

INTRODUCTION

In Sri Lanka the State has provided free education to all her citizens over the last 50 years. As a result we have a literacy rate of about 90%.

During the first few decades, after we gained independence, universities, technical colleges and other tertiary education institutions provided for the training of a wide variety of professional and semi-professional personnel. During this period we produced many scholars, scientists, administrators and national figures of great ability and high distinction.

In recent decades the picture has changed. There has been a sharp decline in the standard and quality of education at all levels. The reading habit and the use of libraries in the learning process have almost disappeared from our education culture.

Serious shortcomings have appeared at every level of the education system. Statistics reveal a dismal situation. Approximately 14% of children in the compulsory school going age (5-14 Years), do not attend school. Recent studies show that only about a fifth of Grade V children attain mastery levels in writing and even less in Mathematics and Health. At GCE Ordinary Level in 1995, the failure rate in all eight subjects was one in ten. At GCE Advanced Level, one in eleven failed in all four subjects offered. (see annexed charts and tables)

The education system does not produce pupils with the knowledge and understanding and the skills and attitudes appropriate for successful living. Total personality development, characterized by creativity, initiative, discipline, team spirit, respect and tolerance for other people and other cultures, is not achieved.

Therefore reform and restructuring the education system has become an urgent priority. It is an integral aspect of the development process of the country. It must be done in the spirit of bringing benefits to all people and not as a means of conferring privileges to selected groups and areas. It is clearly a means of empowering every citizen and providing her or him access to the valuable resources of knowledge and information. None of the proposals for reform should be viewed or interpreted as discriminating against any person or groups of persons. Even where resources are to be targeted specifically, this would be done in conformity with principles of social justice and equity.

Also it is clear that provinces and districts are not equally provided with physical infrastructure and resources. These differences have a bearing on how the education system functions. They affect the background of the learners, participation in education, expression of their potential and levels of achievement. The learners live, learn and work in the provinces and districts in the context of these differences.

The National Education Commission has worked out a district-wise Composite Index, based on the status of transport, housing, water, sanitation and family income in

1990. The value of this index varies from 77 for the Colombo District to 41 for Moneragala. Table 3 (P-A-3) shows these values for all the districts. Chart 3 illustrates how this index is related to participation in formal schooling of the children and adolescents in the 5 to 19 years age range. More detailed analyses are available to show that educational attainment and performance are strongly linked to the value of the Composite Index.

It is clear from the figure that the desire for schooling, as reflected by the participation rate, is very high in the most backward districts of Moneragala and Hambantota. This desire should be recognized and supported by strong, targeted interventions, to provide quality education to the children of such backward areas. There is also a need to match education to the demands of people living in those districts. This matching would be the true determinant of quality.

Public demand, unemployment, poor performance at examinations, school drop-out and non-participation rates are all indicative of the need for improvement of education. The specific interventions necessary can also be determined with reference to these factors. Also, there are fundamental issues arising from the very nature of human development and the role that education must play in that development, which are far more compelling.

Poor performance as a nation, civil strife, high crime rates and high suicide rates are but a few indicators of the failures of education which should really alarm and motivate us. We cannot find solutions by confining ourselves to formal instruction in schools, but must be far more concerned about a **total** approach. If education reforms are identified in terms of development of people and of localities, then many reforms would be seen as acceptable and affordable.

The reforms, as identified by the Task Force on General Education, together constitute a consistent set. They are aimed at human development. Therefore, every effort should be made to implement them as such. They cover five major areas all of which are inseparable aspects of formal education. These are :

- a. *Extending educational opportunity.*
- b. *Improving the quality of education.*
- c. *Developing practical and technical skills.*
- d. *Education and training of teachers.*
- e. *Management and resource provision.*

The improvement of General Education does not take place in isolation. It also requires the expansion and creation of opportunities for Higher Education, Technical Education and for Vocational Training. The quality of administration, management, instruction, services, team-work and leadership depend on these aspects of education and training but lie outside the ambit of formal general education. These sectors of education and training also have sets of policy recommendations for reform. Those proposals too are in the process of being implemented, through the initiatives of two other Presidential Task Forces appointed by the President. These are the Presidential Task Force on University Education Reform and Presidential Task Force on Technical Education and Vocational Training. Details of the University Reforms are available

in a separate document, while those on Technical Education and Vocational Training are being drafted.

The current education system in our country has been reviewed and researched, both formally and informally by many persons with particular interest in the field of education. Some of their findings have been fed into the policy formulating process. The reform proposals have also been fertilized by information about education systems in other countries. There are strong arguments for a major shift in Education goals and practices and a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to change.

The principal elements of this shift are:

self realization, life-long learning with emphasis on learning to learn, inculcating of humanistic values and emphasis on stimulating the balanced mental and physical growth of the individual.

The school has to take on some of the functions which the close knit family is supposed to fill. These functions include *instilling discipline, inculcating wholesome attitudes and values* which become some of the emerging missions of the education system. Ensuring the safety and protection of the growing child against negative social and commercial interests, and guiding and counseling both the child and parents are parts of this new mission.

The reforms have the primary objective of creating an education system which will enable our people to live satisfying and peaceful lives, to be productive and to contribute to the well being of others. Being well-informed and knowledgeable, being practically skilled in the broadest sense, being disciplined and refined, and being able to communicate effectively are essential outcomes of such an education process. Obviously there are certain important responsibilities that have to go hand in hand with the implementation of the Reforms which devolve upon parents and the community.

Teachers are the most crucial and valuable resource within the system. They must be motivated, dedicated and fully committed to the cause of delivery of quality education. Their capabilities, availability, effectiveness and attitudes are key factors. Even if the physical infrastructure of schools is not of a uniformly high standard and the hierarchy of officials outside the school is deficient, good leadership by the principal, backed by efficient school management processes can fill in the deficiencies. Driven by wholesome demands, the system will be able to deliver quality education.

