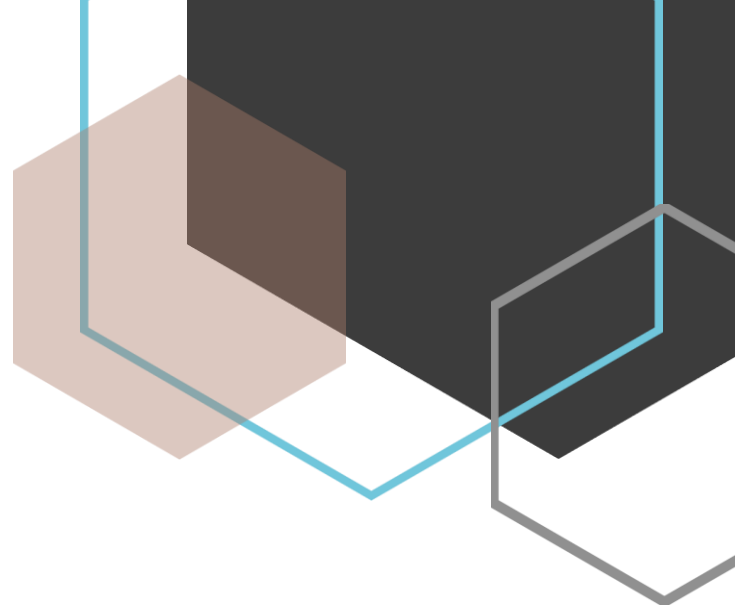




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INITIAL STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTION SURVEY Results

UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA, SRI LANKA



**Integrating Talent Development into Innovation Ecosystems in Higher Education
Ecosystems in Higher Education**

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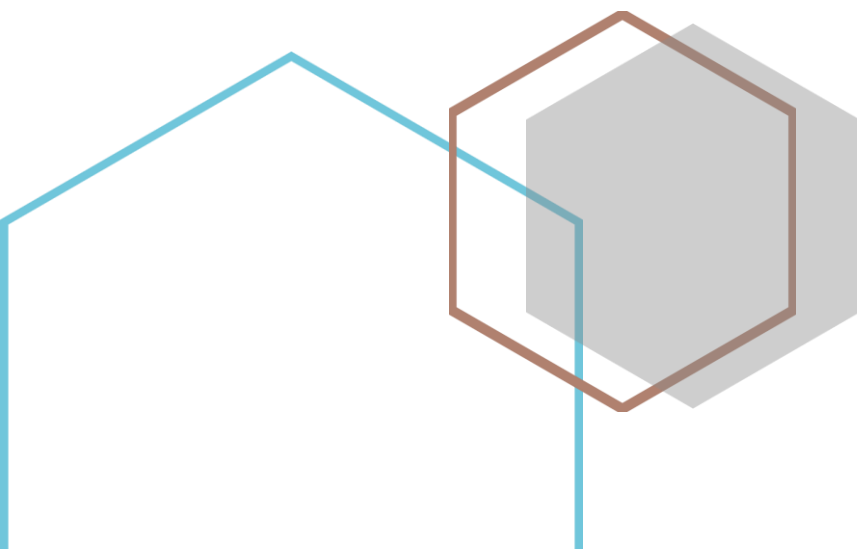




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Each INNOTAL Partner University in Asia has carried out a survey campaign aimed at mapping the initial positions and perceptions of key University stakeholders on issues of relevance to the project.

Representatives of administration and management have been asked to give their opinion about the way graduates' employability and relations with external stakeholders are currently handled at their University.

Students have provided feedback about the state of current student representation at the University, which is an important determinant of the ability of the institution to attract and retain talent.

Faculty members have been asked to share their interest in, and expectations from, future plans to embed employability in the various activities and operations at the University, to further develop talent development and improve the quality and relevance of education.

This document presents and analyses the results from this survey.

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Introduction

The career landscape and graduate employability is undergoing a paradigm shift in Sri Lanka similar to many other developing countries. The number of degree programmes offered in Sri Lankan public university system has increased to more than 100 at present to cater the dynamic and diverse job markets at local and global context. In addition to this, there are number of private universities offering various degree programmes and supplementary professional qualifications. Career development has also emerged as one of the demanding aspects in the Sri Lankan university system and a separate standing committee has been established at the University Grants Commission (UGC) to plan, implement and monitor the career guidance activities at different universities operating under the preview of the UGC. Under these directions, all public universities have established Career Guidance Units (CGUs) to have at least one career counsellor/advisor to enhance their graduate employability.

University of Peradeniya is the oldest and the largest residential university in the country, celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2017. The university has nine faculties, three postgraduate institutes and nine centers for providing services to students and wider community. Nine faculties offer 20 degree programmes and this is the only university offers Veterinary Medicine and Dental sciences degrees in the country. At present, the university has a total fulltime undergraduate student population of 12,818, about 12,000 open and distance learning undergraduates. In addition, there are 8479 graduate students registered for postgraduate degrees as well. The career development and employability of this total student population has become one of the main challenges to the university at present.

The available statistics based on published data of employability of graduates in eight faculties is given in the table 1. The employability of graduates obtained professional qualifications like MBBS, and BDS the un-employability is not an issue at present as they are directly absorbed to the public service. Still there is a fairly good demand for engineering graduates (BSc - Engineering) in both public and private sectors and their employability is also not an issue right now. However, the employability of the graduates of some faculties like Veterinary Medicine and animal science and Science are still poor while the faculty of Arts needs special attention as it is as low as 18%. Faculty of Agriculture needs further improvement and their graduate employability could be enhanced further up from 73% with an extra effort. The university is working towards increasing the employability of its graduates through all possible means including self-employment as we are ranked as the 8th out of 14 universities in the country with respect to overall graduate employability.

Table 1 Employability survey results for eight faculties of University of Peradeniya in the year 2012 (Graduates' Employment, University of Peradeniya, 2012)

Faculty	Employed	Under Employed	Unemployed	No Response
Agriculture	73.3%	6.3%	20.5%	0.0%
Allied Health Sciences	61.3%	3.0%	35.7%	0.0%
Arts	18.1%	14.2%	67.2%	0.5%
Dental Sciences	92.9%	5.7%	1.4%	0.0%
Engineering	92.7%	2.8%	4.6%	0.0%
Medicine	93.5%	2.7%	3.2%	0.5%
Science	55.7%	8.9%	34.6%	0.9%
Veterinary Medicine & Animal Science	36.8%	22.8%	40.4%	0.0%
All	53.6%	8.9%	37.2%	0.4%



Therefore, there is a paramount importance in providing soft skills, entrepreneurship education, talent development etc. to those ill-fated graduates to bridge the gap between the faculty training and the requirements of the external world of work. At the same time we have to satisfy the policies and future plans of the government on human resource needs. Unfortunately, there is no any reputed formal institution offer training on career coaching/counselling/talent development in Sri Lanka at present. However, the career guidance unit of the University of Peradeniya is currently providing its services to this larger target group jointly with a selected external team of trainers in addition to its own staff. Some of the private sector companies have come forward to sponsor/conduct soft skill training programmes and collaborative research as their CSR activities to assist the university. This kind of private sector involvement has immensely contributed to bridge the gap between student skills and private sector expectations. Hence, expansion of soft skill trainings, talent development, adjustment of curricular and introduction of co-curricular activities for students has a paramount importance to the University to enhance its graduate employability which is the need of the day. Indirectly, this will provide an opportunity for the corporate sector to advertise their brands and services to a wider section of the population, students and the university community. The INNOTAL project is looking into identify the gaps and address all aspects of graduate employability through sharing the experience of a consortium of 14 universities in Asia and the EU region.



