that the learners and the students should be allowed to not only think out of the box, but also to have their voices heard.

In the African region in general and South Africa in particular, there is a move towards blended

(technology-enabled) learning, together with on-line and distance learning. However there is still a huge divide between public and private educational offerings primarily due to the limited resources available for public education.

Another challenge is the perception that a university degree is superior to a technical or vocational qualification, which results in an increase in unemployed graduates. The unemployed graduates represent "wasted investment" and creates a burden for society and governments, since the total unemployment figures are skewed and inflated.

## How do you explain the status of the South African Higher education sector?

In SA, there has been great success in

both the school and post-school systems. The government is equally concerned about technical and vocational education as well as academic education and training. Various quality councils have been established, such as the Council on Higher Education, the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations, Umalusi, etc. to monitor quality and accredit programmes and qualifications from senior secondary schools to universities and technical and vocational colleges. There is an increase in private school and post-school education provision, which creates options based on income and earnings. However, all institutions are governed by the relevant quality councils mentioned above, since they are statutory formations.

## What are the differences you observe between two countries in terms of higher education?

As I mentioned in the answer to your previous question, it is difficult to comment on that as my knowledge of the education system of your country is very limited. However, it would seem that both countries have some common challenges, especially when it comes to ensuring quality and affordable education provisioning at both rural and urban levels.

## What are the future challenges to the higher education sector and do you have suggestions to overcome such challenges?

I thoroughly believe that education provision in any country should not be restricted by "bricks and mortar". Learning should take place in virtual environments/classrooms/lecture

rooms. Technology should be fully embraced as we cannot be on par with the global standards if we do not adapt to it effectively. Further, the teachers and lecturers should be retrained and (compulsory CPD), teaching and learning technologies should be continuously developed in order to enhance the learning opportunities.



## Sri Lanka is a country which has a high literacy rate, how can educators contribute to the speedy development of the country?

Are you implying illiteracy or literacy? Since the latter is very good and the country should be commended for this achievement. It is a given, that education and training are vital to development. Coupled with the aforementioned statement is the need to ensure that the "right/fit for purpose" knowledge and skills are being imparted. As mentioned previously, techno-literacy is critical for a population to benefit from the opportunities presented as a result of the advances in technology. The focus should be on developing innovators and critical thinkers as well as emotional intelligence.

## According to your point of view what will be the most trending fields for

## education in the next 10 years?

Considering the swift development of technology and its influence on traditional educational methods, I would say borderless (virtual) classrooms and "my time/my pace/my space" ethos will be an important field in the future education systems.

## What are the possible changes you could suggest in amending the Sri Lankan higher education sector according to global needs?

It is difficult to comment as I have a very limited knowledge about the Sri Lankan education system like I said earlier but I think it would suffice to state that no country is an island. Technology has bridged the digital divide of learning, thus it is not an excuse to state that the country is poor and isolated. The government should create an enabling environment through free Wif-Fi zones and reduced data costs to enable the citizens to educate themselves.

## Finally, what is your advice to the undergraduates of Sri Lanka?

Embrace life-long learning and knowledge production through postgraduate studies. Take ownership of your education journeys and produce creative and innovative solutions to real world/life problems and challenges. Further, I think it is timely apt to study and focus on societal advancement and responsible management of the limited resources.

■ By Kasun Dissanayake

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# DIRECTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION & ITS PROSPECTS IN SRI LANKA

## PROF. SARAVANAN MUTHAIYAH

PROFESSOR  
MULTIMEDIA UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

**P**rof. Muthaiyah is currently attached to Multimedia University Malaysia, where he teaches and conducts research in the area of Semantic Web Algorithms, Web 4.0, Data Analytics, Block Chain, Cryptocurrencies, Evaluation of Intangibles, Value Creation, Semantic Databases, Knowledge Management, Database Management, Computer Networking, Information Systems, Knowledge Management, Service Oriented Architecture, Risk Management, Project Management, Research Methodology and Data Mining. Prof. Muthaiyah has served the university in various capacities for the last 18 years such as Deputy Dean, Head of Department, programme coordinator, auditor, quality assurance committee, research task force, audit task force and Dean/Director of the Graduate School of Management (GSM).