If, in addition, the officials are management oriented in their approach, sensitive to the specific needs of each school within their purview, timely in their responses to the schools, and have a strong sense of responsibility, then much can be achieved within the resources that are available.

Another aspect that needs strengthening in the management is the monitoring of costs of operations and assessment of their effectiveness. This is a completely neglected

aspect of educational administration. This is a major impediment to the improvement of the education system.

Education reform does not imply, merely, the improvement of existing buildings or providing additional buildings to schools. Efforts must be targeted on the re-orientation and motivation of key personnel, to be demand driven, to develop social consciousness, to improve their performance and to be fully committed to responsibilities assigned to them. On going and steady improvement within the resources that are available should be the major thrust.

As a nation, we are committed to rapid economic development. This endeavor demands a human resource of highly qualified, motivated, trained or trainable output from the education system. The current system is failing to deliver that required output.

Current expenditure on Education is around 2.9% of GDP. It is necessary to increase the allocation within the next few years to above 4.5% of GDP. The system will have to depend on substantial inputs of foreign funding in order to carry out the major changes required under education reform process. However, the sustaining of Reforms after introduction cannot continue to be dependent on foreign funds.

The provision of funding to schools has to be on the basis of unit cost per student and the development plans of each individual school as spelt out in the approved school policies. Such policies would cover set periods of time and include areas such as, teaching programmes, extra curricular activities, required support facilities and planned infrastructure development.

Realizing the importance of pursuing a settled policy for Education which should remain outside the ambit of day to day politics, a National Education Commission was established in 1991. The mandate of the Commission was to advise the Government on overall policy covering all aspects of Education in the country.

During its term of office, the Commission conducted in-depth studies on various aspects of education, held public sittings, received written submissions and submissions in person, from a wide range of educationists and others who had interest and commitment in the education process.

Arising out of the above process the Commission produced the following documents:-

First Report of the Commission - 1992.
National Policy on General Education .
National Policy on University Education.
National Policy on Technical and Vocational Education.

The Commission was re-constituted, at the end of the term of the first Commission by Her Excellency, the President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaranatunga. The documents produced by the first Commission were accepted by the new Government

which had come into power and steps were taken to begin the process of implementation of recommended Policies.

The President having studied the recommendations, appointed a Presidential Task Force on General Education Reforms, headed by the Minister of Education and Higher Education, Hon. Richard Pathirana in December 1996. The Task Force was given a mandate to develop and present a comprehensive set of Proposals for reforming the General Education System. The President also declared 1997 as the Year of Education Reform. (The members of the Task Force are listed in Annex - 2).

The Presidential Task Force, in turn worked through 13 Technical Committees. (The Technical Committees and their membership are listed in Annex - 3). An Executive Summary, embodying the proposals of the Technical Committees, was presented to Her Excellency the President in March 1997. This document recommended the specific actions to be taken at the various levels of the education system, identified the agencies which should be assigned responsibility and suggested possible time frames for implementation.

The Reforms address not only the formal school years, Grade I to Grade XIII, but also address Early Childhood Education, Pre School Education, Adult and Continuing Education, as well as Special Education. Actions are already being taken for reforming every stage of the education process. They are set out in this document.

THE REFORMS

1. EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

1.1. Background Note

It is now well known and generally accepted that the learning process begins in the foetus with the early and rapid development of the brain. At about four weeks the foetus can hear sounds, the first of which are those of its mother. In the first years after birth, an explosive growth of brain cells follows and the formation of circuits that control the child's behavior patterns and learning processes take place. This is a period of great potential for rapid conscious and sub-conscious learning, never to be repeated in the ensuing years of life.

Yet the early childhood years, those before pre-school, have been neglected by educationists. Unfortunately, most parents, too, are unaware of the role they, themselves, must play during those crucial years, in order to catalyze the proper development of the child's mind, attitudes and behavior patterns. This is a major gap that needs to be filled by changes in the education system. The Presidential Task Force has recommended the following actions which are being implemented :

- 1.1.1. *The Children's Secretariat, under the Ministry in charge of Women's Affairs is designated the lead agency for the implementation of measures to promote Early Childhood Development. The Non-Formal Education Branch of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education will work together with the Children's Secretariat on this Programme. They will both be strengthened, appropriately, for the task of implementation of the planned programmes.*
- 1.1.2. *Awareness programmes, specially targeted at mothers, will be conducted to sensitize them to the importance of the early years of their children's lives and of their responsibility for the **Home Based Learning** activities of their infants. These programmes will be designed, also to create awareness in the public mind and among those who work in this area of child development, emphasizing the importance of the first five years of a child's life.*
- 1.1.3. *Training Programmes on ECD, for mothers and care givers, will be developed and conducted, involving appropriate NGOs and local community leaders.*

2. PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

2.1. Background Note

In the new approach to total development of the growing infant and child the Pre-School, covering as it does the years 3 to 5, becomes a part of the education system that must be given much greater attention than it has received in the past.

While it would be counter-productive to bring it under the control of the State System, it, nevertheless, requires competent guidance and adequate supervision.

A large number of Pre-Schools exist, at present, in all parts of the country. However, it is estimated that only about 30% of children of Pre-school going age actually attend Pre-School. The quality of staff in position, facilities available and education provided at some of these Pre-Schools is of a high standard but the great majority of them are well below optimum levels.

