

SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF AGRIC. ECONOMICS



**FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE
EASTERN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA**

25th to 27th June 2007

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1. SUBJECT REVIEW PROCESS

Subject review process evaluates the quality of education within a specific subject or discipline. It is designed to evaluate the quality of both undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, focusing on the student learning experience and on student achievement. However, the responsibility for quality and standards lies within the institution itself, since it alone has the powers to control and to change existing practices.

This review on the study programme in Agricultural Economics of the Eastern University of Sri Lanka (EUSL) was conducted according to the guidelines given in the Quality Assurance Handbook for Sri Lankan universities, published by the CVCD and University Grants Commission in July 2002, based on the information contained in the Self Evaluation Report (SER) submitted by the Department of Agricultural Economics (DAE), and observations made by the Review Team during the site visit.

The Self Evaluation Report (SER) submitted by the DAE consisted of ten sections, namely: Aims, learning outcomes and programme details; Students, staff and facilities; Curriculum design, content and review; Teaching, learning and assessment methods; Student achievements; The extent and use of student feedback, qualitative and quantitative; Research; Peer observation; Skills development and Postgraduate studies. There was no indication regarding Academic Guidance and Counseling in the SER. The quality of education was reviewed with respect to the aims and learning outcomes given in the SER submitted by the DAE.

The Review Team visited the DAE from 25th – 27th June, 2007. The agenda of the three day visit is annexed (Annex 1). During the site visit, below listed sources were used to collect additional information for the review.

- Meetings held with the Actg. Vice Chancellor, Actg. Dean, Actg. Head of the DAE, members of academic staff, undergraduate students representing the first year and the final year
- Observation of the facilities at the department and the faculty (library, computer unit, lecture rooms etc.)
- Observation of a class teaching session.
- Supporting documents made available at the DAE

The Review Team focused on the following eight aspects of education at the subject level according to the guidelines given in the Quality Assurance Handbook:

1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review
2. Teaching Learning and Assessment methods
3. Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements
4. Extent and Use of Student Feedback (Qualitative and Quantitative)
5. Postgraduate Studies
6. Peer Observation
7. Skills Development
8. Academic Guidance and Counseling

Each one of the eight aspects was judged as good/satisfactory/unsatisfactory, noting the strengths, good practices and weaknesses in each. Considering the judgment given to eight aspects, an overall judgment was given as confidence/limited confidence/no confidence.

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

The Faculty of Agriculture, EUSL was established in 1981 as one of the two Faculties of the Eastern University College. The status of the Eastern University College was upgraded to that of a University in 1986, with the addition of two more faculties. In 2006, Faculty of Health Care Sciences was established. Thus, at present, the Faculty of Agriculture represents one of the five faculties of the EUSL.

Establishment of the Faculty of Agriculture was a response to the long felt need for the enhancement of opportunities for agricultural higher education in the Eastern region, where more than 75% of the population depend on agriculture for their living. The Faculty of Agriculture is expected to offer educational programmes and launch research studies in Agriculture to address the specific needs of this agro-ecological region, and thereby serve as a catalyst for the agricultural and socio economic development. In this context, at present, the Faculty of Agriculture can annually admit 75 new students to follow B.Sc. degree programme in Agriculture, and has 131 total student enrollment (in all four years). In addition, the Faculty has started an external fee levying B.Sc. degree programme in Agriculture and admits about 25 students annually.

The Faculty is located in the village of Vantharamoolai, Chenkalady, about 18 km north of Batticaloa city. This area is endowed with natural resources including arable land, annual rainfall of 1500 mm – 2000 mm, surface and underground water, dense and open natural forests, range land, and a large population of cattle and buffaloes making it suitable for cultivating a wide variety of crops and rearing of farm animals. Hence, the location of the Faculty is appropriate for the students to acquire necessary skills and enhance agricultural experience easily by living in a farming community.

The Faculty, being located within the main campus, is in a position to make use of the common facilities available in the University such as the Central Library and Computer unit for academic purposes, in addition to the facilities available at the Faculty. The Library has a satisfactory collection of books and journals in the field of Agriculture, and is kept open from 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. On-line access to journals is not possible yet because the local area network is not functioning. The reading area of the library is considerably small and needs improvement. The Computer unit is well equipped with about 200 computers, internet access and printing facilities in three laboratories. It is kept open from 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. and provides printing facilities free of charge to students. The computer unit offers fee-levying certificate courses and diploma courses to external students.

In addition to these common facilities, the Faculty of Agriculture has its own 15 acre farm with crops and livestock, and a Centre for Sustainable Agriculture and Resource Management (CENSARM), which are being used for teaching and research purposes. The Faculty publishes AGRIEAST journal which carries research findings of the staff and students from the Faculty and other local and international institutions.

The Faculty of Agriculture consists of three departments, namely; the Department of Agronomy, the Department of Animal Science and the Department of Agricultural Economics (DAE). The B.Sc. degree programme in Agriculture offered by the Faculty is of four year duration, based on Carnegie credit units and implemented over eight semesters.