His corporate experience includes working as a systems analyst for IBM World Trade Corporation for seven years in developing financial

PROF. MUTHAIYAH HAS TWELVE IPS CONFERRED TO HIM AND A NUMBER OF AWARDS FOR HIS RESEARCH WORK. HE HAS PUBLISHED MORE THAN HUNDRED PUBLICATIONS IN AREAS SUCH AS SEMANTIC WEB, MATCHING ALGORITHMS, INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS, KNOWLEDGE ENGINEERING, LEAN MANUFACTURING, ACCOUNTING INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND WEB 4.0 TECHNOLOGIES.

accounting systems for enterprise wide accounting applications. Prof. Muthaiyah has twelve IPs conferred to him and a number of awards for his research work. He has published more than hundred publications in areas such as Semantic Web, Matching Algorithms, Intelligent Systems, Knowledge Engineering, Lean Manufacturing, Accounting Information Systems and Web 4.0

Technologies. Prof. Muthaiyah was invited as a technical keynote speaker at the International Symposium on Energy Challenges in the Knowledge Economy - 2015 together with the late Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam (former president of India) which was held in Colombo on 26th June. Prof. Muthaiyah is a Stanford University certified Design Thinking Trainer as well as a PSMB TTT certified trainer. Prof. Muthaiyah is also a consultant for numerous professional accounting bodies on Digital Transformation and its impact on Accounting and Finance. These include CIMA (UK), AICPA (USA) and CPA Australia. He is now a full time member of the Research Institute for Digital Enterprise, a research institute that is focused on digitalization and digitization methods in finding solutions for solving real world problems in the digital economy. Prof. Muthaiyah leads the area of Corporate Forensics that includes Risk Management (ISO31000) and methods for Information Assets Monitoring (ISO/IEC27001).

“ ACCORDING TO MY POINT OF VIEW, TERTIARY EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA SHOULD USE, ENABLE AND INCORPORATE MODERN TEACHING-LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT METHODS TO INCREASE THE QUALITY OF DEGREE PROGRAMS, AND SUBSEQUENTLY ALSO EMBED IR 4.0 CONTEXT IN STEM COURSES. THIS WILL EVENTUALLY IMPROVE THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF FUTURE GRADUATES ”



**What do you think about global trends in higher education and trends specific to Asia?**

Higher education is undergoing a major transformation especially with regard to industry 4.0. Considering this context, I believe digitalization and digitization with the aid of emerging technology have become increasingly important. As such new specializations such as Fin Tech and Health-Tech are becoming a trend. In accounting digital audit, distributed ledgers and autonomous taxation are being introduced into the curriculum.

**How do you explain the status of Malaysian Higher education sector?**

Higher education in Malaysia is divided into private and public sector. The overall status can be regarded as the recession proof industry. The Department of Statistics, Malaysia shows contribution of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from private education has steadily increased by RM14.09 bil (2015 to 2018), RM 14.84 bil, RM 15.70 bil and RM 16.62 bil respectively. This is roughly 7.7% growth annually. It's expected that the figure could go up to RM 30 bil

by taking into consideration the investment on infrastructure and info-structure.

**What do you think about Sri Lankan tertiary education?**

According to my point of view, tertiary education in Sri Lanka should use, enable and incorporate modern teaching-learning and assessment methods to increase the quality of degree programs, and subsequently also embed IR 4.0 context in STEM courses. This will eventually improve the social and economic contribution of future graduates.



## What are the differences you observe between the two countries in terms of higher education?

Perhaps the most significant would be digital inclusion and the speed of implementation.

## What are the challenges to higher education sector in future and do you have suggestions to overcome such challenges?

I think it is vital to stay relevant to the changes in the industry and ensuring that we continue to produce graduates that are globally competent. This challenge can only be overcome with the strong determination of wanting to work closely with the industry and being nimble with policy matters.

## Where should we position our higher education in next 10 years?

Any country should align their higher educational goals along with the development of the country.

Therefore, it is critical that we should understand what our country needs in the next 10 years. If we require more doctors, it is obvious that infrastructure for teaching hospitals and medical schools must be made available. Secondly, good qualified faculty and a world class curriculum is necessary to support this initiative. Lastly, I strongly believe that it is about ensuring proper strategies to make sure that the man power planning is met.

## According to your point of view what will be the most trending fields for education in coming 10 years?

The world is developing at a very rapid phase, so it is extremely important that as educators we keep up with that phase. I believe with the technological advancements there are few main fields that will be in demand in the next few years. Some of them are;

A. Fin Tech, B. Health Tech, C. Chemical engineering, D. Gerontology, E. Nursing, F. Construction management, G. Aviation, H. Pharmacology, I. Computer science, J. Medical assistant

## What are the possible changes you could suggest in amending Sri Lankan higher education sector according to the global needs?