The Presidential Task Force has recommended the following actions which are being implemented :

- 2.1.1. *Promote the setting up of more Pre- schools and thus provide facilities for greater participation of children in the age group 3 to 5. Provide incentives to Provincial Councils and Local Authorities to set up and maintain Pre-Schools.*
- 2.1.2. *Make legislative provision for the regulation of Pre-schools in respect of quality of staff and facilities and for their supervision by relevant authorities.*
- 2.1.3. *Design basic curriculum guideline for Pre-schools, drawing on the expertise of Universities, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Ministry of Health and other relevant agencies. Subject the guideline, so developed, to pilot testing and revision before it is made available to the provincial councils. However, such curricula will serve, only, as guides and not as straight-jackets that kill initiative.*
- 2.1.4. *A Department of Child Development and a Child Study Center will be set up at one of the Universities. This would conduct studies and research on Child Development, set up a Data Bank and evaluate on-going Pre-school programmes.*

3. COMPULSORY EDUCATION

3.1. Background Note

About 14% of the age group 5 to 14 years - the Compulsory School going age-do not attend school. The figure given is a national average but in reality includes pockets where the percentage of non-attendance is very much higher. Studies have shown that there is a multiplicity of causes for this state of affairs. These are mostly socio-economic and include poverty and the need for children to work in order to supplement the family income. Girls of this age group may be kept back at home in order to look after the younger children. Non-attendance is also tied up, sometimes, with times of sowing and harvesting of crops and related agricultural activities. In many cases lack of documents, like birth certificates, prevent children from gaining admission to school.

The Presidential Task Force has recommended the following actions which are being implemented:

- 3.1.1. *Regulations making education compulsory for children in the age group 5 to 14 were passed by Parliament and came into effect in January 1998. These regulations require parents to ensure admission of their children to school and their continuous attendance.*
- 3.1.2. *Surveys, were commenced in 1997 in various parts of the country and are on-going, to determine the reasons for non-attendance of children. Results of these surveys are being used to develop strategies which will help to induce fuller participation in education by children of compulsory school going age.*
- 3.1.3. *In cases where parents are not able to provide birth certificates. Heads of schools have been instructed to accept affidavits or letters from the local Grama Sevaka Niladaries as proof of a child's age.*
- 3.1.4. *According to perceived needs, incentives such as clothing, stationery and school meals will be provided, in addition to books and other materials, to those needing to be helped in such manner. Voluntary organizations and NGOs will be encouraged to help in these programs.*
- 3.1.5. *As part of the ECD programme, Crèches and Day Care Centers will be established. These will help to release girls from their responsibility for the younger children at home and enable them to attend school.*
- 3.1.6. *Activity Schools will be established to serve children whose levels of educational attainment do not allow them to gain admission to classes appropriate to their age. Appropriate curricula will be developed for these schools which might serve also to help under-achievers. In*

addition Open Schools will be developed which will function in the distance mode.

- 3.1.7. The lead Agency for implementing, monitoring and evaluating this programme is the Non-Formal Education Unit of MEHE. NFEU will be appropriately strengthened to serve in this capacity.*

A well planned awareness programme will be mounted, island-wide to inform parents about the importance of their children's participation and of the steps that are being taken to help them. The approach to be followed is one of persuasion, not of coercion.

4. THE PRIMARY STAGE OF EDUCATION

4.1. Background Note

The principle that the first five years of a child's life are crucial to the learning process and total personality development applies with equal force to the first five years of Formal Education - Primary Education, as well. During these years the child must build the well recognized, four pillars of Learning:-

Learning to know
Learning to do
Learning to live together
Learning to be

Further, under the reforms, it is expected that, in the Primary School years, the child will acquire certain basic competencies. These are :

Competencies in Communication
Competencies relating to the natural, social and artificial environment
Competencies in Ethics and Religion
Competencies in play and the use of leisure
Competencies in learning : learning how to learn

The Presidential Task Force has recommended the following actions, which are being implemented:

- 4.1.1. *Education will be child centered, not teacher centered. The emphasis will be on developing the child's mind, skills, attitudes and abilities.*
- 4.1.2. *An integrated curriculum will be used which incorporates the Mother Tongue, Religion, Mathematics and Environment Related Activities.*
- 4.1.3. *English will be used as a means of communication from Grade I, while the formal teaching of English will commence at Grade III. Children will be encouraged also to use the other national language, in addition to their own.*
- 4.1.4. *Primary Education will consist of three Key Stages:-*

Key Stage One - Grades I and II
Key Stage Two - Grades III and IV
Key Stage Three - Grades V

*Three elements, **Guided Play: Activity: Desk Work** will go into each of the stages. There will be a stage-wise transition in proportions of the three elements used in the teaching/learning process.*

At Key Stage I, a greater part of the time will be spent on Guided Play with some components of Activity and a minimum of Desk Work. At Key Stage II the three approaches will be given equal prominence, while at Key Stage III, Desk Work will dominate. Concepts relating to stabilization of morals, inculcation of values, development of tolerance, appreciation of other social groups and cultures and living in harmony will run as unifying threads, through all three Key Stages.

4.1.5. At the point of entry the teacher will engage children in a series of specially designed play items and activities, with a view to identifying each child's capabilities at entry, as early as possible. This will help the teacher to plan the learning, teaching process according to the needs of each child. Throughout the learning- teaching process children will be assessed continuously, placing emphasis on informal methods of assessment. Towards the end of each key stage, children will be assessed to determine their levels mastery of Essential Competencies, lists of which will be available to the teachers. This will enable teachers, to assess the degree of success achieved and, to take corrective measures, where necessary.

In order to implement the actions set out above, the Presidential Task Force has set in train a series of essential supportive measures. These include the following:-

4.1.6 Revision of Syllabuses, writing and production of Text Books, Work Books and of Supplementary Materials.

4.1.6.1. A general framework for the entire Primary School Curriculum has been worked out. Syllabuses are being drawn up on the basis of competencies that have been identified.

