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FINAL 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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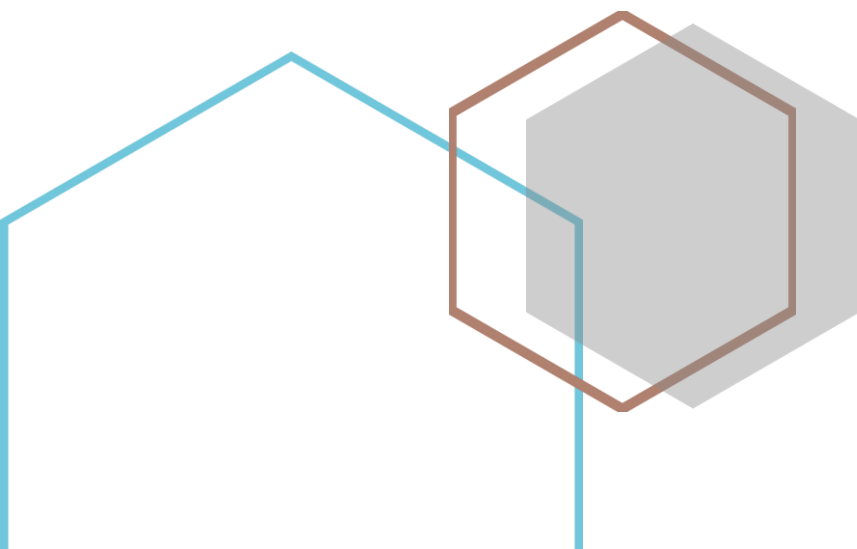




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Each INNOTAL Partner University in Asia has carried out a final survey campaign aimed at mapping the perceptions of key University stakeholders on issues of relevance to the project. The survey has also aimed at analysing the perceived impact of the project at the institution and making conclusions about sustainability actions.

The survey has reached students, faculty members and representatives of University Management and Administration.

This document presents and analyses the results from this survey.

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Co-funded by the
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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Introduction

University of Peradeniya, the first residential university in Sri Lanka, started in 1954 to provide highly skilled professionals to fill the void created exodus of trained British professionals. This void was filled within several years, since the country’s economy was not expanded to absorb the graduates from other sister universities. These sister universities also adopted the same curriculum, as the majority of teachers in these universities are also former graduates of the Peradeniya University and followed its traditions. Producing graduates from a system of similar curriculum from several universities may produce influx of graduates with limited job opportunities in a small economy of around USD 85 billion (2020).

Under the purview of the UGC, the strategy adopted to solve the problem of unemployment in some disciplines (e.g., the Arts) was to create a Career Guidance Unit in each university. The Career Guidance Unit of Peradeniya University had to adopt strategies suggested by the standing committee of the UGC, which was in turn bounded by government policies. The government policy was based on the outcomes of negotiations with the private sector to ease the graduate unemployment problem. The private sector, in turn, forwarded their demands for skills they needed. This created a conflict of interests between universities and the private sector. Subjects taught, skills developed, and the languages taught in universities failed to attract the private sector. Then the higher education authorities attempted to meet the demand for subjects and skills by introducing various new subjects and skills to be taught at the Universities.

The Baseline survey of 2012 (Table 1.1) shows result of the attempts made by higher education authorities to assess the employability situation of graduates, and Table 1.s shows the result of the tracer study of graduates in Sri Lanka in 2018 by the UGC, conducted after six years of interventions to improve the situation.

Table 1.1. Baseline Employability Survey, 2012

(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326914393_Graduand_Employment_Census_2012_2013)

Faculty	Employed %	Under employed %	Unemployed %
Agriculture	73.3	6.3	20.5
Allied Health Sciences	61.3	3.0	35.7
Arts	18.1	14.2	67.2
Dental Sciences	92.9	5.7	1.4
Engineering	92.7	2.8	4.6
Medicine	93.5	2.7	3.2
Science	55.7	8.9	34.6
Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science	36.8	22.8	40.4
All	53.6	8.9	37.2

Table 1.2 Employment status in some faculties of University of Peradeniya in 2018 (<https://www.ugc.ac.lk/downloads/statistics/webTracer/2018/Tracer%20Study%202018.pdf>).



Faculty	Employed %	Volunteers %	Unemployed %
Arts	35.5	-	64.5
Management	60.0	-	40.0
Science	62.2	2.7	53.1
Engineering	95.5	-	4.5
Agriculture	94.1	-	5.9

According to the Baseline Survey (2012), dental, medicine, and engineering graduates' employability rate are above ninety%, while graduates of arts and sciences disciplines were 18 and 55%, respectively. Low employability may reflect the effectiveness of a programme. The high employability of medicine and dental graduates, however, does not reflect the effectiveness of improved curriculum and introduction of new subjects and new skills. The government absorbs all medicine and dental graduates and the employability of engineering graduates may reflect the demand for engineers in the private sector and the government sector. Finally, low employability in Arts and Sciences in 2012 shows the inadequacy of the measures taken by university authorities thus far. The 2018 survey reveals that there are some improvements in Agriculture, Arts and Science streams due to various interventions taken by the University. However, employability in the Arts stream is still not satisfactory and needs effective interventions to increase the employability.

To improve graduates' employability or meet the demands of the job market, the International Relations Office (InRO) of Peradeniya University launched a project 'Integrating Talent Development into Innovation Ecosystems in Higher Education' or (INNOTAL). The INNOTAL project aimed at identifying lapses in employability of graduates through sharing experience in a consortium of 14 universities in Asia and the EU region. The primary tools promoted by INNOTAL are training, coaching/mentoring, innovation, industry networking offered in collaboration with the private, public and non-profit sectors. Private sector involvement is important for this process for several reasons: identifying skills and knowledge needed for the private sector, sharing knowledge, collaborative live innovation projects and identifying job opportunities. We conducted the final stakeholder survey to gauge the (perceived) impact the project activities have had at the university.

The report consists of three parts: Part I provides background and introduction. Part II provides methodology. Survey findings are presented in Part III. The survey findings have three sections: section I consists of responses of Management and Administration personnel, while Section II discusses the responses of students. Responses related to curricula development are given in section III.



