

**STUDY ON QUALITY
ASSURANCE AND
ACCREDITATION IN
GENERAL EDUCATION IN SRI
LANKA**



**NATIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSION
NAWALA ROAD, NUGEGODA
SRI LANKA**

Research Series (2014) - No. 04

Study on Quality Assurance and Accreditation in General Education in Sri Lanka

A Research conducted for the National Education Commission

Funded by

The Transforming School Education Project (TSEP)

World Bank

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**NATIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSION
NAWALA ROAD, NUGEGODA
SRI LANKA**

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Preface

The National Education Commission (NEC) commenced formulating National Education Policy for its third ten year policy reviewing cycle. As a part of the above policy formulating process NEC has commissioned ten research studies in order to identify the important policy issues in General Education System in Sri Lanka. The research teams were asked to recommend changes to the present policies where necessary and suggest new policies to the National Education Commission based on their findings.

The Standing Committee on General Education (SCGE) of NEC has identified ten different study areas in the General Education System and prepared relevant Terms of Reference (TORs) for these studies after several discussions at SCGE meetings. The research reports published in this study series were prepared over a period of around nine months by ten research teams selected for their expertise in the different aspects of General Education. The draft reports of research studies were reviewed by a panel of reviewers before finalizing the research reports.

The National Education Commission appreciates the support given by the World Bank in allocating funds from the Transforming School Education System as the foundation of a knowledge hub Project (TSEP) at Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils. The Commission also thanks Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration (SLIDA) for their services provided in financial administration of the research studies.

It is hoped that the publication of these studies will contribute to the extension of the knowledge base necessary for educational change and will stimulate interest and participation in improving the quality of education in Sri Lanka. These studies can also provide points of departure for future researches.

Prof Lakshman Jayatileke
Chairman
National Education Commission

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List of Acronyms

GCE (A-L): General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level)

GCE (O- L): General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level)

MoE: Ministry of Education

WB: World Bank

PE: Primary education

NEC: National Education Commission

QA: Quality Assurance

SE: Secondary Education

SQAA: School Quality Assessment and Accreditation

1. Introduction

The National Education Commission has taken an initiative to examine the Policy framework on General Education in Sri Lanka under ten different sub themes including the theme 'Quality Assurance'. The present research team was assigned the task of reviewing the prevailing mechanisms for Quality Assurance in General Education in Sri Lanka in relation to the guidelines and procedures adopted in other countries and making recommendations regarding required improvements.

This research was conducted from January to March 2014 using a mixed pragmatic research approach. The convenient sampling method was used due to the limitations of allocated time, physical and financial resources and logistics. Primary as well as secondary data were obtained from diverse sources and respondents which included published documents available in Sri Lanka and on the worldwide web, visits to government schools, focus group discussions with Directors, additional directors of education, in-service advisors, principals and teachers and interviewing the Director of the Monitoring and Evaluation (QA) unit of the Ministry of Education.

1.1 Definition of key terms

Quality is a concept which has made inroads to every sphere of life including education. Quality is a much more complicated term to define than it appears because a variety of perspectives such as the customer's perspective and the specification-based perspective should be taken into consideration. A modern definition of quality as 'meeting or exceeding customer expectations' has been derived from the definition made by Juran in 1951 for quality as 'fitness for intended use' (Juran & Godfrey, 1999).

In the field of education, the term 'Quality' has been attributed to multiple meanings such as 'exceptional', 'excellent', 'fitness for purpose' and 'enhancement or improvement' reflecting different ideological, social and political values of diverse stakeholder groups (Harvey and Knight, 1996). Rasheed (2000) identified effectiveness, efficiency, equality, relevance and sustainability as five key dimensions of quality. UNICEF (2000) recognized five dimensions of quality in education: learners, environments, content, processes and outcomes'.

These definitions and dimensions imply that though there is no universally accepted single definition for 'quality' in education representing the varied, sometimes conflicting views of diverse stakeholders, these wide-ranging definitions suggest quality as being multi-dimensional in nature and whimsical with the perspective of the stakeholder. Therefore any approach used to assess quality of education needs to be holistic with due consideration to all relevant dimensions and perspectives.

Quality Assurance (QA) is a broad concept that focuses on the entire quality system. Quality Assurance is defined as 'the maintenance of a desired level of quality in a service or product, especially by means of attention to every stage of the process of

delivery or production'. An alternative definition of QA is 'any systematic process of checking to see whether a product or service being developed is meeting specified requirements'. These definitions suggest that the QA process should consider the entire system including inputs, process and outcome of a product or service. In the field of education, QA has been defined in a number of ways, some of which are given below:

Quality Assurance is a planned and systematic review process of an institution or program to determine that acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being maintained and enhanced (CHEA, 2002).

Quality Assurance is the means through which an institution ensures and confirms that the conditions are in place for students to achieve the standards set by it or by another awarding body (Vlăsceanu et al., 2004).

Despite differences, these definitions imply QA to be policies, procedures and activities that are in place to assess, determine, confirm, facilitate, promote, and assist the educational institutes to achieve, sustain and improve the standards of education. In this regard, the input, process and outcome of education as well as five key dimensions of quality identified by Rasheed (2000) should be given due consideration.

Quality Assurance models are developed based on the perceived definition of 'quality'. Quality assurance activities depend on the existence of the necessary institutional mechanisms preferably sustained by a solid quality culture. Usually QA is carried out by agencies which have been established either internally or externally or both. The QA process involves three steps, Self-evaluation, Peer review and Reporting.

Accreditation is granting credit or recognition to a programme or an institution. It is different to QA, while QA is a pre-requisite for accreditation. In the education arena, accreditation is a type of QA process under which services and operations of educational institutions or programs are evaluated by an external body to determine if applicable standards have been fulfilled. If standards have been met, accredited status is granted by the agency. Accreditation decisions are time-limited. The duration of validity of the accreditation license is established by the accrediting body, which generally holds the right to suspend and/ or to renew the license, upon the satisfactory resolution of any identified issues.

1.2 Rationale

Quality and Standards are not alien elements to the education system of Sri Lanka, which is renowned for the remarkable achievements it has made in universal education. The realization of the goals and targets of education during the post independent era had been a result of collective efforts of the Government supported by the advocacy of policy makers, relevant administration mechanisms, teachers and parents and well-wishers, and checks and balances operating at the time. Although the approach to quality assurance of education through "school inspectors" is

considered an outdated system, it worked satisfactorily in the centrally governed education system which prevailed.

With the advent of the open economy, the general education system in Sri Lanka expanded its boundaries beyond the centrally governed system to a more decentralized system and from public schools to more open opportunities for non-state schools, including 'international' schools. Gradual changes took place in the attitude of the public, and increased their awareness and demands for returns for investment on education. As we are entering an era where the public has the right to know every detail of how the general education system operates, and the general education system in the country is becoming more decentralized, the need for restructuring and reforming QA in general education has become essential.

Introduction of the presently used mechanisms of 'quality assurance' to the Sri Lankan education system is the result of such long-felt concerns which highlighted the deterioration in equity and quality in general education due to defects in the education policies. The outcome of the discussions that ensued was the establishment of a Management and Standards unit of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2001 with the following mission:

Orientation of Management, Evaluation & a Monitoring Mechanism to assure Quality of physical & Human Resources of the system of schools, strengthening Internal & External Evaluation Processes based on Standards & Competencies.

Since its establishment, this unit has taken a ladder of steps to realize these objectives. The most recent step taken in this regard by the Management and Standards unit has been the formulation of the **Guidelines on National Educational Standards and ISA Competencies Framework** in 2010 to facilitate QA activities at schools and provide QA information to the higher authorities at provincial and Ministry level. All public schools in all categories had been subject to a process of QA using the guidelines and procedures prescribed in this book, which is widely known as the Blue book by all parties concerned. However, the increasingly expanding non-governmental school sector has not been reviewed under this QA framework. Thus, the need of incorporation of the non-state school sector which provides general education under a common QA framework has arisen over time.