4.1.6.2. Primary readers, work books and teachers guides for the new syllabuses are under preparation and will reach the schools at the appropriate time.

4.1.6.3. For the production of supplementary reading materials, an NIE Steering Committee will be formed to select writers from among those registered with the NIE. The Steering Committee will examine books submitted, before they are approved for publication.

4.1.7. Pre-service and In-service Teacher Training.

4.1.7.1. Staff of the Colleges of Education and other Teacher Training Institutes will undergo the necessary orientation for the delivery of training in respect of the new syllabuses and teaching methodologies. The required Teacher Education curriculum modules and support materials have been developed and are being used in the pilot programme that is now on-going.

4.1.7.2. *Master Teacher vacancies have been filled and they will be trained and will conduct in-service programmes, as required.*

4.1.8. *Assessment.*

4.1.8.1. *Class based assessment frameworks have been developed and materials and training provided for assessment of competency levels, throughout the learning - teaching process. Provision has been made to train teachers to conduct teacher-made tests and achievement tests.*

4.1.9. *Infra-structure, Environment and Equipment.*

4.1.9.1. *Models of the desired Primary School Environment and basic infra-structure have been developed. These models will be used to build anew or to enhance the existing infra-structure so that children begin to learn in attractive surroundings using simple attractive materials and furniture.*

4.1.10. *School Based Management.*

4.1.10.1. *Appropriately qualified and trained personnel will be appointed as Heads of Primary Sections and given adequate, devolved, authority and suitable remuneration.*

4.1.10.2. *Primary Education Development Committees, with strong parent involvement will be set up.*

4.1.10.3. *The concept of the School Family, bringing together neighboring schools, to work for the common good will be implemented.*

4.1.11. *Monitoring and supervision of the implementation of reforms.*

4.1.11.1. *The Ministry of Education and Higher Education, in collaboration with the National Institute of Education and the Provincial Education Authorities, will develop a system for continuous monitoring and supervision of the implementation of the Reform Programme.*

4.1.11.2. *The monitoring system will be applied to the Reform process at all levels of the General Education System.*

4.1.11.3. A major part of the monitoring and supervision will become the responsibility of the Provincial, District and Zonal Education system.

The implementation of the Reforms in Primary Education commenced in January 98'. The first phase covered Grade I in 533 schools in the Gampaha District. This district was chosen because, already, there was an ongoing primary school project sponsored by UNESCO, there. Progress is being closely monitored and indicators of positive response to the Reform programme have emerged. Progress Review meetings are held at regular intervals with the monitoring group. Experience gathered through this pilot programme will be used in refining the Reforms before implementation, island wide, in January '99. Meanwhile, the Gampaha district will move into Grade II. Under this phased programme of Primary Education Reform, the Government will have recreated a Primary Education School system in the island, relevant to 21st century needs by 2003.

5. THE JUNIOR STAGE OF EDUCATION.

5.1. Background Note.

The Junior Stage will include Grades VI - IX. In the Primary Stage the child would have been taught through an integrated curriculum. In this stage he will begin to learn through a subject based curriculum. Therefore, Grade VI will be used as a bridging year to facilitate the transition from one type of syllabus to the other.

The Presidential Task Force has recommended the following actions which are being implemented:-

5.1.1. The curriculum will include the following nine subjects:

First Language : English : Mathematics : Science and Technology: Social Studies : Life Skills : Religion: Aesthetics : Health and Physical Education: Children will be encouraged to continue the use of the National Language other than their own in play and activities.

5.1.2. Practical Work and work on small projects will form important elements of this stage of education.

5.1.3. Activity Rooms will be established in each Junior School. In these rooms pupils will learn by doing things by themselves, using simple tools and learning simple techniques.

5.1.4. The programme designed to strengthen English capability Primary Section will be continued in the Junior Section with increase in emphasis, revision of syllabuses and the production of new text books, work books and supplementary reading materials.

5.1.5. Links will be developed between the school system and the Vocational Training system and opportunities will be developed for pupils to move upwards in the general education system or laterally into vocational and technical education. Career guidance and counseling will be introduced into the school system in order to give advice to pupils and their parents, as and when necessary .

5.1.6. At the end of Grade IX, there will be a School Based Proficiency Examination. A certificate will be issued to all pupils who sit this examination. The results of this examination will be useful to Career Guidance and Counseling staff, teachers and parents in guiding the children into avenues most suited to their capabilities.

5.1.1. Concepts relating to peace education national harmony, democratic principles, human rights, gender equality and environmental conservation will be built into the Social Studies and other subjects as appropriate. This will help in developing and re-inforcing the proper

attitudes and patterns of behavior relevant to social responsibilities, civic consciousness national integration and harmony .

- 5.1.2. *Revision of syllabuses, production of texts, course materials and support materials, training of teachers is now in train for the implementation of Reforms at Grade VI and Grade IX from January 1999. The reforms will continue in sequence upwards in the succeeding years.*

6. THE SENIOR STAGE OF EDUCATION: GCE - ORDINARY LEVEL.

6.1. Background Note.

At present the GCE - Ordinary Level extends over a three year period from Grade IX to XI. Pupils have to appear for a single examination that covers three years of work. Such a situation is educationally unsound and places too great a strain on the pupils. Further, teaching methodology has been teacher centered and little emphasis has been given to practical aspects and relevance to societal needs. Pupils will be encouraged to develop the reading habit and teaching will be pupil centered rather than teacher centered.

The Presidential Task Force has recommended the following changes. These will be implemented in Grade X in Year 2000 and will continue into Grade XI in 2001. The first O/L examination under these reforms will be held in December 2001.