Methodology

This survey was conducted online, using a common set of question for all partner universities. The project has circulated the Google link for the questionnaire. There were 177 respondents from University of Peradeniya representing the main four categories of stakeholders in the university, as shown in the Figure 1 below. Faculty members and students represented 98% of the sample, as they represent a larger share of the internal population. Management and administrative staff represented the other 3%.

Your position at the University:

177 responses

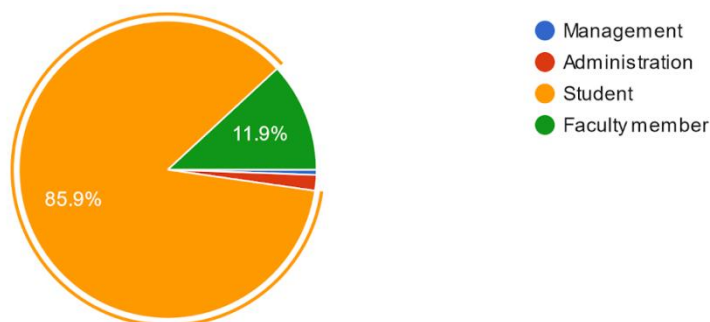


Fig.1. Categories of respondents for the survey

The questionnaire consisted of 50 questions. 16 questions were posed to management and administration. 18 questions were sent for response to the students and 16 questions were directed at the faculty members. The responses were recorded in Google forms and graphical presentation in the form of pie charts was provided by the Google form itself.

Survey findings

Survey findings according to responses of management personnel, students, and faculty members were reported on the themes given below:

A. Management/Administration responses on the effects of INNOTAL project on:

- Awareness about global trends and best practices
- Identifying strengths and weaknesses of project's strategy on promoting graduate-employability and talents
- Design, delivery, and evaluation of new study programmes
- New approach to students' engagement in research and innovation
- University's strategy on improving graduate employability
- University's strategy on promoting student-centered teaching and learning
- Future strategies on promoting graduate employability and university-business cooperation.

B. Students' responses on:

- Usefulness of INNOTAL project and Talent Co-creation Lab on promoting employability and talent
- Opinion for participating in extracurricular activities with industry and public sector
- Building confidence in engaging in innovation and research projects
- Usefulness in engaging in voluntary and community work to enhance skills and employability

C. Faculty members' responses on

- Awareness and willingness to cooperate with external stakeholders to enhance student talents
- Motivation and willingness of the faculty members to promote and practice the learning approaches promoted by the Project
- Faculty members; support on embedding the project's strategy into curriculum, research and evaluation
- Faculty members' willingness to offer innovation and entrepreneurship programs in future.

Responses from Management and Administrative Personnel

▪ Awareness of global trends and best practices

The majority of the respondents (66.7%) agreed that the INNOTAL project has improved the awareness on global trends and best practices (Fig. 2). This is essential for any institute aiming to improve the employability of their students in an ever changing dynamic world. This is even more important for a small economy of about USD 85 billion. No negative responses were voiced.

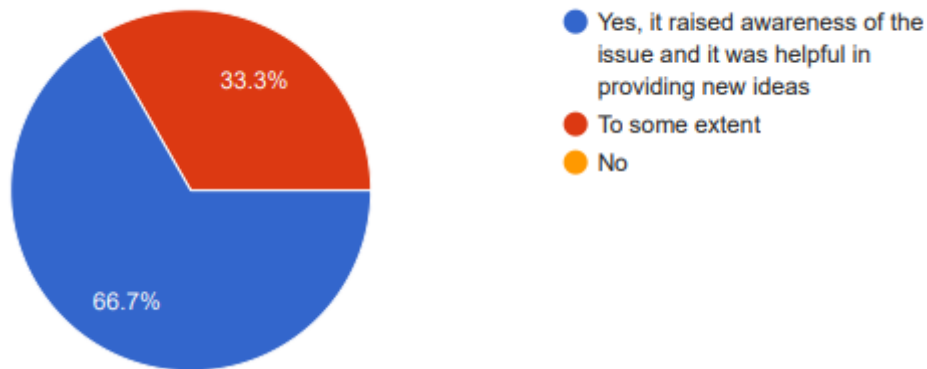


Fig. 2. Did INNOTAL increase the awareness of global trends and best practices?

▪ Identifying weaknesses in the University strategy on promoting graduate-employability and talents

The major strategy of the INNOTAL Project is to promote more intensive cooperation with external stakeholders with the direct participation of students. It has therefore been necessary to identify strengths and weaknesses of the stakeholder relations strategy of the University and to improve it. With too few answers, this is hardly a representative sample, but it is notable that 1 respondent did not see any impact of the project on identifying the weaknesses of the strategy at University of Peradeniya. It is unclear if the opinion is a direct criticism of the project, or a more general lack of confidence in the ability of the University to innovate in this area.

Has the INNOTAL project made our University more aware of any weaknesses in our cooperation with business and in our efforts to promote students' employability?

4 responses

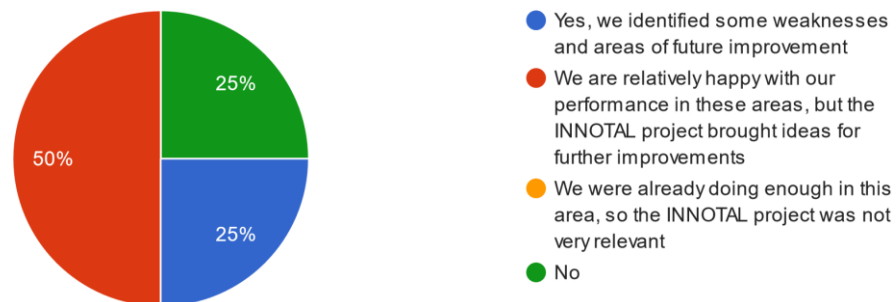
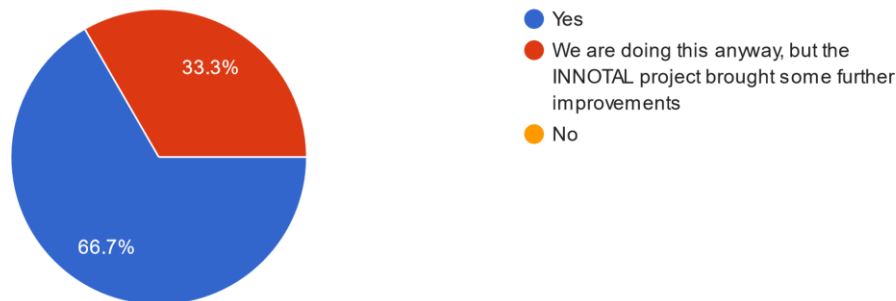