Furthermore, a study conducted in South Asia (Aturupana, 2009) on the quality of primary and secondary education in terms of **learning outcomes** has revealed that, Sri Lanka has a higher primary school completion rates than most other South Asian countries, but learning levels of the students remain low (over 40% of the students fail the GCE (O- L) examination). Such poor performance in learning levels of the future work force will be an impediment to realize the country's growth potential, which envisages producing skillful human capital to meet the challenges of the impending knowledge economy and becoming the Knowledge Hub of Asia (Mahinda Chintana Development Policy Framework, 2010). In this endeavor, transformation of the education system to facilitate acquisition of much needed 21st century skills by students has become essential.

In this context, the National Education Commission, which is mandated to periodically review the national education policy and make recommendations to the President of Sri Lanka, has taken the initiative to examine the Policy framework on General Education in Sri Lanka under ten different sub themes including the theme 'Quality Assurance'. As a result, at an Inception workshop held on 1st November, 2013 with the participation of representatives of the World Bank and selected groups of nationally renowned education research specialists, the NEC appointed ten research teams for the ten research themes. A two member research team was assigned to the research theme 'Quality Assurance in General Education in Sri Lanka' and the contract was signed in collaboration with the Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration (SLIDA). Since one member of the research team appointed to the 'QA Theme' subsequently withdrew from the assignment due to other involvements, consent of another reputed researcher was obtained, membership of this research team was finalized and the contract was signed by the second member to conduct this study in February 2014.

1.3 Research Objectives, Scope and Tasks

1.3.1 Objectives

This research team was assigned with the overall task of reviewing quality assurance in General Education in Sri Lanka and to make recommendations regarding required improvements. The specific objectives of the assignment as per the Terms of Reference are as follows:

1. To review the norms and standards of quality adopted at present in General Education in comparison with other selected countries.
2. To analyze the present methods and procedures of quality assurance adopted in General Education
3. To work towards evolving a uniform set of practices for both General Education and Tertiary Education
4. To study the methods and procedures used in other selected countries for licensing and accrediting non-state providers of General Education, which are relevant to Sri Lanka
5. To recommend a quality assurance and accreditation system covering all institutions providing General education in Sri Lanka

1.3.2 Scope

The ToR stipulates the scope of the study as follows:

'The proposed QA systems and procedures should cover school education from primary to senior secondary level (grades 1-13). This should also include Government schools, Non-state schools and international schools providing General Education'.

1.3.3 Tasks

Indicated below are the tasks assigned to the review team:

1. Review the guidelines, circular instructions and any other documents on National Education Standards issued by the Ministry of Education and other relevant institutions.
2. Critically examine the conformity of textbooks, furniture, equipment including physical plants, teaching learning processes etc., with the guidelines and instructions.
3. Compare the present methods and procedures of QA adopted in Sri Lanka with other selected countries and identify best practices.
4. Explore the feasibility and make recommendations for licensing and accrediting state and non-state providers of general education in Sri Lanka.
5. Recommend a system of QAA covering all institutions providing general education at national and sub national levels based on the above reviews and analyses.

2. Research Methodology

This study was carried out during the period from January to March 2014 using a mixed pragmatic research approach considering the range of tasks stipulated in the ToR, and different levels and the institutions involved in General Education. A convenience sampling method was used due to the limitations of allocated time, physical and financial resources and logistics. Primary as well as secondary data were collected from diverse sources and respondents included published documents, government schools, focus group discussions with provincial directors, additional directors of education, in-service advisors, principals and teachers and interview with the Director of the QA unit of the Ministry of Education.

Specific research approaches used to collect data relevant to the tasks indicated in the ToR are given below:

1. *Review the guidelines, circular instructions and any other documents on National Education Standards issued by the Ministry of Education and other relevant institutions.*

In order to achieve objective # 1, the publication "Quality Development of the Process of System of School Education III" of Management and Quality Assurance Unit was perused giving special attention to guidelines on national education standards. In addition, several published research findings (Seneviratne, 2011, Aturupana, 2013, Alstair, 2012) on General Education in Sri Lanka were considered.

2. *Critically examine the conformity of textbooks, furniture, equipment including physical plants, teaching learning processes etc., with the guidelines and instructions.*

This task was beyond accomplishment within the limited time and resources made available for the review. However, it did not hinder the process of arriving at conclusions based on the findings and making recommendations.

3. *Critically review the present methods and procedures of quality assurance adopted in Sri Lanka with regard to the quality improvement of education including school development planning.*

This task was accomplished through visiting schools and conducting focus group discussions. The schools visited included primary and secondary schools. Focus group discussions were held with provincial directors, additional directors of education, school principals and teachers in the districts of Gampaha, Anuradhapura, Kandy and Kegalle. School visits and focus group discussions at the Gampaha district was organized by the NEC, while the other focus group discussions were organized by the researchers. The NEC facilitated the process by officially informing relevant officials. Additional focus group discussions were held with the teachers following the Diploma programme offered by the University of Peradeniya. Information obtained through these discussions and school visits helped to achieve the second objective.

4. *Compare the present methods and procedures of QA adopted in Sri Lanka with other selected countries and identify best practices.*

In this regard, published documents obtained from the worldwide web on the methods and procedures adopted by India, Singapore, New Zealand and USA were used to compare with those adopted in Sri Lanka. This comparison helped in achieving the objectives 1, 4 and 5 of this study.

5. *Explore the feasibility and make recommendations for licensing and accrediting state and non-state providers of general education in Sri Lanka.*

This task was accomplished analyzing the data collected through document analysis, school visits, focus group discussions and interviews conducted under tasks 1, 3 and 4. Special attention was paid to the findings of task 4 on the methods practiced by other countries for licensing and accrediting general education providers and the opinions expressed during focus group discussions.

6. *Recommend a system of QAA covering all institutions providing general education at national and sub national levels based on the above reviews and analyses.*

In order to accomplish this task, due consideration was paid to the integrated findings of data analysis and the presently adopted QAA system in the Higher education sector in Sri Lanka as the objective stipulates 3 to work towards evolving a uniform set of practices for both General Education and Tertiary Education. Several recommendations were made regarding the essential features to be included in a system of QAA covering all general education providers.

3. Global Trends in School Quality Assurance

With the dawn of the 21st century and the advent of the knowledge economy, the education sector of every country is faced with the need for evolution to meet the challenges arising from the globalization of economies, advances in information and communication technology, and rapid increase in social-political demands of the new century. The countries in the Asia-Pacific region as well as elsewhere in the world that are responsive to this paradigm shift (Cheng and Townsend, 2000), have taken steps to reform school education, not only at the turn of the 20th century but several decades in advance. There had been three waves of educational reforms aiming at strengthening the education quality during the period from 1970 to the turn of the century (Cheng, 2001). Each wave of education reform had specific targets, objectives, and approaches.

The first wave of educational reforms took place in the 1970s targeting improvement of performance of both the teacher and student up to identified standards. The emphasis was given to **internal effectiveness** of internal school performance based particularly on methods and processes of teaching and learning. In general the goals and objectives had been set, in order to improve effectiveness, at the system level rather than at the site level and the strategies and methodologies to achieve these came as directives from the government in the top-down approach.

The impact of quality assurance on internal school effectiveness & quality in different parts of the world had been the subject of much research (Cheng & Townsend, 2000). The aspects covered were improvement of school management and classroom environment, curriculum development and change, teacher qualifications and competencies, improvement of teaching and learning processes and evaluation and assessment (Reviewed by Cheng 2001b). However these measures could not satisfy the diverse needs and expectations of parents, students, employers, policy-makers, and those concerned in the community. With the failure of the interventions to assure quality at the period, it was realized that quality assurance is not only an issue of internal process improvement but also the interface issue of meeting the stakeholders' satisfaction and ensuring accountability to the community, thus paving the way for interface effectiveness and adaptation. The quality assurance at this level should take into consideration the fact that the school or the education institute should render its services to the satisfaction of its key stakeholders.