Methodology

This survey was conducted as an online data collection and analysis using a common platform for all partner universities. We have circulated the Google link for the questionnaire and individuals responded. There were 162 respondents from the University representing main four categories of stakeholders in the university as shown in the Figure 1 below. Faculty members and students represented 93% of the sample as they represent a larger share of the internals population.

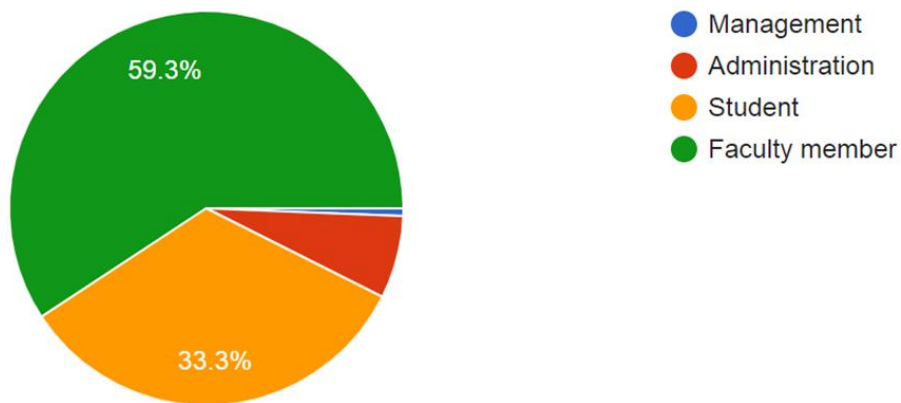


Fig.1. Categories of respondents for the survey

Survey findings

Views of the management and administrative staff on graduates’ employability issues and proposals on mitigating the unemployment issue

University strategy for increasing the employability and developing links with business

It is clear that the university has some strategies to enhance the employability of its graduates but that is not to the best that the university should do (Fig.2). Less than 10% responded that it is satisfactory while 75% believe that the employability enhancing strategies has been done up to a limited extent. The satisfaction of the stakeholder on this aspect reflects that vast majority (92%) has moderate satisfaction while 8% of the respondents are not happy at all (Fig. 3).

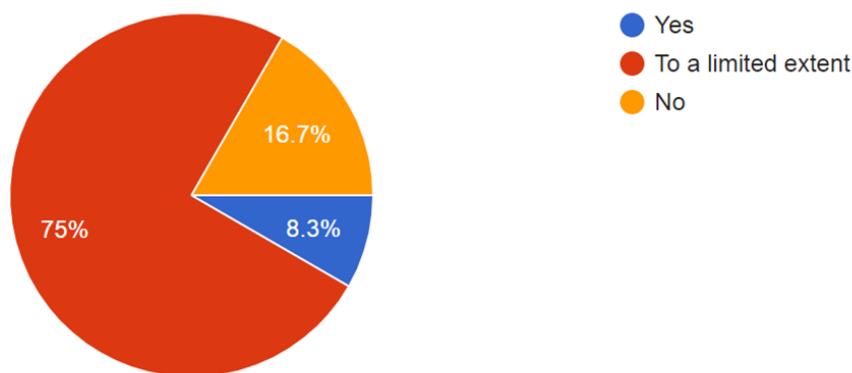


Fig. 2 Level of strategies for increasing the employability of graduates

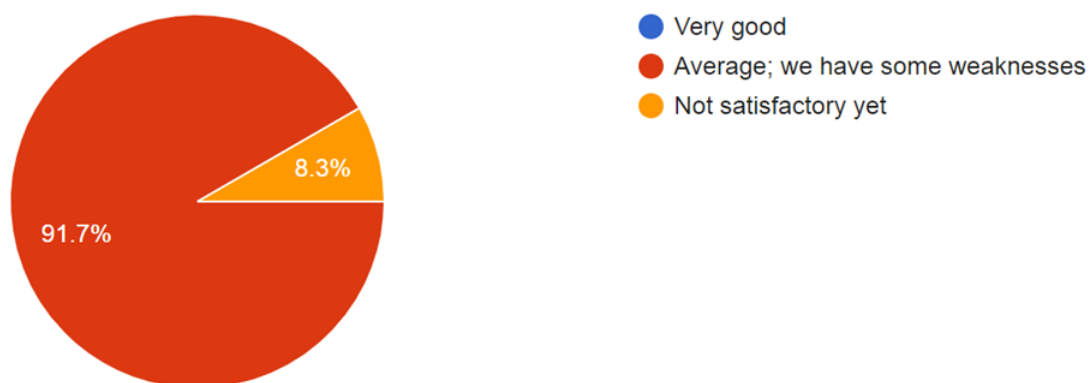


Fig. 3. Level of satisfaction of stakeholders on university strategies on enhancing graduate employability

Graduate employability planning strategies

Universities are bound to align their curriculum and skills training in line with the national and global socio-economic changes in order to assure the employability of their graduates. Private universities are very sensitive to this aspect as their demand for degrees depends on employability. However, one third of the respondents believe that our university is not sensitive to this aspect while 58% believe that it is happening only up to a limited extent. Only a minority of 8% thinks it is happening as it should (Fig. 4). In reality, since our university is a public

university, students are registered in courses according to their merit and not purely by demand for degrees. Therefore, sensitivity to this aspect is limited, especially in some faculties like Humanities and Social Sciences. We need to stimulate this for the benefit of the graduates.

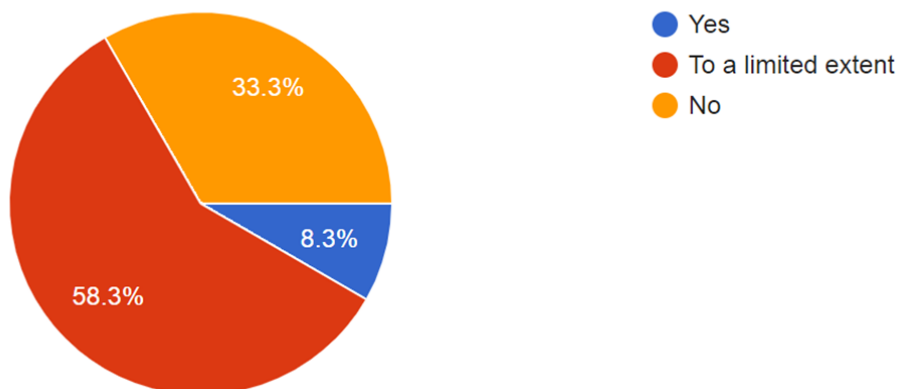


Fig. 4 University’ strategic interventions on monitoring external socio-economic dynamics on graduate employability

The way forward to address graduate employability issue

The issue of graduate un-employability needs immediate solutions as it becomes a national issue. University of Peradeniya was in the 8th place in terms of graduate employability from among the 14 universities we had in 2012. Some of the recently established university occupied the second place with 82% employability even at that time where we had 54%. Therefore, we need to study the achievements in other universities within the country as well as overseas. The result (Fig. 5) reflects this need highlighted by the stakeholders indicating that 82% propose to study others and modernize strategies of our university.