The curriculum is modular in nature comprising a compulsory core module and several optional advanced modules. The core module (134 credit units) extends from first to sixth semester, encompasses a wide range of subjects in six major disciplines, viz., Crop science, Agricultural Biology, Agricultural Engineering, Agricultural Chemistry, Animal Science and Agricultural Economics, and is compulsory for all agriculture undergraduates. The students can select one of the advanced modules for their specialization to be followed during the seventh and eighth semesters. They should complete 23 credit units of which 11 credit units are from five common courses, 6 credit units (3 courses) from the field of specialization and 6 credit units from a research project in the area of specialization. In addition to this 157 credit unit degree programme, the Faculty has started to offer an external degree programme in B.Sc. Agriculture, based on the same curriculum. At present, the Faculty is in the process of complete revision of the curriculum of B.Sc. Agriculture degree programme under World Bank/IRQUE – QEF (Improving Relevance and Quality of Undergraduate Education – Quality Enhancement Fund) project.

The DAE is responsible for the administration, design and offering of courses in Agricultural Economics. It aims to provide a firm foundation in Agricultural Economics and Social Sciences to undergraduates in Agriculture by equipping them with relevant knowledge and skills in basic and applied aspects of Agricultural Economics through its study programme consisting 6 courses (worth 17 credit units, and equivalent to 11% of the credit units) in the core module and 12 courses (of which, students have to take only 3 courses) and research project in the advanced module. Although the department has 5 academic cadre positions (including Professor) and 2 non academic cadre positions (Annex 2), at present the Professor cadre remains vacant, and the only senior lecturer with postgraduate qualifications (M.Sc) is on study leave, and three probationary lecturers conduct lectures under the administration of an Acting Head who belongs to another department. The DAE does not have a laboratory for practical work and conducts the only practical course, Rural Agricultural Work experience (RAWE) using farm visits and village stay.

It was the objective of this review to evaluate the quality of the study programme of the DAE with respect to the aims stipulated in the SER and findings of the site visit.

3. AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

3.1. Aims

As stated in the Self Evaluation Report, the DAE offers a series of courses in the degree programme in Agriculture with the aim of providing the students with

1. Recent advances in knowledge and techniques of Agricultural Economics and Social researches and their role in raising national benefits;
2. An exposure to the farming community and community systems; the problems of the farming community; differences farming systems, preferences of communities between different agro-ecological regions and traditional knowledge of farming system.
3. An adequate knowledge on the system based approach that will enable them to adopt the holistic approach to all agricultural problems relevant Agriculture production or management and develop solutions that are viable, feasible, effective and acceptable to farmers and orienting towards sustainability.

4. An opportunity to expose them into a research project to develop research skills in their chosen field of specialization and promoting their critical thinking to develop innovations which will immensely contribute to foster agricultural production.
5. Opportunities for students to develop the skills and enthusiasm required for lifelong learning.
6. A friendly responsive and supportive departmental environment that is conducive to enthusiastic learning, high standards and good completion rates.
7. Support for teaching staff in their career development including the provisions of feedback and peer advice.
8. The effective teaching and learning process with hand-on experience provided by the department leads to quality enhancement of undergraduates and ultimate production of high quality competent graduates in B.Sc. degree in Agriculture.

3.2. Learning Outcomes

Reproduced below are the learning outcomes of the Agricultural Economics study programme as stated in the SER. On successful completion of the programs offered by the DAE the students should have

1. Gained knowledge and conceptual understanding of areas of Agricultural Economics, based on programmes that provide initial broad frameworks followed by progressively increasing depths of study.
2. Understood how this knowledge and understanding could be applied effectively and efficiently in working alongside with the farming community for improvement in the productivity, profitability and sustainability of existing farming systems.
3. Developed a range of personal and transferable skills (e.g. critical ability, independence of thought, data handling and interpretation, computer literacy, information management, oral and written communication, teamwork) and had experience of applying them to varied situations.
4. Learnt theoretical, technical, conceptual and intellectual skills necessary for the acquisition and analysis of data through survey, and had direct experience of research (based on field work).
5. Developed technical skills and capability for scientific experimentation, including data handling, interpretation and presentation of research results.
6. Developed their ability for critical, self-directed learning through extensive reading, access to electronic information media and self evaluation.
7. Motivated group-learning process towards teamwork to understand the beneficial nature of such effort.
8. Acquired knowledge and management skills to be professional in Agricultural Economics based disciplines and to seek readymade employment both in public and private sectors.

On successful completion of the general programs offered during the first three years, students are expected to have knowledge and thorough understanding of the range of topics covered under Agricultural Economics.