The second wave of education reforms came in the 1990s as a response to accountability to the public and stakeholder-expectations. The focus of the changes was to assure **interface effectiveness** in terms of education quality, stakeholders' satisfaction and market competitiveness, with most policy efforts aimed at ensuring quality and accountability to the internal and external stakeholders (Headington, 2000; Heller, 2001). Since ensuring internal quality improvement alone was not sufficient, some measures that could be employed in ensuring interface quality such as institutional monitoring, institutional self-evaluation, quality inspection, use of quality indicators and benchmarks, survey of key stakeholders' satisfaction,

accountability reporting to the community, parental and community involvement in governance, institutional development planning, school charter, and performance-based funding (Headington, 2000; Glickman, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2001) were included. Quality assurance involving school monitoring and review came into operation at this stage. Other features of the reforms were parental choice, student coupon, parental and community involvement in governance, school charter, and performance-based funding which had direct consequences on enhancing effectiveness at the interface between the school and the community (Cheng & Townsend, 2000).

With rapid globalization, the policy makers and the educators were forced to make decisions based on novel, but often conflicting ideas resulting in much confusion and loss of direction of functions of education in coping with the new demands. The interface quality assurance was sufficient to satisfy the stakeholders, but may not satisfy the future demands brought about by the current trends in globalization the knowledge economy and information technology. A new paradigm shift in learning and teaching promoted reform of different aspects of education in order to ensure the relevance of education to meet the future demands resulting in the necessity for future quality assurance.

The third wave of reforms in education came as a reaction to empower the schools and education enabling to keep pace with swiftly moving globalization the knowledge-driven economy and information technology at the turn of the new century. It was realized that a new paradigm shift is inevitable to assure the effectiveness and relevance of learning and teaching, particularly at the school level and to meet the demands of the present global trends. The public demands reforming the aims, content, practice, and management of education at different levels to ensure their relevance to the future. These facts which had been emphasized by many education researchers (Burbules & Torres, 2000; Cheng, 2000 a & b; Stromquist & Monkman, 2000; Daun, 2001) hold true to date. The emphasis of the new trend of education reforms is identified as **future effectiveness** in terms of relevance to the new educational functions in the new century in keeping with contextualized multiple intelligences, globalization, localization and individualization (Cheng, 2001a). Several new functions of the schools can be identified as technical-economic, human-social, political, cultural, and educational at individual, institutional, community, society, and international levels. Some emerging evidences of the third wave are the pursuit of a new vision and aims at different levels of education, life-long learning, global networking, international outlook, and use of information and technological advances. Many countries have entered this level of school quality assurance today and yet many others are still stuck at the first or second wave of school quality assurance.

The quality assurance today needs to address the relevance of school education in the light of these new challenges which do not only exist today but are also rapidly evolving. It also creates a challenging task of formulating quantifiable indicators in order to assure the public and stakeholders of school education of the relevance and quality of education.

The prevailing QA system for General Education in Sri Lanka seems to be in between the first and the second waves of education reforms. If Sri Lanka is to step up to the second tier, certain new aspects need to be considered. They are survey of key stakeholders' satisfaction, accountability reporting to the community and performance-based funding. Rigorous contemplation of local circumstances is essential prior to embarking on such a move. The existing situation does not seem to be conducive enough to proceed with the 3rd wave (i.e. future effectiveness), although different shades of the required quality aspects are present in general education in Sri Lanka.

3.1 Comparative Experience in Selected Countries

Although quality assurance has been long recognized in holding schools and education institutes accountable to the public, a systematic quality assurance process is still a novel concept for even many developed countries. In every country where school QA is practiced there is an agency which is responsible for QA. In many countries, the major responsible agency in quality assurance is the government while private or non-governmental organizations may also involve in quality assurance exercises. For practicing QA there are QA frameworks which specify standards and processes to be adopted. The frameworks and procedures adopted for school QA in a few selected countries is presented in the next sections of this report.

3.1.1 India

The General education system in India has a number of similarities to that of Sri Lanka. General education is provided by the state sector as well as the non-governmental sector. India's QA in general education encompasses all sectors involved in the provision of such education. India compares the curricula, assessments and evaluations of schools governed by different boards; namely Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), Indian Council of Secondary Education (ICSE), International Baccalaureate Organizations (IBOs) and Delhi Government Schools. Private education institutes are governed by ICSE while international schools are governed by IBO. There are over 30 different boards approved by the Government of India. The differences in emphasis given to the components of curriculum, delivery of the curriculum, examinations and assessments etc. are diverse among the different boards and as such drawing indicators for quality assurance and accreditation needs careful consideration.

The CBSE functions as the main QAA agency for ~ 11000 government schools. The CBSE published a manual on School Quality Assessment and Accreditation (SQAA) in 2011 to be used as the QA instrument for schools that come under its purview. There has not been an initiative to bring primary education in India under School Quality Assessment and Accreditation (SQAA).

The CBSE School Quality Assessment and Accreditation (SQAA) approach is an instrument and is holistic as it covers all aspects of a school's functioning, namely its Scholastic and Co-scholastic Domains, Infrastructural Areas, Human Resources,

Management and Administration, Leadership and Beneficiary Satisfaction. The Seven Domains identified by CBSE are infact focused on the seven areas and processes of developing the capabilities of schools holistically. The Domains are further divided into Sub-Domains which qualify the various aspects of that particular domain. Each sub-domain has a number of indicators under which benchmarks have been developed with a weightage of between 0-7. The bands are 0 or 1, 2, 4 and 7 and if an institution falls between these bands they can also score 1, 3, 5 or 6 respectively.

The SQAA process comprises three steps namely, internal self-evaluation, external assessment or peer review which will encourage sustained qualitative enhancement and reporting. From 2012, the CBSE has conducted SQAA on a pilot basis in selected schools, to use this assessment to accredit schools, to provide quality benchmarks, establish and run effective systems within institutions. It has been made mandatory for all schools to get accredited once in every three years. India does not intend to rank schools based on SQAA but rather to ensure the schools meet the standards set by CBCE and to make the public aware of the quality status of each school.

3.1.2 Singapore

Singapore has liberalizing education from government control since 1988 and after subjecting its education system to several innovative reforms namely, 'Autonomous schools', 'Integrated Programmes', 'Thinking schools, learning nation' 'Innovation and Enterprise' to meet the needs of the stakeholders, it has now entered into an era of "Teach less, Learn more".

As schools are receiving getting greater independence, maintaining quality of education has become the need of the hour. For this purpose a system of ranking of school was introduced in 1992, and was replaced by a comprehensive quality management system in 2000 following 'School Excellence Model (SEM)', a self-assessment model adopted from models used by the European Foundation of Quality Management. SEM comprises nine quality criteria for assessing schools; Leadership, Strategic planning, Staff management, Resources, Student-focused processes, Administrative and operational results, Staff results, Partnerships and society results and Key performance results. These aspects are assessed based on evidence provided by the school. The assessment forms the basis for Master Plan Awards, which are offered at three levels, the highest being the School Excellence Award. In 2004 ranking of schools based on examination results changed to banding of schools having similar performances in academic as well as other spheres.

QA in education in Singapore also concerns basically of two types of systems having different criteria for assessment. All of nearly 1000 private schools in Singapore are regulated by the Council for Private Education (CPE) established in 2009 with which all private schools should register. Singapore does not have a central authority that accords recognition to either the certificates or qualifications issued, or the courses of study offered by private schools. Instead a voluntary certification scheme (EduTrust)

exists in Singapore to award certification to private schools if the stipulated standards exist in the areas of Management Commitment and Responsibilities, Corporate Governance and Administration, External Recruitment Agents, Student Protection and Support Services, Academic Processes and Assessment of Students, Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Results. (Source: A Concise Guide to Students Enrolling in Private Education Institute in Singapore, CPE, available at <http://www.cpe.gov.sg/cpe/slot/u100/Publication/publication/Local%20student%20guide.pdf>)

3.1.3 New Zealand

New Zealand has strong and rigorous quality assurance systems, regulated by a number of key government agencies, which ensure consistent, high quality education across all levels of the education system. The country has government agencies responsible for various aspects of quality assurance covering all areas of the education system. There are two agencies responsible for QA in education; one for early childhood services and schools and the other for secondary and tertiary education.

