

Training Strategy for Non-Academic Staff of the University of Peradeniya under ENACT Erasmus+ Programme

Introduction

The University Grants Commission (UGC) of Sri Lanka, as the governing body overseeing higher education institutions, plays a vital role in ensuring the enhancement of human resources across state universities. Among the critical contributors to university operations, the Non-Academic staff, which numbers around 14,000 across Sri Lanka's state universities, are integral to the smooth functioning of administrative, financial, and support services. These staff members, while not directly involved in teaching, support the essential functions that underpin academic success and institutional effectiveness.

To strengthen this crucial support system, it is imperative that Non-Academic staff receive comprehensive and targeted training. Training enhances organizational performance, increases job satisfaction and motivation, fosters professional growth, and aligns staff capabilities with the university's strategic objectives. The University Grants Commission (UGC) in its Strategic Plan (2019-2023) explicitly highlights the need for a clear and robust policy on the professional development of Non-Academic staff, underlining the necessity of addressing their skills, competencies, and career growth.

Institutional Context, Strategic Change, and Implementation

The University of Peradeniya, in its own Strategic Plan (2022-2026), has established a key objective aimed at strengthening its administrative and financial management systems. This objective emphasizes the promotion of good governance, efficiency, and effective administration as part of Goal 4 of the Strategic Plan. Achieving this goal requires enhancing the capacity of Non-Academic staff in critical administrative, financial, and operational areas.

The training and development of Non-Academic staff are directly aligned with this strategic objective, ensuring that the staff's competencies are continuously upgraded to meet evolving institutional needs. Training in administrative functions, financial management, governance, and other specialized areas is crucial for achieving the University's vision of becoming a more efficient, effective, and transparent institution.

The ENACT Project (Enhancing Governance, Management and Reform in Sri Universities through Non-Academic Staff Training), is a strategic initiative co-funded by the European Union Erasmus+ programme partnered by the University of Peradeniya, plays a pivotal role in fulfilling this mandate. The project focuses on building the capacity of Non-Academic staff to foster institutional growth and development in a sustainable manner.

Inefficiencies and Gaps identified

The stakeholder interviews, SWOT analysis, and feedback sessions revealed significant challenges faced by the Non-Academic staff at the University of Peradeniya. One of the key issues identified is a considerable skill and knowledge gap among these employees. This gap is compounded by the lack of a structured mechanism to transfer knowledge, skills, and experience from senior staff to junior colleagues. Without such systems, valuable institutional knowledge remains underutilized, hindering the development and effectiveness of newer employees.

Despite the university's extensive resources and expertise across nine faculties and 79 departments, this wealth of knowledge is not systematically harnessed to enhance the competencies of the Non-Academic staff. The absence of a structured approach to integrating academic expertise into staff development represents a missed opportunity. Leveraging this internal potential could significantly improve the efficiency and overall contribution of Non-Academic employees.

Another critical challenge lies in the inefficiencies caused by reliance on manual methods of work. These outdated processes slow down operations, increase the likelihood of errors, and reduce productivity. The limited availability of funds for digital transformation slows down the opportunity to address these inefficiencies. Investing in digital tools and systems can streamline workflows, enhance operational efficiency, and empower employees to focus on more strategic and impactful tasks.

Training and professional development opportunities for Non-Academic employees are unevenly distributed. Many staff members lack access to on-the-job training, job-specific skill-building programs, and career development initiatives such as Continuing Professional Development programmes (CPD). Furthermore, the training programs that are available are often insufficient to address the diverse needs of employees. It is crucial to implement equitable and comprehensive training programs to ensure all employees have access to the resources they need for growth and advancement.

Feedback from the analysis also highlighted the importance of adopting good human resource practices. Supervisors play a vital role in managing teams effectively, yet many lack the necessary training to handle responsibilities such as workload distribution, promoting work-life balance, and ensuring employee well-being. Training supervisors in these areas can help create a more supportive and efficient work environment, ultimately improving employee satisfaction and productivity.

Communication gaps among different staff categories are another area of concern. These gaps hinder collaboration and create misunderstandings, negatively affecting workplace harmony. Programs designed to enhance communication, such as team-building activities, workshops, and regular forums for dialogue, can help bridge these divides and foster a more cooperative and cohesive workforce.

Further, improving the attitudes and morale of employees toward their work and the organization is critical. Low engagement and motivation among staff can significantly impact their performance and the institution's overall productivity. Initiatives such as recognition and reward

programs, motivational sessions, and opportunities for employees to contribute their ideas can help foster a sense of belonging and commitment.

Addressing these multifaceted challenges is essential for the University of Peradeniya to improve the performance of its Non-Academic staff. By investing in skill development, embracing digital transformation, promoting good HR practices, and fostering better communication and morale, the university can build a more efficient, motivated, and productive workforce.

Staff Development Cell at the Staff Development Center (SDC) and its Role

To effectively address the training needs of the Non-Academic staff, the University of Peradeniya has established the Staff Development Cell under SDC. This initiative, which operates under the ENACT Project, has been formally approved by the University's Governing Council. It serves as the central unit responsible for the systematic planning and delivery of training programs for all university Non-Academic staff.