In addition, the following list is given in pages 19-20 of the SER, as Intended Learning Outcomes of the study programme offered by the DAE:

1. The DAE aims for a structured development of students' abilities so that they gain both knowledge and understanding within the agricultural and livestock field covered, and personal and transferable skills. To this end, the first three years lectures develop the knowledge base plus tutorial work, practical and library projects that are designed both to encourage the transition from dependent to independent learning and develop cognitive skills.
2. The programmes of the DAe are designed to enable progressive development of transferable skills including: written and oral communication, critical and analytical thinking, problem solving, information handling, numeracy, time management and prioritization of work, basic computer skills and use of IT.
3. The final year research project provides a particularly valuable active learning experience. Students develop skills in experimental design, data collection and interpretation, critical evaluation of their own and others' data and oral and written communication in an environment that gives close contact between students and research staff; helping them from to form views on possible field based careers.

To help students to achieve the above outcomes, the design and nature of the academic programme offered by the DAE is described in pages 10-12 of the SER as follows:

The study programme in Agricultural Economics offers a learning experience that enables the students to

1. Build upon the academic qualifications and potential at entry of students by progressively developing knowledge, skills and understanding, based on a broad and multidisciplinary approach;
2. Study in fields they have most interest or talent by offering a choice of units within a flexible but coherent academic framework, so allowing students to broaden as well as deepen their educational experience;
3. Benefit from exposure to selected areas of high level research that exploit the research strengths and resources of the departments;
4. Undertake a final year research project from wide range offered by active research staff, within the department or made available through interdepartmental collaborations;
5. Benefit from a curriculum of which the design and teaching are enhanced by the collective efforts of staff, students and central university services;
6. Interact with staff who are committed to teaching and learning within a research environment and who appreciate the importance of these activities in relation to their development and promotion;
7. Have a manageable workload within University guidelines;
8. Be provided with clear details of the programme and unit objectives, content, academic requirements and assessment methods;
9. Receive fair and appropriate assessment for progression and grading, and feedback on individual progress;
10. Have access to adequate academic support and resources;

11. Have access to internal support and expert advice, which is available outside the university;
12. Assess their progress through a systematic, appropriate assessment and grading systems designed by the DAE approved by the Faculty Board and Senate and accepted by the Council of EUSL.

The course units provide learning experiences that are appropriate, accessible, interesting and beneficial to students undertaking other programmes in cognate disciplines.

The course units in Agricultural Economics provide suitable learning experience for students from agricultural science to obtain a B.Sc. degree in Agriculture.

The DAE is guided by the University's Teaching and Learning strategy and associated guidelines.

4. FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW TEAM

4.1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review

The degree programme is of four-year duration, organized based on Carnegie credit units and implemented over eight semesters. Medium of instruction is English. The curriculum is modular in nature comprising a compulsory core module and several optional advanced modules. Core module is offered jointly by three departments during the first six (6) semesters. It comprises 134 credit units from 60 different courses. Advanced modules are offered during the seventh and eighth semesters. Students can select one of the advanced modules for specialization according to their preference and performance. A minimum of 23 credit units in the selected advanced module should be completed for graduation. Of these 23 credit units, 11 credit units should be from five common courses, 6 credit units (3 courses) from the courses in the field of specialization and 6 credit units from a research project undertaken during the 8th semester in the area of specialization. This arrangement of having a compulsory core module and optional advanced modules is advantageous because it provides opportunity for the undergraduates to learn basic aspects of agriculture during the core module and acquire in-depth knowledge and skills in a selected area during the advanced (specialization) module.

A student should successfully complete 157 credit units to be eligible for the award of the degree. This credit unit requirement for graduation is beyond the accepted norm of 120 credit units for a four year degree. This aspect need to be given due consideration during the on-going curriculum revision.

The DAE offers six (6) courses worth 17 credit units during the first six semesters and contributes 11% of the core module. In the 7th semester the department contributes one course (i.e. AEC 4101 – Social Research Methodology) to the 5 common compulsory courses followed by all students (i.e. based on the Handbook 2003/2004). In addition, the DAE offers 11 other optional advanced courses. The students specializing in Agricultural Economics can follow a maximum of three (3) advanced courses, without exceeding a maximum of 6 credit units. The minimum number of advanced courses they should follow from the department is two (2). During the 8th semester every student undertakes a research project, which contributes 6 credits. At present, the DAE is revising its curriculum. Courses offered in the Core module and Advanced module are given in Annex 3.

The strengths and weaknesses noted will be highlighted and suggestions will be made to improve the quality of the courses offered by the DAE in the subsequent sections of this chapter, with the expectation that these suggestions will be given due consideration during the on-going curriculum revision process.