The Education Review Office (ERO) is the New Zealand government department that evaluates and reports on the education and care of students in schools and early childhood services.

ERO's education reviews focus on student learning and the ways in which school policies, programmes, processes and practices contribute to student engagement, progress and achievement. Its reports are used by parents, teachers, early childhood education managers, school principals and trustees, and by government policy makers.

ERO carries out several different types of reviews and evaluations - education reviews, homeschool reviews, cluster reviews of education institutions and services, contract evaluations and national evaluations on education topics. Early childhood services and schools are reviewed, on average, once every three years.

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) services span the secondary and tertiary education sectors. NZQA administers the National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) for secondary school students and is responsible for the quality assurance of non-university tertiary training providers. Key indicators include school governance and management, curriculum management and quality of teaching, school safety and hygiene, internal evaluation, discipline, and pupil-teacher ratio.

Universities of New Zealand (UNZ) provides quality assurance for university qualifications through its Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP), and through the independent Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA).

3.1.4 United States of America

In the United States, accreditation is a voluntary method of quality assurance designed primarily to distinguish schools adhering to a set of educational standards. Although the U.S. accreditation structure for higher education is decentralized and complex, and carried out by private, nonprofit organizations designed for the specific purpose, there are no federal government lists of recognized accreditation agencies for primary and secondary schools. Furthermore, there are no specific federal laws or regulations governing the recognition of associations that accredit primary and secondary schools, and the U.S. Department of Education has no oversight role with respect to school accreditation.

In the United States of America, public schools are governed by a set of criteria stipulated by each state, while requirements for private schools have considerable variation in different states. Accreditation is done by private, non-profit organizations.

There are six regional accreditors in the United States that have historically accredited elementary schools, junior high schools, middle schools, high schools and higher education institutes. Schools that possess accreditation and state approval by authorities recognized at the state level are considered to be recognized schools in the U.S. education system. In addition, private schools that are accredited by other associations recognized by the federal Departments of Defense, Homeland Security and State are also considered to be recognized.

3.1.5 Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA)

Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (2011) has listed seven compulsory QA standards that are essential to be considered for accreditation of schools in the Pacific region by the SPBEA. The seven QA standards are Assessment Policy, Governance and management, Personnel, Physical and learning resources, Learner information and support, Development, delivery and review of programmes, and Assessment and moderation. Before May of each year, the schools have to develop their own accreditation manuals meeting the above standards, conduct self-evaluation and inform the National Education authorities of the respective country regarding their intention to apply for accreditation. By July, the National Education authorities indicate their endorsement or otherwise of any school through submitting a written report to SPBEA. In August/September the external assessment site visits are made and submitted for the approval of the Board at its Annual General Meeting in October. In November the schools receive the Board decision and prescriptions for the preparation of courses etc. for the subsequent year.

3.1.6 Quality Framework for UNESCO schools

The above document by Annette Thijs et al (2011) that provides Quality Framework for UNESCO schools, consists of 35 core elements that are clustered in five

categories, i.e. school policy, school curriculum, school organization, quality assurance, and communication. This quality framework offers schools a tool to monitor the quality of the UNESCO programme and to promote and strengthen the further development of the UNESCO mission, objectives and themes as part of their school organization and curriculum. Schools can use the framework to guide programme evaluation within the school, or to evaluate their programme as part of peer exchange with other schools. This can take the form of a peer audit, in which an audit committee comprised of teachers from other UNESCO schools visits the school and, based on its self-evaluation, outlines possible recommendations for strengthening the school's UNESCO programme. The aim of the peer audit is to offer support and inspiration and to encourage reflection on how the UNESCO profile is being put into practice.

3.1.7 Common features of school QA in other countries

The foregoing brief account on the models used for QA in general education in different countries and regions indicates that there are unique features associated with each model, while all models share a number of common features. The presence of the features unique to each model is invariably expected as QA models are developed based on the perceived definition of 'quality', which may vary among institutes/ schools and countries.

Commonality comes from the fact that, in all countries the tools or guidelines used for QA are holistic in nature comprising core dimensions of the definition of 'quality' specific to the institute/ country. Furthermore, in every country QA is carried out by independent agencies. The QA process involves three steps, Self-evaluation, Peer review and Reporting; while QA is a prerequisite for accreditation. These features should be taken into consideration in improving the present QA framework in General Education in Sri Lanka.

4. Experience of Sri Lanka

This section will examine the education system in Sri Lanka followed by recent developments of QA in school education in Sri Lanka. It will also look at the norms and standards of the current QA system and procedures with a view to identifying gaps and issues. The impact of the current QA process on general education will also be examined.

4.1 Education system of Sri Lanka

The present Education system of Sri Lanka consists of four major stages;

1. Pre-school stage for the children of ages 3-5, which is almost entirely handled by the private sector
2. General education stage, which consists of primary grades (grades 1-5), junior secondary (grades 6-9) and senior secondary (grades 10-13) grades
3. Vocational and technical education stage
4. Tertiary education and training stage

The present report intends to focus only on the Quality Assurance and Accreditation of General Education. Therefore, the QAA systems of other stages are not addressed.

Approximately four million school children, about 215,000 teachers, and around 10,000 schools are involved in general education. The general education system of Sri Lanka is dominated by the public sector accounting for 90% of schools and 95% of student enrollments. Overall, about four million school children are enrolled in 9,800 public schools while about 97,000 students are enrolled in 80 private schools. A further 55,000 students are enrolled in about 600 government funded Pirivenas while about 70,000 students have been enrolled in around 200 international schools by 2005 (World Bank, 2005). All government schools of the Sri Lankan general education system come under the purview of the Ministry of Education, which states its Vision and Mission as 'Enriching education to empower future generations of Sri Lanka', and 'To excel in modernizing education, for young people to be valuable citizens of Sri Lanka with a competitive edge in a global setting', respectively.

There are four types of government schools in the Sri Lankan general education system:

Type IAB schools with classes up to grade 13 including A' Level Science stream;

Type 1 C schools with classes up to grade 13 but without A' Level Science stream;

Type 2 schools with classes up to grade 11

Type 3 schools with classes up to grade 5 Ministry of Education, 2005.

4.2 Recent developments of QA in school education in Sri Lanka

As indicated in an earlier chapter, Quality and Standards are not alien elements to the education system of Sri Lanka. The Government directed School Inspector system was used for quality assessment in general education over several decades since independence. However, with the expansion of the boundaries of the general education system beyond the centrally governed system to a more decentralized system, concerns arose regarding the quality of general education provision and the need for restructuring the mechanisms for QA in general education has been recognized. Introduction of the presently used mechanisms of 'quality assurance' to the Sri Lankan education system is the result of such long-felt concerns and studies which highlighted deterioration in equity and quality in general education due to defects in the education policies. The outcome of the discussions that ensued was the establishment of a Management and Standards unit at the Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2001 aimed at improvement of quality of education in the country, enhancement of economic efficiency and equity of resource allocation; strengthen education governance and service delivery through implementation of a variety of multi-faceted strategies at central, provincial and school level.