The Staff Development ENACT Cell is tasked with:

1. **Identifying Training Needs:** *Through regular consultations with stakeholders, including Senior Administrators, Department Heads, and Non-Academic staff, the ENACT Cell assesses the training needs of the staff. These needs are gathered through various channels, including surveys, feedback sessions, and stakeholder meetings.*
2. **Designing and Delivering Training Programs:** The ENACT Cell develops training programs tailored to the identified needs. These programs cover a wide range of areas such as Human Resource Management, Financial Management, Governance, Leadership, Communication Skills, customer service etc. The training sessions are designed to improve both technical skills and soft skills, ensuring that staff members are well-equipped to perform their roles effectively.
3. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The ENACT Cell ensures that all training programs are regularly monitored and evaluated. This includes assessing the effectiveness of training programs, collecting feedback from participants, and adjusting future training sessions based on the evaluation results.
4. **Sustainability of Training Efforts:** One of the key goals of the ENACT Cell is to ensure the long-term sustainability of training programs. It aims to integrate its training initiatives into the university's broader strategic framework, ensuring continuity and alignment with institutional goals. It is also established a **training calendar incorporated into the SDC annual training calendar**, which outlines scheduled training sessions for the year, ensuring that staff development is an ongoing process.

Training Strategy for Non-Academic Staff under the ENACT Project

To develop a robust training strategy for Non-Academic staff, the following key components and principles are essential:

1. Training Needs Assessment

Before designing any training program, a thorough needs assessment is conducted to understand the current gaps in skills and knowledge among Non-Academic staff. This process involves consultations with key stakeholders such as Senior Administrators, Deans of Faculties Divisional Heads, Department Heads and staff representatives. Additionally, feedback from previous training sessions and performance reviews can help identify areas that require further development. The key areas for training may include:

- **Administrative functions:** Record-keeping, correspondence, office management, scheduling, file management
- **Financial management:** Budgeting, accounting, procurement processes, financial reporting
- **Information technology:** Data management, using university management systems, and digital tools.
- **Leadership and management:** Supervisory skills, conflict resolution, decision-making.
- **Communication skills:** Writing emails, making presentations, interacting with students and staff.
- **Customer service:** Handling student inquiries, public relations, communication with external stakeholders.

Integration with University's Strategic Goals

The training strategy will be closely aligned with the university's broader strategic goals, ensuring that Non-Academic staff training contributes directly to the achievement of the University of Peradeniya's objectives, including strengthening administrative and financial management, promoting good governance, and fostering a culture of efficiency and transparency.

Capacity Building for Sustainability

To ensure the sustainability of training efforts, the Staff Development Cell will:

- Collaborate with external experts and institutions to provide up-to-date knowledge and skills.
- Develop internal training capacity, such as training more staff to become facilitators.
- Regularly update the training calendar to address emerging needs and adapt to institutional changes.

Priority Areas of Staff Training identified at the stakeholder consultations

A. Trainers trained under ENACT Project shall deliver the trainings on following areas through the ENACT Cell

1. Internationalization in Higher Education: Strategies and actions for global engagement.
2. Mobility Management: Best practices in managing staff and student mobility.
3. International Office Operations: Running an international office effectively.
4. Modern Human Resource Management Practices: Current trends and methodologies.
5. University Administration and Financial Management: Administrative and financial operations in a higher education context.
6. Project Management: Techniques in project costing, budgeting, and financing
7. Networking and Good Practices: Learning from other universities and sharing best practices.
8. Accounting and Auditing: Specialized practices in higher education accounting and auditing.
9. Modern Systems and Procedures: Enhancing organizational efficiency and productivity.
10. Soft Skills Development: Time management, diversity management, and promoting equality.
11. Leadership Skills: Developing leadership and management competencies.
12. Change Management: Strategies for managing organizational change.

B. Experts from within the institution and hired/invited from outside shall do the training through the ENACT Cell as identified in the stake holder events in collaboration with the Human Resource Development Unit of the University

1. On the job/induction- for newcomers
2. Skill Development- Laboratory Techniques, Safety Methods, Waste Disposal, Job specific other trainings for 147 different categories of employees
3. CDP Programmes- Certificate, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Professional courses
4. Soft Skill Trainings- IT Skills, AI Methods, Specific Software, language trainings, Communication skills, Attitudinal change
5. Wellness and Support- Health and wellness programme, Stress Management, Mindfulness, Work Life Balance, Mentoring, Coaching
6. Other trainings- Knowledge on rules and Regulations, Management practices, HR Practices, Customer service

Key Target Groups

Training will initially focus on 18 trainers who will directly conduct programs for approximately 250 staff members. The program will also indirectly benefit around 1,500 staff through dissemination. Target groups include Administrative and Finance Officers, Executive Staff Officers, Management Assistants and allied grades, Technical Staff, laboratory Attendants and Allied Grades, Skilled Grades, Semi-Skilled grades and primary Grades- Total of 147 different staff categories of Non-Academic Staff

Course Delivery and Administration

Course Design and Delivery:

Design Team: - Led by the Director of SDC, with contributions from the Dean of the Faculty of Management and other Faculties where necessary, Subject specific HODs, Registrar, Bursar, Deputy Bursars and Deputy Registrar of the Non-Academic Establishment/HRDU, Unit under the supervision Registrar and the Vice Chancellor

Delivery Methods: - Lectures, workshops, training programmes group discussions, short courses, tailor made courses for specific job categories, practical sessions, Q&A sessions.

