

The Politics of University Admissions : A review of some aspects of the admissions policy in Sri Lanka 1971-1978

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Education, especially University education, is a key channel of social mobility in most developing countries and hence the distribution of opportunities for higher education is often regarded as the distribution of future wealth, status and power¹. In countries like Sri Lanka where University education is available only to a small minority, the competition therefore becomes very intense². Further problems arise, when in the context of a plural society each ethnic and religious group tends to evaluate the ratio of University admissions obtained by its members as an index of equality of opportunity or of discrimination. University admissions thus cease to be the exclusive preserve of academics and become the concern of politicians and leaders of various groups and interests. What is attempted in this paper is a case study of the situation in Sri Lanka in the 1970s and the proposal of a solution to the problem.

Political and sectional pressure on University admissions in Sri Lanka did not build up effectively for many years after independence. Several reasons may be advanced in explanation. In the first place it was only in the 1960s that the development of secondary education began to increase the difficulty of entering the University. In the 1940s and the 1950s more than one in every three who sought admission was successful in entering the University³.

Secondly the University of Sri Lanka, established in 1942 and in its early years, under the leadership of Sir Ivor Jennings, developed a strong tradition of academic autonomy⁴. Finally, there was the crucial factor that

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1. David Court, (1976) "The education system as a response to inequality in Tanzania and Kenya" in the *Journal of Modern African Studies* XIV (4), pp. 664-5.
 2. Less than 1% of the relevant age group has had access to University education in contemporary Sri Lanka. See G. Uswatte-Aratchi, (1974) "University admissions in Ceylon: Their economic and social background and employment expectations", *Modern Asian Studies* VIII (3), p. 314.
 3. C. R. de Silva, (1977) "Education Sri Lanka : A Survey" ed. by K. M. de Silva, London, C. Horst, p. 423.
 4. K.M. de Silva, (1977) "Sri Lanka : Relations between the Universities and the Government 1960—1977" Seminar on *Universities and Governments in the Commonwealth*, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, May 1977.

up to 1960 all University admissions examinations were conducted in the English Language and that the bulk of the population educated in Sinhalese and Tamil was in no position to compete. This also meant that ethnic or religious groups⁵ in Sri Lanka found it difficult to bring up the cry of favouritism in assessing answer scripts.

This situation changed rapidly in the 1960s. The growth of secondary education in the 1950s had intensified competition for entry to the University. Consequently the University of Sri Lanka was compelled to duplicate its arts, science and medical faculties in the early 1960s. The two new Universities, Vidyalkankara and Vidyodaya, established in 1958 and received with little enthusiasm by the existing academic community at the University of Sri Lanka, also continued to expand. Thus between 1959 and 1967 the total full time enrolment in universities in Sri Lanka rose from 3,196 to 14,287. In 1966 new legislation to regulate the universities also set up a Central Agency of University Admissions. Nevertheless in the 1960s political pressure was exerted largely for the expansion⁶ of University education. There was little questioning of the procedure of selection for University education.

The questioning came in the 1970s. Despite the expansion in undergraduate student number, the proportion of those refused entry to the University rose to over 80% in the 1960s and to over 90% in the 1970s. Economic constraints prevented the further growth of University education and indeed University enrolment stagnated and even declined slightly in the decade following 1967⁷. With the growth of unemployment of arts graduates after 1966 the competition for science based studies became much more intense. It was however these fields that the Sri Lankan Tamils had chosen as their *forte*. The concentration of Sri Lankan Tamil students on professional courses had been noted as early as 1950. It was facilitated by their higher literacy in English and the greater facilities available for science education in schools of the Jaffna district from which many of them entered the University. In 1964 for instance Sri Lankan Tamils held 37.2% of the places in Science and Engineering courses, 40.5% of the places in Medicine and Dentistry and 41.9% of the places in Agriculture and

5. The 1971 census gives the following ethnic distribution in the population of Sri Lanka. Low-country Sinhalese 42.8%, Kandyan Sinhalese 29.1%, Sri Lankan Tamils 11.1%, Indian (Plantation) Tamils 9.4%, Sri Lanka Moors 6.5%, Indian Moors 0.2%, Malays 0.3%, Burghers 0.3%, Others 0.1%. Of the total population 67.4% were Buddhists, 17.6% Hindus, 7.8% Christians and 7.1% Muslims

6. C.R. de Silva, "Education" op cit., pp. 420-422.

7. *Ibid*, pp. 421, 423.

Veterinary Science at the University of Sri Lanka⁸. The adoption of Sinhalese as the official language of Sri Lanka strengthened this tendency among Sri Lankan Tamils to concentrate on professional courses and science courses as they felt that administrative posts in the public sector would become increasingly difficult to obtain. In 1970 they made up 35.3% of all admissions to science based courses in the University, obtaining 40.8% of the places in Engineering and 40.9% of the places in Medicine. Efforts of successive governments to improve facilities in Sinhalese areas did not result in substantial change in these percentages.⁹

In the context of Sinhala - Tamil rivalry that had developed in Sri Lanka especially in the 1950s and the 1960s in the fields of language, politics and employment¹⁰, the change-over in the medium of instruction from English to Sinhalese and Tamil was of key significance. Sections of the Sinhalese began to feel that the Tamils held on to their share of University places at least partly by favouritism and over-marking. A rumour in late 1970 that the Tamils had obtained almost 60% of the admissions to the Engineering Faculty brought these allegations to the open. The source of this information, which appeared before official admissions were announced has never been satisfactorily established, but it was widely suspected that the student leadership at Peradeniya were the recipients of an 'unofficial leak' of information. The allegation of favouritism among Tamil examiners was investigated but no evidence to substantiate it appeared. Nevertheless the ruling United Front Government decided to change the hitherto accepted basis of admission. A lower qualifying mark was set for Sinhalese medium students so that a politically acceptable proportion of Sinhalese students could be admitted to the University.¹¹ At long last the principle of choice of candidates for University education on the basis of their academic performance as reflected in the raw marks had been successfully challenged.

This development was in a sense a product of the decline of the numerical and political strength of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. In 1931 Census figures recorded that 26.7% of the total population of Sri Lanka were Tamils as against 65.5% Sinhalese. The majority of these Tamils were

8. D. L. Jayasuriya, (1965) "Development of University education : The growth of the University of Ceylon (1942 - 1965)", *University of Ceylon Review* XXIII (1 & 2) pp. 91 - 92

9. For statistics see C.R. de Silva, (1974) "Weightage in University Admissions: Standardisation and District Quotas in Sri Lanka", *Modern Ceylon Studies* V (2), p. 172.

10. Robert M. Kearney, (1967) *Communalism and language in the politics of Ceylon*, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press.

11. For details see C.R. de Silva, (1974) "Weightage in University admissions" *op. cit* pp. 156 - 157.

nineteenth and twentieth century immigrants from South India who worked in the tea and rubber plantations and came to be known as Indian or Plantation Tamils as distinct from the Sri Lankan Tamils who had been settled in the island for a very long period. While the Sinhalese nationalist leaders of the twentieth century were by and large willing to work with the Sri Lankan Tamils, most of them tended to regard the more recent immigrants as persons with "no abiding loyalty" to the country who had to be repatriated to India. Faced with the hostility or at least the unwelcome attitude of successive governments many Indian Tamils did return to South India. The fate of the rest amounting to nearly a million persons was negotiated by the governments of Sri Lanka and India in the period 1954-1974. Three agreements between the two parties stipulated that about 60% of these persons were to be sent to India while the rest were to receive Sri Lankan citizenship. This largely explains why the plantation Tamil population fell from 13.5% of the total in 1931 to 9.4% in 1971. With the Sri Lankan Tamils making another 11.1% of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka in 1971, this made up only 20.5% of the whole population, a proportion bound to decline in the future as the plantation Tamil population is projected to decline to about 6% of the total by 1985.

The decline of the political influence of the Tamils was even more precipitous than their decline in proportionate numerical strength. In 1948/49 the newly independent government of Sri Lanka led by Mr. D. S. Senanayake disfranchised the bulk of the Indian Tamil population by three pieces of legislation: *The Ceylon Citizenship Act. No. 18 of 1948*, *the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act. No. 3 of 1949* and *the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act No. 48 of 1949*. One major effect of this legislation was to deprive the Indian Tamils of elected representatives in Parliament for the period 1952 - 1977. During this period therefore the elected representatives of the Sri Lankan Tamils and the occasional nominated Indian Tamil member were left as the defenders of Tamil interests in Parliament. Another effect of this legislation might be noted at this stage. Parliamentary constituencies in Sri Lanka in the period 1947-1970 were largely demarcated according to population and every 75,000 persons entitled a province to an extra seat. This provision was not modified even after the disfranchisement of the Plantation and Indian Tamils so that the Sinhalese who lived in the areas with Plantation Tamils obtained extra parliamentary representation on the basis of the total population of the area despite the fact that a substantial portion of this population did not have the vote. Then after 1952 the Sinhalese gained some 80% of the seats in Parliament, well in excess of their proportion of the total population.¹³

13. A Jayaratnam Wilson, (1975) "Electoral Politics in an emergent state. *The Ceylon general election of May 1970*", Cambridge University Press, Chapter on The Franchise.

The Constitution of 1948 had introduced some weightage in representation in favour of the minorities. Apart from the seats awarded for population, seats were also distributed to the different provinces on the basis of one per 1000 square miles of territory. This was partly designed to aid the Tamil and Muslim minorities many of whom lived in the sparsely populated Northern and Eastern Provinces. In the original House of Representatives with 95 elected members, 25 seats or 21.3% were allocated according to area and of them 8 seats or 8.4% of the total went to the Northern and Eastern provinces even before population figures were considered. But with the expansion of the legislature this advantage was gradually whittled down. By 1970 the legislature included 151 elected members and the percentage of seats (25/151) allocated according to area had fallen to 16.6%. Thus the Northern and Eastern Provinces with 8 seats allocated according to area now started off with only 5.3% of all seats.

The Tamil political representatives also had limited political leverage in another sense. Unlike the Moors and Malays who had joined one or other of the major parties, the Tamils had been organised since 1956 in sectional parties, the Tamil Congress and the Federal Party. In the period 1965-1970 both these groups co-operated with the coalition government of Mr. Dudley Senanayake¹⁴, and thus earned the hostility of the United Front which came into power in 1970. The United Front was the first government in Sri Lanka to win a two thirds majority in Parliament without the support of any substantial section of the Tamils. The political position of the Tamil minority had indeed become very weak. Nevertheless, the Tamil politicians protested strongly at the iniquitous nature of differential 'qualifying marks' for Sinhalese and Tamil candidates. In these protests they were supported by some academics, notably the University of Ceylon Teachers Association and it was generally agreed that the practice would not be repeated. In the event, however, the losses of the Tamil group in 1971 were marginal. They obtained 34.7 % of the places in Engineering and 39.3% of places in Medicine as opposed to the 40.8% and 40.9% they had gained in 1970. The proportion of Tamils entering science based courses fell slightly from 35.3% to 33.6% but the total places gained by them actually rose from 337 to 359.