Since its establishment, this unit has taken a number of steps to improve the quality of general education. Progress made by the MQAU from 2001 to 2010 is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Timeline of the Progress made by the Management and Quality Assurance Unit

Year	Main Achievements/ Activities
2001	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establishment of Evaluation & Quality Assurance Unit. 2. Appointment of 2 foreign Consultants.
2002	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introducing in internal self-evaluation method of school and Identify essential competencies of Principals & Teachers 2. 2. Introducing a pilot project for 25 schools on Internal Evaluation
2003	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Revising Internal Evaluation tools and competencies 2. Conducting Awareness programme for all Zonal Directors & Educational Officers 3. Impact Evaluation for Pilot project
2004	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Re- established Management & Quality Assurance Unit & preparation book on Guidelines for Internal Evaluation (Book I) 2. Introducing Total Quality Management Concept
2005	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Printing & distribution of Internal Evaluation book (15000 copies)

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Training of Trainers Programme for provincial Officers on TQM 3. Establishing Provincial Quality Assurance Unit 4. External School Evaluation of National schools through five teams
2006	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preparation of standards, indicators and criteria for external evaluation 2. Training of trainers programme for Zonal Officers on SBQM 3. External school Evaluation of National schools through evaluation teams 4. Revising of guidelines on Educational Standards 5. Introduction of pilot project for 45 schools on Educational Standards
2007	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preparation, printing & distribution of Guidelines on Educational Standards and External Evaluation (Book II) (15000 copies) 2. Awareness programmes on above standards for MOE Officers, Principals & Deputy Principals, Teacher Centers & Provincial Officers 3. Developing ISA competencies
2008	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preparation of circular 2008/06 based on the Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism on SBQM 2. Awareness Programme on above circular for Provincial Officers (8 WS) 3. Action taken basically on the development of a software on SBQM 4. Awareness of Quality Assurance Programme on SBQM for Subject Directors (English/ Sinhala/ Social Studies/ Science/ Primary/ Mathematics/ ICT) (7 WS) 5. Awareness Programme on prepared Competence levels & performance indicators of ISAs to Dev. Directors of Provinces (1 WS) 6. Progress Review workshops for provinces (8WS)
2009	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With the Sponsorship of ESDG, Revising and Preparation of National Educational Standards according to 4 themes. 2. Preparation SEQI. Introducing Bench Mark, Best Practices and new standards to all Dev. directors of provinces & zones (2 WS) 3. TOT on SEQI Bench Mark, Quality Teams & introducing new standards for 9 provinces(9 WS) 4. Awareness on SEQI Bench Mark, Quality Teams & introducing new standards to all NS Principals (8 WS) 5. Preparation of "Quality Development of School Education Process III" 6. National Forum on Education Quality Assurance 7. A team of 4 Officers from M&QA Unit & 9 Provincial Officers visit AIT Thailand for a capacity development programme on Educational Quality Assurance

2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Awareness on School Educational Quality Index. Introducing Bench Mark Best Practices and new standards to all NCDE Presidents/VP & Teachers' College Principals / VP (01 WS) 2. Printing & Distributing "Quality Development of School Education Process III" 3. Capacity Development of External Evaluators Provincial level (3WS) 4. Awareness on SEQI Bench Mark, Quality Teams & introducing new standards for all Teacher Center Managers
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Source: Quality Development of School Education Process III: Guidelines on National Education Standards and ISA Competencies (2010)

Publishing and distribution of the *Quality Development of School Education Process III: Guidelines on National Educational Standards and ISA Competencies Framework* in 2010 is the most recent step taken towards QA in General Education by the MQAU.

According to this document the objectives of the Quality Development of School Education Process are three fold:

1. Orienting the Principal and the Management Boards to assure educational quality and internal development of the school through a system of Monitoring and Evaluation based on Educational Standards and indicators relevant to the targets and objectives of the school.
2. Guiding the Principals in a more productive way through external evaluations at Provincial, Zonal and Divisional level to develop the standards and indicators selected by the school.
3. To introduce competencies to be developed by the ISA who maintains the closest relationship with the teacher and thus enabling him/her to provide a better service than at present to the teacher.

These guidelines are being used for quality assessment in general education in government schools in Sri Lanka at present.

According to the Guidelines document, the objective of an evaluation process is to find out whether the physical and human resources in a school and the whole educational process are used to provide a quality service to the client (pp 14). The main objectives of these evaluations are to identify the general problems affecting the system and, through educational sessions, to introduce the necessary remedies and to spread more widely in the system the particular strengths that are discovered.

Through these guidelines an agreed, consistent approach to QA in the general education system in Sri Lanka has been established laying a foundation for QAA in schools. The Guidelines were scrutinized by the research team to identify the aspects that could be further improved. Findings of this exercise are given in sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4.

4.3 Characteristics (Norms & Standards) of the present QA system

Eight domains of focus of assessment of quality of education provision of a school are being listed below.

General Management

Physical & Human Resource Management

Systematic Curriculum Management

Co- curricular Activities

Student Achievements

Student Welfare

School & Community

Student Development for a Knowledge Based Society

1-3 National Educational Standards have been identified for each domain, making a total of 12 National Educational Standards for the eight domains. Each National Educational Standard has variable numbers (14-42) of relevant specific indicators, making a total of 220 specific indicators. The extent to which each specific indicator meets the respective National Education Standards is assessed based on 5-7 criteria relevant to the standard and accordingly a score ranging from 1 to 5 is assigned to each indicator. The maximum total score a school can obtain under 220 indicators of the 8 domains is 1200 (Table 2). The total number of marks obtained by a school as a percentage of 1200 is regarded as the School Educational Quality Index.

The guidelines document has a separate sections to describe the Educational Standards, In Service Advisor competencies and Indicator based criteria of the 8 domains to facilitate implementation of the QA framework.

The multi-dimensional nature of quality had been taken into consideration in formulating the guidelines and a holistic approach had been embedded for quality assessment as evidenced by inclusion of eight domains. This is a positive aspect of the presently used QA guidelines and approach.

However, the 8 domains, standards, indicators and criteria had been formulated based on a conceptual framework which considered 'Performance, Reliability, Features, Conformance, Durability, Serviceability and Aesthetics' as the dimensions of quality (page 17). These dimensions of quality used in formulating the conceptual framework for developing the present QA guidelines are more appropriate for quality assessment of industrial products than education quality. Therefore, the use of dimensions of educational quality for a conceptual framework is advised when reformulating the quality guidelines.

Table 2: Domains, National Education Standards, Indicators and Maximum marks allocated in Assessment of Quality in School Education

Domain	No: of Standards	No: of Indicators	Maximum Marks
1. General Management	01	22	110
2. Physical and Human Resources Management	01	30	150
3. Systematic Curriculum Management	02	29	145
Classroom Observation		25	100
4. Co-curricular Activities	01	14	70
5. Student Achievement	02	42	210
6. Student Welfare	01	26	130
7. School and Community	01	17	85
8. Student Development for Knowledge Based Society	03	40	200
Total	12	245	1200

Other problems and concerns associated with the domains, standards and indicators are presented in section 4.4.1.

4.4 Nature of the Present QA procedure for General Education in Sri Lanka

The presently practiced quality assurance system for General education in Sri Lanka operates through collaboration of an internal evaluation component and an external evaluation component. This practice is in conformity with the QA procedures adopted in other countries and hence should be retained in future.

- a). The external evaluation component is made up of teams of external reviewers who had been selected and made aware/ trained by the Divisional Educational Offices for the purpose. Generally the external review teams comprise education officials (Provincial/ Zonal Directors), School Principals, Vice Principals, Sectional heads, Senior Teachers etc.
- b). The Internal Evaluation Committees comprise school teachers appointed by the Principal of the school in consultation with the School

Management Committee. It is usually headed by a sectional Head/ Vice Principal/ Senior teacher and a team of eight (8) teachers (or less depending on the availability) who are assigned the responsibility of being in-charge of one or more of the 8 domains, and responsible for preparation of the self-evaluation report and compiling supporting evidences pertaining to the assigned domains with the assistance of quality circles (teams of other teachers involved in internal QA). The members of the internal evaluation committees are given awareness on the Quality Development of School Education Process, the aspects to be reviewed and the supporting evidence to be compiled by the school authorities. Some of the team members, especially the coordinating senior members had received QA training at divisional/ zonal levels.

