

Report of the Committee on
THE KERALA STATE POLICY ON HIGHER EDUCATION (*)

I. The Tripod of Reforms

(1) The linkages between education and development had long been recognized in Kerala. On the basis of liberal inputs from erstwhile rulers, missionaries, social reformers, political movements and post-independence governments, Kerala has made substantial progress in education during the last two centuries. With universal literacy, near total retention at school level and enrolment of 17-18 % of the relevant age group in higher education, Kerala is far ahead of most other states in the country in terms of access to education at all levels. But the State cannot afford to rest on its laurels, as its equitable and sustainable development is increasingly becoming dependent on maximization of production and dissemination of cutting edge knowledge. A policy for the development of higher education in the state will have to be formulated with the above perspective.

(2) Kerala's success in terms of relatively better access has not been complemented by comparable achievement in quality. While increasing access, it is also necessary to focus on improvement in quality. It is necessary to overcome the tendency to see quantity as a drag on quality. It is a formidable challenge as the tradition of exclusive access to knowledge has now been reinforced by the imported spirit of competitive liberalization. This needs to be substituted by a democratic culture of excellence. An understanding that equity is not opposed to or even accessory to quality, but a necessary condition and component of quality has to be cultivated. Exclusivist elitism is harmful to development of excellence. It fails to tap the talent of those outside the charmed circle through sheer neglect and spoils those within through overindulgence. The pursuit of excellence therefore should be through equity. It requires a broad base, highly inclusive in character, which provides the foundation from which the peaks of excellence will rise. A collaborative approach to the generation of excellence, where excellence is perceived as the consequence of team effort rather than mutual competition is essential. This would help overcome the state's drawbacks of weak infrastructure and low intellectual resource base to some extent.

(3) The mutual dependence of different levels of education needs to be recognized for evolving a sustainable programme of reform and development. The quality of school education is highly dependent on the quality of teachers that higher education produces. Similarly peaks of excellence in higher education arise from the broad base of quality school education. A common, neighbourhood school system which would ensure adequate and equitable opportunity for quality education for all children is the foundation of excellence in higher education.

(4) The objective of “quality education for all” has as much relevance at the level of higher education today as at the level of school education. Inclusive development of the State is premised on inclusive development of higher education. The economic development of the State, constrained by its limited land and natural resources and high density of population, is increasingly becoming linked up with knowledge related industries and services. The profitability and sustainability of Kerala’s cash crops, cottage and IT related industries; tourism and service sectors are highly dependent on national and global developments. Similarly, the support provided by expatriate labour force to the economy of the State can be sustained only by strengthening the quality of manpower generated in the State. Improving productivity and creating greater job opportunities within the state without causing environmental degradation is another challenge being faced by the state? Care has also to be taken to ensure that the State’s growing economic, social and cultural engagements with the global society do not enslave it to the global market forces. Kerala has to keep its windows open to welcome the winds blowing from different directions without being blown off its feet. The intellectual base for such engagement with global capital and for sustainable development of the state has to be created in our higher educational institutions. With nation building as the prime objective, an ideal system of higher education for Kerala is one that would transform our educated men and women into intellect workers and intellectuals at the same time.

(5) Expansion, excellence and equity should form the tripod of reforms in higher education in Kerala. A comprehensive scheme for expansion of facilities with equitable sharing of opportunities for the SC/ST/OBC/Minorities/Physically Challenged/ Women/the poor is a pre-requisite for excellence in this critical sector of development. Appropriate mechanism for ensuring access through positive discrimination in admission and financial support through a scholarship scheme should be put in place immediately. Strengthening the public funded

system and ensuring that private initiatives are in conformity with social justice should be recognized as central features of the policy.

II. The Four Pillars of Learning

(1) At the level of individual learner, the concept of four pillars of learning ---learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be--- (UNESCO, 1996) is as much relevant to higher education as to school education. The quantum of information is growing at such an exponential pace that it is impossible to acquire all relevant information within the short span of time that could be set apart for formal education. The cramming of information is to be dissuaded as most of the information is available at the click of a mouse. What is required is the ability to access and process information into knowledge and to extract the wisdom that comes through the process. Moreover, the nature of the job that one is called upon to do in a life time is also constantly changing. It is also necessary to learn to live with a wide variety of people in a world which is shrinking in time and space day by day. The goals of self-organization, self-development and self-actualization are also important. Higher education should aim at inculcating in the learner certain core competencies and skills that would promote lifelong learning, living together and living productively, both in society and within the self. This in turn would require the cultivation of critical, creative and communicative competence that would equip the individual to envision his/her self-development as part of the larger project of the development of society.