- Most of the courses offered by the DAE are at a suitable academic level in terms of the content, breadth and depth. Of these courses, AEC 3201 Rural Agricultural Work Experience (RAWEX) has a good approach for experiential learning, and adds strength to the programme.
- However, certain amounts of repetitions were noted in several courses (e.g. Applied Farm Management, Production Economics). Such repetitions should be minimized.
- The contents of some courses need minor to major revisions such as inclusion of more relevant materials, increasing the depth/breadth, inclusion of recommended references for the courses. For example, it is better if Microeconomics course and Macroeconomics course are combined and offered in the 1st semester.
- Some courses need to be rearranged to improve the sequence to proceed from principles to application. For example, it is better to shift the course on Agriculture Development and Policy to an earlier semester (4th semester).
- The assigned credit value is not justifiable for some courses. In assigning credit number, the total time spent on lectures, practical and independent work carried out by students need to be taken into consideration.
- The proportional contribution (11%) of the DAE to the core module is inadequate, considering the importance of Agricultural Economics for Agriculture and the absence of important basic aspects such as agricultural marketing, agricultural business management, financial management, accounting, project analysis, international trade and econometrics in the six core courses offered. Both students and staff pointed out this deficiency. It is recommended to strengthen the core courses by incorporating above aspects and contribute at least 20% of the core module.
- Commencement of the advanced module in the 7th semester makes the students to wait for a long period (six semesters or three academic years) for specialization. Furthermore, the 7th semester module is not 'advanced' in true sense, because it consists of 6 common courses (11 credit units) and only 3 (6 credit units) out of 11 advanced courses. It is more a 'transitional' module than an advanced module.
- While the maximum number of advanced courses any student specializing in Agricultural Economics can offer is limited to three (i.e., 6 credit units), the students specializing in other departments also can offer one advanced course from this department. Furthermore, AEC 4101 Social Research Methodology course offered by the department is compulsory for all the students. As a result, the students specializing in Agricultural Economics follow only a maximum of 10 courses accumulating 25 credit units in Agricultural Economics (i.e., 17 credits from 6 core courses, 2 credits from AEC 4101 and 6 credits from 3 advanced courses), while students specializing in other modules follow a minimum of 7 courses worth 19 credit units in Agricultural Economics (i.e., 17 credits from 6 core courses, 2 credits from AEC 4101). This arrangement is not conducive, because it does not have a 'unique set of advanced courses in Agricultural Economics', exclusively for the students specializing in Agricultural Economics to strengthen their knowledge and skills in the field of specialization and gain an added advantage of specializing in Agricultural Economics. Students indicated the need for software

packages such as SPSS exclusively for AEC students. During the on-going curriculum revision these deficiencies need to be rectified.

- A curriculum should improve not only subject related knowledge and skills but also generic skills such as computer literacy, communication skills, English proficiency and professional development. The curriculum has addressed this aspect by including courses on career guidance, scientific writing, two English courses in the 1st and 2nd semesters, and a single course on Introductory IT in the 2nd semester. This is commendable. Students indicated the need for strengthening and expansion of these courses. The Review Team recommends the University to consider IT and English as separate entities, review and expand the syllabi and offer throughout the programme to provide the students more opportunities to enhance these skills.

In relation to the Curriculum Design, Content and Review, the judgment of the Review Team is SATISFACTORY.

4.2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods

Members of the departmental academic staff adopt a variety of teaching/learning methods at present. The most common method of imparting knowledge is through lectures. In addition, a range of more interactive teaching/learning techniques such as case studies, individual and group presentations, take home assignments, term papers, reports, tutorials, field studies, and practical etc are being used. The RAWE programme offered by the DAE needs a special mentioning because it provides valuable opportunities for the students to apply the subject-related knowledge and develop transferable skills. This course should be strengthened further.

Most of the lectures are conducted according to a carefully prepared format. For each course, lecture notes have been prepared for the use of the teacher, and given resource constraints, parallel sets of handouts that provide the summary of the content are distributed to the students. All students undertake library-based assignments related to their research project and to teaching topics. Time slots are allocated in the formal time table to achieve this target.

As indicated by the students as well as the staff members, during separate meetings the reviewers held with them, teaching takes place in an interactive environment. The Review Team too observed teaching classes and judged that teaching environment as intimate and interactive. With regard to teaching in the advanced courses in Agricultural Economics, the teachers are successful in attracting the attention of almost all students in the class.

The DAE is equipped with conventional teaching aids such as chalkboards, whiteboards, OHPs and also with modern aids such as a multimedia. Given the small number of students who specialize in Agricultural Economics at present, the team is of the view that the teaching and learning environment and facilities are satisfactory and adequate to accommodate the learning needs of the students.

Computer-Assisted Learning (CAL) and internet resources currently play a non-significant formal role in the teaching process, although a sufficient number of computers are available. The Review Team opines that the teaching environment can be further improved if the students and staff can have an access to fast internet facilities at the DAE.

The DAE adopts both summative and formative approaches to assess the performance of students, having both the end semester examinations and continuous course evaluation system in place. Progress of the students with respect to each course is assessed through an announced quiz (30 min duration), a mid semester examination (1 hr duration), and a term

paper or assignment and with a final paper at the end of semester. The end semester written examination comprises a number of components including structured and essay type questions, practical, viva, and presentations depending on the nature of the subject.

In general, the question papers are of comprehensive nature adequately covering the material included in the course outline. Scrutiny of question papers is done by an internal moderator or by both internal and external examiners, to ensure that individual questions are clear, fair and discriminatory and that the overall balance and coverage are appropriate.

The departmental staff supervises final year research projects of the students with or without an external co supervisor. At present, supervision is done with the assistance of external co-supervisors because all remaining academic members except the acting Head are probationary lecturers.