At present only the Government schools are subjected to external review. Most of the schools are reviewed once a year. The review process is in conformity with the three step external review process adopted in other countries. The schools are informed of the intended review visit by the authorities. In response, school authorities revitalize the internal QA process, prepare self-evaluation reports, refine and compile relevant supporting evidences (documents) in preparation for the intended visit. Usually the team of teachers who had been assigned this responsibility work almost fulltime and even after hours in this regard. A site visit is limited to one day. A team of reviewers visit the school, examine the supporting evidences presented by the school and the self-evaluation report, determine the quality based on the extent to which the status of indicators agree with respect to the relevant national education standards, and assign a score for each domain. Prior to departure, the review team expresses their opinion regarding the status of each domain and usually suggest ways to overcome deficiencies.

The QA activities are initiated, guided, organized, continued, promoted and monitored by the QA unit of the MoE. The efforts made and work accomplished by the QA unit and relevant officials in this regard is noteworthy and commendable. However, this QA unit does not have sufficient authority or independence. In this regard, the QA system for general education in Sri Lanka differs from those found in other countries where independent QA agencies organize QAA. The review team recommends establishment of an independent QA unit/ agency with sufficient authority in future.

Other problems associated with the presently adopted QA procedure are presented in section 4.4.2.

4.5 Impact of the QA process on General Education

Personnel involved at all levels of the process (Directors of education, Assistant directors of education, In Service Advisors (ISAs), Principals and teachers) are all convinced that a quality assurance system should be in place and the present system has impacted the elevation of quality standards of the schools in the following manner:

a. QA guidelines have helped to improve and formalize the documentation practices adopted by government schools.

b. QA activities have influenced the school authorities to improve the infrastructure facilities in schools, especially in primary schools.

4.6 Problems in the Present QA system

The presently used QA system has problems emanating from the guidelines as well as the review procedure adopted.

4.6.1 Guidelines associated problems

4.6.1.1 *A large number of indicators and incomprehensible nature of the guidelines*

The scope of the eight domains used in assessing quality in General education in schools is comprehensive and multi-dimensional. However, the framework is too broad in nature and contains a large number of indicators (220). It makes assessment difficult. Another problem associated with the exceedingly broad and lengthy nature of the QA guidelines, is that it is incomprehensible in nature. Most of the officials and teachers find it difficult to comprehend all eight domains. Most of them are somewhat aware of one or two domains.

Therefore every attempt should be made to reduce the number of criteria/indicators in the revised guidelines and simplify the procedure during revision. Some strategies in this regard are suggested in the next sections.

4.6.1.2 *Presence of equi-weghing inapplicable criteria/ indicators and inflexible nature*

There is vast room for improvement in the indicators. A notable concern was the presence of some indicators that are not applicable across all classes/ levels and perhaps not to all schools equally because there exists a great diversity among schools (primary, secondary, national, provincial, Navodya, Central, private, international etc.). To overcome this situation, the need for identifying a set of compulsory/ core indicators which can be used across all primary or secondary schools had been pointed out by all levels. Such an exercise would help in comparing schools in a particular category (Type I, II and III) as well. Other (non-common) indicators can be made auxiliary/supplementary/ complementary indicators and be used as applicable for the school under assessment.

This approach would not only ease the burden on schools in preparation for evaluation and but also improve the confidence, especially of less developed and rural schools, on the quality assurance process. Moreover the other hand the

evaluators would also be comfortable with the task that they are assigned with. In addition it would enrich the guidelines by incorporating an element of flexibility.

In order to identify the compulsory and supplementary indicators, their appropriateness and feasibility of evaluation need to be scrutinized thoroughly. This would be possible only after comprehensive stakeholder consultation. In order to accomplish this, it is imperative to discuss with officials at zonal and provincial and higher level and school principals, vice-principals and sectional heads etc. and teachers in a variety of settings.

In addition, any school undergoing evaluation should be given freedom to choose additional standards and evaluation criteria aiming at quality improvement and convince the evaluators of the other possible indicators which reflect its unique strengths/ weaknesses. Schools would be motivated naturally to demonstrate their potential by showing evidence for such auxiliary indicators. Provision of a certain degree of flexibility to choose additional standards and evaluation criteria aiming at quality improvement would be desirable to encourage schools to come up with innovative and creative measures. Such a flexible QA model encompassing different sets of criteria and indicators from among which the most appropriate ones can be chosen by the schools, would help in bringing all general education providers (state and non-state) under one QA framework - another aim of the MoE.

The outcome could be further improved by using differential weightage (higher weightage to core indicators and appropriate weightage to auxiliary /supplementary indicators) instead of allocating equal weightage to all indicators as practiced at present.

4.6.1.3 Greater weightage to management aspects and Lack of flexibility

A close scrutiny of the marks allocation to different domains, and indicators in the QA guidelines revealed that most of the domains, indicators and criteria used for QA in schools are related to Management of the school. Even the indicators and criteria pertaining to Co-curricular Activities, Student welfare and School and Community Relationships are related to management. Approximately 775 marks out of 1200 had been assigned for management aspects. While the significance of efficient management of physical and human resources to provide quality education is undisputable, other determinants of education quality including the content, learning environment, teaching learning and assessment methods, student feedback and desired student learning outcomes should be given due consideration in any QA exercise. Furthermore, even the indicators and criteria in the domain Curriculum Management touches aspects pertaining to content, learning environment, teaching learning and assessment methods and student feedback only in a limited manner. Therefore, the adequacy of weightage allocated to the learning environment, teaching learning and assessment methods in the 8 domains and 220 indicators used for QA is questionable. (It is beyond the purview of this study to discuss the content/ curriculum, although the learning outcomes and curriculum content are interrelated and influence the quality of education because Curriculum is addressed

under another study theme). It appears that management aspects are given greater weightage than other determinants of education quality in the QA guidelines. Considering these facts, it can be stated that the present QA guidelines are inclined to improve the efficiency of management and use of available physical and human resources, but its contribution to improving the quality of education as a whole, especially teaching-learning-assessment processes and the student are outcomes is questionable.

This situation may have resulted from using industry relevant dimensions of quality (which have greater emphasis on management aspects) instead of education quality dimensions in the conceptual framework used when formulating QA guidelines as pointed out in section 4.3.3. To overcome this problem it is recommended to use education quality dimensions in the conceptual framework when formulating QA guidelines in future.

Another strategy would be to separate Institutional and management criteria and indicators from teaching, learning, assessment and curricular related criteria and formulate separate guidelines for Institutional Assessment and Programme

Assessment as done in the University system. This would not only help in giving due weightages to all identified domains , but also in simplifying the guidelines and orienting the QA in general education with QA in tertiary education - another objective of this review.

In addition to the above problems in indicators, the review team noted that there are some 'indicators' which could be used as evidence to judge certain indicators. It is suggested to identify those and as far as possible to use as outcome indicators.

4.6.1.4 *Problematic (non-assessable/ inexplicit) indicators and criteria*

In the QA guidelines, certain domains use indicators and criteria that are difficult to implement. For example, most of the indicators and criteria especially those coming under the domain Student Development for a Knowledge Society are difficult for the schools to implement without support from the higher authorities as well as from the curriculum which might require curriculum revision. Furthermore, assessing the attitudes of students accurately is a difficult task for the teachers. It would be even more difficult for the external review team to assess the students' attitudes within a single day.

4.6.1.5 *Repetition of some criteria in different standards and domains*

Another cause of heavy time investment in the process is the repetition of certain indicators and criteria overlapping across different standards and domains (e.g., student projects in domains 5 and 8, health programmes in domains 6 & 8) as they lead to misinterpretation by some individuals. The research team observes that these indicators and criteria would have different emphasis on different domains, yet the claims made by the staff involved in the QA process should be given due

consideration. If the most appropriate evaluation domain could be identified a certain load can be reduced in the process. All participants in the discussions agreed with the importance of identifying the most relevant standard/ domain. All were aware that the same indicators when used in different standards/ domains are being used in different perspectives, yet the saving in time would compensate sacrificing the indicators in less relevant places.

