

## Higher Education Opportunities in Sri Lanka

Karunathilake, I.M.<sup>1</sup>, Edirisinghe, S.<sup>2</sup>, Dias, N.W.G.L.T.L.<sup>1</sup>, Senarathne, S.<sup>3</sup>, Senanayake, S.<sup>3</sup>, Somaratne, G.T.S.V.<sup>1</sup>, Gunawardhane, H.P.M.C.<sup>1</sup>, de Abrew, A.<sup>1</sup>

Strong human capital development is largely responsible for Sri Lanka's continued resilience as a nation in the face of major economic and political setbacks. Sri Lanka's higher education system has made significant contributions to the growth of human capital. Therefore, the country's higher education strategy should focus on enhancing the system's positive aspects and resolving its problems. Sri Lanka has been providing free education since 1945, at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels (Kalugalagedera, and Kaushalya. 2017). The free education system is funded by public funds through taxation. Therefore, provision of free education can be considered a responsibility of the government. In a broad context, free education can be considered an investment where one generation invests in the education of the next generation. It has worked exemplarily well for Sri Lanka and has paid rich dividends in the form of human capital development.

School education is compulsory for children aged 5-16 in Sri Lanka (Vengadeshvaran Sarma, 2018). After completing 9 years of secondary-level education students enter the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE O/L) classes, typically two years in duration. At the end of the two years, students face a public examination to become eligible for the GCE A/L (General Certificate of Education Advanced Level) class.

For a student who passes the Ordinary Level examination, there are options to either carry on with secondary school education or get access to vocational training or join the working force. If a student is unable to achieve passes in all mandatory subjects, the student still has the privilege to continue education with Advanced-Level studies in the Arts stream. In addition, they can enter into vocational training centers and technical colleges for certificate-level and diploma courses. In the 2017 GCE O/L examination, 71.03% of school candidates qualified for GCE A/L in 2020. (Department of Examination – Sri Lanka, 2020).

At GCE A/L, students can choose a preferred path in science, maths, commerce, arts or technology streams, based on their performance at GCE O/L. The GCE A/L course consists of two years, at the end of which students are required to face an exam that serves as both a selection test for university admission and an achievement test. In 2020, a total of 251,168 students faced GCE A/L as school candidates, including both first and second attempters. Among them, 165,711 students fulfilled the minimum requirement for entrance to state universities (Department of Examinations - Sri Lanka, 2020).

Sri Lankan higher education institutions are broadly classified into four types

1. Public higher education institutions with limited access
2. Public higher education institutions with open access
3. Private higher education institutions which are non-profit oriented
4. Private higher education institutions which are profit-oriented

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayawardenepura

<sup>3</sup> The Organization of Professional Associations of Sri Lanka

Corresponding author: Dias, N.W.G.L.T.L.  
Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo  
diaz94tl.physio@gmail.com



© OPA. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited

The Organisation Of Professionals Associations Of Sri Lanka (OPA)

Volume 11, Issue 1