



UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION

COMMISSION CIRCULAR NO. 01/2021

No. 20, Ward Place,
Colombo 07.

15th January, 2021

Vice Chancellors of Universities
Rectors of Campuses
Directors of Institutes

Restructuring Bachelor of Arts (External) Degree Programmes offered by universities under the Universities Act

The University Grants Commission temporarily suspended new registrations and commencement of all BA External Degree Programmes (BA EDPs) by a letter dated 28th August 2020 in order to streamline BA External Degree Programmes offered by Universities. The intention of the UGC was to enable restructuring and revision of the existing curricula with inputs from all concerned, including the Quality Assurance Council, before the resumption of new registrations. Accordingly, the Commission appointed a Committee to identify and recommend mechanisms for restructuring and improving the curricula of BA EDPs to enhance the employability of graduates. Having considered the recommendations of the Committee, the Commission at its 1043rd meeting held on 19th November 2020 approved the same in order to circulate among the Universities and HEIs as follows:

Recommendations

English language

- Introduce a 9 credit English Language module with three 3-credit course units offered over the 3 years of study, with UTEL Benchmark 5 as the final outcome. This is considered as compulsory.

Information Technology

Introduce a 9 credit IT component spread over the three years of study as three, 3-credit course units. Emphasis in each of these courses should be on the enhancement of employability skills through computer lab-based learning environment. Competency assessment in IT course units should be made under computer lab-based practical assignments, which are at all times conducted under the supervision of University staff. It is further recommended that universities may consider the IT module of the FIT (Fundamentals of Information Technology) certificate course offered by the University of Colombo, School of Computing as a reference. This is considered as compulsory.

Work - based training


Introduce 300 hours of work-based training as a 3-credit, compulsory course unit to be completed at any time after completion of the requirements of year 1. This will be a non GPA course, but should be indicated in the transcript. Ideally this should be in the 3rd year.

It is also recommended that the universities adhere to the following:

- Strictly implement Commission Circular No. 932 with respect to student admissions.
- Validity of registration for a given degree programme should be up to a maximum of twice the prescribe period for completion of the degree.
- Adopt a basket system comprising at least 2 baskets for selection of subjects by students. One basket should include at least four of the most popular subjects in demand by students over the past five years. Students should be allowed to select only one subject from this basket (**Annex 1 & 2**). However, it is not compulsory to choose any of the most popular subjects.
- Adopt a ceiling for enrolment per course (e.g. 15% of total enrolled for the programme based on recognition on prior learning (RPL) such as NVQ Diplomas, Language Diplomas, certificates obtained prior to enrolment in the External Degree Programme as decided by the Senate based on the relevancy to the proposed programme to be offered by the University)
- Universities are encouraged to consider introducing English as the medium of instruction for the revised and new programmes of study or transition the medium of instruction of existing programmes from mother tongue to English.

The above Recommendations are applicable mainly to BA (General) EDPs. However they may be adopted, where applicable, by the BA in English and BA in Environment and Development Studies offered by the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

In order to re-commence the new registrations that had been stopped temporarily pertaining to Bachelor of Arts (External) Degree Programmes, restructured programmes formulated adhering to the guidelines specified in this circular and with Senate and Council approval need to be submitted to the Quality Assurance Council (QAC/UGC) through the Vice Chancellor on or before 1st of March 2021 for ensuring compliance and for approval of the Commission thereafter. Committee report is annexed herewith for further information.



Senior Prof. Sampath Amaratunge
Chairman

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File No. UGC/AC10/2020/External

Subject Basket

As mentioned in the aforesaid circular subject baskets have been decided based on the following rationale:

1. 1st Basket

Based on the information of Degree programmes presented by six universities, the majority of the student enrolment took place based on the most demanding subjects mentioned due to the convenience of selection. However, the industry demands vary from these existing subject combinations and caused graduate unemployability to a greater extent. Therefore, students have a choice to select one subject from the first subject basket. Distribution of students among the course units out of total population considering the upper limits need to be decided by the Senate of each university (**Annex 2**).

2. 2nd Basket

This basket is based on the lowest student enrolment as specified by six universities offering Bachelor of Art Degrees. Students have a choice to select one subject from the second subject basket. (Students may choose one or more subjects from the 2nd subject basket).

3. 3rd Basket

This basket consists of a greater choice for students in subject selection. According to industry demands the lowest subject selection is also included in this basket. Students who wish to have only languages also could have a better selection from this basket.