The final year research project is assessed based on the Student profile (100 points), Report (100 points) and Presentation (100 points). A marking scheme approved by the Faculty Board and the Senate is used to evaluate these. Student profile is assessed based on Adherence to instructions, punctuality, independence of work, neatness, originality, work plans, enthusiasm, adherence to objective, ability to cope with stress and honesty in data collection. Project report is assessed based on Adherence to style and format, grammar & spelling, neatness, importance of topic, objectives, content, and submission on deadline. Presentation is assessed based on Organization, content, presentation skills, discussion and others (grammar, enthusiasm).

Summative scheme of grading is adopted for each course using a grade point scale ranging from 0 to 4.5. Classes are awarded based on the Overall Grade Point Average (OGPA). The adopted OGPA criteria for the award of classes are different to the CGPA cutoff criteria adopted by other Faculties of Agriculture. It is recommended to rectify these anomalies to be in line with the other Faculties of Agriculture during the on-going curriculum revision.

In order to improve the currently adopted good practices, it is recommended to make the students aware of the descriptive course outline, hourly breakdown of lectures, suggested references, assessment criteria, and grading procedure at the commencement of each course. Considering the concerns expressed by students with respect to the external degree programme, it is suggested to provide handouts, other learning aids and facilities of similar quality to both the groups (fee levying external undergraduate students as well as UGC recruited internal undergraduate students) to avoid creation of unnecessary sense of discrimination among students.

The academic members of the DAE seem to be highly committed and contented possibly due to prevailing friendly departmental environment. However, the DAE does not have even a single professor or a senior lecturer to guide these probationary lecturers at present. The only senior lecturer is on study leave, and an acting Head has been appointed from another department. To strengthen the department, it is strongly recommended to recruit a Professor to the DAE as soon as possible.

The DAE does not have even a single non academic staff member at present. As a result, the probationary lecturers have to allocate considerable amount of time to carry out the duties that they are not liable for. It is recommended to recruit at least one qualified non-academic staff member (clerical)/computer application assistant, and a laborer to the available cadre positions.

With respect to Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods used, the judgment of the Review Team is GOOD.

4.3. Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements

The Faculty and the DEA admits new entrants allocated by the UGC, and has no authority in selecting them. The quality of students admitted to follow the degree depends on UGC policy. Although the Faculty is entitled to admit 75 new entrants annually, this eligible quota has never been realized. At present, there are only 131 registered students in four batches (first to final year batches) instead of eligible 300. Annex 4 presents the number of registered students at the EUSL from 1990 till 2007. Although the intake has gradually increased, it has never reached the eligible quota of 75. Furthermore, comparison of the number of new entrants with the number of graduates (Annex 5) indicates a considerable drop out rate from the Faculty. Student counselors indicated this drop out rate is due to the conflict status in the region and other factors beyond their control. This situation warrants serious attention of the administrators to implement required remedial measures as soon as possible.

The DEA receives students to follow the advanced module in the seventh semester, allocated based on their preference and performance. The number of students opted for following advanced module in Agricultural Economics has increased during the past several years. A total of 15 students have specialized in Agricultural Economics during the past 25 years. Meeting with the final year students revealed that they select the advanced module in Agricultural Economics because of the potential job opportunities, prospects for graduate studies and due to the different nature of the aspects covered. They are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the modules and made valuable suggestions to improve the courses and the programme. They requested to strengthen and extend the English language courses and IT course. It is recommended to pay due attention to this justifiable request.

Various measures such as monitoring performance through continuous assessments, advising and counseling of weaker students etc., are taken to ensure students' progress through the programme. It was noted that the drop out rate of the students following the advanced module in Agricultural Economics is zero and that all the graduates specialized in Agricultural Economics have found employment in governmental departments, non governmental organizations and universities (Annex 6). Waiting time for the first job after graduation has declined in the recent past (Annex 7).

During the discussions held with the students and presentation sessions observed by the Review Team, the students are fairly confident in the use of computer software, and communication skills in English. They are objective minded, and skillful. Their generic skills are in par with those of typical agriculture graduates from other universities.

While the DAE can be happy about this outcome, it should take necessary steps to further improve the curriculum and staff strength to attract more students.

In relation to the Quality of Students, Student Progress and Achievements the judgment of the Review Team is GOOD.

4.4. Extent and Use of Student Feedback, Qualitative and Quantitative

Student feedback is obtained through both formal and informal approaches. The DAE uses structured questionnaires (Annex 8) on Teacher and course evaluation for this purpose. Questionnaire surveys are conducted at the end of every course during the final week of the semester. In addition to this formal approach, the lecturers of the DAE conduct informal surveys to receive comments regarding their teaching. It was evident from the documents available that some members have prepared summary reports of the results of student evaluation on their own teaching and courses. The Review Team finds this practice commendable and recommends its continuation.