Fig.3. Identifying strengths and weaknesses of the University's employability strategy



Has the INNOTAL project helped our University better understand and monitor the external conditions in the economy and society that may affect the employability of our graduates?
3 responses



▪ **Design, delivery, and evaluation of new study programmes**

The majority of the respondents (67%) agreed to some extent and 33.3% fully agreed upon project success in raising awareness within the University of the benefits of cooperating with external stakeholders in the design and delivery of education and in the development of students' talents (Fig. 3). The low visibility of the result should be further investigated. It might be due to the fact that the most important project activities happened fully online and there was no way of engaging with stakeholder face to face.

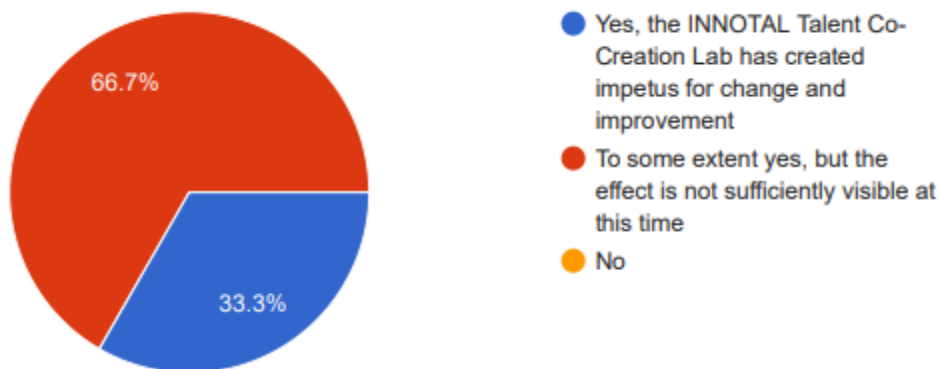


Fig. 3. Project's contribution to a strategy in favour of introducing new study programme with the support of the external stakeholders

▪ **New approach to students' engagement in research and innovation**

The positive opinion is evenly distributed between fully agreed and agreed to some extent on project's success in creating a change-maker coalition at the University, in promoting more student engagement in research and innovation increasing student exposure to the economy and society (Fig 4)

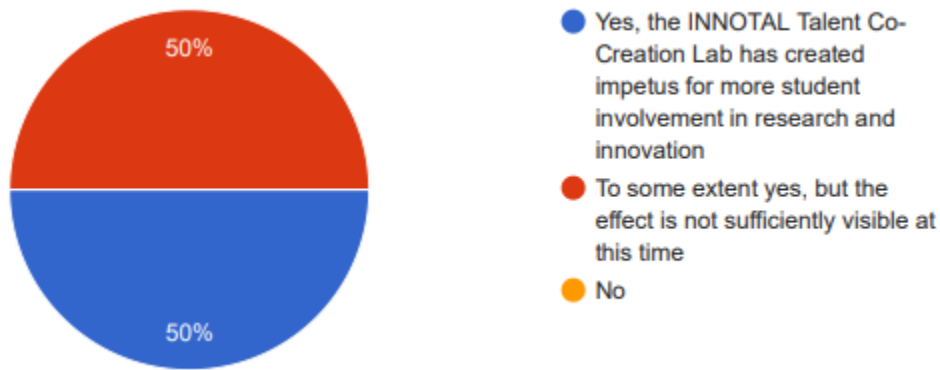


Fig. 4. INNOTAL impact on efforts to promote more student engagement in research and innovation

▪ **Opinion on Talent Co-Creation Lab and external stakeholder involvement**

Management and administrative staff fully support the Talent Co-creation Lab and external stakeholder involvement in the design, delivery and evaluation of study programs/courses and in the development of students' talent (Fig. 5). There has been a positive impact on introducing new study programmes and courses which is essential for a dynamic progression.

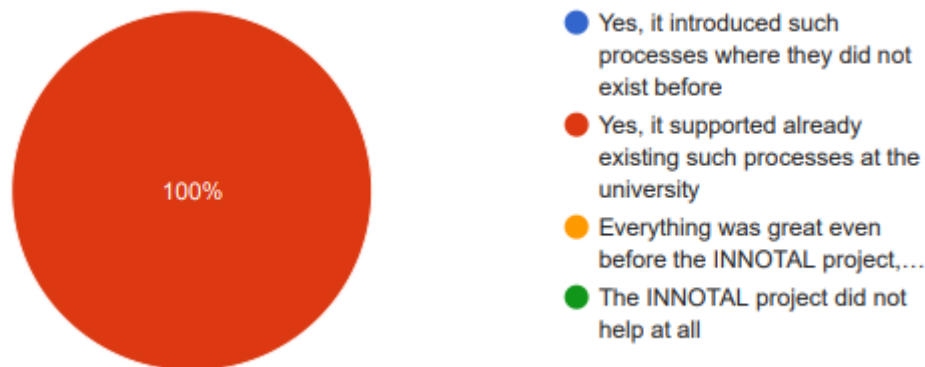


Fig. 5. Project's contribution towards the introduction of new study programmes and courses

The administrative staff was also asked about the impact of the INNOTAL project activities on improving internal institutional dialogue and making institutional culture more in favour of stronger university engagement with external organizations. They were satisfied to a limited extent. The main reason was the limited opportunities of engaging most of the administrative staff in the project activities due to the unexpected university and country closures (Fig. 6).