4.6.1.6 *Non targeting of a Well-rounded student (mainly exam performance)*

Indicators and criteria in domain Student Achievements primarily consider completion of grade examinations and the results of school tests and national level examinations. The three major national level examinations focus on subject matter knowledge with little or no emphasis on skills and attitudes. To what extent the examination performance contributes to the desired attributes of a well-rounded student is questionable. Furthermore, due to this reason, quite justifiably, all parents and teachers push the children to achieve excellence in examinations, and are naturally inclined to admit their children to in schools producing good results at national level examinations. Therefore without changing the mode of evaluation to reflect skills and attitudes in addition to the knowledge component, there would be very little impact on the expected outcome.

It would be prudent to pay due attention to overcome the above deficiencies in the QA guidelines by revising the guidelines taking the views of all stakeholders and the suggestions made in this report into consideration.

4.6.2 Procedure associated problems

In addition to the above mentioned guidelines associated problems, the following problems associated with the adopted QA procedure were identified:

4.6.2.1 *Overburdening of involved staff at all levels*

The composite and broad nature of the guidelines has made it necessary for collection and compilation of a variety of supporting evidences – a time consuming process. However, the teachers in charge of the domains cannot be released from regular teaching responsibilities to collect and compile the documents. They are duty bound to adhere to the time table of classroom teaching and related activities. Therefore, most of the assigned teachers have to work after hours to prepare the documents and supporting evidences for the site visit. The review team observed that the presently practiced QA procedure has overburdened the involved teaching staff at all levels. The situation is worst in those schools which are under staffed. To overcome this situation reduction and simplification of indicators using previously indicated strategies is suggested.

4.6.2.2 Lack / inadequacy of formalized supporting mechanisms at schools and non-involvement of a section of the staff

This is another problem faced by the teachers involved in internal QA. Although Quality circles are nominated, most of the times the Teacher-in-Charge of the domain has to do all the work. Many teachers indicated this as a problem and emphasized the need for a formalized supporting mechanism (by way of allocating a time slot in the Time Table for QA activities/ considering time spent on QA activities into workload) in place to facilitate and sustain QA in general education. They opined that otherwise the QA procedure adopted would be counterproductive and lead to deterioration of quality of education instead of improving it.

4.6.2.3 Lack of / insufficient awareness about QA among some teachers

Focus group discussions revealed that a considerable proportion of school teachers is not well aware of the objectives and procedure of the presently practiced QA in the school system, despite the efforts of the Ministry. As this process is very different to the evaluation by 'school inspectors' and much greater involvement of teachers is essential, a well-organized awareness program penetrating to each corner of the island is a prerequisite for successful launching of the school quality assurance process. Teachers who are directly involved in the process are of the view that their responsibility is to collect the necessary documents and prepare the relevant files to be produced for the review. The way it is practiced in Sri Lanka, quality improvement happens as an indirect product of the process rather than searching directly for indicators of outcomes of student performance.

It appears that in the awareness greater emphasis had been given to the external QA component compared to the internal QA. However, the effectiveness of any QA programme depends primarily on internal QA. Therefore awareness programmes particularly at the teacher-level needs immediate attention. The discussions further revealed that some schools adopt innovative methods to create awareness and implement QA mechanisms. As such a mechanism to share good practices is suggested to enhance the quality assurance in less advanced schools.

4.6.2.4 Too short duration of the site visit

Generally the site visit by the review team is limited to one day due to logistic and financial concerns. Almost every official involved agree that practically it is not possible to evaluate the quality of a school by examining all relevant criteria and inspecting all supporting evidences, meeting all relevant stakeholders within a period of one day. It is not fair by the teachers and schools who have spent an enormous amount of time in preparation for the external review to receive inaccurate judgments. Therefore, the authorities need to reconsider a modification of the process adopted and / or extend the duration of a site visit to make the review more accurate. Otherwise it will be a wasteful exercise.

4.6.2.5 Subjective nature of marks allocation and inaccurate evaluation

Due to individual differences in understanding and interpretation of the status of the criteria in comparison to national standards, marks allocation is subjective in nature. Although there exists a degree of subjectivity in any review, having a large number of indicators to be considered within a very short period of time, and having a considerable proportion of indicators that can be interpreted in different ways makes the situation worse and could lead to inaccurate judgments.

4.6.2.6 Attempt to prove rather than to improve

This is another common problem emanating from human nature. Authorities in a considerable number of schools consider it necessary to obtain a high School Quality Index and make every attempt to secure a high index by creating a supernormal situation on the day of the review visit. As a result, despite having a high School quality index, the quality of the outcomes may remain low.

4.6.2.7 Non collection/ disregarding Student feedback

Despite the students being the major recipient stakeholders of general education, and having a criterion on this aspect, obtaining genuine feedback from students is a rare occurrence both in internal evaluation and external evaluation.

4.6.2.8 Lack of/ insufficient Authority of ME Unit

Another complaint made by higher authorities is that despite being the arm that promotes QA in General education, the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit has no authority to take any action against those who do not comply with the QA procedures, or to provide necessary support for the needed schools other than informing the higher authorities. The MEU does not have sufficient human resources either.

As a solution to the human resource problems and problems related to external evaluation within the system, establishing an independent QAA body with sufficient authority is proposed. This would also enable bringing private and international schools under QAA.

The QAA body proposed should be responsible in making the system aware of the process and importance of QA and in conducting the assessment in a fair and just manner, making recommendations to all levels from schools to the line ministry. That should also be vested with authority to appraise the people involved and recommend corrective actions/ commendations to the relevant authorities within the system.

4.6.2.9 Lack of follow-up (monitoring) and reward scheme to promote internal QA

Despite conducting QA reviews of schools annually, there seem to be no follow-up action to provide necessary support to overcome the deficiencies identified and support internal QA. It appears that certain education officials, school principals and teachers etc. are more committed than others and elevate the standard of schools, which is essential for reducing the competition for popular schools. However, there is no formal mechanism to recognize/ reward more devoted officials and/ or teachers and schools. If such a mechanism is in place that would certainly promote internal QA leading to improve the quality of many schools. Furthermore, there is no established mechanism to communicate the QA achievements of schools to the wider community. One of the ways the schools can communicate with the public/ parents is through the pupils and the School Development Society. This will ease the competition for admitting students to 'popular schools'.

4.6.2.10 too frequent (annual) review cycles

Due to the difficulties that are encountered at school level, a considerable proportion of teachers consider annual reviews to be too frequent. They expressed the opinion that the currently practiced QA protocol would in fact be counterproductive and result in deterioration of the student outcomes if supporting mechanisms are not introduced.

5. Conclusions

- 5.6. The MoE has laid the foundation for quality assurance in general education by establishing a QA unit which has taken steps to publish the Quality Development of School Education Process III: Guidelines on National Educational Standards and ISA Competencies Framework, conduct awareness programmes, train groups of officials and teachers on quality assessment, and facilitate the QA process. The steps taken are in conformity with the steps taken in this regard by other countries.
- 5.7. The steps taken have resulted in establishing the present QA framework which consists of a guidelines manual, an external assessment arm, school based internal QA elements and three step assessment procedure (self- evaluation, assessment and reporting), which are in conformity with the elements of frameworks in other countries. However, other elements such as Benchmarks, Code of Good practices are yet to be established.
- 5.8. Implemented QA activities have helped to improve and formalize the documentation practices adopted by government schools and influenced school authorities to take steps to improve infrastructure facilities in schools, especially in primary schools.
- 5.9. The value of quality assurance and the necessity of a feasible implementation mechanism for Quality assessment in general education are well appreciated by all members in all sectors of education.
- 5.10. The eight evaluation domains and associated standards and indicators identified in the present QA in General education are comprehensive reflecting the multi-dimensional nature of Quality, and cover a wide range of aspects to be considered in assessing quality.
- 5.11. There are too many indicators (220) to be considered, which make comprehension and quality assessment difficult. A review and revision of the domains, standards, indicators and criteria used in the QA guidelines is needed to make the QA indicators and criteria simple, comprehensible, assessable and applicable.
- 5.12. Certain domains have indicators and criteria that are difficult to implement/ assess while some indicators and criteria overlap across domains leading to misinterpretation. Placing the criteria and indicators in the most appropriate domain will simplify the process and reduce the load.
- 5.13. Certain criteria and indicators are not applicable across the variety of schools (Types 1AB, 2 and 3; National, Navodya/ Isuru, Mahindodaya, private schools). Since all indicators are given equal weightage some schools are at a disadvantage. Identification of a set of compulsory/ core indicators which are applicable across all primary or secondary schools, considering others as auxiliary/supplementary/ complementary indicators, allocating differential

weightage for core and auxiliary indicators and allowing the schools to select an appropriate set of auxiliary indicators in addition to core indicators will help not only in simplifying the process, but also in bringing all schools (non-governmental and international schools that cater to general education) into one QA umbrella. Furthermore, it will help in identifying strengths and weaknesses of every school, comparison of schools in a particular category (Type I, II and III), and add flexibility – a desirable feature, to the QA process.