However the real significance of the change in 1971 does not lie in these figures. It marked the ascendancy of a group of Sinhalese in the Ministry of Education, a group which firmly believed that some adjusting

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14. A. Jayaratnam Wilson, "Politics and Political development since 1948" in *Sri Lanka: A Survey*, op cit pp., 302-304.
 15. *Memorandum on admissions to Universities*, by University of Ceylon Teachers Association (Peradeniya), July 1971 (mimeograph).

mechanism was necessary to give Sinhalese students a chance in competing for the coveted places in science based courses at the University. It was this group which came up with the suggestion for mediawise standardization for the next admissions, those of 1973. The technical aspects of the scheme for standardization has been adequately discussed elsewhere.¹⁶ Its effect was to reduce sets of marks in all media—English, Sinhalese and Tamil to a uniform scale so that in the end the number qualifying from each medium would be proportionate to the number sitting the examination in each medium. This was therefore a device to neutralize the superior performance of Tamil medium students in science subjects as depicted by ‘raw marks’. Those who proposed the measure argued that the difference in performance between Sinhalese and Tamil students must necessarily be attributed to differences in facilities, teaching or marking and that standardization was merely a device to correct such imbalances. The fact that differences in facilities and teaching available to students within any one medium was greater than any overall difference between the two media was glossed over.

The scheme when implemented created great and acrimonious debate¹⁷. Nevertheless in retrospect it appears that its impact was relatively small. The Tamil admissions to Engineering courses did fall precipitously to 24.4% and the overall percentage of Tamils entering science based courses fell to below 30% probably for the first time in the history of University education in Sri Lanka. On the other hand they still held 36.9% of the places in Medicine and the total number of Tamils entering science based courses was 347, only 12 less than the 1971 figure and actually 10 more than the 1970 figure of 337. The Sri Lankan Tamils, though they constituted just 11.1% of the population provided about 30% of the science students in secondary schools and the scheme of standardization ensured that this proportion of places in the University accrued to them.

The very next year came a further change in the system. The scheme of standardization was supplemented by a “district quota” system. As a background to the introduction of the new scheme it is instructive to review the political forces which facilitated its adoption. With the grant of weightage to area in parliamentary representation the sparsely populated rural areas had gained representation much higher than their population entitled them to. For instance in May 1970 the urbanised parliamentary constituency

16. C.R. de Silva, “Weightage in University admissions” *op cit*, pp. 157–161.

17. Ministry of Education, *Report on the standardization of marks for University admissions* Colombo (1974); M. Sivasittamparam, (1974) *A rebuttal of Ministry of Education report (undated) on the standardization of marks for university admissions released in the National State Assembly, Colombo.*

of Dehiwela Galkissa with 70,236 voters elected one representative while rural Horowapataka with 23,682 voters did the same. The rural areas were poorly provided with secondary school facilities for teaching science and the Education Department was under considerable pressure from rural politicians for more equipment and more schools. Several academics and educationalists expressed concern on this question. In 1971 Mrs. Swarna Jayaweera (currently Professor of Education, University of Sri Lanka) a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Peradeniya pinpointed this problem in an article entitled 'Regional imbalance in Education in Ceylon'.¹⁸ However some progress had been recorded in this respect. The schools teaching science up to Grade XII had increased from 50 in 1958 to 146 in 1967 and 209 in 1972. Although teachers, especially those proficient in Sinhalese, were difficult to obtain and facilities in many of the newly developed schools were meagre, some results had been obtained. In 1966, 80% of those who were admitted for science based courses at the University came from the developed Western and Northern Provinces. By 1970 this proportion had fallen to 69.3%. More students were entering the University from the less developed areas.¹⁹ Nevertheless imbalance in educational facilities remained a legitimate grouse of the numerous politicians from rural constituencies.

At this stage, however, two other factors emerged—the Kandyan lobby and the Moor/Malay interest group. The Kandyan Sinhalese numbered only 29.1% of the total population but the disfranchisement of the plantation Tamils had increased their share of representation in the legislature to nearly 40%. They were particularly strong in the 1970 United Front Government with the Prime Minister herself sensitive to their interests. The Kandyans had for long been underprivileged in relation to secondary education facilities. The five provinces in which they predominated contained 47% of the country's total population but they gained only 19% of University places in science oriented courses even after standardization in 1973. The Secretary to the Ministry of Education, Dr. Premadasa Udagama represented the Kandyan interest within the Ministry and soon after his appointment, the Minister proposed to reserve 25% of the intake to the University at Peradeniya to those living within 20 miles of the Campus.²⁰ The Moor/Malay group too were not content with standardization. They too had long been backward educationally and since most of them were educated in the Tamil medium, standardization affected them adversely.

18. *Journal of the National Education Society of Ceylon*, (1971) Vol. XX, pp. 29–57.

19. C.R. de Silva, "Weightage in University admissions" *op cit*, pp. 168–171.

20. *Report of the National Council of Higher Education for the year 1969–70*, November 1971, p. 114.

The number of Moor/Malay students entering University which amounted to 107 in 1969 and 1970 had fallen to 72 in 1971 and to 70 in 1973. The Minister of Education, Al-Haj Badi-ud-din Mahmud, leader of the Islamic Socialist Front was not unmindful of their interests.

It was at this stage that several senior officers of the Department of Education suggested a 'district quota' system. The district quota system was designed to allocate University places in proportion to the total population resident in each district. Separate quotas were to be granted for medicine (including dental surgery), engineering, physical science, biological science and arts. It is reported that the original proposal from the officials was to restrict the district quota to a proportion of the vacant places and to leave the rest to be filled according to standardized marks. However it was quickly seen as greatly aiding the Kandyan areas, the Moors in the Batticaloa district and rural areas generally. Thus it generated sufficient support to be implemented for all admissions. The adverse reaction of the Sri Lankan Tamils was given little weight.

Indeed the 'district quota' system placed the Sri Lankan Tamil students in a parlous position. Most of them were concentrated in the Jaffna district. The Jaffna District had for years provided 25% or more of the entrants to science based courses. The 'district quota' if strictly applied would have restricted this to 5.54% of the places. In 1974 however the 'district quota' system was operated with modifications. Only those who attained a minimum standard (of 3 passes + 25% in the 4th subject) were taken into the University and some of the places left vacant in the less developed provinces were redistributed among the other districts according to the district quota. Some other places were distributed according to standardized marks among those who had failed to secure entry to the University. This enabled 52 students from Jaffna and 133 from Colombo to qualify to enter science based courses. Of this 58 from Colombo and 47 from Jaffna had their admissions deferred to 1975 so that this factor softened the figures relating to University admissions both in 1974 and in 1975.²¹

Nevertheless the restriction on Tamil admissions was drastic. The total share of Tamil admissions for science based courses in 1974 fell to 20.9% (from 25.9% in 1973 and 35.3% in 1970). Their share of admissions to Engineering courses fell to 16.3% and those for Medicine to 25.9%. For the first time there was a substantial fall in the absolute number of Tamils entering the science based courses (from 337 in 1973 to 294 in 1974) despite

21. See Tables 2 and 3.

a continued expansion in the total intake to such courses (from 1177 in 1973 to 1403 in 1974). Their position in 1975 was even worse. The percentage of Tamils entering all science based courses fell further to 19% (268 out of 1411). Tamil admissions to science courses fell to 14.2% and those to medicine to only 17.4%. The only compensation available to them was a rise in the intake of arts students from the 1970 (open competition) figure of 7.6% (or 187 students) and the 1973 (standardized marks) figure of 6.1% (136 students) to the 1974 percentage of 10.0% (226 students) and 1975 percentage of 10.1% (211 students). However, the total number of Tamil students entering University had fallen both percentagewise and in absolute numbers between 1970 and 1975.

The major benefits naturally accrued to the Sinhalese. Although they were only 71.9% of the total population they gained 75.4% of the places in science based courses and 78.8% of places in Engineering and 70.0% of places in Medicine in 1974. In 1975 their position was even better, the respective figures being 78.0%, 83.4% and 78.9%. Since they also gained over 85% of the places in arts oriented subjects Sinhalese students had now gained a predominant position in the University comparable to the position of their political leaders in the legislature. The Moors/Malays benefited by the new system too. Their share of the places in science based courses increased significantly as their total science admissions doubled (from 21 to 41) from 1970 to 1975. They were of course still grossly under represented in terms of their total population.

By late 1974, however, opposition to both the district quota system and standardization was gathering momentum. University dons continued to criticize the system in national newspapers.²² The presentation of an official report on standardization in the National State Assembly stimulated further discussion.²³ More significantly a number of educated and influential Sinhalese became convinced that the scheme was iniquitous. Although the differences in the performances of candidates who entered the University from different districts was not revealed officially, they were known to be fairly large.²⁴ The spectacle of students with inferior performances entering the University, while those with better grading in the same school were left out merely because the fortunate students had their earlier education in 'undeveloped districts', alienated many.²⁵

22. eg. Ceylon Daily News (CDN), 3 October 1974.

23. *Ministry of Education Report*, *op cit.*

24. See table 3.

25. CDN, 10 February, 1975.

Then again there was the consideration that although the 'district quota' system did assist students in certain districts it really brought little or no benefit to areas where educational facilities in science had not been developed. For example in 1974 Polonnaruwa, Moneragala, and Vavuniya together had eight places in the Faculty of Medicine reserved for them but these areas failed to produce a single qualified candidate to take up these places. In 1975 one student from Polonnaruwa entered the Medical Faculty but the 5 places allotted to Amparai, the 4 given to Moneragala and the 2 kept for Vavuniya were all unfilled. Many other examples can be found below in Tables 2 and 3. It was becoming apparent that without better schooling facilities 'a district quota' would not benefit the really undeveloped districts.

Two other factors were significant. Firstly the government sensing that elections were near was beginning to be more sensitive to Tamil opinion. Indeed the disillusionment among the Tamils had grown apace. The Tamil youth radicalised by what they saw as open discrimination against them in the sphere of University admissions, had already pushed the Tamil leadership to declare for a separate state. The formation of the Tamil United Front to achieve this aim had alarmed the United Front Government. Mr. Kumarasuriyar, Minister of Posts and the only Tamil in the Cabinet was given some leeway to restore the situation. He successfully secured a University Campus for Jaffna. He now lent his influence for the modification of the district quota system.

Much more important was the disillusionment of the Sinhalese of Colombo district. The district quota system, though it benefited the Sinhalese as a whole, was a disaster for Sinhalese students in Colombo. Had selection been made according to standardized marks without district quotas in 1975 the number selected from Colombo district for Engineering and Applied Sciences would have risen from 71 to 129. (The corresponding figures for Jaffna were 18 to 56). The government thus faced considerable pressure from articulate parents in Colombo.

