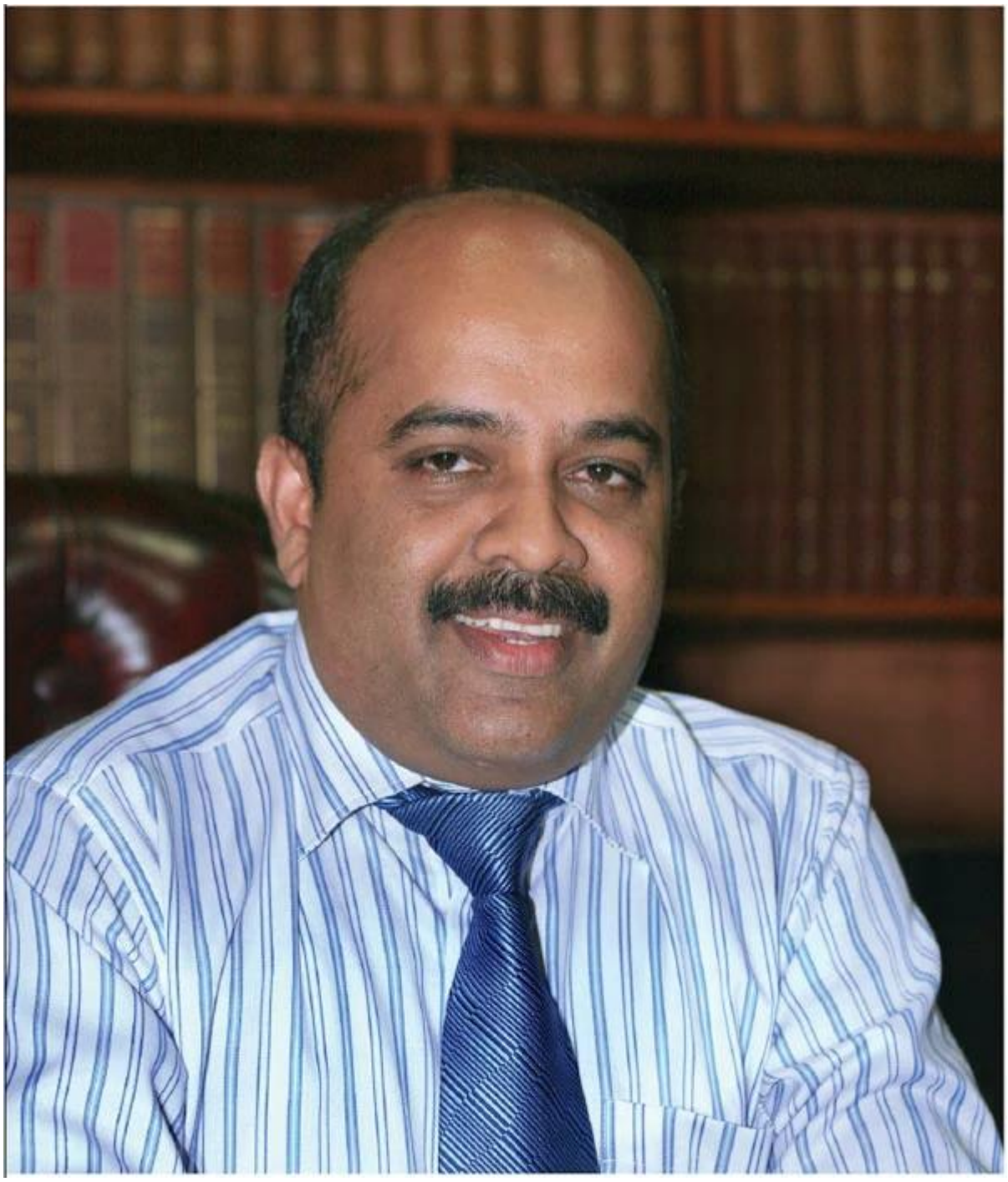
Making Learning Happen



A Masters Degree enhances your career prospects. Yet, balancing studies with work or family commitments can be a daunting task. Nizam Razzaq, Director of Business Management School (BMS) believes that in such situations, a learning style that is flexible and best suited to meet the needs of each individual may be adopted. That is just what BMS does, he explains.

By Madhushala Senaratne | Photography by Menaka Aravinda

Can you give us a brief description of BMS and your slogan “we make learning happen”?

BMS is entering its tenth year of success as a UK education specialist. We offer Postgraduate and Undergraduate programmes with a specific learning style suited for each level of study. We offer Bachelors programmes with the option of studying two years in Sri Lanka and completing the final year in the UK. In addition, our degree pathways for professional programmes have become a popular option in obtaining a degree and professional qualification. One of our very popular programmes is University of Leicester MBA, which is studied entirely by flexible learning.

What is flexible learning? How does it work?

It is a novel learning process with an intelligent blend of traditional, resource based and student centred learning. In practical sense it offers a balance with minimum destruction to personal life style and job commitments. It can be claimed as a blended approach to education. It provides traditional teaching (lectures), support material such as text books and modular books, interaction using case study sessions and direct tutor support from the University.

Our lectures are fixed according to the group. All our lecturers are approved tutors by the University to conduct seminars. In addition, students can also attend the optional summer school at the University of Leicester. We also conduct Research Methodology Workshops.

What are the main programmes offered at BMS?

BMS offers programmes in Marketing, Finance, Human Resource Development and Industrial Relations. Chief among these is the University of Leicester MBA, which we have been offering in Sri Lanka for the last nine years. Students can also study the MSc Marketing, MSc Finance, MSc Management, MSc Human Resource Management programmes as well as the Doctorate programme from the University of Leicester in Sri Lanka.