(2) The four-fold requirements of the learner should be borne in mind while designing an appropriate curriculum for higher education. The role of higher education for enabling the learner to earn a decent living, either through wage employment or self-employment, should not be lost sight of. The need for qualified personnel trained to do a variety of jobs will continue to grow. However, this does not mean that higher education has to produce ready-to-serve knowledge workers who could be readily absorbed into jobs without any on-the-job training. While such a programme of specialized job training would suit the interests of the immediate employers, it will not serve the long-term interests of the learners. Since the pattern of future demand can neither be controlled nor foreseen, the only alternative available is to build up the capacity to innovate which will require a balanced acquisition of basic and applied skills. It should

further be understood that society needs not only knowledge workers who would perform a variety of tasks, but also thinkers, dreamers, philosophers, scientists, artists, policy makers, administrators, politicians, statesmen and others to facilitate the onward march of civilization. Higher education has an important role to play in the making of such individuals. We need experts in different disciplines who could open up new vistas of knowledge and experience. Knowledge is usually created at the intersection of different disciplines and there should be adequate space in higher education for multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary explorations. While undergraduate education could offer a limited common core of information and skills for all students and diversified ,choice based learning in multiple disciplines, post graduate and research level education should promote inter-disciplinarity and specialization.

(3) Curricular reforms should necessarily begin with reforms in pedagogy. The student should get greater opportunities for grappling with the process of acquisition of existing knowledge and generation of new knowledge. Written assignments, seminars, problem solving sessions, projects, field studies etc. should become integral to any reform in pedagogy. Through a dialogic process, the teacher should induce the student to think, innovate and challenge existing ideas and generate new knowledge. The method of evaluation should be progressively changed to continuous internal evaluation by evolving an open, transparent and fool-proof system with an appropriate mechanism for effective grievance redressal. The evaluation should be made holistic by making provisions for assessment of aptitudes and dispositions, along with acquired knowledge and skills. The choice-based credit/semester mode should be preferable to the uniform/annual mode, as the former would give the students an opportunity to select subject combinations of their choice and to encourage more focused learning by dividing the content into manageable chunks. The developments in Information Communication Technology (ICT) should be put into service, both to improve the quality of learning and access to learning. The possibilities of virtual learning have to be exploited to the fullest extent, even as we continue to improve the quantity and quality of education through the face-to-face mode. Similarly the traditional face-to-face mode can be further improved by integrating ICT into the curriculum. This would require a continual programme of intensive and extensive exposure to the new pedagogy of learning to teachers as well as students and also additional investment for providing new infrastructure.

(4) An important issue that is usually overlooked is the role of mother tongue in higher education. The dominant role assigned to English as the medium of instruction in higher education has now been reinforced by the emergence of English as the language of the Internet and international commerce. While English may continue as the medium of instruction in the universities and the colleges, there has to be some provision for the production of knowledge and its dissemination in the mother tongue in the university system. This is because there is a greater possibility for the production of knowledge, especially in humanities and social sciences, in the mother tongue than in other languages. There is also a growing need to disseminate knowledge produced in other languages through the mother tongue. This is part of the extension work that higher education institutions must necessarily be performing. Strengthening the publication division of the universities is one way in which this could be put into practice. Encouraging the writing of dissertation and thesis in the mother tongue could also help. There should also be provision for translation of good research papers written in the mother tongue into English and other languages.

(5) Generally, Universities and other institutions of higher learning are called upon to perform three key functions; viz, (1) Teaching (2) Research (3) Extension. While universities and colleges have recognized these three functions, the synergies among these are not properly appreciated. There is a tendency to compartmentalize them and to exclusively reserve each one of them to separate groups of teachers and students. We have good teachers, good researchers and good extension workers, but rarely teachers and students who combine in themselves all these diverse roles. While specialization is inevitable in higher education and every one cannot be expected to excel in all three fields, the attempt should be to combine all three roles, perhaps at different periods in the career of both students and teachers. The career graph of teachers and course content of students must be structured accordingly. Appropriate curricular and structural changes for incorporating the above goals need to be worked out. Internal Quality Assessment and Assurance Cells should be set up in all institutions, with adequate representation for the feeder population, regulatory institutions and the state along with teachers and students of the institutions concerned.