The question was therefore placed before the Sectoral Committee on Social Overheads, Mass media and Transport of the National Planning Council. The Committee included Mr. Pieter Keuneman, Minister of Housing and member for Colombo Central, Mr. K.B. Ratnayake, Minister

of Sports and member for Anuradhapura and Mr. K. Kumarasuriyar, Minister of Posts. The public and various associations were encouraged to send in memoranda and quite a number did so.²⁶

The Sectoral Committee submitted its report in early October 1975.

The report accepted the contentions of the Commissioner of Examinations and the Superintendent (Data Processing) of the Examinations Department that "organised manipulation of marks in one whole medium in a deceptive manner is neither possible nor probable". It argued that while the possibility of correcting examiner variability through standardization was slight "its contribution both to deepening and indeed institutionalizing suspicions between communities and promoting distrust in the fairness and impartiality of public examinations" was considerable.²⁷ It therefore recommended the abolition of media-wise standardization.

The report also commented adversely on the district quota system. "The arguments in favour of retaining the District Quota System as it operates at present, apart from those which were solely concerned with the comparative advantage that one or other racial community could hope to obtain from it was that it would:

- (1) reduce the tendency for children to migrate from peripheral districts to developed urban centres;
- (2) provide an impetus for the improvement of schools in peripheral areas;
- (3) give greater opportunities for youth from rural areas to receive higher education and
- (4) produce a more "national minded" intelligentsia who will resist the temptation of the brain drain.

Such arguments undoubtedly have a strong emotional appeal but it is open to question whether they are objectively correct or scientifically valid".²⁸

The Sectoral Committee pointed out that the district quota system was brought into operation without sufficient notice and without a sufficiently deep study of its educational consequences and social repercussions;

26. e.g. *Memorandum of the Northern Province Principals Association*, (mimeograph); *Memorandum of the University of Ceylon Teachers Association* (Peradeniya); *Memorandum of University of Sri Lanka, Colombo Campus Science Teachers Association* (See CDN of 1/3/1975); *Memorandum of the All Ceylon Muslim Educational Conference* (See CDN 13/3/1975).

27. See Appendix I.

28. *Ibid.*

that the system did not take into consideration the disparity in facilities within districts; that it would have been fairer to base quotas on student population than to base them on total population; that the most educationally underprivileged districts have benefited only marginally and that the main beneficiaries appear to have been the students from more affluent families who have had their primary education in relatively less developed districts but their secondary education in developed districts.

Nevertheless, the Sectoral Committee did not follow this line of reasoning and recommend the abolition of the district quota system. One can speculate as to the reasons why the Sectoral Committee recommended a compromise. The political forces which favoured the district quota system were strong. The Sectoral Committee also largely depended for data and analytical comments on a "Committee of officials" appointed by Dr. Premadasa Udagama, then Secretary to the Ministry of Education. This Committee consisted of six persons three of whom—Mr. U.D.I. Sirisena, Mr. K. D. Ariyadasa and Mr. E.L. Wijemanne were senior officials in the Ministry of Education. The other three were Prof. Charles Dahanayake, Professor of Physics at the Vidyalankara Campus, Prof. P.P.G. L. Siriwardena, Professor of Chemistry at the Colombo Campus and Dr. K. Karunanayake, Registrar of the University of Sri Lanka. All six were Sinhalese and all of them cannot by any means be described as opponents of the district quota system.

This Committee pointed out that much heart burning had arisen simply because of the fact that students who had their initial education in less developed districts were allowed to qualify for those districts although they took up the Grade XII Examination from schools in developed areas. They argued that this led to two sets of criteria being adopted for students who were educated in the same class and recommended that this 'special concession' be abolished. Similarly they admitted that some of the problems arose from the fact that certain good students from developed areas were left out by the operation of the district quota system. Therefore they recommended a scheme of admissions based on 30% admissions on merit and 70% on a district basis. The Sectoral Committee made a counter proposal of 75% admissions on merit and 25% on a district basis which was strongly opposed by the "Committee of officials" partly on the grounds that this change would benefit Jaffna more than Colombo.²⁹

Eventually the Sectoral Committee recommended a somewhat complicated scheme. 70% of the admissions would be purely on 'raw' marks gained by the students. The other 30% would be chosen according to district. Of

29. See Appendix II, Appendix III.

this 30% however, half or 15% was to be reserved for the backward districts of Amparai, Anuradhapura, Badulla, Hambantota, Mannar, Moneragala, Nuwara Eliya, Polonnaruwa, Trincomalee and Vavuniya. Colombo and Jaffna districts, however, were not to get any places at all on district quotas as they were considered educationally developed districts well able to compete with others.

The proposals were eventually submitted to the Cabinet. The Cabinet accepted the modified district quota scheme but the Sinhalese interests were strong enough to retain media-wise standardization. Also in the implementation district quota places were granted to Colombo and Jaffna along with the other districts. The new system as it operated in 1976 brought distinct gains to the Tamils. Their share of total admissions to the science oriented faculties rose by 35% from 268 in 1975 to 362 in 1976 although total admissions of all students to these faculties actually fell slightly from 1411 in 1975 to 1395 in 1976. This gave them a proportion of 25.9% of places in science based courses well above the 19.0% of 1975 or the 20.9% of 1974 but still much below the 1973 (standardization only) figure of 29.5% or the 1970 (open competition) percentage of 35.3%. The number of Tamils entering the University for Medicine rose to 30.4% and those who entered for Engineering came up to 22.4% of the total number of students. On the other hand the Sinhalese did not lose much. They still had 71.3% of overall University admissions for science based courses including 65.8% for Medicine and 76.1% for Engineering.

However the deviation from the 100 percent district quota system provoked a campaign in defense of it. The campaign was spearheaded by the *Sinhala Tharuna Sanvidhanaya*, a relatively small organization which published a monthly news-sheet called *Sinhala Tharunaya*. The organisers were able to obtain the public support of the *Samastha Lanka Trinikayike Sangha Sabha* and the Mahanayakes of the Malwatta and Asgiriya Chapters of the Siamese Sect.³⁰ However the Government stood firm and the campaign eventually failed.

For the year 1977 with the same system of 70% admissions according to standardized marks and 30% according to district the breakdown showed a small but significant change in results. The proportion of all Tamil entrants to science based courses fell slightly to a total of 350 or 23.6%. Their share in admissions for Medicine fell to 27.8% and those for Engineering fell to 19.1%. The Sinhalese admission figures rose correspondingly and the parallel figures were 73.3%, 68.0% and 79.5%.

30. *Ceylon Observer Magazine Edition*, 12 Oct. 1975, *CDN*, 8 Oct. 1975 and 14 Oct. 1975.

The reasons for this change are difficult to pinpoint but one important factor might be the change in the administrative procedure of allocating students to districts. In 1976 the school or examination centre sat determined the district. It is therefore possible that some students from Jaffna had joined schools in Vavuniya, Mannar and Trincomalee or at least sat the examination in these districts. This might well explain why the total entry to science based courses from these areas which was only 21 with a 100% district quota operating in 1975 rose to 68 in 1976 despite the restriction of the entrants through the district quota. In 1977 however the district was defined more rigidly as either (a) the district in which the school is situated in the case of school candidates or (b) the district in which the first attempt at the examination was made or (c) the district of the school last attended. In 1977 the number who entered the science based courses from the above three districts fell to 45. This measure alone could well explain the slight changes in the ethnic breakdown of admissions from 1976 to 1977.

Meanwhile political events brought in a new approach to the problem. The then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. J. R. Jayewardene declared in late 1975 that once his party came into power standardization and district quotas would be abolished. Mr. Jayewardene might have been quite convinced that these devices were undesirable in themselves. Such a policy was also in consonance with the rest of Mr. Jayewardene's political programme. He clearly envisaged a new Constitution where executive power would reside in a President elected by the people.³¹ In such a system (unlike in the Westminster system) a substantial minority could not be ignored. Their role might well decide the Presidential election of the future. After Mr. Jayewardene's sweeping political victory of July 1977 he decided to keep to his pledge. Both standardization and district quotas were declared abandoned.

Mr. Jayewardene's policy, however, met with certain political problems. The major Tamil political party, the Tamil United Federation Front which had won an equally sweeping victory in the Tamil areas in the North continued its campaign for a separate state. In August 1977, the bitterness aroused in the previous years eventually resulted in open clashes between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Large parts of the island were affected and before the violence ended over 100 persons had died and some 25,000 both Sinhalese and Tamil rendered homeless. It was one of the worst ethnic clashes in the country, comparable to the Sinhala-Tamil riots of 1958 and the Sinhala-

31. *A programme of action to create a Just and Free society*, (1977) (United National Party Election Manifesto), Colombo, p. 10.

Muslim clashes of 1915. The Government continued its policy of conciliation and appointed a Commission headed by former Supreme Court Judge Sansoni to investigate the disturbances. However, tensions remained and Sinhalese communities who lived in the North and East and Tamils who lived in the rest of the island began to feel a sense of insecurity they had not felt for a generation.³²

It was in this atmosphere that the 1977 admissions to the University were being processed. When the marks were processed it became clear that if district quota and standardization were not applied, the Tamils would considerably outnumber the Sinhalese in the much-sought-after faculties of Medicine and Engineering. Some inkling of this situation reached members of Sinhalese nationalist groups. Assertions were made that Tamil examiners had inflated marks. A one-day strike by all Sinhalese secondary school children in protest against government policy was planned and indeed this was only averted by the closure of all government schools for the day and by taking into custody several of the alleged organisers.

In this context it was decided to make some compromise and the basis of this was explained by the new Minister of Education and Higher Education, Dr. Nissanka Wijeyeratne in Parliament,

“I think in any country it is imperative that a system be evolved to draw the best talent irrespective of their racial origins. The government therefore decided on a policy which I am happy to implement namely the restoration of the raw marks system. But, as we made clear to the House, we decided that no student who would have gained admission to the University, had there been standardization, would be deprived of admission to the University owing to the abolition of standardization and that special consideration will be given to students from areas which were under privileged in terms of educational facilities”.³³

The complete ethnic breakdown of University admissions for 1978 is not yet available and indeed the basic admission statistics available are very approximate. Some of these figures are given in Table 8 A. What was done was that the original admissions of some 3700 students on raw marks was supplemented by admitting almost 900 extra students, virtually all of them Sinhalese who would have been admitted had standardized marks been used for the original admissions. Over another 250 students were subsequently admitted on a district basis under the following guidelines. A minimum

32. Proceedings of the Sansoni Commission in CDN, October - December 1978.

33. *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), Official Report (Uncorrected)*, 1 (7), Thursday 19 Oct. 1978, Col. 676.

number of places was offered for each district. For Medicine/Dental Surgery the number was 9, for Engineering 9, for Physical Sciences 6 and for Biological Sciences 6. In the case of new admissions for arts oriented courses it was provided that each electorate would be offered a minimum of 8 places.³⁴

The Tamil leadership agreed tacitly to the compromise. They had reason to be satisfied, for the number of Tamil entrants to the Faculties of Medicine and Engineering had risen by over 250 per cent while the Sinhalese intake had risen only marginally. It was unofficially estimated that the proportion of Tamil students entering science based courses in the University in 1978 approximated if it did not exceed the 35% they attained with the system of open competition in 1969/70 and 1970/71.³⁵ Once again, however, the change in principle was more important than the changes in statistical tables. What happened in 1978 was that the original proposal of a complete return to raw marks obtained at the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Examination was replaced by a policy of adjusting marks after examination results were received. With the application of new quotas for districts the differences in examination performances of candidates entering University from different districts remained as wide as ever. More significantly, as the 1978 admissions scheme was not envisaged as a permanent structure, the whole question of University admissions became once more a target of conflicting political pressures.