4. Importance of Languages

As the total number of students accommodated into a Degree programme, except under special circumstances should not exceed twice the number admitted into the internal compartment for a similar study programme, 5%-10% of the total student population is suggested to select from Languages oriented subject Combination. Further, recognition of prior learning (RPL) could be applied in selection of students such as Diplomas, certificates obtained prior in languages to pursue External Degree.

5. Introduction of New Course Units

Further, it is suggested embracing newer course units which are having contemporary importance.

Annex 2

1 st Basket (Taken from highest enrolment)	2 nd Basket (Taken from lowest enrolment)	3 rd Basket (Rest of the subjects)
Sinhala	Social Statistics	Social Statistics
Sociology	Economics	Statistics
		Sanskrit
		Pali
Political Science	English	Buddhist Philosophy
Tamil	Statistics	Hindu Philosophy
Psychology	English Literature	Buddhist studies
Mass Communication	Japanese	Buddhist Civilization
	Archeology	Hindu Civilization
Geography	International Studies	Christian Civilization
History	Chinese	Library & Information Science
Philosophy	Library and Information Science	
	TESL	Greek & Rome Studies
	Pali	Music
	Sanskrit	Linguistics
	Hindu Philosophy	Chinese
	Drama and Theatre	German
		Arabic
		Islamic
		French
		Japanese
		Drama & Theatre
		Archeology
		International Studies
		Buddhist Culture
		Hindu Culture
		Islamic Culture
		Economics
		English
		TESL
		English Literature
		Statistics

Recommendations of the Committee on External Degrees pertaining to restructuring Bachelor of Arts (External) Degree Programmes offered by universities under the Universities Act

The University Grants Commission temporarily suspended new registrations and commencement of all BA External Degree Programmes (BA EDPs) by a letter dated 23rd August 2020. The intention of the UGC was to enable restructuring and revision of the existing curricula with inputs from all concerned, including the Quality Assurance Council, before the resumption of new registrations.

At its 1036th meeting held on 13th August 2020, the Commission appointed the following Committee to identify and recommend mechanisms for restructuring and improving the curricula of BA EDPs to enhance the employability of graduates:

- Prof. Ranjith Arthanayake (Chair of the Committee)
- Prof. Nilanthi De Silva (Vice Chancellor, University of Kelaniya)
- Prof. Shirley Lal Wijesinghe (University of Kelaniya)
- Prof. PMC Thilakarathne (University of Kelaniya)
- Prof. Shirantha Heenkenda (University of Sri Jayewardenepura)
- Prof. Dushyanthi Mendis (University of Colombo)
- Dr. Lasith Gunawardena (University of Sri Jayewardenepura)
- Prof. Kalyani Perera (Director, QAC)
- Ms Janadari Wijesinghe (Secretary to the Committee)

The above Committee determined the specific objectives of the task assigned by the Commission as follows:

- To identify deficiencies in the existing BA EDPs with respect to imparting employability skills
- To identify courses that would facilitate acquisition of deficient attributes
- To suggest mechanisms for restructuring the BA EDP curriculum to incorporate such courses

With this in mind, the Committee prepared a questionnaire (Annex-1) that was sent by the UGC to all universities to send their responses before 30th September 2020 to the Committee. The following universities submitted the information requested by the UGC:

- University of Kelaniya
- University of Sri Jayewardenepura
- University of Ruhuna
- South Eastern University of Sri Lanka
- University of Jaffna
- University of Peradeniya

The Committee noted that the above six universities offer UGC-approved BA EDPs as follows

Course of Study	Faculty/Dept	University
Bachelor of Arts (General)	Faculty of Humanities and Faculty of Social Sciences	University of Kelaniya
Bachelor of Arts in Environment and Development Studies	Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences/ Department of Geography	University of Sri Jayewardenepura
Bachelor of Arts in English (General)	Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences/ Department of English and Linguistics	University of Sri Jayewardenepura
Bachelor of Humanities and Social Sciences (General)	Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences	University of Sri Jayewardenepura
Bachelor of Arts (General)	Faculty of Arts	University of Peradeniya
Bachelor of Arts (General)	Faculty of Arts	University of Ruhuna
Bachelor of Arts (General)	Faculty of Arts	University of Jaffna
Bachelor of Arts (General)	Faculty of Arts and Culture	South Eastern University of Sri Lanka

Based on the tracer study on graduate employment conducted by the UGC in 2018 among all the graduates in Sri Lanka, the Committee found that the lowest rate of employment was in Arts graduates and Performing Arts graduates, and that there is a positive relationship between employability, proficiency in English and internship training.

