

Employer needs and graduate skills: The gap between employer expectations and job expectations of Sri Lankan university graduates

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Graduate Unemployment is considered an important social problem in Sri Lanka. Attempts by many governments in the past to bring a sound solution to the problem have failed. Today, the private sector is becoming the dominant player in the economy. However, it is widely observed that the current education and training system does not produce graduates to meet the private sector needs.

This study was conducted with the objectives of identifying university graduates' job expectations, factors affecting their job expectations and identifying employers' needs from university graduates. The study attempts to find the nature of the gap between employers' expectations of skills and job expectations of graduates from Sri Lankan universities to make recommendations for stakeholders confronting the problem. Data for the study were gathered through structured interviews and surveys of selected sample of employers, unemployed graduates, employed graduates, current university students and university faculty members. Survey questions were designed to obtain information on perceptions and attitudes of sample respondents based on the determinants identified from the literature review. Findings reveal that in general, university graduates lack key skills sought by employers. Universities do not generate the required labor skills for the society and undergraduates lack knowledge about reality of the labour market. This skill mismatch leads to a larger number of unemployable graduates in the society. All stakeholders: the government, the university system administrators, employers and graduates themselves must all endeavor to find a solution to this gap. This research recommends the improvement of the relationship between university and private sector, on-campus recruitment, company presentation and organization of guest lecture series, leadership and professional development programs for the undergraduates, improving practicability in the course content, employment market analysis, preparation for company Guide Book for the undergraduate students, and some other recommendations for each stakeholder.

Key words: Employer needs; Graduate skills; Unemployment; University curricula; Sri Lanka; private sector