6.1.1. *The GCE - O/L courses will be limited to the two years Grades X and XI.*

6.1.2. *The syllabus will include subjects under two categories - **Core Subjects** which will be compulsory and **Optional Subjects** from which pupils may select a maximum of two subjects.*

6.1.3. *Pupils will have to obtain passes 7 out of the 8 Core Subjects in order to pass the GCE O-L examination.*

The Core subjects will provide a firm and broad educational base. They will include the following:

First Language

English

Mathematics

Science and Technology

Social Studies and History

Religion

Aesthetic Studies (Literature will be an option within this group)

Technical Subject

6.1.4. *Two levels of question papers will be set on the Mathematics syllabus and the Science Syllabus. The lower level paper will help pupils who will not be studying these subjects further.*

The Optional Subjects will provide more opening for pupils who intend to specialize in certain areas of study and will include the following:

Sinhala /Tamil as a second Language

History

Geography

Health and Physical Education
Development Studies
Literature (Sinhala/ Tamil/ English)
Other Languages

- 6.1.5. *Syllabuses, Teachers Guides and required resource materials are being produced to serve the new 2 year O/L programme, beginning in January 2000.*
- 6.1.6. *The required in-service training will be conducted to enable teachers to handle the new syllabuses and the student centered teaching approach. The curricula of Teacher Training Institutes will be adapted, accordingly. The necessary orientation will be given to officials concerned.*
- 6.1.7. *To support the emphasis on practical work and on inculcating the reading habit in pupils, facilities such as well equipped Libraries, Science Laboratories and adequately equipped workshops will be provided. Resource rooms for use by students in Social Studies, also, will be provided.*
- 6.1.8. *Pupils will be required to participate in as many extra curricular activities as possible and the school must provide the facilities for a range of such activities.*
- 6.1.9. *The reforms at O/L aim to produce an output with total personality development, able to move into academic work at the A/L or into Technical Studies, or to the world of work. To achieve this end, links will be established with a formalized Technical and Vocational Education Systems and with potential employers.*
- 6.1.10. *Career Guidance Staff, adequately trained, will be attached to every school or to school families. They will help pupils in selection of courses of study, finding out-of-school training opportunities, and giving advice on personal problems, as well. The Career Guidance personnel will be functional at all levels of the Junior Secondary Schools. They will interact with teachers and parents as well.*

7. THE SENIOR STAGE OF EDUCATION : GCE ADVANCED LEVEL

7.1. Background Note

The GCE Advanced Level courses extend over two years and constitute the final stage of Secondary Education, in the country. Approximately 180,000 students go through this course and appear for the GCE A/L Examination.

It has been the practice, in the past, to focus the syllabuses, course structure and examination system on the limited objective of preparing students for university admission. At the present time, less than 12,000 pupils gain admission to the various faculties of the 10 formal style universities in the country. The Open University of Sri Lanka caters to a larger number of pupils, who may not have the base A/L qualification required by other universities.

Even so a large majority of students who complete the Advanced Level are neglected by the present system. Their subject combinations, dictated by pre-requisites determined by university faculties, often, have little relevance to potential for employment or further education of this less fortunate category. The existing system pays little or no attention to their needs. Therefore, there is an urgent necessity for a major change in the goals of education at the Advanced Level.

Further, at present, the A/L examination serves a dual purpose. It is an attainment examination as well as a selection examination for universities. Using a single examination for both these purposes is contrary to accepted educational norms.

Considering all these factors the Presidential Task Force has recommended the following changes. These are being implemented beginning with Grade XII in September 1998 and continuing into Grade XIII in September 1999. The first Advanced Level Examination under the Reforms will be held in August 2000.

- 7.1.1. *The number of subjects to be offered by a candidate is reduced from four to three.*
- 7.1.2. *Those candidates seeking university admission will be required to select subject combinations as set down by the particular university faculties. University faculties will be requested to reduce the number of pre-requisite subjects to the minimum possible.*
- 7.1.3. *Candidates seeking university admission will be required to appear for a **Common General Test**. This will be set by a special unit at the UGC and administered by the Commissioner General of Examinations. It will be time-tabled for the end of the series of subject papers. Other candidates, too, may sit for this paper, if they so desire.*
- 7.1.4. *The Common General Paper will be designed to assess intellectual attributes categorized as:-*
General Awareness
Problems Solving ability

Reasoning ability (analytical, formal, numerical, and spatial)
Ability to Comprehend and Communicate

- 7.1.5. *In order to be considered for university admission a candidate must qualify by:-*
- a. *passing the Common General Paper.*
 - b. *obtaining a minimum subjects' aggregate of 140 marks on the three subjects offered. (The marks scored on the Common General Paper will not be added to this aggregate).*
- 7.1.6. *Candidates so qualified will be selected on the basis of the Rank Order in the Aggregate marks scored. The Prevailing District Quota system for university admission will not be changed. The pass mark on the Common General Test will be adjusted with due consideration being given to overall performance on the Test in each district.*
- 7.1.7. *Practical work becomes a compulsory requirement of the Advanced Level Course in the subjects Agriculture, Biology, Chemistry, Home Science, and Physics. In other subjects, assignments, project reports be written, will take the place of practical work. Project work will also become a part of the teaching and learning process.*
- 7.1.8. *No candidate will be permitted to submit an application for the Advanced Level Examination, without having completed 80% of the listed Practical Exercises/Assignments.*
- 7.1.9. *School Based Assessment (SBA) of Practicals, Assignments, Project work will be conducted.*
- 7.1.10. *A Pupil's Record Book will be maintained in respect of each student, by the Principal of the school. This will carry a full, authoritative record of the student's total performance and development during the Grades XII and XIII.*
- 7.1.11. *Zonal Monitoring Panels appropriately constituted of will visit schools and ensure that practical work is being carried out according to guidelines given by the NIE and that SBA is being done regularly and accurately.*
- 7.1.12. *The minimum number in an Advanced Level Class will be 15 and the maximum number will be 35. Provincial Education Officers will be requested to ensure that pupils are not drawn away from smaller schools to those that already have large number of students in the A/L classes.*
- 7.1.13. *In support of the above Reforms, all Advanced Level Schools conforming to the stipulations in Section 7.1.11. will be provided with*

necessary laboratory and library facilities and the full complement of teachers required to handle the various streams.

