# Setting up of Industry Advisory Boards at Universities – Moratuwa University Experience (Discussion paper)

TITTAGALA, Sunil <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0783-1088>

**Workshop on the**

**Setting up of Industry Advisory Boards at Universities**

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Discussion paper on **Moratuwa University Experience.**

Dr. S. Rohan Tittagala
Director - Career Guidance, University of Moratuwa.

*The theme of the recently concluded SLAAS 57th Annual Session was 'Towards a Knowledge Based Economy : The Role of Scientists & Technologists'. Clearly the future need of the country is highly trained and motivated man power. Are our graduates equipped with not only the required knowledge base but also the necessary skills?*

*The University Reforms currently being implemented by the Ministry of Higher Education and the Science & Technology Personnel Development Project (STPDP) of the Ministry of Science & Technology both address this issue. One facet of this exercise is University – Industry linkages.*

## 1. Introduction

Over the last decade or so, the locus of challenging jobs has shifted markedly from state controlled corporations to private sector entrepreneurial firms. With this change, the relevance of academic programmes conducted in different faculties of the local universities to industry needs in producing **employable graduates** has been discussed and debated at different forums and continues to be a key issue in the university circles.

In many instances, academic departments or faculties have their own style or mechanisms of interaction with industry developed intentionally as part of the academic programmes or evolved naturally over a period of time of existence. Faculties of Medicine are a good example of such positive and formal interaction. However, perhaps more definite programmes and actions across the national universities need to be in place if any real changes are to take place and tangible results achieved in a broader sense.

This discussion paper presents a model of industry interaction that has been put in place at the University of Moratuwa. The implementation is at three distinct levels, viz. Academic Department level, Faculty level and the Senate/Council level. Such mechanisms of industry interaction of different forms are well established in leading universities all over the world. The University of Moratuwa has experience only with the conduct of courses which have a professional career in focus, viz. Engineering

and Architecture. Thus there would generally be a group of target industries and the model presented here may reflect same.

## 2. University Reforms & Industry Interaction

This is explicitly stated in the Reforms Action Plan as 'Links with the World of Work'. There are also other directly or indirectly related activities such as 'Establishment of Career Guidance Units'. The Task force report itself identifies a number of important areas for interaction under the heading 'University, State, Private Sector Linkages'.

While attention is drawn to the above documents, no further elaboration is necessary as this is the subject of a previous speaker.

## 3. The Mechanism

Industry Consultative Boards (**ICB$^S$**) are to be established at three distinct levels, viz.

Department – Industry Consultative Boards ***(DICB$^S$)***
Faculty – Industry Consultative Boards ***(FICB$^S$)***
University – Industry Consultative Board ***(UICB)***

***Department – Industry Consultative Boards (DICB$^S$)***

This is envisaged to be the most active & productive level.

Being discipline specific, participation of all academic staff including most junior levels is proposed. The long term objective is grooming the younger staff and establishing the culture of industry interaction.

Industry representation at this level is expected to be a broad and diverse group of individuals consisting of veterans as well as the relatively young to strike the necessary balance in exchange of ideas and innovative thinking. The Board is expected to benefit from the wisdom and experience of the veterans as well as the fresh outlook and current status awareness of the young.

Programme implementation, where relevant, should be with active student participation, to add value and meaning. Discipline oriented student societies (such as 'UMMES'–UoM Mechanical Engineering Society) must be established and mobilized towards this. Where possible, programmes need to be built-in to the academic schedule to ensure long term sustainability.

***Faculty – Industry Consultative Boards (FICB$^S$)***

The main objective at this level is to promote multi-disciplinary and cross-department activity. The reforms agenda spells out clearly the necessity of such programmes. The academic departments generally have a tendency to work in

isolation and the much needed harnessing of scattered resources and team activity could be facilitated by the FICB$^{S}$.

The FICB$^{S}$ will also serve as an advisory and monitoring arm for the functioning of DICB$^{S}$.

***University – Industry Consultative Board (UICB)***

At the highest rung in the ICB structure is the UICB which is mainly a policy and overall strategy formulating forum. Expected to be convened once a year only, the UICB will provide an opportunity for professionals and state officials holding influential positions to interact with the university officials. Outreach and publicity are two main objectives.

***State – Sector Participation***

In an era where the private sector is considered to be the 'engine of growth' and its aggressive dominance is felt, there is a tendency to forget the state sector totally. However, state organizations still continue to employ a sizeable proportion of undergraduates and, therefore, state sector representation in Industry Consultative Boards at all levels is essential.