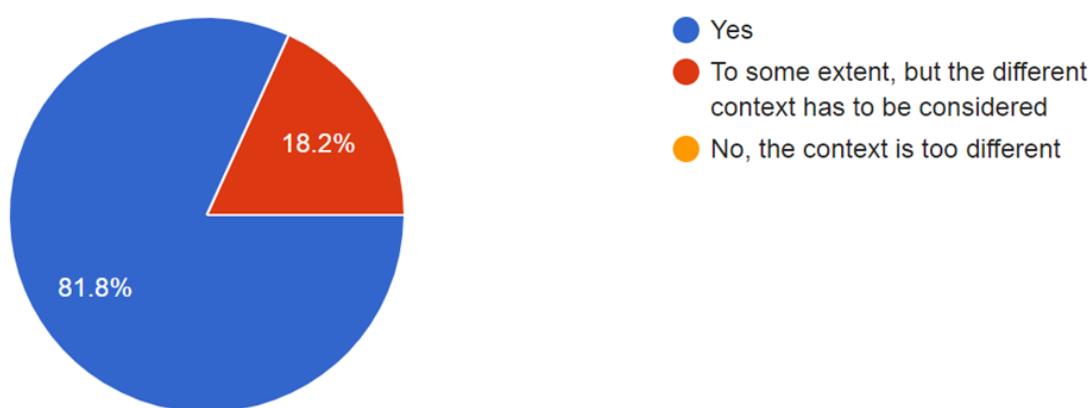


Fig. 5 Research and learn from the experience of other universities on graduate employability

Graduate employability and curricular development

The university quality assurance system established during last two decades has prepared clear guidelines to prepare curricula to enhance quality and relevance of degree programmes. This is a comprehensive mechanism and starting from need analysis from external stakeholders to expected outcomes from individual subjects is needed. Further, in this process all stakeholders should be consulted and final document is assessed internally and also by external quality

assurance experts. Therefore, majority of the stakeholders (75%) propose the same technique while the 25% (Fig. 6) indicates that we need to follow the national level guidelines like Sri Lanka Quality Framework (SLQF) and other requirements of public agencies.

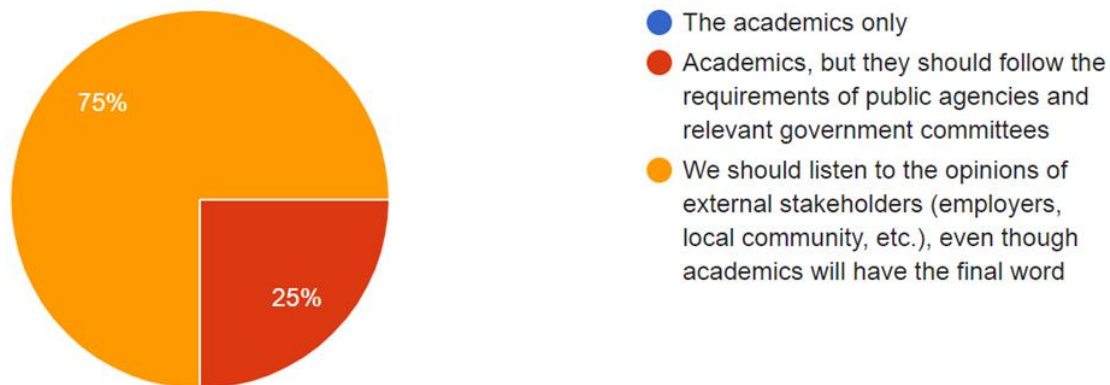


Fig. 6 The design, delivery and evaluation mechanism of curricula at our university

Graduate employability and talent development

Talent development is directly or indirectly linked to career development process of graduates. At present it happens in the university at different levels for different purposes but not well focused on career development aspect. It also happens as diverse isolated activities (i.e. Music, artwork, IT, language skills, robotics etc.) and not well coordinated towards an expected outcome. The results indicate that all respondents believe that it should not be a teacher prescribed recipe. According to stakeholders, majority believe that teachers should play a major role but talent and employability development should be done in consultation with employers and industry. Most importantly, 42% propose that employability should be facilitated through the direct linkage of students with the external world of work (Fig. 7). However, the majority of respondents believe that academics should consult the external stakeholders while taking the leading role for enhancing the graduate employability.

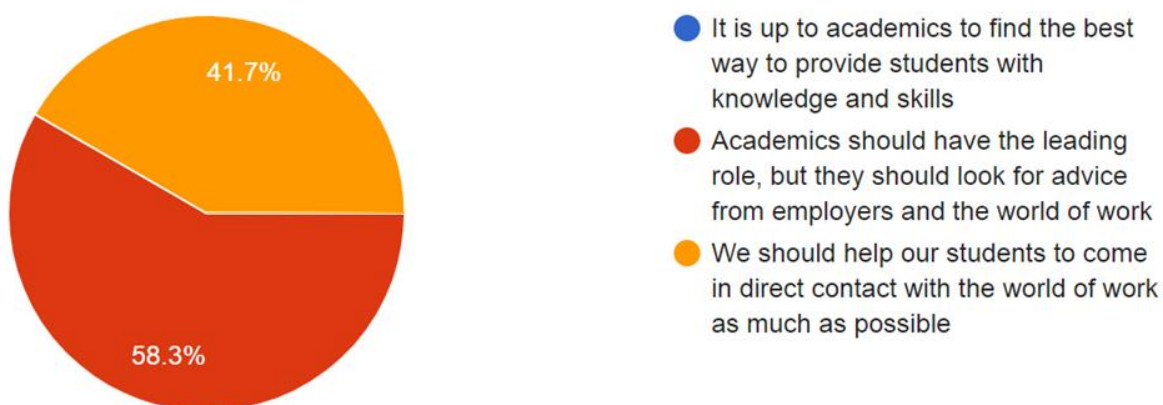


Fig. 7 How to develop our students' talent and employability

Teaching and learning environment in the university

Although the university has been trying to enhance the autonomy, responsibility and freedom to students in the teaching process, there is still much to do to improve this teaching learning environment. We are fairly weak in offering cross faculty courses, multidisciplinary teaching environment etc. although there are nine faculties in one place. This need is stressed by the stakeholders correctly by proposing 83% (Fig. 8) to improve this aspect. To increase the graduate employability, certain curricular should be revised to meet the needs of the current labour market and should provide more placement opportunities to the undergraduates together with the employers. To achieve this target, we need an urgent attitudinal change within the academic staff, administrative staff as well as among students and re-orient their employment in line with the direction of the national planning.