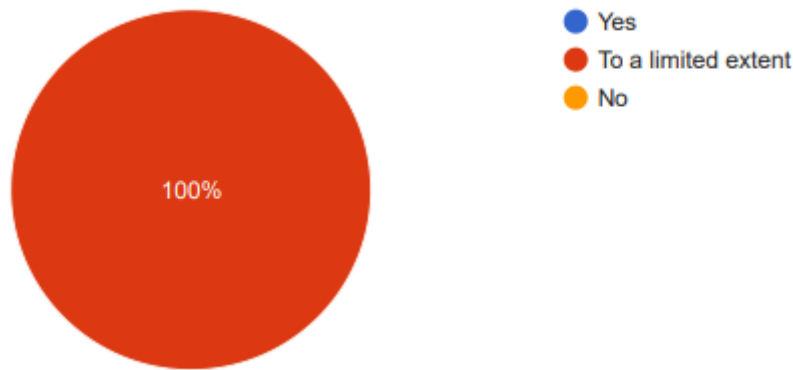


Fig. 6 Impact of the INNOTAL project on creating an institutional culture of stronger University engagement with external organizations

▪ **Influence of the project on current management and administrative positions**

All management and administrative personnel agreed upon the INNOTAL project’s contribution to a practical and concrete University strategy and action plan for the promotion of graduates’ employability and links with the business community (Fig. 7). The project is believed to have enhanced the existing strategy.

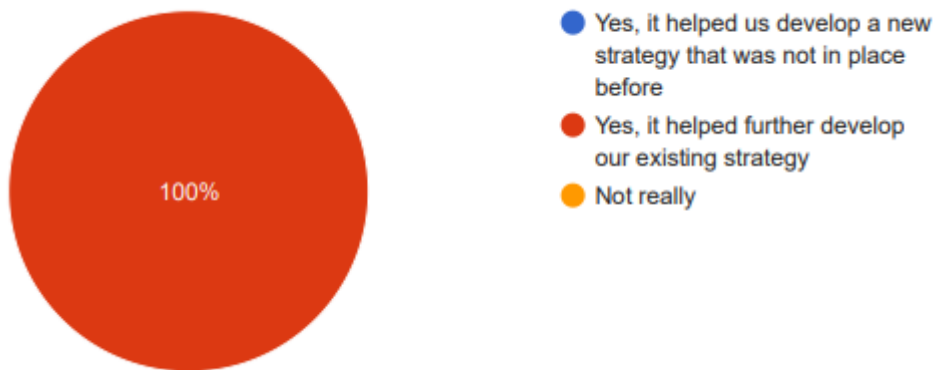


Fig. 7. Project’s contribution towards developing a practical strategy to improve graduates’ employability

Although the administrative and financial management staff did not participate much in academic planning and development activities at the university, they all believe that the INNOTAL project and the strategy it developed will positively influence them and their jobs (Fig. 8). Therefore, it is important to get the cooperation of the management to sustain and further develop the project strategy successfully in future. The majority of the respondents (67%) have also expressed their willingness to promote student participation in research and innovation activities with external stakeholders (Fig. 9)

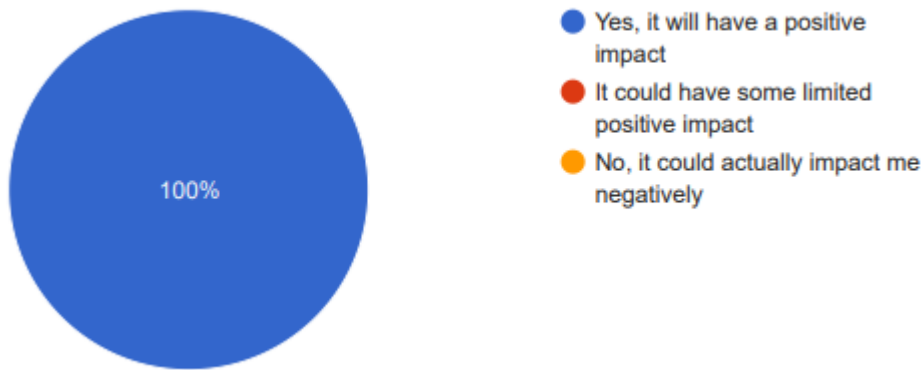


Fig. 8 Impact of INNOTAL strategy on administrative staff and their jobs

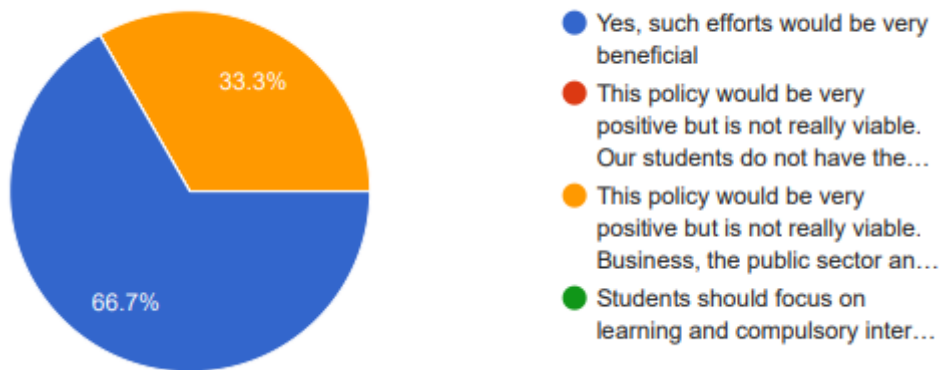


Fig. 9 Willingness to promote student research and innovation with external stakeholders

- **Future strategies for promoting graduates’ employability and university-business cooperation.**

All respondents agreed upon the contribution made by the INNOTAL project on promotion and the acceptance of a more student-centred approach to teaching and learning at our University (Fig. 10)