I think a developing country such as Sri Lanka should focus on improving infrastructure for teaching and learning. Like I mentioned earlier we need to be on par with global needs. Further I would say as a country with a strong higher educational sector, Sri Lanka should be nimble on policy matters for introducing change. Then only we can expand the horizons of higher education in order to cater to the global needs.

## Finally, what is your message to the undergraduates of Sri Lanka?

I think it is important to do what you are passionate about then only you will give you hundred percent to whatever that you do. So my message to them is, choose a major that you are passionate about and continue to learn, unlearn and relearn constantly.

By Kasun Dissanayake



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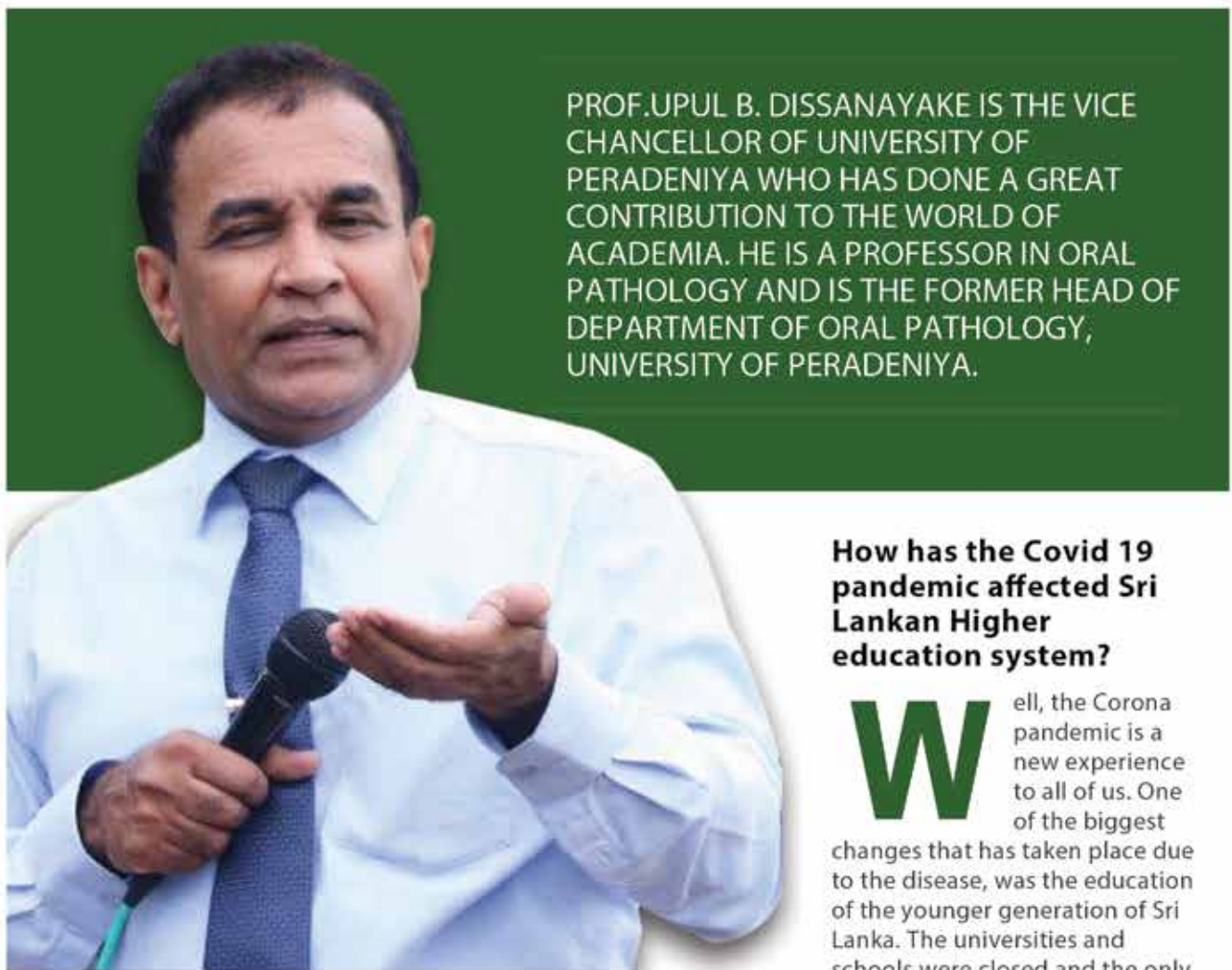
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MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

# TURNING A PAGE IN SRI LANKAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

PROF. UPUL B. DISSANAYAKE  
VICE CHANCELLOR – UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA



PROF. UPUL B. DISSANAYAKE IS THE VICE CHANCELLOR OF UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA WHO HAS DONE A GREAT CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD OF ACADEMIA. HE IS A PROFESSOR IN ORAL PATHOLOGY AND IS THE FORMER HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF ORAL PATHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA.