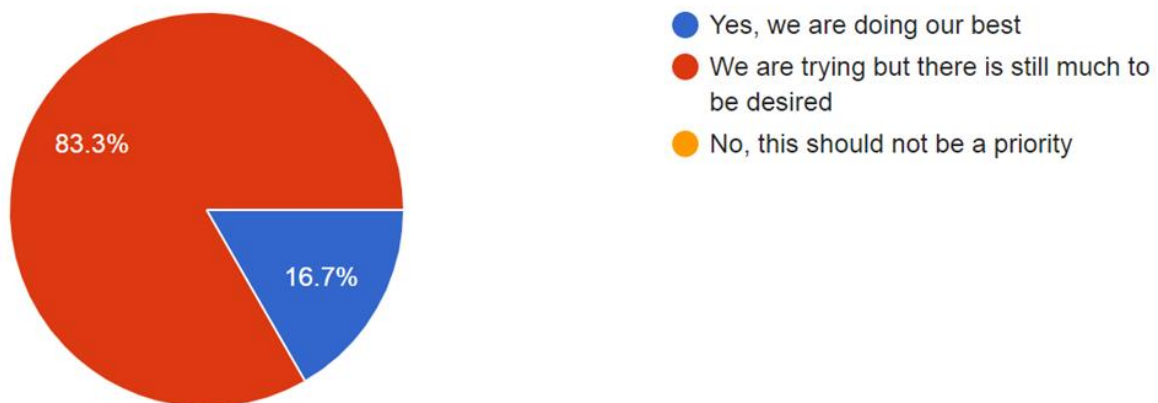


Fig. 8 Student autonomy, responsibility and freedom in the teaching process

Students views on their employability and related issues

Student involvement in university development through partnership in decision making bodies

The university administration system is designed based on the universities Act No. 16 established in 1978. This has been amended by the parliament of Sri Lanka from time to time to accommodate changing needs of the public universities. However, the statutory bodies/decision making boards in the university system are faculty board and senate for academic matters and the university council is the supreme management body for academic and administrative matters. By regulation, students are members of the faculty boards but not in any other management boards at present. However, student unions are officially established at faculty level and at the university level. Their issues are discussed separately at faculty level and at the university level. All student matters are falling under the responsibility of the Deputy Vice Chancellor and there are formal meetings with these unions. In some cases both vice chancellor and the deputy vice chancellor meet students and then their issues are taken up even at the council level. Unfortunately, university student unions are influenced by the external political parties and students become the hostages of those political parties than addressing their real academic and welfare issues. This has led to develop a gap and mistrust between students and other staff. Student voice is also not democratic due to politicization and not the voice of the majority at present. This is well reflected in the figure 9 as 43% believes that it is deficient while 46% propose to provide some more space as it is already there up to some extent. Only about 10% are of the opinion that prevailing level is sufficient.

Although the students’ feedback on teaching, curriculum revision and quality assurance are officially obtained in the university, about 13% believe that their contribution is not properly represented in the university teaching and improving the quality of academic programmes (Fig 9).

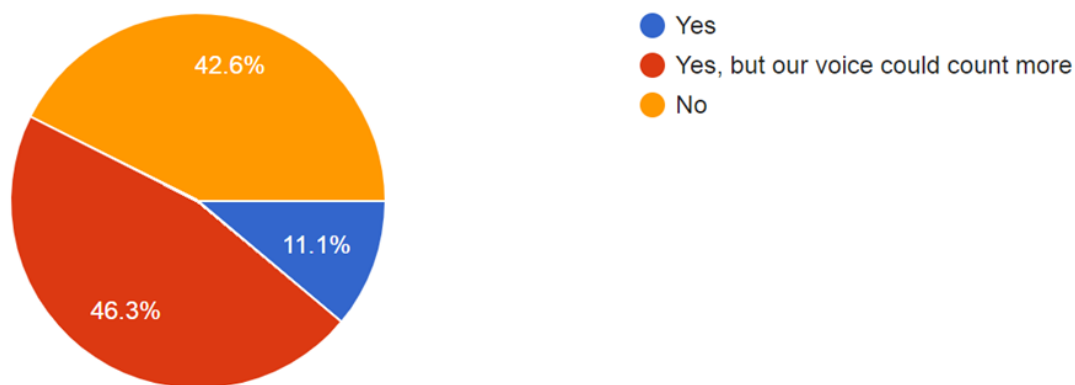


Fig. 9 Satisfaction of student participation on the official decision making bodies of the universities

Satisfaction on student consultation on the quality management of the programs and teaching

Only about 30% believes that it is at a satisfactory level while 33% feels that although the consultation there it not done effectively. About 24% are in the opinion that the student consultation for programme development and quality of teaching are not happening at a regular basis (Fig. 10). Then it is essential to consult students at regular basis for quality of teaching and programme development.

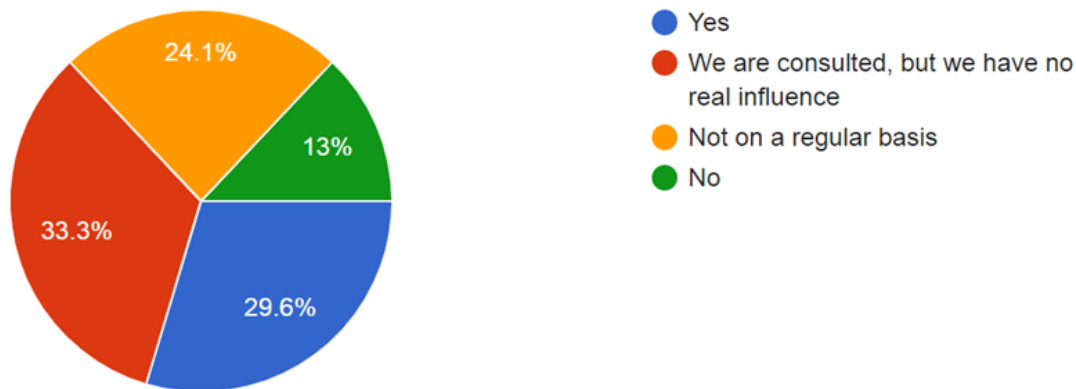


Fig. 10 Student perception on their consultation in student welfare and student services improvement

Student perception on their consultation on the provision of student support services

The provision of student support services, including financial assistance, accommodation, health services and social life including recreation at the university are well developed over the years. However, student consultation and feedback is needed to push their quality to the next level and most of these services are managed by committees/councils which includes students as well. Figure 11 illustrates that only a minor fraction says that they are not consulted while 73% agrees that they are consulted. However, out of 73%, about 30% express that it is not happening in a regular way and need some improvements. Only about 20% feel that although they are being consulted, students are given no proper channels to to intervene in student support services. This indicates that the university needs to pay its attention on this matter although it is satisfactory to some extent.