Having studied the responses received from the six Universities regarding their BA EDP curricula, the Committee identified the following issues:

- Teacher student ratio ranges from 1: 1 to 1: 46456 among the courses
- 5-credit courses
- Year based curricula with year-end examinations at University of Kelaniya, University of Sri Jayewardenepura and University of Peradeniya, while the semester end examination system is in place at University of Jaffna, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka and the University of Ruhuna
- Less importance given to formative assessment
- Delayed feedback to students

- Low graduation rate (< 10% in most; exception University of Kelaniya and some University of Sri Jayewardenepura programmes)
- Medium of instruction is mostly in Sinhala/Tamil

The Committee requested all six Universities to present their BA EDP curricula along with the following details on 28th October 2020 to a meeting of the Committee via Zoom.

- The 5 subjects with highest student enrolment during the past 5 years
- The 5 subject combinations with the highest number of student registrations during the past 5 years
- The 5 subjects with the lowest student enrolment in the past 5 years
- The 5 subject combinations with the lowest number of student enrolment in the past 5 years
- Medium of instruction of the programme of study

Issues Identified by the Committee and Suggestions for remedial action

Issue	Suggestions
1. The most popular subjects are common to most BA EDPs; and they do not have course outcomes that include skills to enhance employability	Introduce a basket of popular subjects and allow students to select only one subject from the basket Introduce a ceiling on numbers permitted to enroll for a course
2. All but one university lacks work-based Training	Introduce work-based Training; Develop guidelines for such training
3. All universities have included English Language courses, but the English proficiency of BA EDP graduates remains poor	Introduce a well-designed, credit-based English Language module based on UTEL benchmarks
4. All universities have included IT courses, but IT skills of BA EDP graduates remain low	Introduce well-designed, credit-based IT modules for each year. Emphasis should be on providing hands-on IT skills which can be applied in their prospective workplaces. The IT module of the FIT Certification from the University of Colombo School of Computing may be considered as a reference.

Suggestions presented by the Committee for restructuring BA EDPs

The Committee suggested the following:

Maximum of 72 credits of the 90-credit programme should be fulfilled from 3 subject-based courses.

At least a minimum of 2 Subject baskets;

- 1 subject basket consisting of the most popular courses identified by the University (E.g. Sociology, Mass Communication, Buddhist Culture, Sinhala, Tamil, Psychology); students select 1 subject from this basket.

1 subject basket containing all other courses and students to select 2 courses from this basket; or 2 subject baskets for other subjects and students to select one course from each basket.

A ceiling for enrolment per course (25% of total admitted for the programme).

9 credits from 3 English Language courses in 3 years. 9 credits from 3 Information Technology courses in 3 years.

300 hours of work-based Training to be undertaken any time after completion of year 1 as a compulsory course not contributing to GPA; 3 credits to be indicated in the Academic Transcript

Medium of Instruction: Year 1 - Mother tongue; Year 2 - English & Mother tongue; Year 3 – English.

Opinion on the Suggestions made by the Committee

The six Universities made the following suggestions to the Committee:

1. Subject Basket

University representatives were of the opinion that Sociology and Psychology should not be placed into one basket as they are interrelated.

2. Ceiling for enrolment per course (25% of total admitted for the programme)

In selecting students for the subject of Mass Communication, the GCE Advanced Level subject of Media Studies could be made a prerequisite for registration.

3. IT delivery and teaching

The University of Ruhuna stated that they may partner with accredited IT providers due to lack of facilities in IT. It was observed that in such situations the assessment needs to be done **internally**. When IT facilities are expanded in all faculties of Humanities and Social Science the situation is likely to improve. The South Eastern University of Sri Lanka reported that they do not have a practical component and also they do not have IT facilities for external students.

4. Medium of Instruction

The Committee noted that the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and the University of Peradeniya are offering foundation courses in English while the University of Kelaniya offers a compulsory non GPA four credit English course. Further, the internal BA degree programmes of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, University of Kelaniya, University of Jaffna and South Eastern University of Sri Lanka have adopted UTEL Benchmark level 5. It is also observed that when following IT, students generally wish to opt for the English medium.

Respective English Language Teaching Units/Departments of the Universities need to develop lesson material and activities in order to ensure that students reach UTEL Benchmark level 5 at graduation.