In the evaluations the teachers have received excellent, very good, and good ratings from students with respect of several parameters. For example, preparation and organization of the course, style of teaching, content, clarity, teaching materials used and punctuality has been rated very good or good. However there was no documentary evidence regarding the use of such student feedback to improve the quality of teaching further.

The Review Team suggests to introduce mid semester teacher/course evaluation survey in addition to the existing end semester survey and make use of the results of mid semester survey to identify deficiencies and improve teaching. Furthermore, it is recommended to introduce a system of recognition of good teachers using student feedback and other supporting documents in future.

In relation to the Extent and Use of Student Feedback the judgment of the Review Team is GOOD.

4.5. Post Graduate Studies

At present, the DAE has no post graduate programme, while members of the department do not teach in post graduate programmes. They neither supervise post graduate students of other Institutes nor consider post graduate research as an activity of the department. Lack of senior academics in the DAE would have contributed to this situation.

The probationary lecturers themselves are graduate students of the other Post Graduate Institutes in Sri Lanka and abroad. One staff member is in abroad pursuing graduate studies. Other members have received research grants under IRQUE-QEF project, and get the undergraduates involved in some research activities. It will be possible to develop these research activities into a good post graduate programme, if the department so wishes and makes an attempt. It is hoped that the DAE will give high priority to develop post graduate research. The absence of a postgraduate programme at the department is noted as a weakness by the Review Team. It is recommended to recruit a Professor to the available cadre as soon as possible to introduce research culture and post graduate studies.

In relation to the Postgraduate Studies the judgment of the Review Team is UNSATISFACTORY.

4.6. Peer Observation

There is no regular formal effective practice of peer observation at present. However, the academic staff members indicated of having informal discussion regarding teaching/learning and assessment methods, new developments in subject areas and the problems pertaining to academic activities. According to the SER, the Head of the DAE observes teaching of each staff member annually. However there was no documentary evidence to support above claims, or with respect to providing guidance to the junior members by the senior members on aspects of teaching.

As indicated previously, moderation and scrutiny of the examination papers are done with the help of external examiners and faculty members. This is a good practice that should be continued. It would be advantageous if peers could attend the classes and advise the staff on how teaching could be improved. Peer observation should be extended to visiting staff also and developed into a more formal system, to enhance the quality of teaching.

Lack of a formal mechanism for peer observation was noted as a weakness by the Review Team. Unavailability of senior lecturers in the DAE has contributed to this situation in the department. The Review Team recommends recruitment of at least one Professor as soon as

possible to the DAE to promote research culture, postgraduate supervision and peer evaluation.

In relation to the Peer Observation, the judgment of the Review Team is SATISFACTORY.

4.7. Skills Development

The DAE has introduced courses such as Rural Agriculture Work Experience and Research methodology to improve subject specific skills and generic skills of students. In addition, the curriculum comprises of courses in English language, Scientific writing, Career Guidance, Computer literacy and Presentations, which promote generic skills. The courses in English language are offered during two semesters while a course on Introductory IT is offered during one semester. This is commendable. During the discussion held, the students indicated the need for improving and increasing the duration of teaching of English language and IT courses. This justifiable request should be given due consideration during the on-going curriculum revision. The Review Team recommends strengthening the RAW programme, Research Methodology course, expanding English and IT courses.

In relation to the Skills Development the judgment of the Review Team is SATISFACTORY.

4.8. Academic Guidance and Counseling

Due to the prevailing conditions in the area, student counseling appears to be one of the important aspects to maintain social harmony and undergraduate education. The Faculty has four academic members appointed as Student counselors (three female counselors and one male counselor). Senior student counselor is from the Faculty of Arts. In addition, the Faculty has also appointed student advisors recently.

The team of counselors has taken several measures to overcome problems such as ragging and other stress situations. The Review Team noted that Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim students are living and studying here in harmony. This is highly commendable and encouraging. Discussions with the students also revealed that the existing counseling service is effective and that the students are satisfied with the counseling services provided. However, there was neither a specific place allocated to carry out counseling services nor there was a record of the performed services.

While congratulating the student counselors for the effective service rendered and devotion, the review team recommends allocating a place (room) for Student counseling and start maintaining records of the counseling services provided and achievements made to make it more visible and effective in future.

With respect to Academic Guidance and Counseling, the judgment of the Review Team is GOOD.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The curriculum comprises higher number of credit units (157) than the accepted norm of 120 credit units for a four year degree programme. Having a core module and several advanced modules is advantageous to provide required basic knowledge and skills in agriculture and in-depth knowledge and skills in a chosen field of specialization to students.

The DAE offers 6 courses which contribute only 11% of the core module. The proportional contribution (11%) of the department to the core module is inadequate. Core courses offered are at a suitable academic level in terms of the content, breadth and depth, but do not address some important aspects such as agricultural marketing, agricultural business management, financial management, accounting, project analysis, international trade and econometrics. Of the core courses, AEC 3201 Rural Agricultural Work Experience (RAW) has a good approach for experiential learning, and adds strength to the programme.