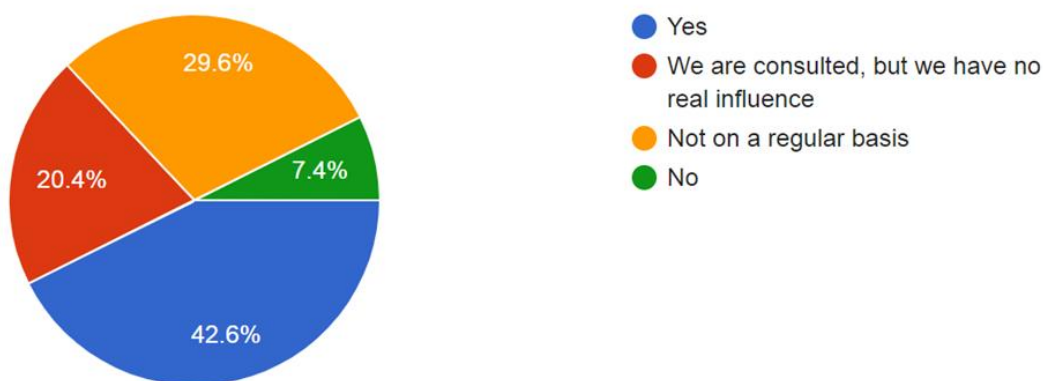


Fig. 11 Satisfaction of students on consultation of them for the provision of student support services at the university

Students view on the strategy of the university to attract and retain talented students

With respect to the role of the university on attracting and retaining talented students, majority (70%) believes that university has attended to it (Fig. 12). Some faculties have special attraction activities targeting school children while the others make different activities to publicize their programmes to the general public. In the university admission criteria students are given the choice to apply for interested degree programme and the desired university. However, university selection by students is not demand driven as the UGC allocate students based on student choice

on available programmes, number of positions available in different universities etc. Although this is at a satisfactory level, activities are needed to maintain the status and further enhance student attraction to the university.

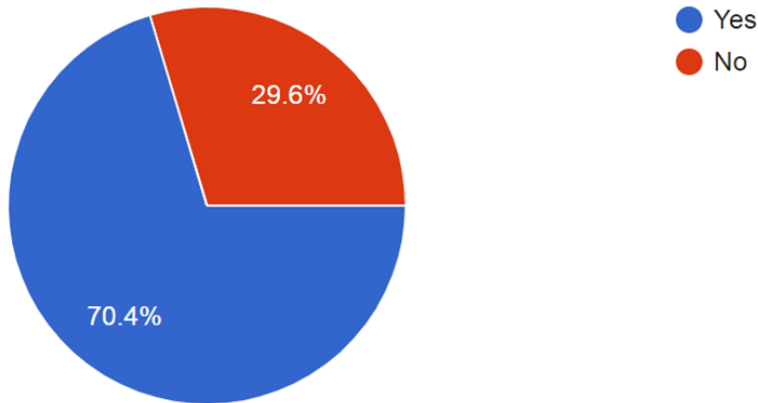


Fig. 12 Student opinion on the university's role on attracting and retaining talented students

Student confidence and preparedness to involve in innovations or research projects

Except a few, vast majority of the students (91%) has the will to engage in innovative research with their faculty staff (Fig. 13). However, 41% has less confidence to start without proper training before getting into research. This is may be due to the students who follow three year degrees without a research component. However, the student commitment is very clear that they are interested and therefore the university can easily initiate and explore this area to become a research university.

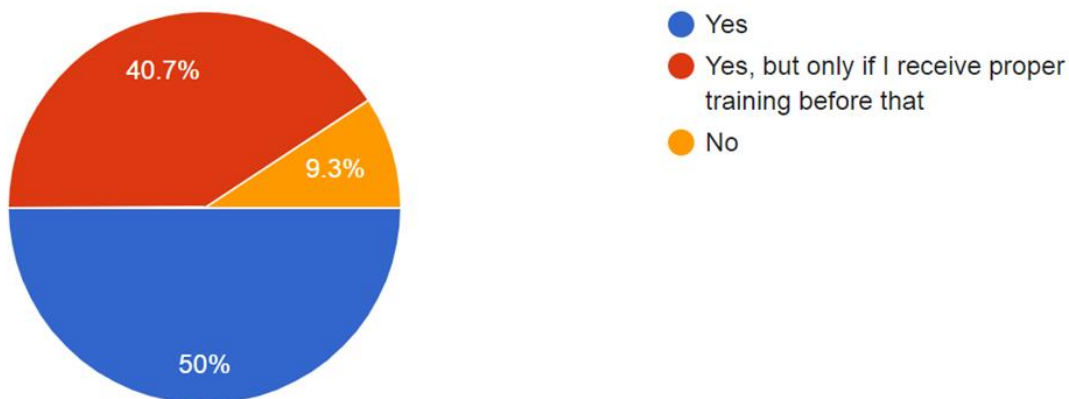
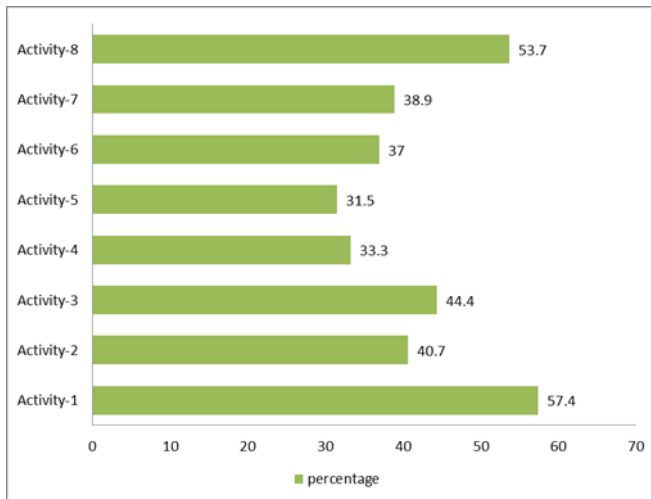


Fig 13 Student confidence and preparedness to be involved in an innovation or research

Student opinion about activities influencing their employability

Students believe that the two main activities which will enhance their employability are internship training (57%) and involvement in community work (54%). Volunteering and, research and innovation are falling into the next important category as proposed by 40%. Other activities are considered to be relatively less effective but have some impact with the belief that it should be a cumulative effect of many activities (Fig 14).



(Activity-1 Internship or training placement in business/industry, Activity-2, Internship or training placement in a non-governmental organization, Activity-3, Research or innovation projects where employers also participate, Activity-4 Job fairs and meetings with potential employers during my studies, Activity-5 Courses and assignments based on case studies and practical tasks, Activity-6 International mobility or periods of study abroad, Activity-7 Volunteering, Activity-8 Involvement in community work while at the university)

Fig 14. Student opinion on activities best serving to improve their employability

In addition to the above activities, students expect additional services such as an effective mechanism to provide them with employment opportunities, better career counseling and career guidance service, redesign of curricular to match with industry expectations, initiation of collaborative industrial research and attraction of more research grants. Some students has a major concern about global university ranking of university of Peradeniya and the depreciation of the rank over time. Although it may not directly influence their employability, there are evidence that some high ranking universities add negative marks in selecting students for their international scholarships. However, the main issue of the attitudes of the students, academics, administrative staff and the behavior of students’ unions and their influence to academics and academic programmes is highlighted. Especially, brainwashing of new students by the student unions and propagation of anti-government and negative attitudes towards their career are of their concern. Therefore, a long term systematic action plan is needed to resolve such social issues.