8. STRENGTHENING OF ENGLISH TEACHING PROGRAMMES

8.1. Background Note

The Government recognizes that the education system must provide its output with an adequate degree of competence in the use of the English language in the world of work and in the technological international environment of the 21st century. At present, the only certification in English that a pupil obtains by the time he leaves school after 11 years of schooling is the O/L certificate. Most such pupils cannot read, write or speak the language at an acceptable level. Thus they are unable to find suitable employment or to proceed easily into tertiary education. They cannot benefit from the immense pool of information available through the multi-media systems.

In order to rectify this situation the Presidential Task Force has introduced a number of important reforms aimed at strengthening English capability at all levels, beginning at Grade I. The following actions are being implemented:-

- 8.1.1. *English will be used in Grade I for communication, in addition to the mother tongue. This action is already being implemented in the Gampaha District and will be implemented in all schools of the island from January 1999.*
- 8.1.2. *Formal teaching of English with the use of necessary texts and guide books will begin in Grade 3 and develop from there onwards. Materials will be produced in which the content will capture and hold the interest of the child and will be presented in attractive format. Supplementary materials will be provided, as well.*
- 8.1.3. *English will be taught as a subject from Grade VI onwards, using revised, upgraded and attractive books and supplementary materials. Pupils will be encouraged to borrow books from the library and the reading habit will be developed among pupils by a well planned approach. The programme in Grade VI - IX will be used to develop Spoken English capabilities, further, building on the base of the English for Communication approach that will be developed in the Primary Education years.*
- 8.1.4. *English will be a core subject for Ordinary Level from January. Text Books, Work Books and supplementary materials will be revised and upgraded. Library facilities with appropriate English Readers will be supplied to Libraries and the reading habit inculcated at Junior Secondary level will be strengthened further.*

- 8.1.5. *A new subject, **General English** will be introduced for Advanced Level from September 1999. This will be a two year course with 450 teaching periods. Books of specially selected essays will be compiled. These would cover a wide range of topics relevant to the world of work and of life in the 21st Century. For instance there could be essays covering diverse areas of life and work, such as, banking, commerce, agriculture, computers, space travel, tourism and health.*
- 8.1.6. *An assessment will be made of the capability of teachers now teaching English, in schools, at the O/L and A/L to teach the new subject, with additional training. Appropriate training programmes will be mounted where necessary.*
- 8.1.7. *There is likely to be a major shortfall in the availability of competent teachers. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education has taken a decision to recruit, by advertisement, retired teachers and other personnel with a high degree of fluency in English. There will be a preliminary screening of those responding to the advertisement for selection of persons to undergo a special course of training. A second screening will be conducted before persons are selected for appointment on 3 year contracts.*
- 8.1.8. *All teachers now at training colleges and all those who will be trained in the future will be required to follow and pass a two year course in English, in addition to the particular course in which they are being trained.*
- 8.1.9. *Special programmes of teacher training for English teachers at all levels, will be carried out on a pre-service and an in-service basis.*

9. DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNICAL AND PRACTICAL SKILLS

9.1. Background Note

It is necessary that the education system should provide for sustained development of technical and practical skills in pupils. It is desirable that these skills be developed from the early stages of the education system. The Presidential Task Force has recommended the following actions which are being implemented

- 9.1.1. *Activity learning is being introduced as a important part of Primary Education. Pupils will be encouraged to do things and learn by practical experience. They will make use of materials, simple tools and measuring devices and also learn to work together as teams.*
- 9.1.2. *In Junior Secondary schools practical skills will be developed in relation to food, clothing, shelter, health, organization, information and communication. These activities will be supported by the establishment of Activity Rooms in each school, provided with appropriate basic equipment and tools.*
- 9.1.3. *At the GCE O/L Science and Technology will be taught on a revised and modified syllabus.*
- 9.1.4. *At the GCE A/L a new Technology stream will be introduced with bias towards Agriculture, Industry, Commerce, Services and Professional fields.*
- 9.1.5. *Practical work and project work will be introduced as these activities will contribute greatly to the development of technical capability.*

10. CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

10.1. Background Note

These activities will form an essential part of the policies and programmes of all schools. They will help to develop qualities of leadership, team work, ideas of co-operation, organizational and practical skills, concern for others and a sense of justice and fair play.

Schools will be encouraged to organize a wide range of such activities so that pupils will have opportunities to express their potential. Pupils should participate fully in such activities. Pupil Record Books will record the achievements of the pupils in curricular as well as co-curricular fields. These Record Books will be useful to employers in assessing the total development of pupils.

At present most schools conduct sports meets, prize days and contests of various sorts. This must become standard practiced in all schools and there should be a year round range of activities from amongst which pupils may choose. The school should provide as many games as possible and encourage student participation. Subject based societies, debating societies, literary societies, bird watcher's club and astronomy societies are some activities that can be introduced at low cost with wide student participation. Inter-class, intra-age group, inter-school contents, involving physical and /or intellectual pursuits should be developed.

Such co-curricular activities can succeed only if there is support forthcoming from the teaching staff and the community at large. Community based activities and projects and community involvement in pupil development will pay rich dividends.

11. SPECIAL EDUCATION

11.1 Background Note

A number of children suffer from handicaps which may be due to physical, mental or societal problems. The system will adopt a two-pronged approach to serve the needs of such children.