The University of Leicester was named as the University of the Year 2008/2009. It has always been within the Top 20 Universities in the UK, Top 100 within the Europe and Top 200 in the world. The Guardian University Guide 2010 ranked Leicester as the second top University after Oxford for Business and Management Studies.

A special feature of the University of Leicester MBA is that even if a student moves to another part of the world, he can still continue the programme. Once a student registers, they become a student of the University with a student identity card and are entitled to the same status of a full time student with respect to studies. Some of our students are currently working in Malaysia, USA, Botswana and UAE and are continuing their studies without disruption.

In addition, together with the Institute of Bankers in Sri Lanka, we also launched a degree in Leadership and Management from Northumbria University. Institute of Bankers, Diploma holders and those who have completed four core subjects of Diploma in Banking and Finance can obtain the Honours degree from Northumbria University with one year of study in Sri Lanka. Similarly CIMA, CIM students can also have advanced standing into the final year of the degree.

How do you guarantee quality of your programmes at BMS?

The University of Leicester MBA is the only MBA programme in Sri Lanka accredited by the Association of MBAs, UK. All assignments and examinations are set and marked by the University. The entire academic integrity is with the University and is subject to rigorous quality assurance by QAA of UK. Examinations are conducted at the British Council and the examinations are kept very much independent.

The Bachelors programmes, the Diploma and Advanced Diploma are accredited by Edexcel, UK, which ensures and audits our quality management systems of all the processes in the programme. The final year of the degree is directly offered by Northumbria University and once again the academic process is entirely with them.

You mentioned degree pathways for professional programmes and also said a student could study two years of the degree in Sri Lanka and the final year in the UK. Can you explain this?

BMS is finding ways and means to make UK education affordable and accessible. We are the first institution which developed degree pathways for all British professional qualifications offered in Sri Lanka and recognised local qualifications. If a student who has completed a Chartered qualification or partly completed and wants to develop a route towards the achievement of a Bachelors degree, BMS will be able to find a cost effective pathway with an advance entry to the Bachelors degree which can be studied in Sri Lanka or UK. However the options are limited in Sri Lanka but a wide variety of programmes are available in our partner UK institution. This is not only limited to Business, but is available in Computing, Engineering, Bio Medical Science, Chemistry, Quantity Surveying and Built Environment Studies as well.

We Are The First Institution Which Developed Degree Pathways For All British Professional Qualifications Offered In Sri Lanka And Recognised Local Qualifications.

There are many foreign MBA programmes in Sri Lanka. It is extremely difficult to choose the right one. What advice would you give to students on choosing a foreign MBA?

You need to do a thorough research. The ability to read for an MBA can be demonstrated by the research carried out by the student to choose an MBA. The candidate cannot afford to make a mistake in finding the right MBA.

Firstly a candidate must check the credentials of the awarding body (University) of the MBA. If it is a British institution, British Council will provide information. If it is USA, you can contact Fulbright Commission. It is also equally important that you check with the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka whether it recognises the

qualification locally.

Secondly the content, structure and the learning outcomes of the programme – whether it is the same as the full time programme of the University – should be looked into.

The programmes are offered in different formats such as validated programmes. Validated programmes are generally owned by the local centre and the assessment and examination are set and marked by the local institutions with the quality audit from the University. In most cases the transcript will state that it is a validated programme studied in Sri Lanka.

Also, we want to make it clear that there is no fast track or short cut to achieve a quality degree. We do not believe in a fast track system and a degree should be studied over a minimum period of time.

BMS is also known for full time recruitment of students to UK Universities. What is your role here?

BMS is the local representative for several UK Universities such as the University of Aston, Surrey, Bristol, Oxford Brookes, Leicester, Portsmouth and Northumbria. We do not charge a fee from the student. We support them from choosing the course and applying to the University until enrolment at the University. Even thereafter we are in touch with the students and also their parents. The most satisfying moment in this service is supporting their parents to attend the graduation.

We provide unique pre-visa and pre-departure guidance and we have introduced three full day academic writing workshops as a pre-departure guidance for all our students who go to UK University to commence or continue their degree programmes. The feedback received from the students after they reach UK is very much encouraging and we will continue this workshop as a part of our preparation of students for UK Universities.

Can you tell us about the British Education Representative Association and the regulatory elements in the foreign education sector?

I took an initiative to form a British Education Representative Association in Sri Lanka. The initiative was supported by the British Council. We have drafted a comprehensive code of ethics for all the members. As a Secretary of the Association steps were taken to present it in the Parliament as a private members bill for incorporation.

The existing laws are sufficient to deal with the current issues and we need to implement them with full force. New laws or regulations may ensure quality into the system but it should not deny the right to earn the foreign qualification. I am more favourable towards non legal rules such as code of ethics with some form of authority in the form of a government institution to deal with complaints. Even the Consumer Affairs Authority can look at how to deal with student complaints taking an innovative step to consider student as a consumer. In fact the Association mentioned earlier was registered with the Consumer Affairs Authority.

Can you tell us your background and your association with BMS?

I am a Lawyer by profession and Law is my first priority while being a Director of BMS. I started lecturing in law and during that process I was attracted to education. Even now, I continue to lecture in Law and meet many students. Supporting students and helping them develop and grow gives me immense satisfaction.

What lies ahead for BMS?

In the next three years, we plan to expand by offering programmes in the areas of Bio Medical Science, Law and Computing. We are also looking at new links with local institutions and further strengthening the existing ones. Northumbria University has appointed BMS as the Regional Centre for Sri Lanka and Maldives. We aim to give Sri Lankan students great opportunities to access UK education. We will remain as the UK education specialist.