Views of the academic staff on issues of graduates' employability

Employability issues and vision on mitigating the unemployment issue

At present, faculty members are also not that happy about the university's role on guaranteeing their employability and only 9% is in agreement that it is acceptable. However, it is positive that majority (63%) believes that the university is doing something but to reach the goal, more efforts are needed. In reality this is a true reflection of the scenario. Still 25% are in the opinion that although the university has the policy framework and strategy it is not implemented correctly (Fig 16).

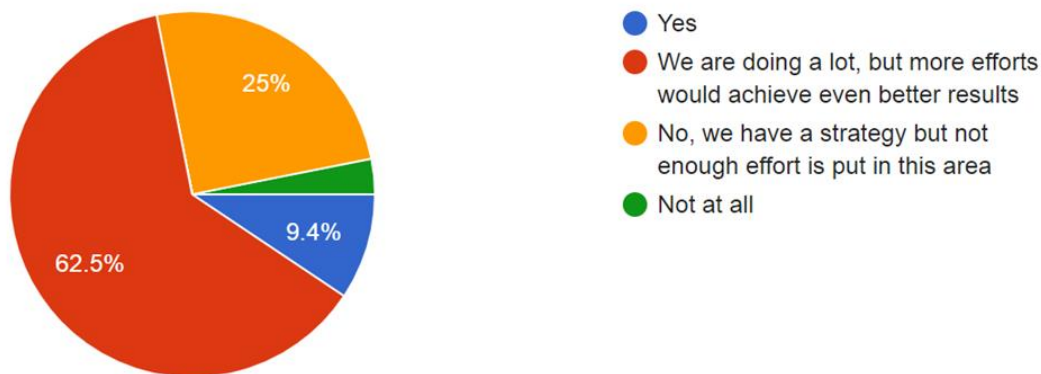


Fig 16 University's role in assuring the employability of graduates through student's eye

Teacher perception about graduate employability and industrial linkages

Only about 7% of faculty members are happy about the current linkages of the university with the employers while 51% think that much better outcome could be achieved by further expansion of the linkages (Fig 17). Still 39% is in the opinion that sufficient efforts are not being made by the university although a strategy is in place. It clearly indicates that the university should expand employer interactions further with the view of improving employability. Almost all (95%) of the teachers are willing to support the university to improve linkages with employers and that should be considered by the university in future planning (Fig. 18). Further, 57% faculty members think that it will not be a significant burden to their regular work while 35% believes that it will effect on their activities as it is an extra workload. Only about 8% are of the opinion that it will not be any burden to them (Fig. 19).

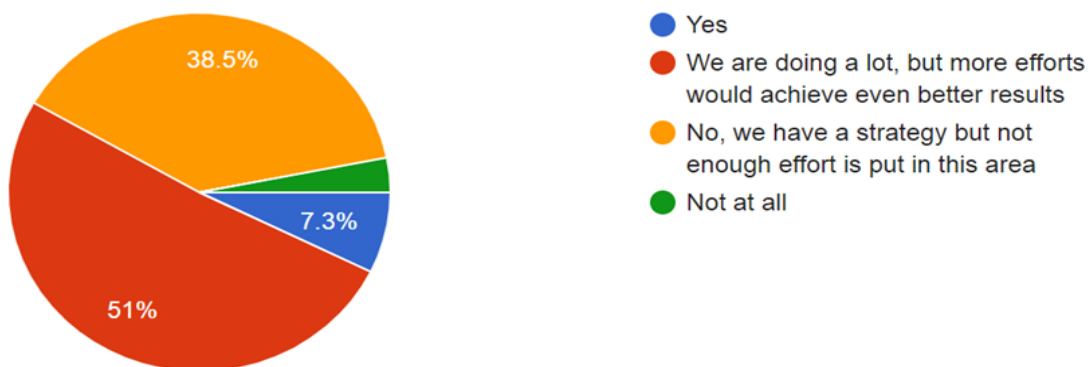


Fig. 17 Maintenance of beneficial links with employers by the university

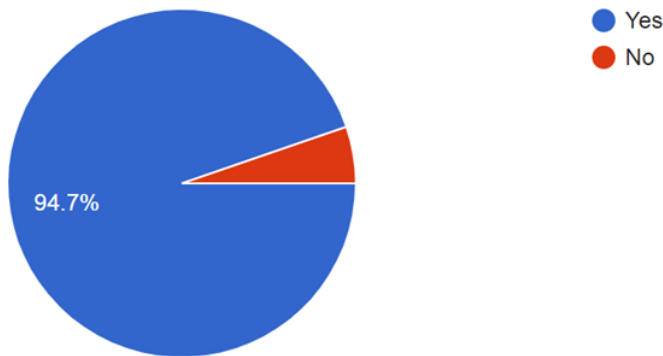


Fig. 18 Student willingness to assist the university efforts to develop the employability of students or create links with employers

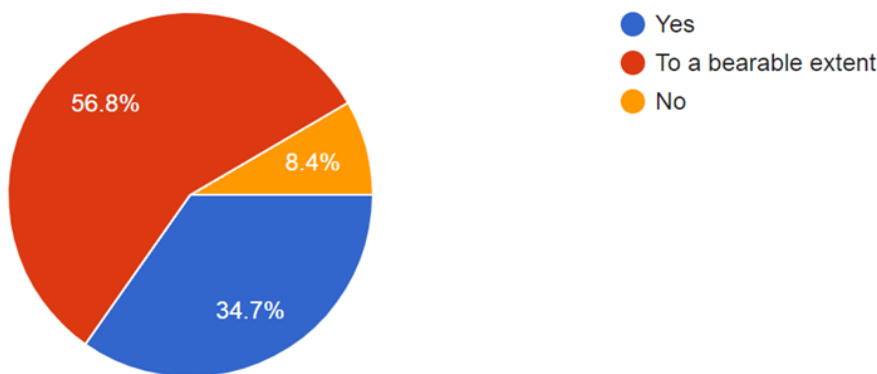


Fig 19 Opinion of students on involvement in activities of improving the employability of students on their workload

Recognition and rewarding of faculty members already involved in improving the employability of students or creating links with employers

There are some faculty members actively involved in activities aimed at improving the employability of students or creating links with employers. In some faculties, they are officially assigned while others are doing voluntarily as a responsibility. The recognition and appreciation by significant others for such members will accelerate the services naturally. Only about 10% of academics think that they are being properly rewarded while 38% express that it is not happening (Fig 20). Opinion of one half (52%) of the respondents is that it is happening in the university to some extent but need a kick-off to enhance the recognition properly. In general, rewarding is very much limited in the public university system although the university quality assurance system is looking into this aspect for a long time.