Many Sinhalese nationalists were distinctly unhappy with the 1978 compromise scheme. They alleged that the Sri Lankan Tamil minority of 11% could consistently obtain such good results only by unfair means.³⁶ It was alleged that especially in 1977 many Tamil examiners gave excessive marks to students of their ethnic group.³⁷ The question came into the open when Mr. Cyril Mathew, Minister of Industries and Scientific Affairs, alleged in Parliament that some Tamil examiners were giving Tamil students an unfair advantage. He produced six answer scripts in Sinhalese and Tamil

34. *Ibid.*, Column 677 and Information from Central Admissions Agency, University of Sri Lanka.

35. See Table 10.

36. It was also argued that allowing 30% or more of University places to Tamil medium science students was actually a form of reverse discrimination against the Sinhalese and that rural Sinhalese areas would be inadequately served with teachers and technical officers unless an increasing proportion of Sinhalese medium students were trained at University level.

37. The question papers in Science subjects have generally two parts(1) with multiple choice questions and(2) essay type questions. It is rumoured that while marks for multiple choice questions in the two media show little variation those for the essay type do and that this accounts largely for the superior performance of Tamil medium students.

from the 1977 G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Examination to substantiate his statements.³⁸ Professor P.P.G.L. Siriwardena, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sri Lanka who was later associated with Mr. Mathew in a press conference stated that the only solution to the problem was to have quotas for ethnic groups.³⁹ The widespread scepticism relating to marking levels in the different media had received a boost earlier when Mr. Bogoda Premaratne, former Commissioner of Examinations, in his evidence before the Sansoni Commission had held that there was no means of ensuring a correspondence in marking standards in the Sinhalese, Tamil and English media at the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Examination.

The Government appointed a Committee consisting of Prof. Stanley Kalpage, Secretary to the Ministry of Higher Education, Mr. W.M.A. Wijeratne Banda, Registrar, University of Sri Lanka, Mr. Bogoda Premaratne and several others to study the question and propose an equitable solution to the problem of University admissions. The report submitted by this committee was not made public but on 2 December 1977 the *Ceylon Daily News* announced the Government decision relating to the basis of University admissions for 1979.

Thirty per cent of the students were to be recruited on an island wide basis on raw marks; fifty five per cent were to be selected on a district basis according to the population ratio and the remaining fifteen per cent was to be reserved for the educationally backward districts which were specified as follows: Anuradhapura, Badulla, Batticaloa, Hambantota, Moneragala, Mullaitivu, Nuwara-Eliya, Polonnaruwa, Mannar, Vavuniya, Amparai and Trincomalee.

There is sufficient evidence to usefully speculate on the possible impact of the new scheme which in certain respects is similar to that proposed by the 'Committee of officials' in 1975. The allocation of 70% of University places according to district quotas of one sort or another will have an adverse impact on both Colombo and Jaffna. However, since, unlike in 1976, the basis of selection for the 30% chosen on an all-island basis is raw marks, students from Jaffna who are expected to obtain 18 % of the admissions (15% on raw marks and 3% on district quota) will be less adversely affected than those from Colombo who would also be restricted to approximately the same percentage of places (7% on raw marks and 11% on district quota). The severe restriction of admissions from Colombo is likely to lead to an outcry from the people in that area especially when students

38. CDN, 9 November 1978, pp. 1 and 9. For the full text of speech see Parliamentary Debates, op cit. 1 (10), 7 November 1978, Col. 944 - 1020.

39. CDN, 13 November 1978, p. 1.

who barely qualify for admission to the University are chosen from outlying districts while those who have performed very well from Colombo are excluded. This system would indeed be harsh on students from other districts who were attracted to schools in Colombo from other areas by the Government's own scheme of scholarships.

The Tamil share in admissions is likely to drop somewhat from the 1978 levels but not significantly. It is provisionally estimated that the total Tamil admissions to science courses will remain at around 32 to 35% a figure comparable to that of 1970/71. On the other hand Sinhalese agitation against admission on raw marks is likely to continue especially as the preliminary figures indicate that Tamil medium students are likely to obtain 60% of places awarded on an all-island basis. The 1979 formula is therefore no solution to the problem which has plagued Sri Lanka's politics in the 1970s.

Let us briefly consider what alternative approaches are available to resolve this problem. In the first place it might be possible to try to establish a correspondence in standards between the Sinhalese and Tamil media at the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Examination. However, given the large number of candidates sitting the examination this would be a somewhat difficult and time consuming process. It would necessitate mixed Sinhala-Tamil panels of examiners and translators who could check random scripts. The inevitable differences of opinion within these panels would tend to perpetuate suspicions between the two communities. This formula would also leave untouched the question of the secondary school students without adequate facilities.

A second approach would be to convert the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Examination to a multiple-choice type test. This proposal has the advantage of enabling a person who does not have any knowledge of the medium of instruction to correct the answer scripts. It also has certain distinct disadvantages. A good multiple-choice examination takes two to three years to develop and the problem is one which requires a reasonably quick solution. It is also very difficult to test certain skills like those of expression in a multiple choice test. Finally it is questionable whether the needs of an admission test to the University should determine the nature of the examination in secondary schools, especially as a vast majority of the terminal students do not enter the University at all.

The introduction of racial quotas cannot be seriously thought of as a solution. It will only worsen existing tensions between the Sinhalese and the Tamils as the racial make-up of the total population changes gradually. It will also stimulate demands for quotas for specially underprivileged caste and religious groups.

The re-introduction of standardization is a possibility but while it will satisfy the Sinhalese, it will be bitterly opposed politically by the Tamil leadership and it will be the retraction of a concession offered to them by the ruling party at the outset of their period of Government. Standardization alone, however, will not restrict the entry of Tamils too harshly provided that the proportion of Tamil students contending for science based courses in the University does not fall. This can be illustrated by the 1973 admission figures (see Table I). An alternative would be to reject standardization and to keep the district quotas based on population or more preferably on student numbers. This would, however, leave wide disparities in the standards required for entry between those competing from developed areas such as Colombo and Jaffna and others such as Nuwara-Eliya or Moneragala. Further, the policy of a Government which offers rural students scholarships at the primary and secondary levels to enable them to move into schools in the more developed areas and then imposes a quota for University entry from those areas does seem questionable.

Indeed, the best approach seems to be to regard the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Examination as merely a qualifying test. Those who are successful at this examination should be merely entitled to compete in another test for University admission. This test should be designed on a multiple choice basis and should be so devised that it tests the aptitude of the student for a University education. General intelligence and perhaps a general knowledge paper could form the basis of this test and entry to the University could be made solely on the results of this test.

This solution appears to have the distinct advantage of defusing communal tension while it also gives the student from the less well-equipped school a chance to show his innate ability and would thus equalise educational opportunity. One might also hope that this scheme would also have the beneficial effect of liberating Grade XII students in school from

some of the drudgery they endure in schools and tutorials, for this scheme converts the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Examination into an achievement test and would free it from being distorted as a result of functioning as a selective test for entry to the Universities. Since the number of those who are successful at the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Examination is limited the test could be held in a few centres. The problems inherent in the suggestion are two fold. Firstly, politicians might well be concerned that no one will be able to predict the racial breakdown of those who qualify for the University in any one year. Secondly, some parents might resent the fact that those who do well in the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Examination might be eliminated by others due to their performance in the new test. Educationists should find no objection on either score but the critical question would be whether the politicians would agree. If they do not, communal and regional tension over access to higher education is bound to persist in the near future.

TABLE I

UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS (1969-1977)

by ethnic origin and course of study

1969-1970 Course of Study	Sinhalese		Tamil		Moor/Malay		Others		TOTAL
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Phy. Sc., Bio-Sc. & Architecture	235	69.7	93	27.6	7	2.1	2	0.6	337
Engineering	77	51.7	72	48.3	-	-	-	-	149
Medicine	112	48.9	112	48.9	2	0.9	3	1.3	229
Dental Surgery	11	52.4	8	38.1	2	9.5	-	-	21
Agriculture	17	44.7	18	47.4	2	5.3	1	2.6	38
Vet. Science	5	27.7	12	66.7	-	-	1	5.6	18
Total-Science	457	57.7	315	39.8	13	1.6	7	0.9	792
Arts Oriented Studies (excluding Law)	2035	89.1	158	6.9	91	4.0	1	0.0	2285
Law	30	57.7	18	34.6	3	5.8	1	1.9	52
Total Arts	2522	88.4	176	7.5	94	4.0	2	0.1	2337
GRAND TOTAL	2979	80.6	491	15.7	107	3.4	9	0.3	3129
1970-1971									
Phy. Sc., Bio-Sc. & Architecture	307	68.0	129	28.6	8	1.8	7	1.6	451
Engineering	85	55.9	62	40.8	3	2.0	2	1.3	152
Medicine	132	53.5	101	40.9	6	2.4	8	3.2	247
Dental Surgery	17	41.5	23	56.1	1	2.4	-	-	41
Agriculture	23	53.5	17	39.5	2	4.7	1	2.3	43
Vet. Science	15	71.4	5	23.8	1	4.8	-	-	21
Total Science	579	60.6	337	35.3	21	2.2	18	1.9	955
Arts Oriented Studies (excluding Law)	2200	89.7	171	7.0	81	3.3	2	0.0	2454
Law	26	54.2	16	33.3	5	10.4	1	2.1	48
Total Arts	2226	88.9	187	7.6	86	3.4	3	0.1	2502
GRAND TOTAL	2805	81.1	524	15.2	107	3.1	21	0.6	3457
1971-72									
Phy. Sc., Bio-Sc. & Architecture	299	67.0	139	31.2	5	1.1	3	0.7	446
Engineering	171	62.4	95	34.7	5	1.8	3	1.1	274
Medicine	124	56.1	87	39.3	5	2.3	5	2.3	221
Dental Surgery	21	42.8	26	53.0	1	2.1	1	2.1	49
Agriculture	48	58.6	32	39.0	2	2.4	-	-	82
Vet. Science	17	63.0	10	37.0	-	-	-	-	27
Total Science	680	63.6	389	33.6	18	1.7	12	1.1	1069
Art Oriented Studies (excluding Law)	2031	92.7	102	4.7	53	2.4	4	0.2	2190
Law	42	85.8	5	10.2	1	2.0	1	2.0	49
Total Arts	2073	92.6	107	4.8	54	2.4	5	0.2	2239
GRAND TOTAL	2753	83.2	466	14.1	72	2.2	17	0.5	3308
1973									
Phy. Sc., Bio-Sc. & Architecture	356	73.1	115	23.6	10	2.1	6	1.2	487
Engineering	201	73.1	67	24.4	5	1.8	2	0.7	275
Medicine	150	58.8	94	36.9	6	2.3	5	2.0	255
Dental Surgery	25	51.0	23	46.9	1	2.1	-	-	49
Agriculture	41	46.6	45	51.1	2	2.3	-	-	88
Vet Science	20	87.0	3	13.0	-	-	-	-	23
Total Science	793	67.4	347	29.5	24	2.0	13	1.1	1177
Art Oriented Studies (excluding Law)	2019	91.8	128	5.9	45	2.0	7	0.3	2199
Law	34	77.3	8	18.1	1	2.3	1	2.3	44
Total Arts	2053	91.5	136	6.1	46	2.0	8	0.4	2243
GRAND TOTAL	2846	83.2	483	14.1	70	2.1	21	0.6	3420