**How has the Covid 19 pandemic affected Sri Lankan Higher education system?**

**W**ell, the Corona pandemic is a new experience to all of us. One of the biggest changes that has taken place due to the disease, was the education of the younger generation of Sri Lanka. The universities and schools were closed and the only



remaining mechanism to continue education was the online education system. The government then realized the significance of online education system and started working on implementing it along with training people. This corona pandemic I believe is a blessing in disguise. The government started working on building infrastructure to implement online education system in both school and university setup. Currently, we have developed our education system to such a level that we can teach students despite any crisis.

**What do you think on current online teaching and learning system?**

Although we didn't have a completely developed infrastructure by the time the pandemic occurred, we did have some useful resources which we started using immediately. Online education has its own advantages. For instance, a student doesn't necessarily have

to be at a specific place when it comes for online education. He can learn from being at anywhere he wants. However, I don't assume that we can compare an internal residential graduate with a person who graduates from an online degree program. For a person to be a global graduate, there are many experiences a university can offer. The

interaction with people from diverse social backgrounds and working with them along with the direct interaction that occurs within a classroom is unique and highly beneficial for the learner to be a global graduate which the online classroom environment fails to offer. Considering the prevailing situation, I think online education is a really strong





alternative so that students will be putting all their time at home for good use. Comparatively, the online platform is broader, yet it wouldn't be able to produce a comprehensive graduate that university residential education does.

### **Based on the prevailing situation what are your suggestions in shaping up our higher education for future needs?**

We need to change the existing conventional education system. The teaching techniques and learning methods are emerging. At present University Grants Commission has instructed to conduct 25% lectures online. Further we should be moving towards student centric teaching. If you have observed, you would have noticed a large number of occupations are no longer in existence where as new occupations are coming up. Cyber Security officer can be taken as an example. Likewise, there's a large number of new jobs coming up that we need to prepare our graduates for. We should be able to produce a diversified graduate who should be able to handle any job that's unforeseen yet. The

WE NEED TO CHANGE THE EXISTING CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM. THE TEACHING TECHNIQUES AND LEARNING METHODS ARE EMERGING. AT PRESENT UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION HAS INSTRUCTED TO CONDUCT 25% LECTURES ONLINE. FURTHER WE SHOULD BE MOVING TOWARDS STUDENT CENTRIC TEACHING. IF YOU HAVE OBSERVED, YOU WOULD HAVE NOTICED A LARGE NUMBER OF OCCUPATIONS ARE NO LONGER IN EXISTENCE WHERE AS NEW OCCUPATIONS ARE COMING UP. CYBER SECURITY OFFICER CAN BE TAKEN AS AN EXAMPLE

graduate should be enriched with all the relevant skills that should pave him the way to handle all the challenges gracefully. That should

be the outcome of any degree program offered by any university. This, I believe is the universal truth and I hardly believe that complete online education system can contribute in building up a comprehensive graduate. So, I think we should opt for an amalgamated system.

### **What could be the arrangements that can be made for the students who cannot afford online education?**

Sri Lanka is a developing country where there's a set of people suffering from extreme poverty. Let alone learning online, they are in fact struggling for their survival on a daily basis. Thus, one suggestion that would cater to such people would be the implementation of a structure similar to the open university where we can install centres that support distant learning. Therefore, the students can access online lectures via these centres. Further the use of television to share educational materials and lessons can be highly beneficial when paired with online education.



### **How do you see the future of education in Sri Lanka?**

The first thing is that we should never forget what happened and we should not step back. Covid 19 helped us to rethink of the teaching strategies and be innovative. What we should do now is to move forward from that point. Currently, Sri Lanka is known for its quality of education around the world. In order to maintain that standard, we need to keep working on improving it.