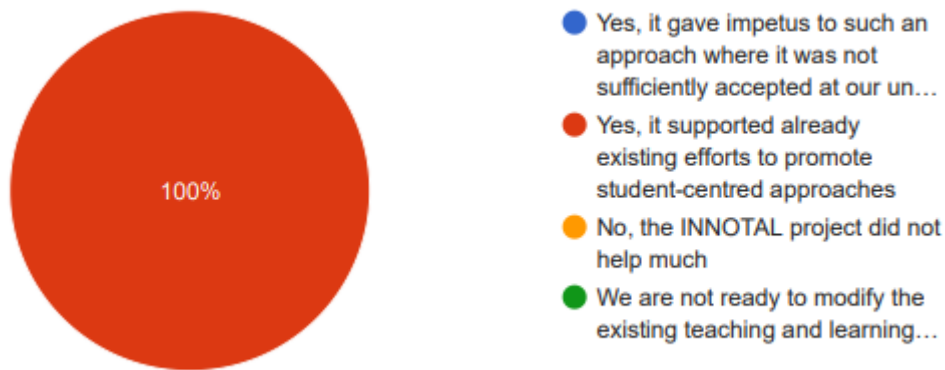


Fig. 10. Project support for promotion of student-centered teaching and learning

67% of the respondents fully agreed, while the rest somewhat agreed to extend support to the INNOTAL project’s proposed strategy to embed employability across all institutional activities (curriculum, teaching, research & innovation) (Fig. 11).

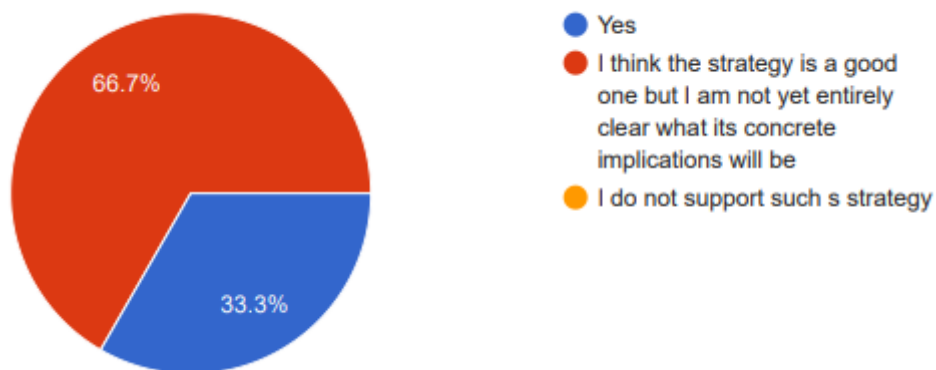


Fig. 11. Embedding the project strategy across curriculum development, teaching and research

Responses from Students

The students' responses were summarized under four main themes: students' perception on the INNOTAL project and the Talent Co-Creation Lab, opportunities provided by the INNOTAL Project, students' confidence for participating in innovation and research and students' view on volunteering and community work.

▪ Students' perceptions of the INNOTAL project and the Talent Co-Creation Lab

Almost all the students agreed on the usefulness of the INNOTAL project and the Talent Co-Creation Lab (Fig. 12). A great majority of the students agreed that useful opportunities for them were provided by the INNOTAL Talent Co-Creation Lab (Fig. 13). This acceptance may enhance more student involvement in the project in the future, once the university activities become normal.

Do you think the INNOTAL project and the Talent Co-Creation Lab have been important and useful initiatives for students at this university?

151 responses

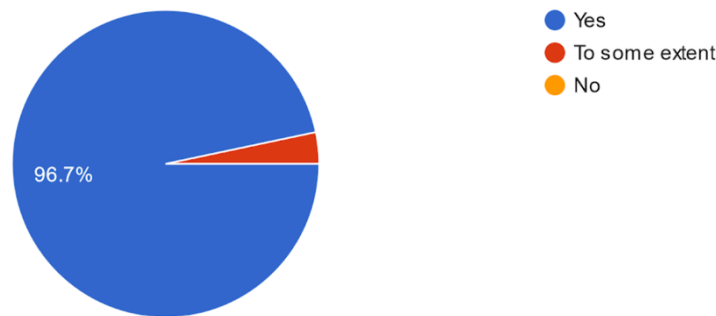


Fig 12. Students' perception about INNOTAL Project and the Talent Co-Creation Lab

Do you think that the INNOTAL Talent Co-creation Lab can be useful for you?

148 responses

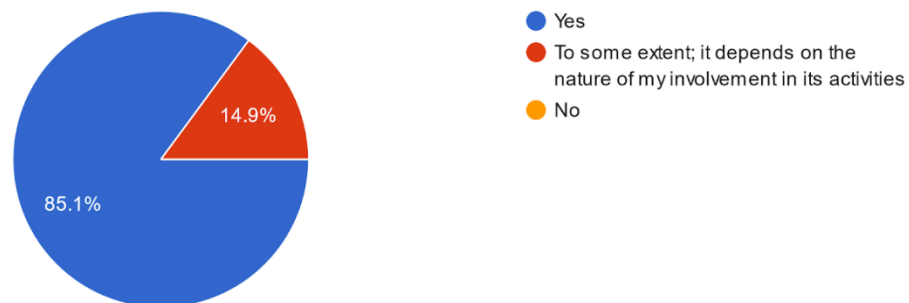


Fig. 13 Perceived usefulness of INNOTAL Talent Lab for students

▪ **Opportunities provided by the INNOTAL Project**

79% of the students have received an opportunity to improve their employability or learning activities, while 8% have received such opportunity to some extent (Fig. 14).

Did the INNOTAL project and the Talent Co-Creation Lab give you an opportunity to improve your employability or learning?