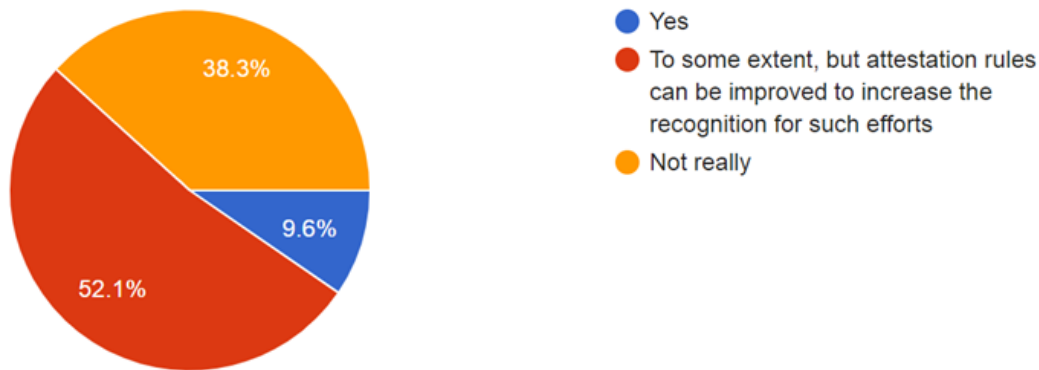


Fig. 20 Students opinion about appreciation of the faculty members who are already engaged in improving the employability of students or creating links with employers

The need of involving employers in the design, delivery and evaluation of courses

About 80% of academics propose that it is better to involve employers for the design (Fig 21), delivery and evaluation of courses for enhanced employability. In fact, this is happening in the university and it is mandatory to consult them in the design part at present. However, the involvement in delivery and evaluation is very much limited due to various practical limitations. It is well reflected in figure 22 that 82% think that it will disrupt the academic process to some extent. Majority of teachers (74%) is of the opinion that it can be accommodated which is a positive sign for readiness to change.

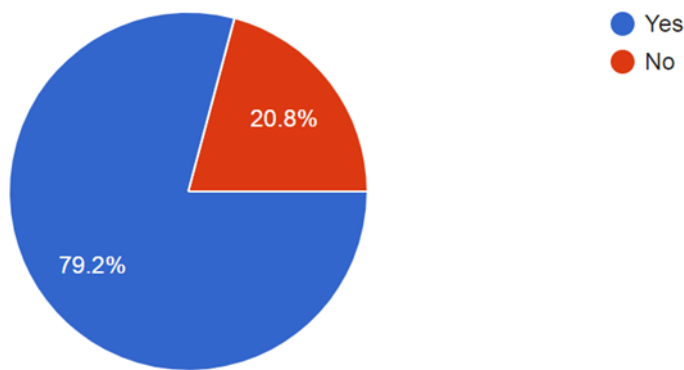


Fig 21 Student view on the involvement of employers in the design, delivery and evaluation of courses

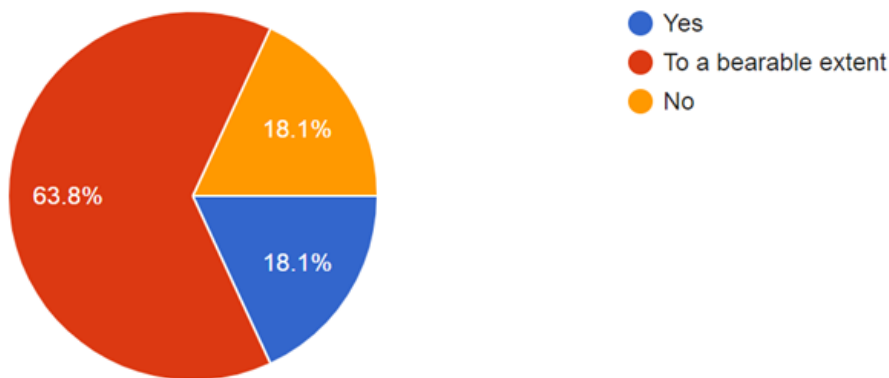


Fig. 22 Views on effect of involving employers in academic activities on disrupting the teaching process

Involvement of external parties on the academic freedom of teachers

The influence of getting involvement of employers on design, delivery and evaluation of academic programme may change the current learning environment to some extent. Involvement of external parties may threaten the academic freedom of teachers concerned could be an issue to foresee. However, according to figure 23, 51% of academics think that it will not affect their academic freedom while 34% are of the opinion that it will be within the bearable limit. Still a small fraction (16%) thinks that it will affect their academic freedom. This indicates that majority of academics are more accommodative and ready for positive changers towards improving employability of their students.

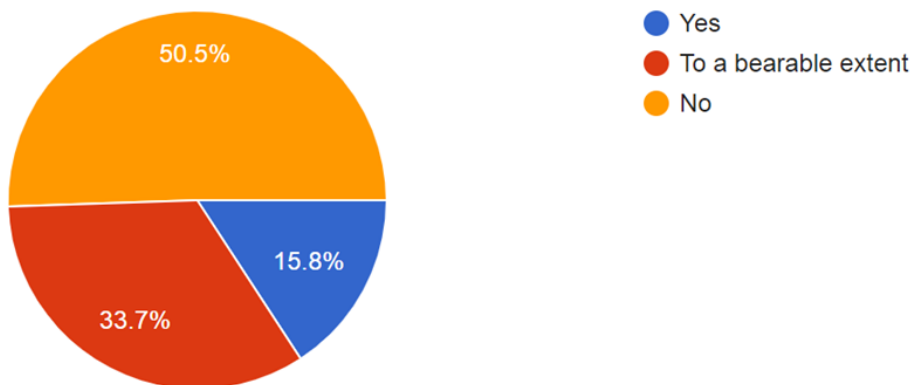


Fig 23 Views on effect of involving employers in academic activities on academic freedom

Responsibility, autonomy and freedom given to students in teaching learning process

The results revealed that giving students more responsibility, autonomy and freedom in teaching by staff is done only by 20% but 57% says that they do it with respect to the university requirements (Fig 24). The balance (23%) does it to a controlled degree. The situation is not very bad but it needs more discussion among the academics on how to change the learning environment into student centred teaching.

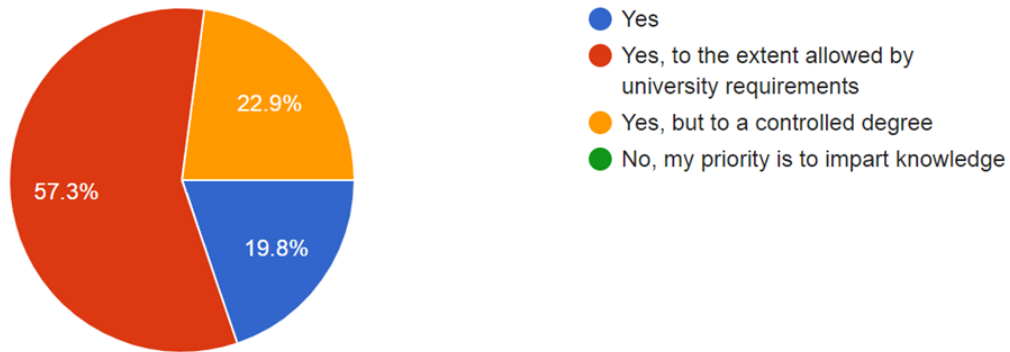


Fig 24 Teachers view on giving students more responsibility, autonomy and freedom in the teaching learning process

How to incorporate innovation and entrepreneurship training into teaching learning process

The results indicate that there are diverse opinions among teachers on offering innovation and entrepreneurship training to students. Majority (33%) propose it as a separate elective course, 24% suggests that it should be embedded into existing curricular as topics (Fig 25). About one quarter (23%) of academics think that they are not the experts to train students in this area while 18% propose separate short-term training on this aspect rather than adding it to formal curriculum. A minor fraction thinks that it is not relevant to their subject stream. Moreover, 92 percent of teachers are willing to accommodate students into their research or innovative projects, along with, employers (Fig 26). This is a really positive sign that change is possible with a little effort.