### **What can be done to map the global trends with higher education?**

The entire education system should be changed. We need to change according to the way the world is changing. We need to keep the education system updated. The primary section from grade 1 to 5 should be focusing on improving their fundamental literacy skills and making them aware of the historical background, culture, ethics, decorum, significance of respecting to other religions maintaining positive attitudes and live

harmoniously within a diverse community. Thus they will be loyal to their motherland and could result in reducing the brain drain. From grade 6 to 10, the students should be allowed to choose the streams they prefer to specialize in. Earlier, people were used to be trained for vocational skills such as carpentry and handcrafters. Yet, such vocations are not in demand in the modern world. What is required today in terms of knowledge are disciplines such as; automation, web development, communication etc. The implementation of technology stream in Advanced level stream, I believe will benefit greatly to our society. The technology faculties established in the Sri Lankan universities may then help the undergraduates to expertise in the fields that they specialise in. Further, I believe school education must focus on uplifting the knowledge of English and computing knowledge of students as well. With all these changes, all Sri Lankans will be able to utilize their knowledge learnt effectively for the betterment of themselves and their country.

**By Gayanthi Mendis & Archt. Upeksha Hettithanthri**





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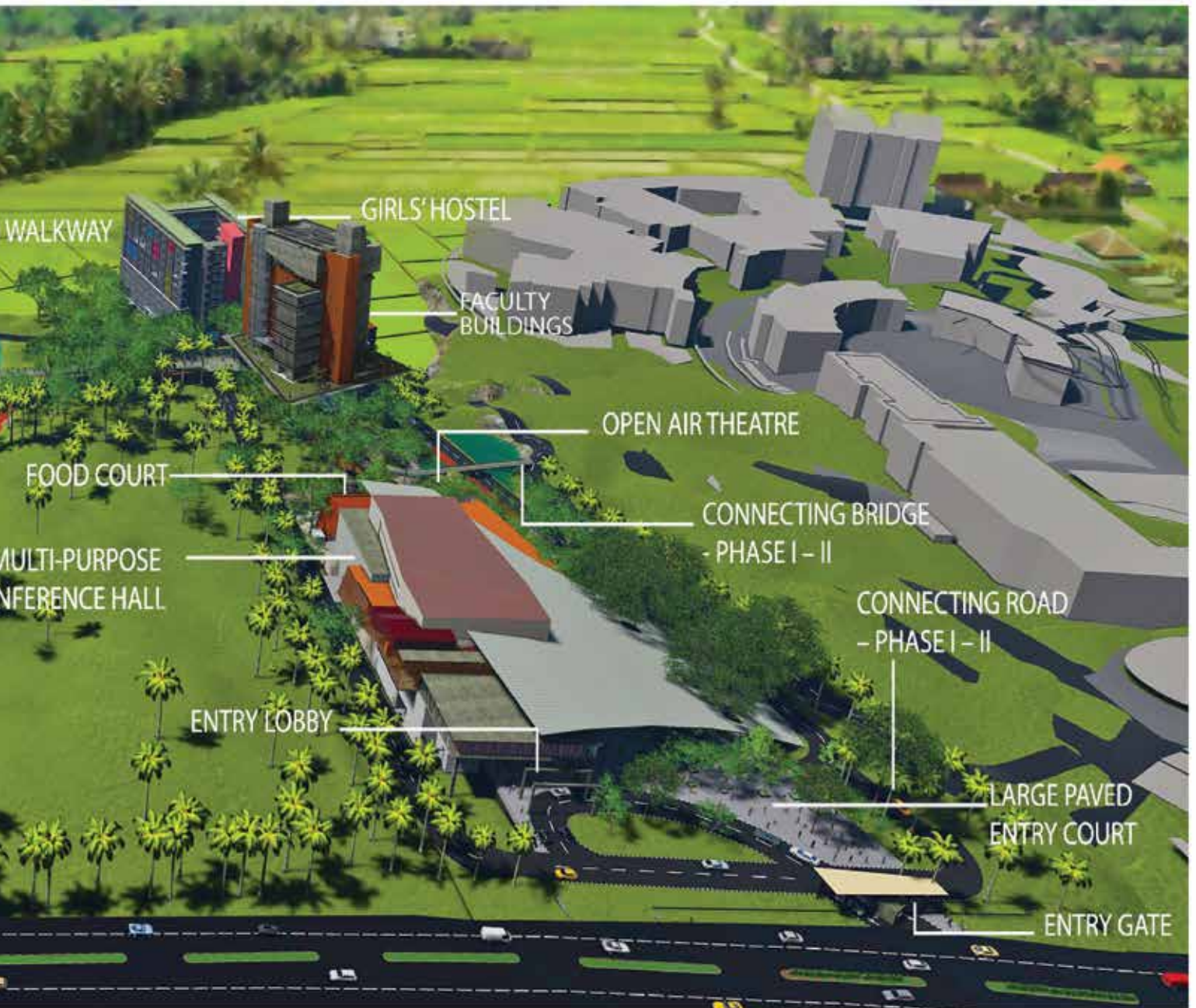


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