- 11.1.1. Every effort will be made to bring the child into the main stream of education.*
- 11.1.2. Where the above is not possible special schools or institutions will be organized to cater to the needs of those children.*
- 11.1.3. Programmes will be established for slow learners and for fast learners in such manner that the normal school system is not affected.*

Fast learners, for instance, can be offered special vacation programmes which can help them to develop their potential at a more rapid pace.

12. VALUE EDUCATION AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION

12.1 Background Note

Values and morals cannot be taught as separate subjects. They are learned continuously as cohesive threads that run through all subjects, through all the years of schooling. The teaching of religion, which begins in primary and continues through the rest of the general education years, contributes greatly to the building up of correct values and morals.

During this process, pupils will also learn to understand the religious practices and values of other groups of children and also understand other cultures and give due respect to them. It is in this manner that the education system must play a major role in creating a just society in our country.

The saying goes that "*values are not taught but are caught*".

This implies that responsibility for value education rests firmly on the shoulders of the principal, the teachers and adults in the child's environment. The teaching and learning environment if properly oriented, will inculcate justice and fair play in pupils regardless of caste, creed or social class and will lead to a total school culture built upon sound values and morals. The pupil must be able to distinguish right from wrong, not on the basis of a particular culture but also on the basis of universal acceptance.

13. COUNSELING AND CAREER GUIDANCE

13.1 Background Note

The General Education system does not provide Counseling and Career Guidance, at present. However, this is very important aspect, specially under circumstances where jobs are not easily available. Guidance is necessary in selection of subjects and of course streams and finding of appropriate job placements. In addition, because of stresses both in the home environment, at school and in the community, guidance in relation to personal problems is also necessary.

The Presidential Task Force has recommended the following actions in this regard :-

- 13.1.1. Selected teachers in schools will be given special training in Career Guidance and Counseling and assigned these duties in their schools, as part of their work on the time table.*
- 13.1.2. Schools and school families will build up databases on available Vocational and Technical training courses in their areas and also on possible job opportunities. Career Guidance Officers will use the databases to help children select appropriate courses of study which will help them to fit into available opportunities.*
- 13.1.3. Career Guidance Officers will meet with pupils at regular intervals or as necessary to advice them on personal problems and will also interact with parents of pupils when the need arises.*

14. RATIONALIZATION OF SCHOOLS

14.1. Background Note

At present there are schools with classes from Year 1 - 13, 6-13, 1-5 and 1-8 in various parts of the island. There are schools called 1 A B schools which have Science as well as other streams in their A/L classes and schools called 1 C schools in which the A/L classes do not have Science Streams.

14.1.1. *Under the Reforms, each class will be referred to by Grade and not by Year. The schools will be restructured into a uniform two tier system in the following manner:-*

The First Tier will comprise the Junior Schools.

The Junior School will have two Sections:

A Primary Section - Grades I - V

A Junior Section - Grades VI - IX

The Second Tier would comprise :-

The Senior School - Grades X - XIII

THE TWO TIER SYSTEM.

	Section	Grades
Tire I Junior School	Primary Junior	I - V VI - IX
Tire II Senior School	-----	X - XIII

14.1.2. *There are likely to be a larger number of Junior Schools than of Senior Schools. The former can function as Feeder Schools to the latter.*

14.1.3. *Action is already being taken to pilot these changes in a number of selected large schools, in and around Colombo.*

14.1.4. *There will be a need for a large number of Schools with Primary Sections only, as these should be located within easy access to children of the age group served by Grades I - V. Some of these may not, themselves, become full Junior Schools but may function as Feeder Schools to the Junior Sections of Junior schools nearby. .*

14.1.5. *Each Junior School and each Senior School will have its own Principal and Management. Within the Junior School the Primary Section will have its own Head with full responsibility and adequate resources.*

14.1.6. *The maximum number of students that may be admitted to any one school will be determined by the education authorities and principals will be required to restrict admissions to those numbers. At present, there are a number of schools where the total number of students on roll is far too large.*

15. REORGANIZATION OF SCHOOLS

15.1. Background Note

Though there are over 10,000 schools in the island their distribution is unplanned and their quality is far from being inter-comparable. The development of the school system has been determined largely by historical and political factors rather than by demographic factors and sound educational planning. The Central School concept, developed and implemented in the fifties, did give a sound start but this petered out for reasons now unclear.

In order to make educational opportunity equally available to children in all parts of the country, the Presidential Task Force has recommended the following actions which are being implemented:-

- 15.1.1. A school-mapping exercise covering all parts of the country is on-going, at MEHE and will be completed, shortly.*
- 15.1.2. Three Hundred schools will be selected, one per AGA division in all parts of the country for total quality improvement. This activity has commenced with the identification of schools to be improved.*
- 15.1.3. Quality improvement of schools will include the upgrading of staff, infra-structure development provision of playgrounds, standardized Laboratories, Activity rooms, adequately equipped Workshops, Libraries.*
- 15.1.4. Each of the selected schools will be provided with the full complement of trained, qualified, staff. There will be regular in-service training for staff of these schools.*
- 15.1.5. The principals of each of these schools will be specially selected and trained so that all schools so developed will function with equal efficiency.*

16. SCHOOL BASED MANAGEMENT

16.1. Background Note

It is the view of the Presidential Task Force that schools will function most efficiently if they are allowed to manage their day to day affairs, with Education Officials functioning as facilitators, who monitor progress and tender advice.