## 4. 'Softer Skills'

To be successful in industry in the 21$^{st}$ Century, the graduate should not only have a sound fundamental knowledge but be able to adopt to the rapid changes in the profession and have a new skill set associated with communication, teamwork and leadership. The Sri Lankan graduate often fails in the world of work due to poor softer skills compared to his/her foreign counterpart.

Imparting softer skills may be an area where the Industry Consultative Boards could make a significant contribution by devising revolutionary programmes.

## 5. Conclusion

Perhaps the real challenge of producing employable graduates lies not with faculties conducting professional courses as clearly evident from the employment statistics. Thus, different universities constituting of faculties distinctly different in nature may need to think differently and innovatively based on their own expertise and experience in developing programmes of industry interaction. The reality with national universities is that there is no real pressure or incentive to sell the 'product'. The success at implementation stage of any such programme would, therefore, depend at the present time on the commitment of the university staff and industry personnel towards the objectives, together with effective monitoring from the university administration. There should also be adequate incentives in the system to motivate staff to be actively involved with industry.

***ANNEXE***

## Industry Consultative Boards

1) University-Industry Consultative Board **(UICB)**

2) Faculty-Industry Consultative Boards **(FICB$^S$)**

   Example : FICB (Faculty of Architecture)

3) Department-Industry Consultative Boards **(DICB$^S$)**

   Example : DICB (Department of Chemical Engineering)

## Department-Industry Consultative Boards (DICB$^S$)

***Composition :***

Head of Department **(Chairman)**.
Academic Staff of the department.
Industry Representatives (as nominated by the department in consultation with Dean of Faculty).
Head of Training Division or nominee.
Department's Industry Co-ordinator **(Convener)**.

***Functions :***

Curriculum Development to suit Industry needs.
Industry Training Placements and other links with the industry.
Implement Industry Mentor – Academic Advisor programmes.
Devise programmes to obtain services and exchange ideas with relevant professional bodies (such as ICE, IEE, IMechE).
Develop programmes with alumini and well wisher participation.
Provide facilities for the academic staff to work in the industry and industry personnel to work in the University.
Establish mechanisms to obtain feedback from the industry.
Execute CPD Programmes for industry.
Identify actions appropriate to be implemented at the faculty level and recommend to FICB.

*Frequency of DICB meetings :* ***Quarterly***

## Faculty-Industry Consultative Boards (FICB$^S$)

***Composition :***

Dean of the Faculty **(Chairman)**.
Chairmen of DICB$^S$.
Head, Industrial Training Division or nominee.
Career Guidance Coordinator or nominee.
Industry Representatives (as nominated by the Faculty Board).
SAR of the Faculty **(Convener)**

***Functions :***

Review and monitor the functioning of the DICB[S] in the Faculty.
Evaluate the recommendations made by the respective DICB[S] and facilitate implementation of same.
Evolve programmes for interaction with relevant professional bodies.
Devise mechanisms to obtain the industry feedback at regular intervals to produce marketable graduates.
Review the demand for graduates of different disciplines by carrying out regular tracer studies.
Organize Faculty level seminars and workshops.
Initiate actions to promote public awareness programmes and introduce mechanisms for publicizing the facilities and capabilities (such as organizing University Open-day programmes).
Identify CPD programmes for Industry.
Initiate any other actions as it may deem fit to promote/enhance University-Industry interaction as relevant to the Faculty.

Such as : Setting up of a Technology Watch Group.
Identifying major consultancy projects for industry.

*Frequency of FICB meetings :* ***Twice a year***

**University-Industry Consultative Board (UICB)**

***Composition :***

Vice-Chancellor **(Chairman)**
A Council Member (nominated by the Council from among its external members).
Secretary, Ministry of Higher Education.
Secretary, Ministry of Industries.
Secretary, Ministry of Science and Technology.
Presidents of relevant Professional Institutions.
Chairman, Board of Investment (BOI).
Chairman, Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
Chairmen of FICBs.
Chairmen of DICBs.
Director, ITUM.
Head, Industrial Training Division.
Career Guidance Coordinator.
Industry Representatives (as nominated by the Senate/Council).
Deputy Registrar (Academic) – **(Convener)**.

***Function :***

Initiate policy decisions and actions to promote University-Industry interaction and review and monitor the functioning of the FICB[S] and the respective DICB[S] under them.

*Frequency of UICB meetings :* ***Once a year***