However, certain amounts of repetitions, presence of less relevant content, insufficient depth etc. were noted in several courses. Some courses have been placed inappropriately, while some others should be combined. In some courses, the assigned credit value was not appropriate. These modifications should be made during the on-going curriculum revision.

The advanced module offered by the DAE is not properly organized to provide 'in-depth knowledge and skills in all relevant spheres of agricultural economics' exclusively for students specializing in Agricultural Economics. Present advanced module is more of a 'transitional module' than an 'advanced module'. Commencement of the advanced module in the 7th semester makes the students to wait for a long period to start specialization. These disadvantageous aspects need to be corrected.

Members of the departmental academic staff adopt diverse teaching/learning approaches. They seem to be highly committed and contented. However, at present, the DAE does not have even a single professor or a senior lecturer to guide these probationary lecturers. Final year research project supervision is done with the assistance of external co-supervisors at present because all remaining academic members except the acting Head are probationary lecturers. Since the department does not have non academic staff, probationary lecturers have to carry out the duties of the non academic staff also.

The DAE is equipped with sufficient teaching aids, while teaching takes place in an interactive environment. Student feedback is obtained through both formal and informal approaches. However there was no documentary evidence on the use of such student feedback to improve the quality of teaching further.

Both summative and formative approaches are used to assess the performance of students. The question papers are of comprehensive nature. Question papers are moderated and scrutinized with the participation of an internal moderator or internal and external examiners. Classes are awarded based on the Overall Grade Point Average (OGPA). This adopted OGPA cutoff points are different to the CGPA cutoff points adopted by other Faculties of Agriculture.

The DAE has no post graduate programme, while peer review is performed through informal methods.

Academic guidance and counseling is good and appreciated by most students. But there is no specific office allocated for counselors, while no documentary evidence regarding the services provided was available.

The Faculty does not receive its entitled quota of undergraduates, while the drop out rate is considerable. However, the drop out rate of students following Agricultural Economics is zero. All the graduates specialized in Agricultural Economics have found employment. Waiting time for the first job has declined significantly in the recent past.

Based on the information provided in the SER and observations made during the study visit by the Review Team as discussed above, the eight aspects were judged as follows:

Aspect Reviewed	Judgment Given
Curriculum Design, Content and Review	Satisfactory
Teaching, learning and assessment methods	Good
Quality of Students, Student Progress and Achievements	Good
Extent and Use of Student Feedback	Good
Postgraduate Studies	Unsatisfactory
Peer Observations	Satisfactory
Skills Development	Satisfactory
Academic Guidance and Counseling	Good

The overall judgment is suspended

The present status of each of the eight aspects and the reasons for arriving at the said judgments are indicated in sections 4.1 to 4.8. Recommended measures to improve the academic programme are given in section 6.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the context of all above, to improve the academic programme offered by the DAE, the Review Team recommends the following major modifications, for which the reasons are given in the sections 4.1 – 4.8.

- It is recommended to revise and improve the core courses by minimizing repetitions, including more relevant materials, increasing the depth of coverage and including recommended references. The DAE may consider assigning suitable credit value for each course, considering the total time spent on lectures, practical and independent work. Strengthening the RAWE programme further is also recommended.
- It is recommended to improve the sequence of courses to proceed from principles to application. Offering the course on Agriculture Development and Policy during an earlier semester (4th semester) is recommended. The DAE may consider combining Microeconomics course with macroeconomics course and offer in the 1st semester.
- The DAE may consider introducing important basic aspects such as agricultural marketing, agricultural business management, financial management, accounting, human resource management project analysis, international trade and econometrics into the core courses, and strengthening the core courses to contribute at least 20% of the core module. In this regard, some courses in the Advanced Module can be modified to address the basic aspects and transfer to the core module.
- The DAE may consider reducing the total credit unit requirement for the four year Agriculture degree from 157 to a number close to the accepted norm of 120 credit units for a four year degree. It is recommended to align the intended learning outcome of each module with the overall intended learning outcomes of the Degree Programme.

- The DAE may consider reorganizing and improving the present ‘transitional type’ advanced module into a ‘real advanced module in Agricultural Economics’ by transferring the common courses to the Core module (6th semester), and having only a ‘unique set of advanced courses in Agricultural Economics’, exclusively for the students specializing in Agricultural Economics to provide an added advantage of specializing in Agricultural Economics.
- The DAE may consider the IT and English as separate entities, review and expand the syllabi of English and IT. Offering English and IT courses throughout the programme and providing the students more opportunities to enhance these skills is recommended.
- It is recommended to improve the teaching environment further and to provide faster internet facilities at the Department.
- The DAE may consider adjusting OGPA cutoff points for the award of classes to be in line with the CGPA cutoff points adopted by other Faculties of Agriculture.
- It is recommended to improve the currently adopted good practices. The DAE may consider providing the descriptive course outline, hourly breakdown of lectures, suggested references, assessment criteria, and grading procedure at the commencement of each course.
- It is strongly recommended to recruit a Professor to the academic staff to guide the probationary lecturers, promote research culture, post graduate studies and peer evaluation as soon as possible. Recruiting at least one non academic staff member to the available cadre positions in the department is recommended.
- The DAE may explore the avenues to attract more students.
- The DAE may consider introducing mid semester teacher/course evaluation survey in addition to the existing end semester survey. Using the results of mid semester survey to identify deficiencies and improve teaching is recommended.
- The DAE may consider introducing a system of recognition of good teachers using student feed back and other supporting documents in future.
- Strengthening the RAWE programme, Research Methodology course and expanding English and IT courses are recommended.
- The DAE may consider allocating a place for counseling services, starting maintaining records of the counseling services provided and achievements made to make it more visible and effective in future.