The Presidential Task Force has recommended that a substantial part of the management of the school should be transferred to the school level itself. The Presidential Task Force has recommended the following actions which are being implemented:

- 16.1.1. *Decisions will be taken with regard to the areas of authority that should be devolved to the school management.*
- 16.1.2. *Principals will no longer be considered simply as administrators of schools. They will be trained in School Based Management and will function as Policy Makers, Financial Controllers, in addition to being administrators.*
- 16.1.3. *Training programmes in School Based Management are being developed by NIE and some programmes have being conducted, already.*
- 16.1.4. *Schools will be managed by School Boards, the composition of which will be determined, in due course.*
- 16.1.5. *Each school and School Board will develop a School Policy and Programme for the school, taking into account, also, the community which it serves. There will be close interaction between the school and the community. The school will draw from the community such expertise and help as may be available locally and the school itself will assist the members of the community where such assistance is necessary.*
- 16.1.6. *Under the Advanced Level Reforms which came into effect, in September 1998, each subject teacher is required to develop a two year plan for teaching his or her subject. The Principal and all A/L teachers together are expected to develop a School Policy for teaching and learning in the Advanced Level Classes. This is the first step in the direction of developing a total school policy .*
- 16.1.7. *The school policy will be developed in consultation with the provincial authorities. Financing of the school will be tied to the approved policy and the student numbers in the school.*

17. TEACHER EDUCATION

17.1. Background Note

At present, there are about 190,000 teachers in the general education system. Of this number over 10,000 have not been given any formal training in teaching. The quality of education in the country is determined to a very large extent by the quality of the teacher, though there are also various other contributory factors.

The Presidential Task Force has recommended the following actions which are being implemented:

- 17.1.1. *A National Authority of Teacher Education (NATE) has been established by Act of Parliament in order to co-ordinate teacher training programmes in the country. It will be responsible for policy development, monitoring and accreditation of an integrated National Teacher Education System.*
- 17.1.2. *The training of teachers is carried out at Colleges of Education, Teacher Colleges, National Institute of Education, and Faculties of Education of the Universities. The number of Colleges of Education will be increased to 14 in order to meet the increasing demand. University Faculties will provide B.Ed. courses and Post Graduate Diploma courses in education. The teacher education courses will be revised appropriately to serve the education reform. The distance mode of training will also be used.*
- 17.1.3. *All untrained teachers in the system will be trained, as early as possible, using the expanded and improved facilities of the training system.*
- 17.1.4. *In future the Ministry of Education and Higher Education will employ only teachers who have received training in a teacher training institute.*
- 17.1.5. *All teachers undergoing training now and in the future, will have to follow a two year course in English, in addition to the special area of training for which they have been selected. It will be necessary for all trainees to pass the English component in order to pass the training college examination.*
- 17.1.6. *A Teacher Education Service comprising academically and professionally qualified personnel will be established to fill the posts of Lecturers and Administrators. This will help to attract and retain high quality staff for the teacher training programmes.*
- 17.1.7. *Special attention will be paid to the training of teachers of English, at all levels, from primary upwards. In order to handle the new*

General English programme which comes into effect at GCE A/L in September 1999, teachers will be recruited on contract, trained, screened for competence and used for the teaching of the new programme. They will fill the gap at this level until the teacher training colleges produce trained English teachers who can take over.

- 17.1.8. *A special training programme will be established at a selected College of Education in order to train a cadre of teachers to teach the new technology subjects.*

18. TEACHER PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

18.1. Background Note

Success of the entire Reform Programme depends, ultimately, on how the teacher performs in the class room and interacts with the pupils. The best laid plans will fail if the fullest co-operation of the teacher is not given at all times. Much time, effort and expense will be incurred by the Education system in order to build up the quality and efficiency of the teaching community. However, in order to achieve desired results a well planned monitoring programme is essential. The Presidential Task Force has decided to take the following steps:

- 18.1.1. *A system of Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA) will be introduced into all schools.*
- 18.1.2. *Under this system each teacher will enter into a contract with the Principal/Sectional Head in respect of an agreed range of activities to be carried out by the teacher during a specified period of time- perhaps one year.*
- 18.1.3. *At the end of that period the Principal/Sectional Head will review the degree of completion of the terms of the contract. A report on Teacher Performance will be written in the TPA form held by the Principal. The teacher will be informed of the nature of the report.*
- 18.1.4. *The TPA will also take note of a number of factors such as attendance, punctuality, neatness of dress, peer co-operation, participation in general school activities, interaction with parents and pupils.*
- 18.1.5. *TPA will be used as a basis for decisions regarding increments, transfers, promotions, selection for training programmes and workshops and for the award of scholarships.*

19. STREAMLINING THE FUNCTIONING OF MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE PROVINCIAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

19.1. Background Note

The Management of the Education System and the Implementation of the Reform process is the responsibility of the MEHE and also of the Provincial Education systems. It is essential that MEHE should restructure its administrative and functional framework and build up the required Human Resource capacity in order to fulfill the demands placed upon it by the Education Reforms. The following steps have to be taken:

- 19.1.1. Each major sector that comes under the Reform process must be assigned to a responsible officer at level of Director, with delegated authority to take necessary actions for implementation. He should be supported by a sufficient number of qualified staff forming a cohesive unit. For example there should be an English Unit, a Science Education Unit, and an Aesthetics Unit.*
- 19.1.2. Similarly, units should be set up with responsibility for the implementation of School Based Management and Teacher Performance Appraisal, Library Services, Laboratory Services, Backward area schools etc.*
- 19.1.3. Efficient coordination and logistical support should be established between MEHE, NIE, NEC and Provincial Administrations.*
- 19.1.4. Consensus should be reached between the center and the provinces on modalities for efficient and rapid implementation of the various changes. There should be no delays in communication between the center and the provinces and between provincial administration and the zonal officers and the school system.*
- 19.1.5. New monitoring and supervisory systems should be developed, rapidly, involving the center and provincial systems, whereby School Based Management can operate efficiently, with the official system carrying out a monitoring and facilitating role rather than one of control.*