



EDUCATION TIMES

The British Council hosts inaugural Alumni UK forum with 'Transdisciplinary Approach for Sustainable Development' theme

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The British Council in Sri Lanka under its Alumni UK Programme – together with The Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science (SLAAS) and The National Science Foundation (NSF), held the programme's inaugural forum on Tuesday the 24th of October. The enlightening symposium brought together a distinguished gathering of well-established scholars, researchers, and professionals (SRPs) from both Sri Lanka and abroad to address key national issues under the theme 'Transdisciplinary Approach for Sustainable Development.'

The British Council – the most established primary provider of English language education and resources in Sri Lanka – is dedicated to building connections and knowledge sharing to help foster a more sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous future for the country. In this vein, the British Council's Alumni UK online platform was initiated to nurture the spirit of a global networking community; connecting alumni of various UK education institutions, facilitating the exchange of information, and creating opportunities for learning and collaboration. This inaugural forum was organised with the aim to harness the collective expertise of the scientific community to contribute towards Sri Lanka's sustainable development and future.



Professor Saroj Jayasinghe (Former Chair Professor of Medicine, University of Colombo) delivered the keynote address



Professor Eran Edirisinghe, Pro Vice Chancellor, Research and Innovation, Keele University delivered the theme talk on Leading a nation towards net zero - The Keele journey



Professor Ajith de Alwis led SIG1 on Circular production and zero-waste society



Professor Ruchira Cumararatunga led SIG2 on Blue economy and national development



Professor P Ravirajan led SIG3 on Green energy and mitigation of climate change

The British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, H.E. Andrew Patrick, opened the event underscoring the importance of strong and accessible education links between Sri Lanka and the UK; links that serve to benefit both countries, especially

with Sri Lanka being the third largest country for transnational education for the UK.

Country Director of the British Council in Sri Lanka, Orlando Edwards, in his opening address, concurred with the theme of the forum: the idea that the solution to national sustainability challenges requires a multifaceted, and interconnected approach. "A transdisciplinary approach encourages us as experts from diverse backgrounds to come together, share our expertise, and collaborate," he said. "In doing so, we unlock the potential to develop innovative and holistic solutions that elude us when we operate solely within the silos of individual disciplines." He further emphasised the critical role UK alumni play in driving forward solutions to national challenges by harnessing the knowledge, experience, and connections gained during their time in the UK in order to make a meaningful impact on Sri Lanka's development.

Prof. Ranjith Senaratne, General President of SLAAS and Chairman of NSF, in his opening remarks spoke of how collaborations such as this with the SLAAS, NSF, the British Council, and the British High Commission only serve to enhance the global academic climate. "Today the world must come to grips with a myriad of formidable challenges and threats such as climate change, which are complex and multifaceted, and cannot be tackled through monodisciplinary interventions," he added. "These require instead interdisciplinary, multisectoral, and multinational solutions through corporation with specialists from diverse backgrounds in both the natural and social sciences across territorial boundaries."



The audience

Prof. Prasad M. Jayaweera, Secretary – International Relations at SLAAS, introduced attendees to the scope and objectives of the Sri Lanka UK Alumni Forum, outlining the sessions of the day while also highlighting the importance of integrated knowledge and combined expertise-led collaboration.

Prof. Eran Edirisinghe, Pro Vice Chancellor Research and Innovation University of Keele, UK – who was present with his visiting delegation – spoke of the award-winning university as a case study for the successful incorporation of 'Leading a nation towards net zero' with its ground-breaking sustainability initiatives. With the university recognised as a pioneering 'living laboratory,' and even acknowledged by Sir David Attenborough for its commitment to green practices, Prof. Edirisinghe underscored how both the institution's staff and students actively work to reduce CO2 emissions and carbon footprints by engaging in cutting-edge research and producing innovative solutions by partnering with some of the world's biggest names, and even incorporating of new technologies such as AI to work towards this goal.

The highlight of the event was the presentation by Prof. Saroj Jayasinghe, Former Chair Professor of Medicine, University of Colombo on 'Advancing trans disciplinarity: Is there a role for collective Intelligence?' He addressed the overarching national challenge of substantial migration of Sri Lankan professionals from the country as a cause for concern, but also stressed on the importance of leaving the doors open for returnees with newly acquired skills and learning.

Following Prof. Jayasinghe's presentation, attendees were given the choice of participating in three special interest group (SIG) discussions – parallel breakout sessions addressing various pertinent subjects related to the larger theme. SIG 1 'Circular production and zero-waste society' was chaired by Prof. Ajith De Alwis, SIG 2 chaired by Prof. Ruchira Cumaranatunga focused on the 'Blue economy and national development', and SIG 3 led by Prof. P. Ravirajan addressed 'Green energy and mitigation of climate change.' All breakout sessions were extremely well-received and lay the groundwork for moving from knowledge and science to action. Propositions on a way-forward were then presented at the close of the SIGs, and following the conclusion of the event, both attendees and speakers were given the opportunity to meet and network over dinner – staying true to the very mission of the Alumni UK programme.

The forum was lauded by attendees for bringing together academics from a broad spectrum of sectors, and making important parallels between the recommendations and the feasibility of actioning the sustainable development goals that address Sri Lanka's current challenges when a transdisciplinary approach is applied. Furthermore, it served as testament to the many benefits that come with the British Council's Alumni UK platform membership – accessible for all those who have graduated from an education institution from the UK.



The British High Commissioner HE Andrew Patrick welcomed by Professor Ranjith Senaratne and Professor Prasad Jayaweera

About Alumni UK

The British Council's Alumni UK online platform, at its core, strives to provide the necessary resources for alumni to foster collaboration, share their experiences, and expand their professional networks. This platform transcends being a mere website; it acts as a bridge, linking UK alumni to a world of opportunities, partnerships, and ongoing education.

For those UK alumni in Sri Lanka who have not registered yet for this amazing platform, please visit: <https://alumniuk.britishcouncil.org/register>

This is your opportunity to embark on a journey of perpetual growth and collaboration.

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