(6) Humanities, Social Sciences, Commerce, various Science disciplines, Engineering, Management, Medicine etc. may have to incorporate discipline specific methodologies within the above broad parameters. Broadly stated, liberal arts and science courses may have to bring in greater

professionalism in their methodology and professional courses have to incorporate greater liberal content and societal concerns. The argument for specialist universities may have relevance in some disciplines. The popular demand for discipline wise universities which is on the increase has to be critically evaluated. The notion of universities as the meeting place of all knowledge continues to have relevance in facilitating interdisciplinary explorations. Instead of establishing specialist universities, it would be a better idea for each university and college to identify one or two disciplines for focused learning and emerge as centres of specialization in their chosen fields. Some coordination in the identification of the area of specialization by different institutions would facilitate inclusive and comprehensive development of all disciplines through different centres.

III. Autonomy and Accountability

(1) Even as the basic objectives of higher education would be common to all, divergent steps need to be adopted for their implementation. This would necessitate a certain degree of autonomy for all higher education institutions. A redefinition of the concept of autonomy in higher education is also required. Autonomy of higher education institutions needs to be defined in such a way as would make it an instrument for the realization of the individual and societal goals of higher education. Autonomy implies freedom, not freedom to impose the self-will of the academic on society, but freedom for the academic to pursue knowledge for social good. This implies that autonomy should be linked up with accountability. We need a decentralized democratic system of academic governance that would translate the ideal of socially accountable autonomy into a living reality. In the context of Kerala, this would imply making provisions for strengthening social control over the system of education to keep in check the sway of communal, casteist and commercial forces over the governance of secular educational institutions. Democratization of the governance structures of higher education at all levels ---from universities to individual institutions ---is a necessary concomitant of autonomy and accountability in higher education institutions.

(2) All institutions of higher education, including universities and colleges, should set up Social Accountability Cells (SAC). A system of academic audit and compulsory disclosures should be put in place through these cells. The Right to Information Act (RTI) should be implemented in all higher education institutions.

Each institution and each individual teacher should maintain a website in which basic data regarding the institution/individual and self-assessment reports should be compulsorily posted and updated at regular intervals. Institutional information could include details about infrastructure, curriculum, human resources, admission norms, fees etc. Such information provided by all institutions including universities and colleges should be codified to develop a State Data Bank on Higher Education which should be annually updated. The database should be comprehensive enough to provide adequate data support for state level policy planning and administration of higher education. Details about the curricular, co-curricular and extra curricular activities undertaken by each individual teacher could be posted on his/her website. An appropriate system of student feed back should be developed, the findings of which should also be posted on the website, with adequate remarks by the head of the institution or the individual as the case may be. The provisions in the RTI Act for 'compulsory disclosures' by the institutions/individuals concerned to prevent 'deceptive practices' should be implemented. However, public vigil is the key to accountability. Therefore the posting of 'counter information' in the form of 'voluntary disclosures' by public spirited organizations against deceptive practices by institutions/individuals should also be encouraged. Yearly academic performance reports of universities and colleges should be posted on the respective websites. External academic audit of all universities and colleges should be held once in five years and the reports with appropriate remarks of the heads of the institutions should be posted on the website and sent to the state legislature or universities, as the case may be, for their consideration. Follow up actions on the basis of the remarks on the reports by the respective authorities should be mandatory. A democratically represented statutory Parent Teacher Association (PTA) with adequate monitoring powers could also play an effective role in ensuring social accountability of the institution.

IV. Government, Aided and Unaided Institutions

(1) The problems of government, aided and unaided sectors need to be looked at separately. The aided and unaided sectors dominate the scene today. Government colleges are few in numbers. Most of them are also underfed and underdeveloped. This needs to be corrected. A concerted effort must be put in to upgrade the infrastructure and resources of the Government sector in higher education. Even

if the bulk of higher education is not in the Government sector, it is important that Government institutions function as the flagships of the higher education sector.