1974 Course of Study	Sinhalese		Tamil		Moor/Malay		Others		TOTAL
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Phy. Sc., Bio-Sc. & Architecture	511	75.5	146	21.6	18	2.6	2	0.3	677
Engineering	223	78.8	46	16.3	14	4.9	—	—	283
Medicine	184	70.0	68	25.9	8	3.0	3	1.1	263
Dental Surgery	34	69.4	14	28.6	1	2.0	—	—	49
Agriculture	83	83.8	11	11.1	5	5.1	—	—	99
Vet. Science	23	71.9	9	28.1	—	—	—	—	32
Total Science	1058	75.4	294	20.9	46	3.3	5	0.4	1403
Arts Oriented Studies	1934	86.0	226	10.0	84	3.7	6	0.3	2250
GRAND TOTAL	2992	81.9	520	14.2	130	3.6	11	0.3	3653

1975

Phy. Sc., Bio-Sc. & Architecture	535	77.3	135	19.5	22	3.2	—	—	692
Engineering	241	83.4	41	14.2	7	2.4	—	—	289
Medicine	195	78.9	43	17.4	8	3.2	1	0.4	247
Dental Surgery	33	66.0	16	32.0	1	2.0	—	—	50
Agriculture	75	73.5	24	23.5	3	2.9	—	—	102
Vet. Science	22	71.0	9	29.0	—	—	—	—	31
Total Science	1101	78.0	268	19.0	41	2.9	1	0.1	1411
Arts Oriented Studies	1781	85.6	211	10.1	79	3.8	9	0.4	2080
GRAND TOTAL	2882	82.6	479	13.7	120	3.4	10	0.3	3491

1976

Phy. Sc., Bio-Sc. & Architecture	519	72.9	174	24.6	16	2.2	2	0.3	711
Engineering	204	76.1	60	22.4	3	1.1	1	0.4	268
Medicine	158	65.8	73	30.4	7	2.9	2	0.8	240
Dental Surgery	28	56.0	20	40.0	2	4.0	—	—	50
Agriculture	71	74.0	21	21.9	3	3.1	1	1.0	96
Vet. Science	14	46.7	14	46.7	—	—	2	6.6	30
Total Science	994	71.3	362	25.9	31	2.2	8	0.5	1395
Arts Oriented Studies	2071	86.3	208	8.6	114	4.7	6	0.3	2399
GRAND TOTAL	3065	80.8	570	15.0	145	3.8	14	0.4	3794

1977

Phy. Sc., Bio-Sc. & Architecture	566	73.0	179	23.1	26	3.4	4	0.5	775
Engineering	229	79.5	55	19.1	4	1.4	—	—	288
Medicine	164	68.0	67	27.8	9	3.7	1	0.4	241
Dental Surgery	38	76.0	12	24.0	—	—	—	—	50
Agriculture	76	74.5	24	23.5	2	2.0	—	—	102
Vet. Science	16	55.2	13	44.8	—	—	—	—	29
Total Science	1089	73.3	350	23.6	41	2.8	5	0.3	1485
Arts Oriented Studies	2139	85.8	229	9.2	112	4.5	14	0.6	2494
GRAND TOTAL	3228	81.1	579	14.6	153	3.8	19	0.5	3979

TABLE 3
UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS - 1975
Statistics of students selected on district basis*

District	Popu- lation Percen- tage	MEDICINE				DENTAL SURGERY				BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE				ENGINEERING & APPLIED SCIENCE				PHYSICAL SCIENCE				ARTS				
		(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)					
1. Colombo	21.03	94	94	265	38.1	38	38	255	76.0	69	68	258	23.8	71	71	289	24.6	110	112	269	26.7	442	447	246	21.3	
2. Kalutara	5.76	21	15	-	6.1	-	-	-	-	19	19	240	6.7	19	19	274	6.6	30	30	255	7.2	121	122	249	5.8	
3. Kandy	9.34	35	24	-	9.7	-	-	-	-	30	30	243	10.5	31	32	258	11.1	49	51	240	12.2	196	195	248	9.3	
4. Matale	2.49	9	7	-	2.8	-	-	-	-	8	10	242	3.5	8	9	255	3.1	14	15	235	3.6	52	51	236	2.4	
5. Nuwara Eliya	3.57	9	1	-	0.4	-	-	-	-	10	3	-	1.0	10	6	-	2.1	15	3	-	0.7	75	75	224	3.6	
6. Galle	5.80	26	26	239	10.5	9	2	-	4.0	19	20	246	7.0	19	20	278	6.9	30	30	259	7.2	122	113	254	5.4	
7. Matara	4.63	11	7	-	2.8	-	-	-	-	15	17	238	6.0	15	15	275	5.2	25	26	250	6.2	97	98	260	4.7	
8. Hambantota	2.68	7	1	-	0.4	-	-	-	-	8	8	-	2.8	8	8	-	2.8	11	8	-	1.9	56	54	247	2.6	
9. Jaffna	5.54	25	26	272	10.5	10	10	265	20.0	19	19	260	6.7	18	18	296	6.2	29	31	274	7.4	116	117	247	5.6	
10. Mannar	0.61	2	1	-	0.4	-	-	-	-	2	2	239	0.7	2	1	-	0.4	3	3	-	0.0	13	13	212	0.6	
11. Vavuniya	0.75	2	-	-	0.0	-	-	-	-	2	1	212	2.4	7	7	256	2.4	11	11	228	2.6	16	16	225	0.7	
12. Batticaloa	2.03	8	6	-	2.4	-	-	-	-	7	7	-	0.4	7	7	-	0.4	9	6	-	1.7	43	43	210	2.0	
13. Amparai	2.14	5	3	-	0.0	-	-	-	-	6	1	-	0.4	6	5	-	0.4	6	6	-	1.4	32	33	223	1.6	
14. Trincomalee	1.51	4	-	-	1.2	-	-	-	-	5	5	-	0.4	5	5	263	1.7	9	9	-	1.7	45	44	228	2.1	
15. Kurunegala	8.09	20	12	-	4.9	-	-	-	-	27	27	227	9.5	27	28	241	9.7	42	41	-	9.8	170	170	253	8.1	
16. Puttalam	2.99	7	3	-	1.2	-	-	-	-	9	9	226	3.2	10	10	247	3.5	16	17	236	4.1	63	64	232	3.0	
17. Anuradhapura	3.06	8	2	-	0.8	-	-	-	-	9	7	-	0.0	4	4	-	0.4	13	1	-	0.2	64	64	236	3.0	
18. Polonnaruwa	1.29	3	1	-	0.4	-	-	-	-	4	4	-	0.0	4	1	-	0.4	5	5	-	1.2	27	27	229	1.3	
19. Badulla	4.84	12	2	-	0.8	-	-	-	-	14	7	-	2.4	14	6	-	2.1	20	5	-	1.2	101	102	228	4.8	
20. Moneragala	1.51	4	-	-	0.0	-	-	-	-	4	2	-	0.7	4	1	-	0.4	6	4	-	0.0	32	33	243	1.6	
21. Ratnapura	5.21	13	10	-	4.1	-	-	-	-	15	8	-	2.8	15	9	-	3.1	22	4	-	1.0	109	111	240	5.3	
22. Kegalle	5.13	13	6	-	2.4	-	-	-	-	16	18	223	6.3	17	17	233	5.9	22	19	-	4.5	108	110	251	5.2	
TOTAL	100.00	247	99.9	50	100.0	285	100.0	288	100.0	419	100.0	2101	100.0													

* Basis of Selection: 100% district-quota system based on population percentage.

- (a) Quota on district basis: include unfilled vacancies which were re-distributed among districts which had a surplus of qualified students.
- (b) No. actually selected.
- (c) Lowest mark of student selected. Absence of this statistic indicates that all qualified students in that district have been selected. All marks are standardised marks.

Note: In addition to the above numbers 76 students (44 from Colombo and 32 from Jaffna) selected in order of merit in 1974 but whose admission was deferred due to a shortage of places were also admitted for Biological Science courses. 29 other students (14 from Colombo and 15 from Jaffna) were also admitted on the same basis for Engineering and Applied Science.