The University of Peradeniya stated that they offer all the subjects of the programme in the English medium and a separate subject of English is offered in addition to a 3-credit foundation course. The Committee was of the opinion that when English is offered as a subject, there is no necessity for students to take remedial English Language courses, as UTEL is for those who do not have proficiency in English. Further, it was reported that the English language programme offered by the University of Ruhuna is not aligned to any UTEL benchmark at present. The Committee noted that students should attain UTEL band 5 at the completion of the degree programme.

The Committee also observed that with relevance to promoting trilingual proficiency, Sinhala and Tamil language courses should also be developed in a similar manner to English.

5. Work-based training (Non-GPA, 3 credit course to be included)

The University of Sri Jayewardenepura stated that students who are in employment are required to maintain a journal. The Chair of the Committee stated that a logbook, daily diary system, and final training report as practised by NAITA will be helpful to assist the work-based training. The Committee was of the opinion that guidelines are in preparation at the QAC Standing Committee pertaining to work-based training. Students will be provided opportunities to undergo work-based training anytime after completion of year one. Monitoring and Supervision of training need to be done by the Institution where the training is being provided. There is a necessity to devise an alternative approach for work-based training to those who are already in employment.

6. Streamlining evaluation mechanism of External Degrees

The University of Kelaniya representative stated that there is a need to streamline the total evaluation system while introducing the basket system for the selection of subjects, in order to improve the quality of BA EDPs. He also stated that subjects such as Sociology, Mass Communication, Psychology, and Buddhist Culture are very easy to pass, or have become popular among students due to the lack of proper mechanisms of evaluation.

Universities should ascertain how many graduates are required in the respective subject, before enrolling them. This is applicable to both internal and external degree programmes.

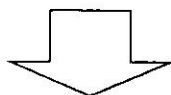
Admission Criteria for the proposed restructured BA (EDP)

Committee suggested the following Admission criteria for the proposed BA EDP:

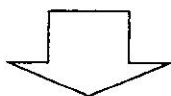
1. Z-Score
2. Recognition of prior learning – To reduce unemployability issue
3. Adherence to 1:2 Internal: External ratio as per Commission circular 932

Proposed Structure for BA (EDP) Degree

Level 1 (SLQF 3)				
Subject A 8 Credits	Subject B 8 Credits	Subject C 8 Credits	English 3 Credits	IT 3 Credits



Level 2 (SLQF 4)					
Subject A 8 Credits	Subject B 8 Credits	Subject C 8 Credits	English 3 Credits	IT 3 Credits	IPT 100-150 h



Level 3 (SLQF 5)					
Subject A 8 Credits	Subject B 8 Credits	Subject C 8 Credits	English 3 Credits	IT 3 Credits	IPT 100-150 h

The Committee noted that the Bachelor of Arts in English (General) and Environmental and Development Studies offered by University of Sri Jayewardenepura, do not have any issue with producing employable graduates.

Recommendations

Having considered the presentations and the discussion with the universities, the Committee recommends the following measures to be implemented by universities in order to restructure the existing BA curriculum with appropriate Senate and Council approvals of the respective universities:

English language

- Introduce a 9 credit English Language module with three 3-credit course units offered over the 3 years of study, with UTEL Benchmark 5 as the final outcome.

Information Technology

- Introduce a 9 credit IT component spread over the three years of study as three, 3-credit course units. Emphasis in each of these courses should be on the transfer of employable skills which are taught in computer lab-based environments. Competency assessment in IT course units should include computer lab-based assessments, and at all times be under the supervision of University concerned. It is further recommended that universities may consider the IT module of the FIT (Fundamentals of Information Technology) certification offered by the University of Colombo, School of Computing as a reference.

Work - based training

- Introduce 300 hours of work-based training as a 3-credit, compulsory course unit to be completed any time after completion of year 1. This will be a non GPA course, but should be indicated in the transcript.

It is also recommended that the universities adhere to the following:

- Strictly implement Commission Circular No. 932 with respect to student admissions.

- Adopt a basket system for selection of subjects by students, with at least 2 baskets. One basket should include at least four of the most popular courses in demand by students over the past five years. Students should be allowed to select only one subject from this basket.
- Adopt a ceiling for enrolment per course (e.g. 25% of total enrolled for the programme based on recognition on prior learning)
- Universities are encouraged to consider introducing new programmes of study in the English medium and to transition the medium of instruction of existing programmes from mother tongue to English.

The above Recommendations are applicable mainly to BA (General) EDPs. However they may be adopted, where applicable, by the BA in English and BA in Environment and Development Studies offered by the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

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Sgd.:Prof Kalyani Perera (Director, QAC)

Sgd.:Janadari Wijesinghe (Secretary to the Committee)

3rd November 2020