150 responses

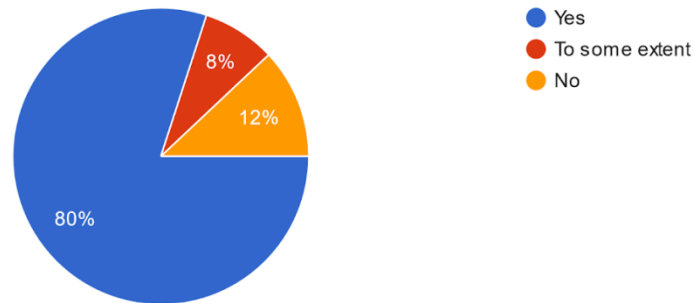


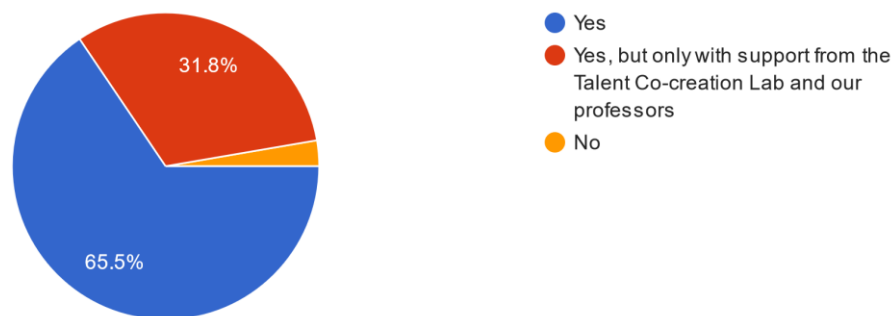
Fig. 14. Opportunities provided by the INNOTAL Project for students

▪ **Students' confidence to participate in innovation and research**

Nearly 97% of the students built their confidence and prepared to become involved in an innovation or research project. This preparedness is a great encouragement for the project team to strengthen its activities and reach more students (Fig. 15).

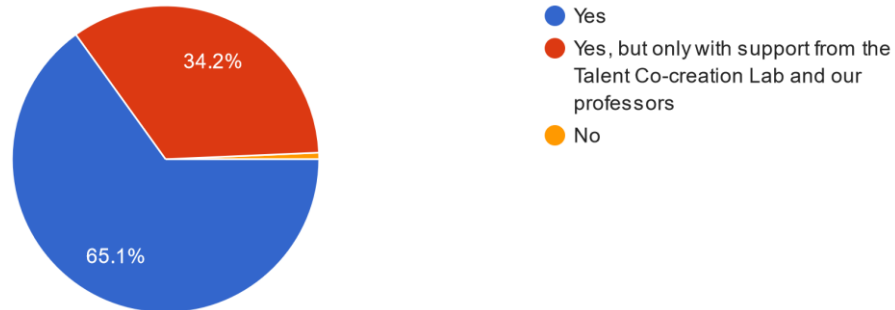
Do you feel confident and prepared to become involved in an innovation or research project?

148 responses



Do you feel confident and prepared to accept challenging tasks related to research and innovation projects proposed by employer organizations?

146 responses



Did INNOTAL project activities make you more confident and prepared to cooperate with employers and to accept challenging tasks related to research and innovation projects?

144 responses

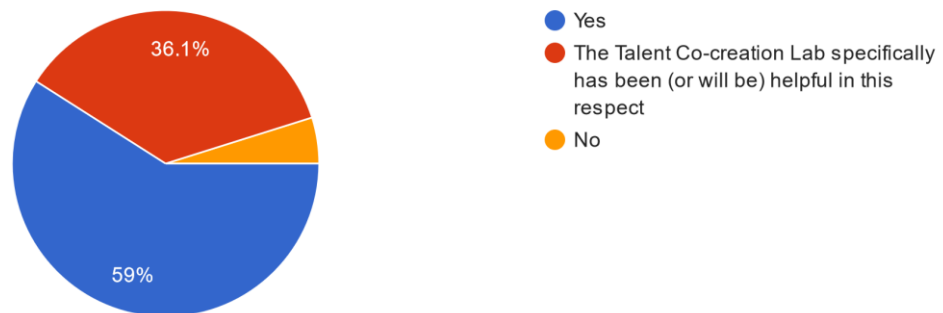


Fig. 15. Students' confidence to participate in innovation and research

▪ **Students' view on volunteering and community work**

The majority of students (91%) believe that volunteering and community work could improve their skills and employability while 8% are on the opinion that it will influence them only to a certain extent. Although volunteering is not widely regarded as skill training activity in the Sri Lankan university system, 75% of the students wish to participate in it (Fig. 17). This is a very important fact for future skill training activities.

Do you think that volunteering and community work could improve your skills and employability?
149 responses

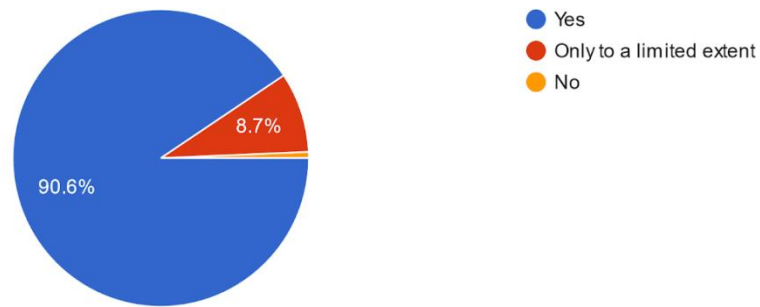


Fig. 16 Students' view on the effect of volunteering and community work on skills and employability

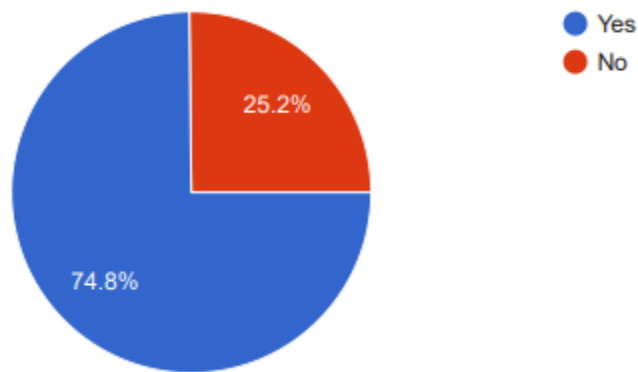


Fig. 17 Willingness of students to participate in volunteering activities

Responses from Faculty Members

- **Awareness and willingness to cooperate with the external stakeholders to enhance student talent**

84% of the respondents agreed that the project has positively impacted, raised awareness and increased the understanding about the University’s cooperation with the external stakeholders in the development of student talent and in the design and delivery of education.

Do you think the INNOTAL project raised awareness and increased the understanding and the willingness of the University to cooperate with ext...talent and in the design and delivery of education?