TABLE 4
UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS - 1975
Statistics of candidates who have obtained minimum requirements for University Admission
but who have not been selected (by ethnic group)

District	BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE			PHYSICAL SCIENCE			ARTS							
	Sinhala	Tamil	Others	Total	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	Others	Total	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	Others	Total
1. Kegalle	17	-	-	17	25	-	-	-	25	590	2	29	-	621
2. Ratnapura	5	2	-	7	10	2	-	-	12	346	2	1	-	349
3. Anuradhapura	2	-	-	2	5	1	-	-	6	187	5	5	-	197
4. Polonnaruwa	4	-	-	4	2	2	-	-	4	60	-	2	-	62
5. Galle	69	-	-	69	56	-	-	-	56	774	6	1	-	781
6. Matara	26	-	-	26	22	-	2	-	24	774	2	17	1	794
7. Hambantota	7	-	-	7	7	-	-	-	7	286	-	2	-	288
8. Badulla	2	1	-	3	7	-	-	-	7	101	16	2	-	119
9. Moneragala	1	-	-	1	2	1	-	-	3	92	-	3	-	95
10. Kurunegala	23	-	1	24	8	-	-	-	8	1180	3	40	7	1230
11. Puttalam	7	4	1	12	18	1	1	-	20	181	3	10	2	196
12. Matale	15	3	-	18	11	-	-	-	11	116	9	8	-	133
13. Kandy	63	9	8	80	46	4	3	-	53	769	18	94	4	885
14. Nuwara Eliya	3	2	-	5	4	1	-	-	5	132	13	4	-	149
15. Jaffna	-	329	-	329	-	192	-	-	192	-	449	-	-	449
16. Vavuniya	2	8	-	10	1	2	-	-	3	12	22	-	-	34
17. Mannar	-	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	14	6	-	21
18. Batticaloa	-	5	-	5	-	12	1	-	13	2	31	12	-	45
19. Trincomalee	-	7	-	7	1	5	-	-	6	20	14	8	-	42
20. Amparai	1	-	-	1	1	2	1	-	4	52	18	5	1	76
21. Kalutara	26	1	2	29	49	-	3	-	52	537	2	8	1	548
22. Colombo	380	74	6	469	216	34	4	3	257	1536	50	56	6	1648
TOTAL	653	447	21	1127	491	257	15	3	766	7748	679	313	22	8762

Percentage 57.94% 39.66% 1.86% 0.54% 100% 64.10% 33.55% 1.96% 0.39% 100% 88.43% 7.75% 3.57% 0.25% 100%

TABLE 5
UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS - 1975
100% selected on District Quota

District	Highest mark of candidate/candidates failing to get selected in Colombo and Jaffna and the lowest mark of candidate/candidates qualifying for selection in other Districts: Standardised Marks	
	MEDICINE	ENGINEERING
Colombo ..	<u>262</u>	<u>289</u>
Kalutara ..	226	273
Kandy ..	229	259
Matale ..	220	263
Nuwara Eliya ..	260	246
Galle ..	232	278
Matara ..	237	264
Hambantota ..	245	240
Jaffna ..	<u>268</u>	<u>294</u>
Mannar ..	262	218
Vavuniya ..	-	-
Batticaloa ..	227	256
Amparai ..	-	303
Trincomalee ..	221	276
Kurunegala ..	225	248
Puttalam ..	250	248
Anuradhapura ..	240	244
Polonnaruwa ..	248	268
Badulla ..	231	244
Moneragala ..	-	229
Ratnapura ..	211	231
Kegalle ..	246	237

Source: Senate House, University of Sri Lanka

TABLE 6

UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS — 1976

Statistics of students selected on district basis and on order of merit

District	MEDICINE		DENTAL SURGERY		BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE		ENGINEERING AND APPLIED SCIENCE		PHYSICAL SCIENCE						
	(1)	(2)	(a)	(1)	(2)	(a)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(a)				
1. Colombo	13	83	272	5	15	267	13	109	257	13	101	285	26	163	262
2. Kalutara	3	5	264	1	—	263	5	12	252	4	11	284	7	20	259
3. Kandy	6	12	267	2	—	264	5	16	255	6	13	274	11	9	256
4. Matale	1	2	255	—	—	—	1	3	253	1	2	284	3	5	261
5. Nuwara Eliya	1	—	—	—	—	—	4	1	—	3	—	—	3	1	—
6. Galle	3	8	274	1	5	266	4	14	255	5	19	283	7	40	260
7. Matara	3	3	269	1	—	268	3	7	254	2	2	284	6	7	258
8. Hambantota	2	1	—	—	—	—	9	—	236	8	—	—	6	—	—
9. Jaffna	3	33	273	1	15	268	5	39	257	3	37	287	8	76	264
10. Mannar	3	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	232	2	—	256	6	—	—
11. Vavuniya	9	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	216	3	—	241	6	—	—
12. Batticaloa	1	1	266	—	—	—	1	3	251	1	2	286	3	5	255
13. Amparal	1	—	—	—	—	—	6	—	—	5	—	—	4	—	—
14. Trincomalee	5	1	—	—	—	—	5	—	—	9	2	231	12	—	—
15. Kurunegala	5	10	261	2	—	260	5	15	253	6	3	271	10	10	255
16. Puttalam	2	3	257	1	—	253	3	1	255	1	2	268	3	3	261
17. Anuradhapura	2	—	—	—	—	—	6	0	—	3	—	—	6	—	—
18. Polonnaruwa	1	—	—	—	—	—	2	0	—	—	—	—	2	—	—
19. Badulla	2	—	—	—	—	—	16	1	218	8	1	—	8	—	—
20. Moneragala	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	1	—	—
21. Ratnapura	3	3	264	1	—	264	5	2	250	3	1	264	7	1	236
22. Kegalle	3	—	—	—	—	—	3	3	253	2	2	282	6	4	257
	73	165		15	35		105	226		89	199		151	344	

(1) No. on District basis

(2) No. on Merit

(a) Lowest mark of student admitted on district basis. All marks are standardised marks.

* Absence of lowest mark of student selected indicates that all qualified students in that district were selected.

Source: Senate House, University of Sri Lanka

TABLE 7

UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS - 1976

Statistics of candidates who have obtained minimum requirements for university admission but who have not been selected (by ethnic groups)

District	BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE			PHYSICAL SCIENCE			ARTS				
	Sinhala	Tamil	Others	Sinhala	Tamil	Others	Sinhala	Tamil	Others	Total	
1. Kegalle	51	-	-	25	-	-	471	2	34	1	508
2. Ratnapura	5	-	51	4	-	-	344	5	1	-	350
3. Anuradhapura	1	-	5	-	-	-	139	3	6	1	149
4. Polonnaruwa	-	-	1	-	-	-	80	-	1	-	81
5. Galle	124	-	124	118	-	-	659	2	5	-	666
6. Matara	73	-	74	39	-	119	1366	1	8	3	1378
7. Hambantota	4	-	4	-	-	42	233	3	2	-	238
8. Badulla	2	-	2	2	-	-	46	4	-	-	50
9. Moneragala	1	-	1	-	-	-	63	-	-	-	63
10. Kurunegala	57	-	57	27	-	30	868	34	1	-	903
11. Puttalam	16	-	16	22	1	23	257	5	11	7	280
12. Matale	24	1	28	36	-	36	107	10	7	-	124
13. Nuwara Eliya	-	-	-	-	-	-	64	5	2	1	72
14. Kandy	74	19	100	36	19	64	705	17	106	6	834
15. Jaffna	8	359	381	4	374	4	1	499	3	-	503
16. Mannar	2	-	2	-	-	-	5	21	13	-	39
17. Vavuniya	-	2	2	-	-	-	5	33	1	-	39
18. Batticaloa	-	15	17	1	20	21	3	42	6	-	51
19. Trincomalee	1	2	3	-	-	-	10	4	11	1	26
20. Amparai	1	1	1	-	-	-	11	10	31	-	52
21. Kalutara	68	-	69	62	1	63	439	-	15	-	454
22. Colombo	452	95	560	198	30	8	1148	37	58	11	1254
TOTAL	964	494	1498	574	445	8	7024	737	322	31	8114
Percentage	84.35%	32.98%	100%	54.15%	41.98%	0.76%	86.57%	9.08%	3.97%	0.38%	100%

TABLE 8
UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS - 1978
Admissions by Faculty and Method of Selection (Estimate)

Faculty	Admissions on raw marks		Admissions on standardised marks		Admissions on district basis		Total Admissions
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
1. Medicine/ Dental Surgery ..	322	79.3	61	15.0	23	5.7	406
2. Biological Science	307	62.4	131	26.6	54	11.0	492
3. Engineering ..	301	74.1	93	22.9	12	3.0	406
4. Physical Science..	548	93.0	28	4.8	13	2.2	589
5. Arts ..	2214	75.1	571	19.4	164	5.5	2949
Total ..	3692	76.2	884	18.3	266	5.5	4842

Note: Figures based on estimates and calculations at Ministry of Higher Education which have not yet been finalised but they can be regarded as accurately conveying the general picture.

TABLE 9
UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS - 1978
**Minimum raw mark for admission according to Faculty
and Method of Selection**

Faculty	For those admitted on raw marks	For those admitted on standardised marks	For those admitted on district basis**
1. Medicine/ Dental Surgery ..	218	212	152 (Polonnaruwa)
2. Biological Science.	204*	195	142 (Polonnaruwa)
3. Engineering ..	237*	221	155 (Nuwara Eliya)
4. Physical Science ..	212	189	176 (Hambantota)
5. Arts ..	211	197	170 (Wiyaluwa)

Note: * Indicates that some students who obtained this mark were not admitted while others with superior grades were admitted.

** Admissions on district basis were for science based courses. Admissions for arts courses was on an electorate basis.

TABLE 10

UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS (1977 and 1978)

by course of study and medium of instruction

Course	Medium	1977		1978	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Medicine	Sinhala	168	69	228	57
	Tamil	67	28	170	43
Dental Surgery	Sinhala	38	76	18	36
	Tamil	12	24	32	64
Vet. Science	Sinhala	19	63	14	47
	Tamil	11	37	15	50
	English	—	—	1	3
Agriculture	Sinhala	76	74.5	93	69
	Tamil	24	23.4	42	31
	English	2	2.2	—	—
BioScience	Sinhala	193	81.5	217	64
	Tamil	39	16.5	114	33
	English	5	2	9	3
Engineering	Sinhala	215	80	231	62
	Tamil	50	19	136	36
	English	4	1	8	2
Applied Science	Sinhala	15	71	7	33
	Tamil	6	29	14	67
Architecture	Sinhala	16	59	26	65
	Tamil	10	37	14	35
	English	1	4	—	—
Physical Science	Sinhala	361	71	390	72
	Tamil	143	28	150	27
	English	4	1	5	1
Law	Sinhala	42	82	39	78
	Tamil	3	6	10	20
	English	6	12	1	2
Arts & Commerce	Sinhala	2020	88	2424	84
	Tamil	259	11	443	15
	English	30	1	39	1

Source : Hansard 7.XI.1978 Columns 1011-1012

APPENDIX I

Draft Report submitted by the Chairman, Mr. Pieter Keuneman

STANDARDISATION OF MARKS AND DISTRICT QUOTAS IN UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS (Report of the Sectoral Committee of the National Planning Council on Social Overheads, Housing, Mass Media and Transport)

Our Committee was asked by the Cabinet to examine and report upon the above-mentioned procedure currently adopted in selecting students for admission to the University of Sri Lanka.

These procedures had become the subject of adverse public comment. It was alleged that they were discriminatory, caused invidious distinctions between comparable students, and prevented many meritorious students from receiving University education. It was further contended that, as a result, such students become alienated and frustrated and that the country was deprived of the services of potential talent that it could ill afford to lose. In order to ascertain public opinion on these matters, our Committee invited written representations from members of the public and from public organizations. We received 115 such representations.

These representations were reported upon both by officials of the Department of Examinations and by a special Committee of officials. The Sectoral Committee also had the advantage of obtaining the views of representatives of the University of Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Education and the Department of Examinations who attended its meetings.