Delivery mode: - physical face to face sessions, workshops, practical sessions, online sessions, group discussions, presentations, e-learning, zoom platform, Moodle, hands on

Resource Pool: -

- Trainers who were trained under ENACT Project
- Resource persons from faculties as Management, Arts, Science, Engineering, Allied Health Science etc. will be selected from among academic staff members
- Resource persons from General Administration and Financial Administration including Registrar, Bursar, Senior Officers and other Executive officers
- Project Administration team including Project Manager
- Chief Technical officers, Audio Visual Technical Officer, Staff Grade Management Assistant
- Professionals/academics/persons hired/invited from outside institutions and universities

Equipment, Facilities and other Resources

The ENACT Project has provided essential equipment for the ENACT Cell, including Digital Podiums, participant tablets, and external hard drives. The university has supplemented this with additional resources. All the resources available at the SDC are allowed as per the mandate

document which established ENACT Cell under SDC. Any other resources including venues and equipment available in the university can be used with permission of the relevant authorities.

Resource Analysis

It is expected that sufficient annual training budget is allocated to the ENACT Cell under SDC. Further support from donors, well-wishers, NGOs, foreign/local agencies, alumni, private companies etc. required to be explored. Required facilities, equipment to be shared with available university resources. Inter university collaborations will also be sought. International collaborations would be useful in filling resource gaps.

Implementation, Leadership and Management

University administration, as supervised by the Governing Council and regulated by the UGC and Ministry of Education would lead the implementation with the assistance of Administrative and Academic staff. Registrar, Bursar, Deans of Faculties, Heads of Departments, Directors and Divisional Heads would work as supervisors. Director SDC and Director HRDU would provide necessary guidance and corporation. Outside experts will provide necessary directions when necessary.

Hierarchical Position of the ENACT Cell

The Staff Development Cell operates under the Staff Development center, which is managed by the Director/SDC. The hierarchy is as follows:

Vice Chancellor



Director/SDC



Staff Development Center (SDC)



ENACT Cell

Stakeholder Analysis

The key stake holders that need to be involved in and should be aware of this strategy are the Non-Academic staff members including Registrar, Bursar and all divisional heads, all Admin and Finance Officers, other executives. As the supervisory body the members of the Governing Council, all academic staff members including Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Deans of Faculties, Heads of Departments are required to be acquainted with this strategy. Students at the university, outsiders, experts in the field may aware of this. Through the awareness supervision, assistance, cooperation can be taken for implementation from these stake holders.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Data required to monitor trainings are no. of participants, feedback from supervisors regarding performance of employees, practical tests and assessments, established training data base, job descriptions, google sheets and papers or materials used.

Key performance indicators set for the trainings will be tested against the goals and objectives. Regular monitoring visits by the supervisory bodies /persons would be in place. Feedback received from participants, employees, Heads of relevant divisions and statistical data available would be used as evaluation tools. Staff satisfaction through questionnaire, survey, assessments will be used. Practical training data and observations would be useful. Better organizational management

Use performance metrics and feedback to measure training impact and adjust programs as needed.

Impact and Risks

Regular assessment of training effectiveness and participant feedback. Impact would be seen on productivity, performance, corporation, enhanced relations with colleagues. Enhanced working culture and motivation to do the job properly. Better structural process and system, standardize methods and total quality management would be visible. Improved HR practices. Legislation towards organization. Career advancements, overall customer/stakeholder withing conducive work environment. satisfaction

Potential Risks: Resistance to change, inadequate participation, and resource limitations. Heavy workload in the substantive post. Difficulty in measuring effectiveness. Less involvement, general myths which are not reality and less support from the supervisors

Mitigation Strategies: Clear communication, stakeholder engagement, and continuous support.

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Mitigation Strategies: Clear communication, stakeholder engagement, and continuous support.

Approach: Implement a structured change management plan to address staff concerns and integrate new practices smoothly.

Future improvements

Provide training relevant to their job roles and supervise them regularly. Continuous CPD programmes. Equal Provide training and professional development opportunities as possible to enhance skill and knowledge to all employees concerned. Divide jobs equally among staff members to minimize dissatisfaction. Improved infrastructure and other facilities for a conducive work environment. Fill competency gap through training. Develop systems and procedures to improve efficiency. Attitudinal change and coaching and regular mentoring. Knowledge sharing sessions and team building activities recommended.

Data for Future Evaluations:

Collect Data: Track participant progress, course effectiveness, and organizational improvements.

Analyse Data: Use findings to refine training strategies and ensure alignment with institutional goals.