- 5.14. The present QA guidelines are more inclined towards improving the efficiency of management and use of available physical and human resources than improving the quality of education, especially teaching-learning assessment processes and student outcomes. The use of industry related dimensions of quality instead of education related dimensions of quality in the conceptual framework may have caused this situation. This could be overcome by using education related dimensions of quality in the conceptual framework and formulating the standards, criteria and indicators paying due attention to teaching learning assessment procedures and student outcomes during revision of guidelines.
- 5.15. The limited number of indicators and criteria allocated to assess Student achievements are primarily based on exam performance. To what extent the examination performance contributes to the desired attributes of a well-rounded student is questionable. Therefore a wider integration of other relevant attributes of desired student performance in addition to exam criteria into QA guidelines is vital for producing a well rounded student for the impending knowledge society through QA in general education.
- 5.16. Separating the domains pertaining to Institutional management from the domains pertaining to the teaching learning assessment process and desired outcomes (student achievements), and formulating separate QA guidelines for Institutional Reviews and Study Programme Reviews as in the University system are recommended. This will not only simplify the process and balance weightage among domains but also facilitate improvement of the quality of education process without deteriorating the quality of management and align QA in general education with that in higher education.
- 5.17. Due to the need for collecting and compiling a large number of supporting evidences for a wide range of criteria, the QA process has overburdened the staff at all levels, particularly those who are directly involved in it. The situation is worse in those schools which are understaffed. This problem can be overcome by initiation of a formalized supporting mechanism (by way of allocating a time slot in the Time Table for QA activities/ considering time spent on QA activities into workload) for internal QA at school level.
- 5.18. A considerable proportion of school teachers is not well aware of the objectives and procedure of the presently practiced QA in the school system, despite the efforts of the Ministry. Awareness programmes seem to have paid greater attention to those involved in external QA compared to internal QA. Since the

effectiveness of a QA programme depends primarily on internal QA, awareness and training programmes penetrating to schools in every corner of the country targeting introduction of a revised QA is required.

- 5.19. Individual differences prevail in understanding and interpreting the status of the criteria in comparison to national standards and marks allocation, making the present review process subjective. The presence of a large number of indicators to be considered within a very short period of time, and having a considerable proportion of indicators that can be interpreted in different ways makes the situation worse leading to inaccurate judgments. Simplification of the guidelines and training of relevant personnel is needed to avoid misinterpretation, make accurate judgments and objective reviews.
- 5.20. Insufficient understanding about the objectives of the QA and the natural desire to obtain a higher school quality index has resulted in creating a supernormal situation on the day of the review visit. As a result, despite having a high School quality index, the quality of the outcomes may remain low. A sound awareness programme reaching schools in every corner of the country will help in preventing this situation, changing attitudes, and avoiding the creation of supernormal situation in schools on the day of the site visit.
- 5.21. A site visit of one days duration is not sufficient to effectively assess the quality of management, especially of the education provision. Annual reviews are considered as being too frequent. Conducting Institutional review, and Programme review separately and extending the duration of the site visit will help in increasing accuracy of reviews and adjusting the duration and frequency of review cycles as needed.
- 5.22. Despite the students being the major recipient stakeholders of general education, and having a criterion on this aspect, obtaining genuine feedback from students is a rare occurrence both in internal evaluation and external evaluation. Procedural changes are required both in the internal QA and external QA to promote obtaining genuine feedback from relevant stakeholders especially from the students.
- 5.23. Lack of follow-up (monitoring) action is another drawback in the current mechanisms. Follow-up actions supplemented with an incentives/ reward system would encourage sustaining continual commitment to quality enhancement in education.
- 5.24. The Monitoring and Evaluation Unit lacks authority and human resources to take necessary follow-up action other than organizing QA activities. Establishment of an independent MEU with appropriate authority to take necessary action to promote internal QA and external assessment is required.
- 5.25. Bringing all schools (including private and international schools) that prepare students for national examinations under the purview of a revised QA framework and QA unit would facilitate national level quality improvement and sharing of good practices.

6. Policy Recommendations

A review of the QA Guidelines is recommended to formulate guidelines that can bring all general education providers (government, non-government, international) under one QA framework, which consist of simple, clear, comprehensible, and assessable criteria that are balanced across domains, devoid of overlaps across the standards and domains. The revision should take the views of the personnel already involved in the process, QA specialists, administrators in education and educationalists in general, private and international school sectors, and the suggestions made in this report into consideration.

To reduce the number of indicators, strengthen student learning and outcomes related aspects, balance across domains, and make them more relevant. The strategies indicated below are suggested:

- 1.1. Using education related dimensions instead of industry related dimensions in the conceptual framework that would be used to identify domains, standards and indicators.
 - 1.2. Identify Core (compulsory) indicators relevant to all schools, and other indicators, which may be called auxiliary indicators.
 - 1.3. Assign appropriate weightage to Core and Auxiliary indicators.
 - 1.4. Use the Core set of indicators applicable across various types of schools to compare the levels of achievement in general education provision. Use the other indicators (auxiliary indicators) to assess differential strengths, creativity and innovation in different schools.
 - 1.5. Another strategy would be to separate the domains, standards and Criteria pertaining to Institutional governance and Management from the domains, standards and criteria pertaining to Teaching learning, assessment Processes and student achievements and desired outcomes, and formulate separate QA guidelines for Institutional Reviews and Study Programme Reviews as in the University system.
- 4.3 The target of producing a well-rounded student through implementation of revised QA guidelines by incorporating standards and criteria pertaining to other desired attributes of student performance in addition to exam performance is suggested. A comprehensive dialogue between personnel involved in QA and those involved in testing and evaluation at national level is timely and essential. Presently there is a wide gap between students qualifying in examinations and the ones who are well-rounded.
- 4.4 Launch a well-organized island-wide awareness program penetrating all schools and teachers on the objectives of QA, revised QA guidelines and procedures. Provide a comprehensive training on external assessment procedures and objectives to relevant authorities.

- 4.5 Initiate supporting mechanisms to facilitate and strengthen the internal QA activities. Indicated below are some strategies in this regard:
 - 4.5.1 Recognize the time spent on QA activities by assigned teachers, and establish suitable mechanisms such as allocation of designated periods in the time table for QA or releasing the responsible teachers at least for one hour per week for QA activities.
 - 4.5.2 Make involvement in internal QA compulsory for all teachers to be considered for promotion.
 - 4.5.3 Revive the QA circles.
- 4.6 Design a system to reward schools and staff for excellence in internal QA to sustain the enthusiasm and to encourage backward schools to engage in quality enhancement.
- 4.7 Reduce the frequency of external QA, but allocate sufficient time for the site visits. Adjust the frequency of site visits according to the quality of the education provision of the school.
- 4.8 Establish a QA Unit(preferably an independent unit) with sufficient authority and acceptable to all stakeholders for organizing external QA and follow-up procedures.
- 4.9 Establish mechanisms for all private and international schools that provide General Education and prepare students for National Examinations to come under the QA framework.

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