The Committee wishes to submit the following report: -

GENERAL

We observed that the controversy in regard to the matter under review was largely confined to the question of students who seek admission to the University in order to follow courses in Engineering, Medicine and Applied Sciences. Students of the Humanities (the so called Arts students), who are still the bulk of the students who receive University education are not affected so seriously.

The crux of the problem is that, while the number of students who qualify for and wish to follow courses in Engineering, Medicine and Science subjects at the University is increasing year by year, the University's capacity to accommodate them has remained static.

It is not difficult to understand why more and more students want to follow University courses in Engineering, Medicine and Applied Sciences. Graduation in these disciplines offers the best prospect of lucrative employment, both in Sri Lanka and abroad. The country too requires an abundance of the knowledge and skills which these disciplines provide in order to sustain desired levels of social and economic development.

There are a number of reasons why the University has not been able to absorb the increasing numbers of students who qualify for admission to follow courses in Engineering, Medicine and Science. Prominent among these are (1) the lack of sufficient laboratories and (2) the shortage of necessary equipment, chemicals, books due to constraints imposed by the fiscal and especially the foreign exchange situation.

We strongly recommend that greater attention is paid to providing additional laboratory accommodation and that higher priority is given in the allocation of funds and foreign exchange for the purchase of the necessary equipment, chemicals and publications required. Our Committee has been informed that the allocation of foreign exchange for importing magazines like "Readers Digest", "Times", "News Week" etc. exceeds the allocation made for obtaining scientific and technical publications needed by the University libraries. It would be a worthwhile exercise if the Ministry of Planning sets up a Committee to report on these matters.

Our Committee, has, however, formed the opinion that the reasons for the restricted intake in these fields cannot be confined to the shortages mentioned earlier. It is a matter of some doubt whether the existing capacities and resources at the University for teaching these subjects are used to the best advantage. It would be interesting if a study is made of the time that those responsible for teaching these subjects actually devote to such teaching and whether their individual time-tables could not be co-ordinated to get better results.

An interesting suggestion made to our Committee was that of holding double sessions, especially in the non-Arts subjects in order to make best use of the accommodation that is now available in certain Campuses. In our opinion this suggestion was turned down too lightly as "Impracticable in view of the present difficulties regarding working hours, accommodation, staff requirements, equipment and chemicals". None of the reasons mentioned can, in our opinion be regarded as insuperable. If a more serious effort is made to identify, quantify and cost what is necessary, it may well turn out that the temporary solution suggested could be adopted without excessive extra-expenditure or too elaborate alternative administrative arrangements".

We recommend that the Ministry of Education, if necessary in association with the Ministries of Planning and Plan Implementation, goes further into the question of how existing facilities at the University can be better used in order to increase the numbers admitted especially in the non-Arts subjects.

Standardization of Marks

At present, the raw marks that students who seek admission to the University obtain at the G. C. E. (Advanced Level) are "standardized" on the basis of both subjects and the media of instruction. Our Committee received certain representations against the continuation of subject-wise standardization of these raw marks. Some of these representations questioned the statistical validity and other technical assumptions on which such standardization is based. Others argued that no standardization at all is necessary and that selections for admission should be made on the raw marks alone.

We do not consider such representations compelling enough to justify our recommending the discontinuance, or any major change in, the systems of subject wise standardization. In the G. C. E. (Advanced Level) a wide variety of subjects in different combinations are offered. In this examination the main fact is whether candidates *attain* a required standard. The aim is different in the case of admissions to the University, where a *selection* has to be made between candidates who have all attained the required standard. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to convert all marks into a uniform scale so that direct comparisons between individuals can be made. Subject wise standardization will also help to make the cut off points for the various courses comparable over the years

Subject wise standardization of raw marks is not something that is unknown in educational theory and practice or confined to Sri Lanka. It is used elsewhere too, with advantage. We therefore recommend that the standardization of raw marks on the basis of subjects should continue.

The main controversy in regard to standardization has, however been over the media-wise standardization of raw marks. Most of the allegations of unfairness and discrimination centre round media-wise standardization.

Our Committee is of the view that the case for continuing media-wise standardization cannot by any means be equated with that for continuing subject-wise standardization. Apart from the theoretical possibility that media-wise standardization may help to level off any discrepancies due to examiner variability that may remain after subject-wise standardization has been applied, the underlying "justification" for it appears to be a lurking suspicion that examiners in one or other medium may manipulate marks in such a way as to give students in one language medium a distinct and unfair advantage over students in the other medium as far as admission to the University is concerned.

Our Committee agree with the view expressed in the Report submitted to us by the Commissioner of Examinations and the Superintendent (Data Processing) that "organized manipulation of marks in one whole medium in a deceptive manner is "neither possible nor probable". The question therefore arises whether it is necessary or prudent to continue media-wise standardization when its possibilities of correcting examiner variability are slight and its contribution both to deepening and indeed institutionalizing suspicions between communities and promoting distrusts in the fairness or impartiality of public examinations is so considerable.

As Sri Lanka will, for many years to come, continue to depend on the University to provide it with the leaders it needs in the various spheres of national endeavour, especially in all branches of social and economic development, it is the view of our Committee that in applying formulae for processing marks for admissions to the University, great care should be taken to see that such formulae (1) eliminate only deficiencies that urgently need to be eliminated; (2) do not eliminate or subordinate the cardinal principle of merit in the selections and (3) give the diverse sections of our population confidence that the selections are fair and reasonable and in the over-all interests of the country irrespective of sectoral or subjective considerations.

From this point of view, it could be neither just nor wise to persist in formulae which have little or no justification educationally and are based mainly on fears and suspicions. *We therefore recommend that media-wise standardization in processing marks for University admissions should be discontinued from 1975.*

District Quota System

By far the most controversial of the procedures governing University admissions is the system of admissions on the basis of district quota. This system was introduced in 1973. However, in this initial year, those who qualified on the basis of merit but who could not obtain admission owing to the district quota were later admitted to the University after considerable public agitation. In 1974, a 100% District Quota System was applied.

The District Quota System was introduced with the laudable intention of giving special weightage to students from schools in relatively less developed areas of the country in the matter of admissions to the University. However, sufficient thought does

not appear to have been given to the fact that any system of district quotas should be only a temporary *variation* from the basic principle of selection on merit and should be designed to correct an imbalance caused by historical and other factors. The present anomalous situation appears to us to have arisen from the district quota system virtually superceding the system of selection on merit.

Having examined the working of the 100% District Quota System which operates at present our Committee has formed the following conclusions:—

- (1) This system was brought into operation without sufficient advance preparation and without sufficiently deep study of the educational consequences and social repercussions that so widespread a departure from the cardinal principle of selection on merit would have.
- (2) The system does not take into consideration the disparity in facilities *within districts*. For instance, the bulk of schools in many areas considered “developed” educationally, such as the Colombo district and wide areas of the Western Province, are as poorly equipped and sometimes even more so, than schools in areas considered “under developed” educationally.
- (3) As admissions to the University are made only from among those with the required aggregate marks in the G. C. E. (Advanced Level), it is more fair and reasonable, in determining district quotas to be guided by the G. C. E. (Advanced Level) candidate population rather than the total population of the district. Failure to do so has resulted in certain districts receiving quotas higher than the number of eligible candidates available from the district.
- (4) The District Quota System has not fulfilled its original purpose as the more educationally underprivileged districts which the scheme was designed to help have received only marginal benefits and sometimes none at all. This is so in the case of Amparai, Anuradhapura, Badulla, Hambantota, Mannar, Moneragala, Nuwara-Eliya, Polonnaruwa, Trincomalee and Vavuniya districts.
- (5) The main beneficiaries from the scheme have been students from more affluent families who had their primary education in relatively less developed districts but their secondary education in developed districts.

According to the Committee of officials who examined the detailed figures, “a large number of students who obtained a higher merit order” were “left out as a result of the present scheme of admission”. The Committee also reported that “The special concession granted to scholars who qualify for the district of origin in spite of their having the secondary education in developed districts should be withdrawn. In this connection the Committee noted that in schools such as Ananda, Royal and Visakha two sets of students in the same class who sit the same examination after having followed the same course for a period of two years or more find to their dismay that one group of students who obtain lower marks secure admission to the University, while the other with a higher aggregate of marks does not get selected as a result of the rule which permits scholars to claim admission under the privilege of residence in the district where they had the initial education.

One can appreciate how bewildered and bitter students who find themselves in this unenviable plight feel, and what a profound effect such an experience can have on such young persons. Where their parents are professionally, scientifically or technically

qualified persons who can find employment abroad without much difficulty, the uncertainty whether their children, despite necessary basic qualifications, can find entry into University and higher education is a powerful factor inducing them to emigrate and thus aggravate the "brain drain".

Many representations made to us also urged that the 100% District Quota System had penalised the children of public servants and others in transferable services. The arguments in favour of retaining the District Quota System as it operates at present apart from those which were solely concerned with the comparative advantages that one or other racial community could hope to obtain from it, were that it would (1) reduce the tendency for children to migrate from peripheral districts to developed urban centres; (2) provide an impetus for the improvement of schools in the peripheral areas, (3) give greater opportunities for youth from rural areas to receive higher education and (4) produce a more "national-minded" intelligentsia who will resist the temptation of the brain drain.

Such arguments undoubtedly have a strong emotional appeal, but it is open to question whether they are objectively correct or scientifically valid.

Under conditions of the almost total monopoly that the state now enjoys in the sphere of education, the rapid improvement of schools in under-developed districts is more likely to be determined by deliberate government policy in the matter of the supply of funds, teachers and equipment to such schools than by any indirect or spontaneous process that may or may not be generated as a result of an essentially administrative and arbitrary arrangement such as the District Quota System.

As far as opportunities for youth from the rural areas to receive higher education is concerned, an examination of the background of the present University student population will reveal that this process has already made considerable headway. Greater representation of educated youth from rural areas in the selections for admission to the University to follow courses in Engineering, Medicine and the Applied Sciences will depend on having a sufficient number of properly equipped schools available in the under-developed districts rather than on temporary expedients.

In our opinion, the general disadvantages of the 100% district quota system far exceed any fringe benefits it may have given certain limited categories of students. We therefore recommend that the scheme should be substantially modified. The officials Committee was also of a similar view and suggested the scheme be changed to permit 30% of admissions to be made on the basis of merit and the remaining 70% on the basis of district quotas. In our opinion this suggestion does not take into account the fact that merit should be the *main* consideration in making selections for admission to the University and that any variations from the merit principle should be secondary and directed towards adjusting imbalance caused by historical factors.