19 responses

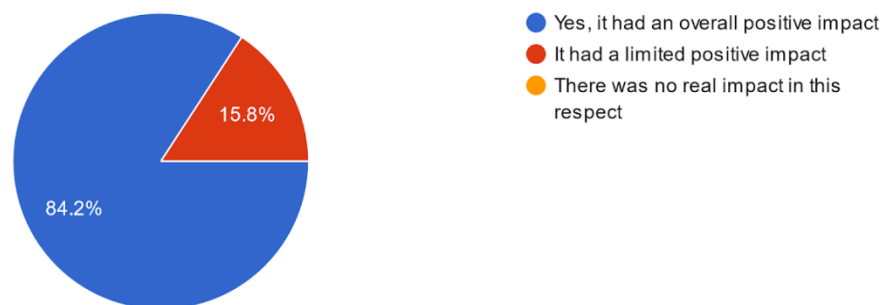


Fig. 18 Awareness and willingness to cooperate with the external stakeholders to enhance student talent

- **Influence of external stakeholders on design, delivery and evaluation of study programmes and courses**

70% agreed that external stakeholder involvement has enhanced the design, delivery and evaluation of study programmes and courses. 30% agreed but cautioned about rules and regulation about external party involvement at present (Fig. 19).

Do you yourself think that involving external stakeholders more actively in the design, delivery and evaluation of study programs and courses or in the...ent talent would be beneficial for your students?

20 responses

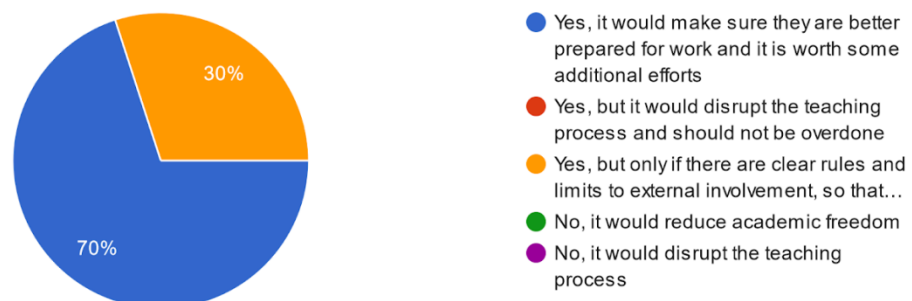


Fig. 19. Influence of external stakeholders on the design, delivery and evaluation of study programmes

▪ **Motivation and willingness of the faculty members to sustain the outcomes of the Project**

63% of the respondents fully agreed, while rest agreed “to some extent” that the INNOTAL project events or results increase their motivation, willingness or ability to contribute to the University’s employability strategy.

Did the INNOTAL project events or results increase your motivation, willingness or ability to contribute to the University’s employability strategy?

19 responses

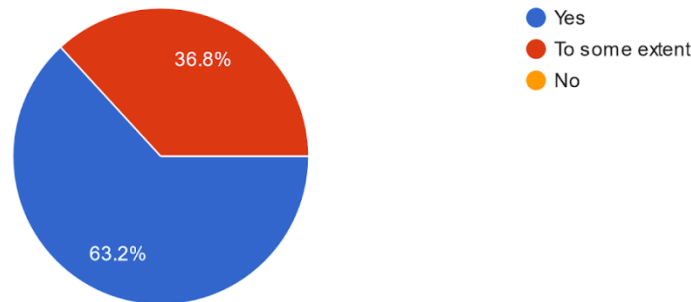


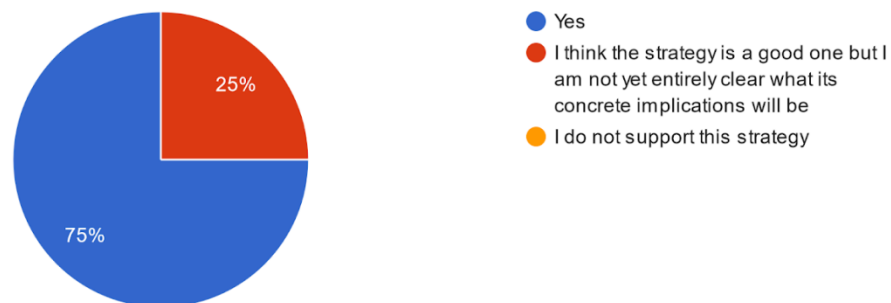
Fig. 20 Motivation and willingness of the faculty members to sustain the outcomes of the Project

▪ **Faculty members support for embedding the project’s strategy into the curriculum, research and evaluation**

75% of the faculty members support the INNOTAL project’s proposed strategy to enhance employability across all institutional activities (i.e. curriculum, teaching, research & innovation), while 25% still needs some clarification on the strategy impact and implications (Fig. 21).

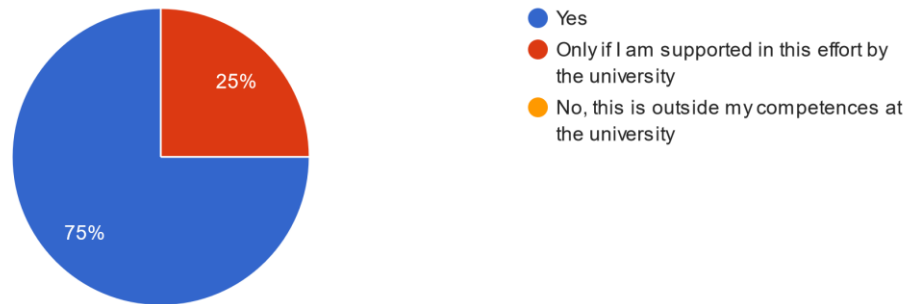
Do you support the INNOTAL project’s proposed strategy to embed employability across all institutional activities (curriculum, teaching, research & innovation)?