(2) The label 'aided' as applied to colleges in the state where the system of direct payment of salary has been put in place is a misnomer. Some of these colleges were started as land grant institutions. Others were set up with land and resources raised through public contributions. The system of grant-in-aid introduced in these institutions in the sixties was replaced by direct payment of salary in the early seventies. Since then, the entire salary expenditure and the bulk of the maintenance expenditure have been met from the public exchequer. A substantial percentage of the infrastructure facilities in such colleges have been built up over the years through direct contributions from government, public funding agencies and the larger public. The aided colleges in the state are privately administered public institutions. There is little public control over such aided institutions. Appointments are made by the managements. Donations go into private coffers. The opening up of these colleges for public - private - participation (PPP) recently by starting unaided courses has further aggravated the existing iniquity. If the arrangement is permitted to continue, these institutions could gradually be reverted to their original status as private unaided colleges. Such an eventuality has to be resisted at all costs as it would lead to the private appropriation of public assets built up in these institutions over the last fifty years. Efforts must also be made to bring in greater public control over these institutions, especially in matters pertaining to the appointment of staff and admission of students.

(3) Education has never been the sole responsibility of the State in Kerala. There is a tradition of private initiative in education which has strengthened in recent years. But there is a world of difference between private involvement in the earlier decades and the new wave of private investment. While the earlier intervention was largely philanthropic in nature, the new mode is primarily profit oriented. This has led to the mushrooming of higher education institutions in recent times, especially in the professional sector in which the courses have immediate market value. The unprecedented growth of the self-financing sector as against the Government and aided sector over the last few years has turned out to be socially divisive and academically cancerous. A system of access based on financial merit as against academic merit can accelerate the prevailing social

tensions by inviting the wrath of those sections of the population which cannot raise the resources required for higher education, which is the stairway to success in a largely knowledge driven economy. A system of admission based on financial considerations could also exclude a vast majority of meritorious candidates and include mediocre aspirants on the strength of their purse, with its attendant adverse impact on the quality of higher education. Both societal and academic considerations necessitate a reorientation of the present strategies for development in higher education.

(4) This is not to argue that private players have to be eliminated from the scene. The challenge is to harness the benefits of a larger educational system that private participation can bring in by restraining the profiteering of private players. Regulation in the field of private participation in higher education should include the following aspects:

(a) Ensuring minimum standards in the human and physical infrastructure in all educational institutions.

(b) A ceiling on the level of fees that can be charged from any student; the ceiling should be fixed at such a level as to ensure that the surplus earned by the private player in education is sufficient to carry out an appropriate level of capital expenditure

(c) Putting in place provisions for the award of merit-cum-means scholarships, a system of admission according to merit and levy of fees on the basis of means and availability of educational loans at minimal rates of interest and without collateral securities

(d) Admissions to all institutions should be on the basis of a Government conducted centralized entrance test and marks secured in the qualifying examination, with adequate reservation for students belonging to the reserved category and other socially and economically disadvantaged groups

(e) The service conditions of teachers and non-teaching employees in private educational institutions should be brought on par with their counterparts in public educational institutions.

(f) Decision making and operation in private educational institutions should be made transparent and accountable to a Governing Council with adequate representation for teachers, non-teaching employees and students.

(g) Given that private players in education will inevitably offer those courses which will yield employment opportunities, they should be obliged to set aside a meaningful proportion of their allocations for teaching and research in

fundamental and basic disciplines in the natural and social sciences as well as areas which are deemed to be indispensable for the over-all development of the country/area in question.

(h) All courses offered by private educational institutions should be vetted by committees appointed by competent university /apex regulatory bodies which should ensure that the course structure reflects current, well established research in the discipline concerned and does not give room for unscientific prejudice of any kind.

(i) Government, aided and unaided streams and institutions should maintain their separate identity. The tendency to mix public and private streams by starting unaided courses in Government/aided institutions will lead to private appropriation of public assets and therefore should be strictly forbidden.

(j) The concept of private universities has no place in a system that relies on public regulatory intervention to ensure equity and excellence.

V. Funding

(1) Though education was originally a subject matter in the state list, it was later transferred to the concurrent list. Maintenance of standards in higher education is the responsibility of the central regulatory agencies. The existing devolution of financial powers unduly favors the central government vis-à-vis state governments. The norms of deprivation adopted for central assistance in education usually work to the disadvantage of Kerala. The very success of Kerala in primary and secondary education disqualifies it for most of the centrally assisted schemes. The state's priorities relate to second generation problems of quality assurance in school level education and expansion, equity and excellence in higher education. State-specific requirements need to be considered in the distribution of central funds to ensure that Kerala is not penalized for its successes. Pressure should also be built up for starting more centrally funded higher education institutions in the state. Educational investment on the part of the central and state governments should be raised to levels prevailing in most of the developed nations. This implies that at least 6% of the GDP should be spent on education of which 1.5 to 2% should be set apart for higher education. The central government should be persuaded to set apart at least 10% of its budgetary expenditure and the state Government 30% of its budget share on education, of which 25 to 33% should be earmarked for higher education.