7. ANNEXES

Annex 1. AGENDA FOR THE REVIEW VIST

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS EASTERN UNIVERSITY, SRI LANKA

Day 1 - 25.06.2007

- 08.30 - 09.00 Private meeting of Review panel with QAA Council Representatives
09.00 - 09.30 Discuss the agenda for the visit
09.30 - 10.30 Meeting with the Vice Chancellor/ Chairman, Internal QA unit! Dean, Heads of the Departments (working with tea)
10.30 - 11.30 Department presentation on the Self Evaluation Report
11.30 - 12.30 Meeting with undergraduates - First year & Third year
12.30 - 13.30 Lunch
13.30 - 14.30 Observing Department facilities- Department of Agric. Economics
14.30 - 15.30 Observing other facilities (Library, Computer centre, Farms etc.)
15.30 - 16.30 Meeting with Department Academic staff- Department of Agric. Economics
16.30 - 17.30 Brief meeting of Reviewers

Day 2 - 26.06.2007

- 09.00 - 10.00 Observing teaching -Agric. Economics + Tutorials
10.00 - 11.00 Observing Documents (Working tea) - Department of Agric. Economics
11.00 - 12.00 Meeting with special degree students - Final years
12.30 - 13.30 Lunch
13.30 - 14.00 Observing students' presentations
14.30 - 15.30 Observing teaching - Agric. Economics -lectures
15.30 -16.00 Meeting student counselors/ Academic Advisors/ Personal tutors

Day 3 - 27.06.2007

- 10.00 - 11.00 Meeting with head and staff for reporting
11.00 - 12.00 Lunch
12.00 - Report writing

Annex 2. ACADEMIC AD NON-ACADEMIC CADRE ATTACHED TO THE DAE

Designation	Cadre Provisions	No Filled
Professor	01	00
Senior Lecturer/Lecturer (Prob.)	04	04
Clerk	01	01
Labourer	01	01

Annex 3. COURSES OFFERED BY THE DAE

Module	Year	Semester	Course (Credits: Lectures / Practical hrs)
Core	1	1	AEC 1101 Introductory Microeconomics (2:30/00)
	1	2	AEC 1201 Introductory Macroeconomics (2:30/00)
	2	1	AEC 2101 Farm Management Economics (3:45/00)
	2	2	AEC 2201 Agricultural Extension (2:30/00)
	3	1	AEC 310 I Agric. Development & Policy (4:60/00)
	3	2	AEC 3201 Rural Agricultural Work Experience Programme (4:00/120)
	Advanced	4	
4			AEC 4102 Intermed Microecon. Theory (2:30/00)
4			AEC 4103 Intermed. Macroecon. Theory (2:30/00)
4			AEC 4104 Resource & Emt. Economics (2:30/00)
4			AEC 4105 Basic Econometrics (2:30/00)
4			AEC 4105 Basic Econometrics (2:30/00)
4			AEC 4107 Production Economics (2:30/00)
4			AEC 4108 Agric. Project Analysis (2:30/00)
4			AEC 4109 International Trade (2:30/00)
4			AEC 4110 Introduction to Oper. Research (2:30/00)
4			AEC 4111 Ecological Economics (2:30/00)
4			AEC 4111 Ecological Economics (2:30/00)

Annex 4. NUMBER OF STUDENTS REGISTERED AT PRESENT

Academic Year	No of Students		Total
	Male	Female	
2001/2002	16	09	25
2002/2003	23	19	42
2003/2004	17	17	34
2004/2005	20	10	30
Total	76	55	131

Annex 5. STDENT INTAKE AND NUMBER GRADUATED DURING PAST 5 YEARS

Year	Intake	No of Graduates
2005	30	17
2004	34	15
2003	42	12
2002	25	15
2001	30	11

Annex 6. PRESENT JOB STATUS OF DAE GRADUATES

Year Passed Out	No of Students Specialized in Agricultural Economics	Working in Governmental Depts	Working in NGOs	Working in the University
2006	04	01	00	03 (Asst Lec)
2005	00	00	00	00
2004	03	02	01	00
2003	01	00	01	00
2002	01	01	00	00

Annex 7. TIME PERIOD TAKEN TO GET THE JOB

Year Passed Out	Time Period
2006	Immediately after the Graduation
2005	Nil
2004	Immediately after the Graduation
2003	After 3 months
2002	After 5 months