20 responses



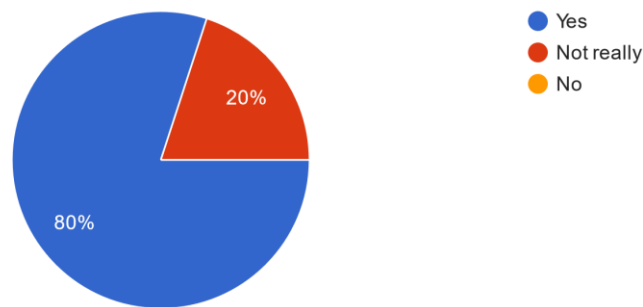
Would you be willing to organize and facilitate the involvement of your students in live innovation projects and in other forms of collaboration with external stakeholders?

20 responses



Did the INNOTAL project activities and the Talent Co-Creation Lab make you more motivated and prepared to involve students in live innovation projects and other forms of collaboration with external stakeholders?

20 responses



Do you think the results of the INNOTAL project, and in particular the Talent Co-Creation Lab, would strengthen student employability and innovation and help students get better exposure to external stakeholders?

20 responses

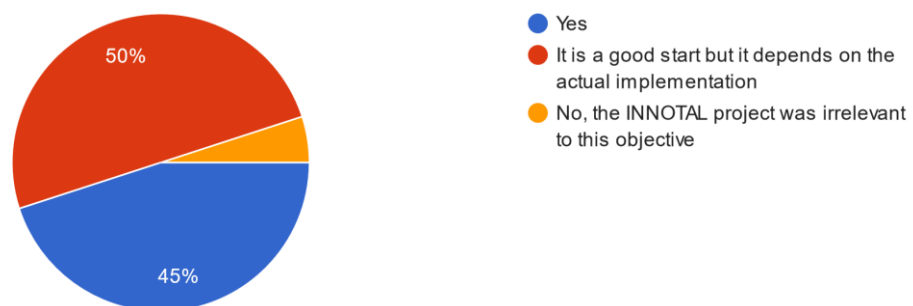


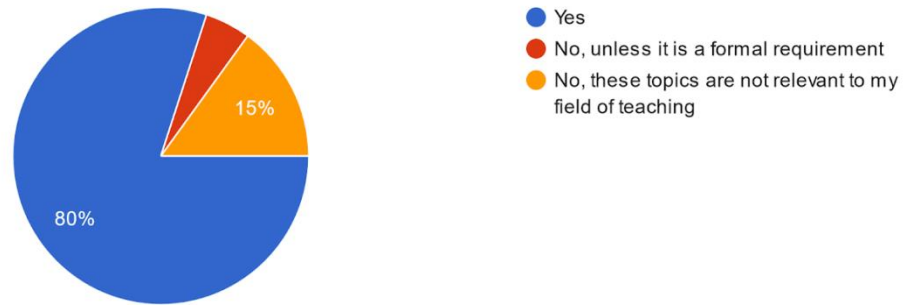
Fig. 21. Faculty members support for embedding the project’s strategy into the curriculum, research and evaluation

- **Faculty members’ willingness to offer innovation and entrepreneurship programmes in the future**



80% of the faculty members agree to offer future innovation and entrepreneurship training programmes. 15% (not surprisingly) rejected the idea stating that the topic was irrelevant to their area of work, while 5% stated they would not offer it unless it becomes a formal requirement (Fig. 22).

Would you be willing to design and deliver innovation and entrepreneurship training in the future?
20 responses



Will the results of the INNOTAL project help you design and deliver innovation and entrepreneurship training in the future?

19 responses

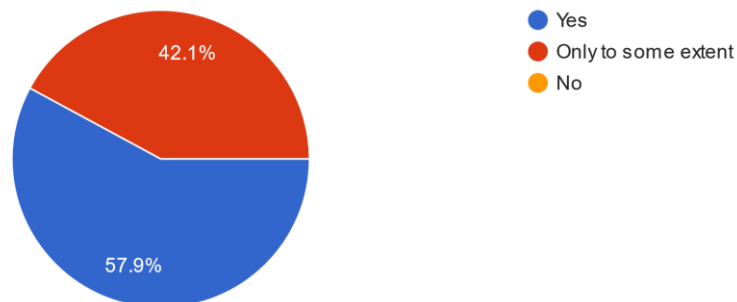


Fig. 22. Faculty members' willingness to offer innovation and entrepreneurship programmes in the future

Conclusions

The major findings of the survey were given in the previous sections. The rest of the findings fall in line with the major findings. The project strategy on enhancing graduates' employability is a tripartite one, involving university, external stakeholders, and students. Management and administrative personnel, students and faculty members are in agreement that the INNOTAL project has created a positive impact on graduates' employability. Since the survey has not covered the external stakeholders, their agreement cannot be predicted. However, support for the Talent Co-creation Lab by the industry shows their willingness to cooperate in the activities.

External stakeholders' involvement is mandatory to resolve the graduates' unemployment problem since government will not be able to provide job opportunities for all the graduates of the fifteen public universities in the country. Also, the public sector of the country has not been updated to adopt modern technologies and expand the industry sector to create gainful employment. Most of the public policies are aimed at providing graduate employment through creating graduate employment schemes at the cost of public funds. As a result, government expenditure increases, without substantial economic return and graduates become unproductive as well.

Hence the higher educational institutes need to collaborate with the industrial sector to create gainful employment while helping industry to add profit for each recruited student. The university's contribution to expand industry by research and development initiatives, as well as by creating appropriate new talents and innovations, is imperative. When implemented at the University, the INNOTAL approach of exposing students directly to industry demands while still studying, can create job opportunities but also help industry to expand. Awareness of the current local trends as well as the global trends and changes is of great importance. According to the responses, all three stakeholder parties agreed on the Project's role in raising awareness.

Awareness about global and local trends and changes can only have a positive impact if there is a strong strategy. The project strategy in this respect is to direct the students to industry-related extracurricular activities and community work and volunteering. According to this survey results, student responses are overwhelmingly positive. This implies that the students have understood the project strategy and have attempted to exploit opportunities created by the project.

Finally, the future of the project and its sustainability is essential in order to continue to enhance the University's graduates' employment promotion activities. Faculty members and management are in consensus to make the project sustainable by including future entrepreneurship and skill development training programmes into the teaching and training process. More importantly, the students, which are the focus of this survey, are willing to engage in the project's future extension and sustainability.

