

Sector briefing

Education & Skills Opportunities in Sri Lanka

Why Sri Lanka

1. The Government's focus on re-building the economy in Sri Lanka and the opening up of the North and East for trade and investment has created large scale development projects in-country. This surge in activity requires private sector input in many fields including information technology (IT), engineering, management, hospitality, leisure & tourism and related fields.
2. In their main policy statement for the next ten years the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) identified the need for private sector participation in higher education, further education and vocational training. GoSL therefore plans to fast-track new legislation in 2011 that will enable foreign education providers to deliver courses in country under their own brand, with full ownership and 100% repatriation of profits. Sri Lanka also has logistic relevance as a potential regional education/knowledge hub.

“Government incentives for UK universities and local bodies to set up UK accredited courses in Sri Lanka”

“Sri Lanka maintains a literacy rate of 91% - the second highest literacy rate in any other SAARC nation reaches only 60%”



Find general information on the **Sri Lankan** market conditions on [UKTI's website](#). [The Doing Business Guide for Sri Lanka](#) gives an overview of Sri Lanka's economy, business culture, potential opportunities and an introduction to other relevant issues.

Opportunities

Higher Education

The higher education sector in Sri Lanka is on a strong upward curve in growth, with increasing numbers of students opting for international qualifications.

This is largely due to insufficient numbers of places available in the 15 Government - managed universities. Admission into a Sri Lankan university is highly competitive and merely satisfying the minimum admission requirement is no guarantee of a place. While there are approximately 130,000 students that qualify for a university place each year, only 20,000 students are eventually admitted.

Description	No of students
Students sat for the 'O' Level Exam	530,000
Students qualifying for the 'A' Level Exam	207,436
Students satisfying minimum requirements for university admission	130,236
Students applying for university	46,010
Students selected for State universities	20,270
University admission as a % of total no of students sat for A/L exam	9.7%
University admission as a % of total no of students sat for O/L exam	3.8%
University admission as a % of eligible students	15.5%

Source: University Grants Commission – Year of A/Examination 2008

In 2009, approximately 13,000 students travelled overseas for their higher education. The UK is still the No.1 Western education destination for Sri Lankan students. At the end of 2010 there were approximately 6,300 Sri Lankan students following various courses in the UK.

This means that there is an opportunity for the private sector to cater to upwards of 50,000 students who are looking at Further or Higher Education programmes and courses.

There are no Sri Lankan Universities featured in the top 100 universities in the world.

The quality of higher education has been adversely affected by a shortage of trained faculty staff, ingrained resistance to modern teaching methods and processes and little investment in university infrastructure. The increasing prevalence of student unrest, strikes and demonstrations in state universities has been heavily influenced by the country's political opposition parties. Political intervention in student activities has recently led to closure of some state universities. Therefore, parents with sufficient economic means are increasingly unwilling to send their children to Sri Lankan state universities and seek either overseas educational opportunities or alternative, and more affordable, private sector higher educational opportunities available in-country.

The provision gap in the education system offers the following opportunities for education providers from the UK:

Affiliation with Sri Lankan Higher Education Institutes

Affiliations could be for validation of qualifications, franchised operations or joint-venture partnerships. Common practice is that foreign universities allow local providers to offer programs under which students can study in Sri Lanka for a part of the degree and complete the remaining part of the degree at the parent foreign institution. Some foreign institutions also allow the entire degree program to be followed in Sri Lanka. Joint delivery of courses, joint research, curriculum development and student/staff exchange programmes are also available. There is no legal barrier for foreign universities/higher education institutes recognised by the University Grants Commission (UGC) to award degrees affiliated with local HE providers.

Establishing a Higher Education/Training Institution in Sri Lanka

There are currently several options by which to enter the private sector higher education market in Sri Lanka.

Foreign education providers can either set up operations either under the Department of Registrar of Companies as a private limited company or under the Board of Investment in Sri Lanka (BOI). *[NB this is subject to imminent change as the BOI undergoes restructure of its remit]*

There is no legal barrier to establishing private sector education institutes, foreign affiliated institutes or private degree awarding institutions under the University Grants Commission (UGC) or Board of Investment (BOI) as long as they don't carry in the title the word "University".