We therefore propose that from 1975,

- (a) 70 per cent of the admissions in respect of both Arts and Science subjects respectively be made on the basis of merit, taking into account all who are eligible irrespective of the area where they had their primary or secondary education.
- (b) 30 per cent of the admissions in each category should be reserved for admissions on the basis of district quotas; such selection should be confined to students from districts other than Colombo and Jaffna which have received a somewhat disproportionate weightage in the past due to historical reasons; and

- (c) of this 30 per cent of admissions, 15 per cent should be reserved for students who qualify and who receive their secondary education in schools in the following districts where the imbalance is most felt-namely Amparai, Anuradhapura, Badulla, Hambantota, Mannar, Moneragala, Nuwara Eliya, Polonnaruwa, Trincomalee and Vavuniya.

If sufficient qualified candidates are not available in any one of the districts the surplus vacancies may be distributed among the others.

Although this modified scheme is in our opinion, by no way perfect or capable of providing lasting solutions to the problems raised, it is less unfair than what exists at present and can help in some measure to reduce controversy and restore confidence.

As far as admissions to follow Arts courses are concerned, we recommend that the University should make an effort to accommodate all students who qualify while those who can be admitted as residential students to campuses where accommodation for such students is available will necessarily be limited by the actual accommodation available, it should be not too difficult to give others who qualify but who cannot be accommodated an opportunity to pursue their studies as external students or through a system of correspondence courses. We recommend that the Ministry of Education and the University authorities take early action to evolve such a scheme.

In the case of those seeking admission to follow courses in Engineering and Applied Science and in Medicine and Dental Surgery, on the basis of projections supplied to us for admissions in 1975, the scheme that we have prepared is likely to work out as follows:-

The total number of students who can be admitted to follow these courses will be about 576. Of them, 343 will be selected on an all-island test on the basis of merit and 233 on the basis of district quotas. Of those 253, 84 places will be reserved for candidates from the 10 specially under privileged districts.

We would like to emphasise once again that this recommendation cannot hope to be more than a stop gap one. If a real opportunity is to be given to students from more un developed areas to obtain University education and if a fair distribution of University admissions, especially in 'Science' subjects is to be achieved among the different districts, it will be necessary for the Ministry of Education to take certain other steps.

In this connection, we recommend that this Ministry of Education prepares a plan to establish in each electoral district at least one well equipped and well staffed school with classes from Grade VIII to XII. Such a school or schools should function as centres of excellence and children of that electorate who display the highest aptitudes should be sent to it and supported, where necessary, with hostel and other facilities. Such schools can, in time become centres from which future students of the University are drawn.

Even if it is not financially or administratively possible to set up such centres of excellence in all electoral districts at one time, an effort should be made to do so in stages, starting with the districts which are in the most disadvantageous situation educationally. We also recommend that Ministry of Education and the University consider starting courses for the issue of a National Diploma in Management. *One of the main problems of the country today is the lack of proper managerial training and skills.* If courses for the award of a National Diploma in Management are started, some of those who cannot now gain entrance into the University to follow courses in other professional and scientific disciplines could be diverted to such courses. These courses will not require extra laboratories and other equipment.

In conclusion our Committee wishes to thank all the officials who assisted us in our work and especially our Secretary Mr. Harold Fernando who had to bear the brunt of the work of processing the representations received and summarising them for us.

APPENDIX II

Committee on University Admissions

On a decision taken at a meeting of the Sectoral Committee on Social Overheads, Housing, Mass Media and Transport, this Committee was appointed by the Secretary, Ministry of Education to inquire and report on the following matters relating to University Admissions:

1. To review the system of district quota admissions to the University,
2. Running of the Universities on a Double Sessions basis and making better use of the available accommodation in the Universities,
3. Establishing Centres of Excellence in district capitals or other appropriate population centres in the rural areas in order to diffuse science education opportunities as widely as possible throughout the Island.
4. Finding accommodation for some of the Science students in the Technical Colleges.

The Committee studied the available information on the admission of students to the University and decided to recommend the following:-

1. The scheme of admissions be based on a 30% merit and 70% district basis. This arrangement to be reviewed in two years. This recommendation was made on the basis of the following arguments:-
 - (a) A large number of students who obtained a higher merit order is left out as a result of the present scheme of admissions. The Committee felt that adequate advance notice has not been given to students as well as to their parents that the district quota system was brought into operation.
 - (b) The scheme suggested will not seriously affect the possibility of providing places to students from rural areas that have inadequate facilities for higher education. Those students who have gained sufficient marks to enter the University but have been left out under the 100% district quota system will also get a chance of entering the University under the suggested system.
 - (c) The demoralising effect under the existing system on students from Colombo and Jaffna who have obtained sufficient marks could be reduced by setting apart 30% for all-island competition on marks alone.
 - (d) Under this scheme students with high marks from other districts too will get into the 30%.
 - (e) The special concession granted to scholars who qualify for the district of origin in spite of their having the secondary education in a developed district should be withdrawn. In this connection the Committee noted that in schools such as Ananda, Royal and Visakha two sets of students in the same class who sit the same examination after having followed the same course for a period of two years or more find to their dismay that one group of students who obtain lower marks secure admission to the University, while the other with a higher aggregate of marks does not get selected as a result of the rule which permits scholars to claim admission under the privilege of residence in the district where they had the initial education.

2. The question of having double sessions to accommodate students who have qualified for admission to the University was examined by the Committee and it was found impracticable in view of the present difficulties regarding working hours, accommodation, staff requirements, equipment and chemicals. Since some of the members who attended the last Sectoral Committee meeting pointed out that funds were available under the bi-lateral trade agreements to purchase equipment for Science, Engineering and Medical Faculties, the University has explored the possibility of making use of such facilities. But unfortunately it was not possible to get even an assurance regarding the question of obtaining supplies under these trade agreements without spending the foreign exchange already allocated to the University.
3. Regarding regional Centres of Excellence, the Committee felt that due to difficulties already experienced by some of the schools in the teaching of science by way of equipment and facilities, it was not feasible to recommend the creation of centres of excellence.
4. The question of using the facilities at the Technical Colleges for the purpose of admitting extra numbers of students was also considered by the Committee. According to information available from the Technical Colleges, there is already a high demand for places and only 10% of those seeking admission are taken into these institutions mainly due to the lack of accommodation and facilities. The Director of the Colombo Technical College in fact mentioned that even the present admission can be increased only if extra facilities and accommodation are made available. Therefore this proposal was not considered feasible.
5. The breakdown of the number of students admitted on the 'merit' and 'district quota' system in 1974 is annexed along with the other relevant data.

Sgd/ U. D. I. Sirisena

Sgd/ K. D. Ariyadasa

Sgd/ E. L. Wijemanne

Sgd/ C. Dahanayake

Sgd/ P. P. G. L. Siriwardena

Sgd/ K. Karunanayake

APPENDIX III

Admissions to the University of Sri Lanka - 1976 and after

1. The Committee appointed by the Secretary, Ministry of Education to inquire and report on certain matters relating to University Admissions met again to consider the following observations made at the Sectoral Committee on Social Overheads, Housing, Mass Media and Transport:
 - 1.1 The feasibility of increasing the proportion to be admitted on the order of merit and the limitation of the district-basis quota only to backward areas. eg. 75% on order of merit and 25% on district-basis. (The 25% of places, under the district-basis, to be distributed only among the deficient districts.)
 - 1.2 To assess the facilities in the Campuses for the teaching of Science on the basis of the available information and any other study to be conducted with a view to increase the intake of students.
2. **Admissions on merit basis and district basis**
 - 2.1 The Committee very carefully considered the observations made at the Sectoral Committee that the admission of students to the University be made on the basis of 75% in order of merit and the balance 25% according to the district of origin (The 25% of places to be distributed among the deficient districts only).
 - 2.2 This Committee is aware that no attempt has been made to comparatively evaluate all the factors that cumulatively influence the student population in each district to pursue studies at the secondary school level. It would therefore be, according to the view of this Committee, an arbitrary division to call a particular district as "deficient" and another as "non-deficient". However, for purposes of analysis this Committee interpreted "deficient" districts to mean districts that are unable to generate the number of students entitled to admission on the basis of population. On this basis, this Committee considered Colombo and Jaffna to be the only districts that could be classed as "non-deficient".
 - 2.3 This Committee compared the possible admission figures in 1975 on the two proposed methods of selection from the districts Colombo and Jaffna and the results, according to the figures supplied to this Committee are as follows:

Table I

MEDICINE

District	Selection on 70% district basis and 30% merit	Selection on 70% merit and 30% district basis*	Increase/Decrease
Colombo	108	97	- 11
Jaffna	25	35	+ 10

Table II

ENGINEERING

District	Selection on 70% district basis and 30% merit	Selection on 70% merit and 30% district basis*	Increase/Decrease
Colombo	90	95	+5
Jaffna	24	43	+19

NOTE - *30% of vacancies to be distributed only among the deficient districts.

- 2.4 While on population and area basis, Colombo district is a major region having a heterogenous population including a fair percentage of students from the outlying suburbs as well as from other districts particularly Jaffna, the above tables show that in Medicine, Colombo district students would be adversely affected, while the Jaffna district would gain by as much as 40%. In Engineering, while the Colombo district will gain only 5.5% the Jaffna district will gain as much as 79%.
- 2.5 The Committee wishes to emphasize that any change to the method proposed by this Committee earlier (i. e. 30% on merit and 70% on district basis) should serve equitably these two districts which can be regarded as non-deficient districts.
- 2.6 On the other hand the alternative scheme proposed for admissions will only result in a situation where, from districts such as Badulla and Puttalam, only a single candidate would qualify for admission to the University and this would defeat the purpose of admissions on population, which will mean a situation similar to what was prevalent prior to 1974 and may lead to adverse political and social repercussions.
- 2.7 In view of the wide publicity given to the district quota system of admissions to the University, a fair number of parents who come from the suburbs and outlying districts have removed their children for admission to schools in the rural areas, particularly in the hope that after 3 years they will benefit by this scheme. If there is a radical variation of the present formula adopted for admissions, they may lose confidence. Besides, one of the chief reasons for adoption of the district quota system was to induce parents from rural districts to keep their children in those areas so that they could be sent to rural schools in order to ease the congestion in Colombo (and other urban districts) and thereby to promote the development of those areas. If there is any radical change in the system now its advantage to the country will be lost, apart from the fact that many parents will be disappointed.
- 2.8 In view of the above considerations and the reasons adduced in our earlier report we regret we are unable to agree to the suggestions referred to us for consideration. It is the considered view of the Committee that admissions should be on the basis of 30% on merit and 70% on district basis.

3. Intake of Students to the Science Faculties

The question of increasing the intake of students to the Science Faculties is being looked into. The University is getting the assistance of the Ministry of Education and two Unesco consultants to assess the utilization of all the resources available in the respective Faculties in the Campuses. A decision may be made regarding this matter thereafter

Sgd/ **G. J. Wijetunga**
Deputy Registrar,
University of Sri Lanka.

K. D. Ariyadasa
C. Dahanayake
U. D. I. Sirisena
P. P. G. L. Siriwardena
E. L. Wijemanne
K. Karunanayake

1st October 1975.

Members of the Committee.