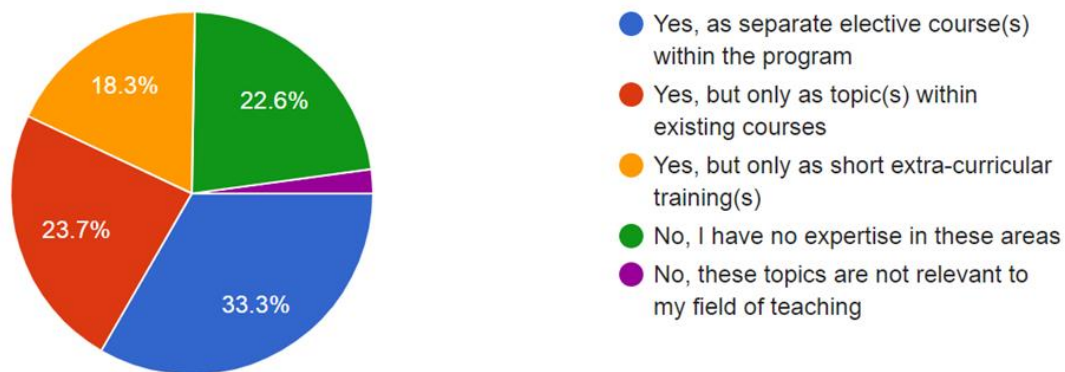


Fig. 25 Willingness of teachers to develop and deliver innovation and entrepreneurship training

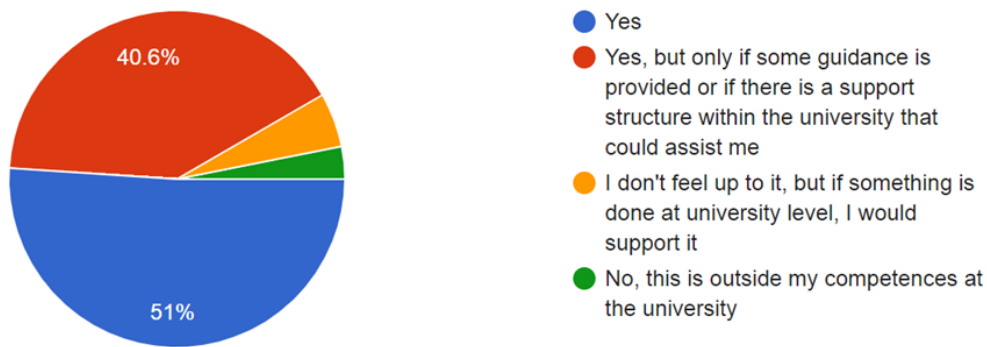


Fig 26 Willingness of teachers to facilitate their students in innovation or research projects jointly with employers

In addition to above findings, based on experience, university teachers view un-employability in different perspectives. Further, they believe that there should be a multidimensional approach to jump over this barrier. Among them, programme planning and curricular play a major role. Majority of them are in agreement that curriculum development should be done by subject experts in consultation with all stakeholders including employers. Some others propose that it is better to validate the degrees offered by University by the industry at some level. Teachers believe that employers in industry are aware of the nature of degree programmes offered by public universities since they may have graduated from these universities. However, they have some concerns that some degree programmes offered by public universities are not aligned with national development plans and economic needs and therefore it leads to unemployment and under employment issues. This is significant and a valid comment because conventional universities are changing very slowly in comparison to demand driven private universities. This may mainly due to the public funding, less challenging jobs of academics and student intake is not demand driven. Therefore, some members propose strong industry University partnerships and gearing our teaching towards the country’s needs should be done immediately.

University teachers strongly believe the fruitfulness of university-industry linkage on improving the employability of students. This gives an opportunity for students to get involved with the real world problems and acquire the work place skills. This networking will also expand the employment opportunities of students indirectly. However major limitation of employability through industry-university partnership is poor growth rate of industries and lack of innovative industries in Sri Lanka. Hence some teachers believe that the involvement of employers in curriculum development and teaching could bring limited success in employment generation and reducing graduate un-employment. At the same time some academics think that involving employers is highly beneficial for programmes like applied sciences than pure sciences Mathematics, Physics, etc. As teachers, they are ready to invent new avenues for such subject areas as well. Unfortunately, some academics believe that involvement of employers in teaching will work only to a limited extent.

Free education system in Sri Lanka has both positive as well as negative impacts towards the economy. We have to assess the returns for the investment of public funds on training graduates. Since selection of subject streams is based upon Z-score, students’ willingness to select prestigious programmes is unavoidable. Un-employability remains with lowly placed subject streams such as social sciences and pure sciences. Hence some believes in overhaul (complete change) of free education system in Sri Lanka. The term ‘free’ in education system may have interpreted wrongly and students may believe the responsibility of providing employment is a

responsibility of respective government. Therefore, students' responsibility of enhancing skills to be selected for a job has largely been ignored. Moreover, unlike undergraduates in developed countries, majority of Sri Lankan student may not have career plans as they get admission to the university. Once students passed out only they think about getting into the existing job market. They have not have done a SWOT analysis and improve skills needed while in the university. This situation may not give desired results for efforts made by the University to improve employability.

Selection of degree programme is based on the Z-score of the advanced level examination and there is a huge social influence from the society towards the subject stream ie. Some of them are prestigious while the others are not. Therefore, admission has an external influence on top of the preference of the student. Due to this nature, one school of thought is that that there should be a complete change in the whole education system in Sri Lanka. Due to the "free" nature of everything, students' willingness and enthusiasm in participation in developing employability skills is not attractive at present although the services are available. They prefer to take safe and easier paths than challenging themselves to think differently and develop their career. We need to change this mindset and develop personality attributes and positive attitudes among the students. Due to this reason, there is a significant dialogue in the private and public sector that graduates are not capable enough or competitive enough with skills to work in those challenging external environments.

On top of these major issues, a few teachers believe that we should think beyond addressing the whims and fancies of employers, as they are trying to exploit universities. As a publicly funded institution our role is to address tough questions that may not necessarily be in the best interests of corporations. We cannot become their handmaidens. But that is where we are headed. They also believe that graduates are having problems with employment because they enter an economy that is weak. Employers have poor hiring practices. Discrimination in various aspects are also taking place in recruitments (e.g., gender, school, parents' livelihood etc.). Further, this minor fraction of teachers thinks that problems in employability mainly lie on the unorganized political and institutional structures in Sri Lanka. They wait until this social system to change for them to change the attitudes and improve the employability skills of the graduates to match the employers. There are some academics with such negative attitudes at present and they have a secure job and not challenging due to the government employment policy.