Opening affordable branch campuses / offshore campuses in Sri Lanka

The GoSL is shortly planning to introduce a separate Parliamentary Act (New Private University Act) to allow foreign universities to set up branch/offshore campuses. This Act lays down guidelines for foreign universities to offer degree programmes. The Act is expected to ready by Q1 of 2011. In the second phase of this programme, the GoSL plans to develop six state universities to international standards and specifically to promote Sri Lanka as a recruitment hub for other countries in the region (India, Maldives, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Japan).

Additional plans:

- Establishing Knowledge City / University Parks
- Developing linkages between universities
- Encouraging Private Public Partnerships
- Promoting online distance learning
- A National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Council.

Demand for International Schools

Despite the high cost of fees there has been an increase in demand for international school leaving qualifications.

Although the majority of Sri Lankans do not have the resources to fund options for international education, there is a growing disillusion with what the state offers. Of even more significance, a growing number of Sinhala-medium private schools are now offering English medium British A-levels as an option, and the uptake is high. (Note: to be admitted to universities in Sri Lanka, students must sit for Sri Lankan A Levels. International Schools do not offer their students the option of taking Sri Lankan A levels). In 2009, Sri Lankan private schools (national and international) produced approximately 2,500 candidates with good British A-levels, along with the desire and the financial resources to pursue higher education at a degree or diploma level.

Specific opportunities for degree pathways / top- up degree programmes for professional Institutions members

A large body of students taking UK qualifications (eg. CIMA, CIM, ACCA, ICASL, ABE, BCS, EDEXCEL and City & Guilds) are looking to further their studies in the country.

Target Sectors

Information Technology /BPO

Sri Lanka has been earmarked by major employers in India and the region as an emerging destination for finance and accounting, legal services and software testing. Furthermore, Colombo is currently ranked 7th out of 50 fast emerging global outsourcing cities.

There is, therefore, a major opportunity here for providers of ICT and software engineering courses, and to supply customised training programme for companies engaged in the BPO industry.

Maritime, Aviation & Logistics

As the country fast-tracks its ports development, demand for training in cargo handling, logistics and supply chain management, will increase.

Courses in shipping and logistics, marine engineering, marine insurance and security are also in short supply.

Finally, demand for courses in engineering and technology, aerospace, mechanical and automotive engineering is also growing.

Hospitality Management and Tourism

The GoSL has identified growth in tourism as a revenue and employment generator. But Sri Lanka's Hotel and Tourism Sector has identified a critical shortage of developed human capital. There is therefore a gap in the market for training programmes in food and beverages, front office, housekeeping, marketing, human resource management and general management.

Management Training and Education

Sri Lanka currently has limited options for management training and education. At Masters level the demand for MBA degree places is est. 6,000 applicants per year. However, annual admissions to all government and private programs are for less than 900 candidates per year only. Opportunities in the local university system for Doctoral studies and Postgraduate Studies in Management and Economics are also limited. Only the Postgraduate Institute of Management (PIM) offers a Doctoral program - and it admits only 12 students at a time (in two-year intervals). There are therefore reported to be a number of managers with MBA or postgraduate qualifications who would study for doctoral degrees should a good-quality program at a reasonable price become locally available.

There is also demand for postgraduate studies in all research fields. Graduate output from Sri Lankan universities for 2008 was 11,941 (first degree) and 2,708 (postgraduate). Out of these, a considerable percentage of graduates preferring research programmes have increased in the fields of bio-technology, pharmacology and molecular biology. In addition, the University of Colombo has introduced new undergraduate courses in pharmacology and bio-chemistry.

However, there are no postgraduate courses in these fields, and as a result there is further demand for research programmes abroad. MBAs are very popular with professionals, but they generally opt for distance learning / affiliated courses, due to the high cost.

Engineering Courses

There is a general shortage of courses in quantity surveying, and post graduate courses for qualified engineers.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Programmes

There is a general perception by private sector companies that the current system in Sri Lanka does not deliver either the number or quality of graduates they require. Although there is a strong research culture in the universities it is largely academic and *not geared to market requirements*. Common complaints include that graduates from state universities do not possess either the skills or the appropriate attitude to work expected by employers. There is an opportunity, therefore, to deliver customised training programmes to leading private sector companies to develop *soft skills* for their employees.

English language and communication skills

Lack of communication skills in the workforce (both written and spoken) has become a drawback to the development of businesses. Hence, there is a high level of interest from private sector companies in English language training. There is a clear gap in the market for comprehensive English/Business English programmes. Although many private sector companies would like to send their employees to the British Council for training in business English, it doesn't have the capacity to satisfy local demand. Provision of generic skills of language and communication is therefore yet another dimension of the education market which is not adequately satisfied.

Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET)

The TVET Sector in Sri Lanka continued to expand during the first half of 2010. There were 820 public, private and NGO sector institutions registered to provide technical and vocational education in the country by end June 2010. With the inception of the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) system in 2005, a total number of 28,118 NVQ certificates have been issued by the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) as at end June 2010. Nine Technical Colleges in nine provinces have been upgraded into Colleges of Technologies and have started to offer national diplomas. The University of Vocational Technology (UNIVOTEC), which was set up in 2008, has commenced several new degree courses to provide technical and vocational training in different fields. The Technical and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) which is the apex policy setting and regulatory body for the TVET sector, developed a national TVET policy framework. The intention of developing this policy framework was to introduce policies and strategies to provide training that match the labour demand at the national and international levels. The TVET plans were designed in 2009 with a special focus on the Northern and Eastern provinces. Furthermore, TVEC worked on a new programme where TVET plans are developed to supply trained skilled workers depending on the labour demands of specific geographic areas in:

- Textile & Garments
- Gems & Jewellery
- Printing
- Construction
- Hotel & Tourism
- Automobile Repair & Maintenance
- Office Management
- Food & Beverages
- Rubber & Plastics
- Leather & Footwear
- Plantation
- Electrical & Electronics
- Metal & Light Engineering
- Health

Future strategy for sustainability

- Linking technology and the world of work during general education
- Establishing pathways for school-leavers to enter TVET
- Linkages with Higher Education
- Recognition of non-NVQ programmes under NVQ framework

There is, however, an opportunity for UK vocational education providers to offer:

- academic staff exchange - UK-Sri Lanka linkages
- deliver sector-specific skill content and assessment standards in a wide range of sectors
- provide 'Train the Trainer' programmes to equip the training providers with relevant skills and understanding

If you have any questions on the opportunities above, contact the UKTI Sri Lanka contacts named in this report. Business opportunities aimed specifically at UK companies are added daily to UKTI's website. These leads are sourced by our staff overseas in British Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates, across all sectors and in over 100 markets.

You can be alerted to business opportunities on a regular basis by registering on the UKTI website. [Find out more on UKTI's business opportunities service on the UKTI website](#)

Major events and activities

In Sri Lanka

Education UK Exhibition, organised by British Council

www.britishcouncil.org/srilanka

Contact: Mr Tony Reilly, Country Director, British Council

Email: Tony.Reilly@britishcouncil.org

Time: February 2011

ADYAPANA 2011

Contact: Manori Dissanayaka

Email: Manori.Dissanayake@fco.gov.uk

Time: October 2011

EDEX 2011

<http://careers.edex.lk>

Contact: Manori Dissanayaka

Email: Manori.Dissanayake@fco.gov.uk

Time: January 2011

In the Region

WorldDidac India

www.worlddidacindia.com

Contact: British Educational Suppliers Assoc

Email: william@besa.org.uk

Time: September 2011

BES Asia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

5th annual Conference, workshops and all-British exhibition of educational resources, services and training solutions.

www.bes-asia.com

Contact: William Prieto-Parra, British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA)

Email: William@besa.org.uk

Date : 1-2 November 2011

Find full details of all events in this country and sector on the UKTI website.

New export events are added daily to the site and [you can register to be alerted to them](#) on a daily, weekly or monthly basis

UKTI's Tradeshow Access Programme (TAP) provides grant support for eligible Small & Medium Sized Enterprises (SME's) to attend trade shows overseas. Find out more about [UKTI support](#) for attendance at overseas events.

UKTI contacts

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Next steps - How UKTI can help

British companies wishing to develop their business in the **Sri Lankan** market are advised to undertake as much market research and planning as possible in the UK. UKTI's team in **Sri Lanka**, with its wide local knowledge and experience, can provide a range of services to British-based companies wishing to grow their business in global markets.

This can include:

- Provision of market information
- Validated lists of agents/distributors
- Key market players or potential customers in the **Sri Lankan** market
- Establishment of interest of such contacts in working with you

This work is available via our [Overseas Market Introduction Service \(OMIS\)](#) a chargeable service which assists British-based companies wishing to enter or expand their business in overseas markets.

To find out more about commissioning this work, or accessing other UKTI services and specialist advice, please visit the UKTI website to find [contact details for your local UKTI office](#).

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