(2) The existing parameters for funding by UGC and other central agencies need to be revised. The drawback of the existing UGC and centrally sponsored

funding schemes is that they tend to overlook institutional autonomy in designing and implementing projects. Funds are generally available only for implementing centrally designed schemes. This should go. In a vast country like India, there is a great need for contextualization of centrally sponsored programmes as also for bottom-up-planning and implementation of schemes. The present tendency to give greater funds to already well off institutions to help them scale greater heights in excellence would imply that less and less resources will be available to new institutions and old institutions which, for various reasons, have been left behind in development. An equitable criterion based on feasibility assessment of local schemes needs to be drawn up, the major principle of which should be to give a helping hand to the weaker and needier institutions with a potential for better performance. This aspect of central assistance needs to be pursued through persistent campaigns. Funding priorities of the state should be tuned to the objective of ensuring that every higher education institution has a minimum level of human and physical infrastructure facilities to ensure that no one is denied higher education simply because he/she is poor. Individual institutions may be encouraged to generate funds without compromising equity and excellence. Funds could come in the form of contributions from the public, non-profit philanthropic bodies of parents, the alumni, or through collaboration with industry, which will have to be properly directed and accounted for. Consultancy, assignments and sponsored projects may be undertaken by higher education institutions on the basis of well-defined principles, ensuring full democratic rights and freedom of speech. The right to publish the results of research also should be ensured.

(3) Several institutions in the state have been receiving foreign grants for various purposes such as construction and maintenance of buildings, conduct of various programmes and courses and training of faculty etc. Adequate provisions should be incorporated in the rules of these institutions to ensure transparency and accountability for such transactions. Academic collaboration may be restricted to research level activities in frontier areas, exchange of students, teachers, credits etc.

(VI) Teachers and Students

(1) Recruitment, training and motivation of teachers and students and their mutual relationship are crucial areas that need careful consideration in any reform aiming at improving quality in higher education. Ideally, teachers and students should be treated as senior and junior partners engaged in a joint endeavour for

exploring new vistas of knowledge and wisdom. But in practice, it is not always so. Application of common criteria and practices in recruitment, training and motivation could inculcate a sense of commonness of purpose among teachers and students. The recruitment of teachers and the admission of students in higher education institutions should be governed by the principle of balancing the objectives of expansion, excellence and equity. The principles of merit and reservation should be observed both in the recruitment of teachers and in the admission of students in all institutions of higher education, whether government, aided or unaided. A College Service Commission may be constituted for creating a pool of potential teachers through a transparent and academically relevant selection process in accordance with UGC regulations. While teachers could be appointed to government colleges on the basis of merit and reservation by the College Service Commission, aided colleges could select teachers from among applicants in the merit list approved by the Commission. Unaided college managements should also be persuaded to appoint teachers from the Commission's list. The admission of students could be held centrally by the universities. Besides ensuring merit, a system of open, transparent, non-exploitative recruitment and admission process could inculcate a sense of self-respect among teachers and students, which is an essential component of academic work culture.

(2) There should be adequate provision for in-service training of teachers at regular intervals. Fresh recruits should necessarily undergo a course in the pedagogy of higher education within the first two years of their joining service. The triple roles of teaching, research and extension should get adequate coverage in the course. The duration of such a programme should not be less than three months. This should be followed by refresher courses of three week duration once in five years for updating knowledge and pedagogic practices. More academic staff colleges may be set up for teacher training. Teacher training and student learning should take place simultaneously through interactive sessions within and outside the classroom. The monologue of the teacher has to be replaced by multiple dialogues facilitated by written assignments, seminars, workshops, group discussions, shared experiences like lab work, field visit etc. The tutorial system will have to be strengthened. This would become practicable only if the teacher-student ratio is pegged at manageable levels, a maximum of 30 at the undergraduate level and 20 at the post graduate level. The system of teaching assistants would also have to be introduced either by giving fellowship to research

scholars, wherever possible, or by appointing part time teachers who could share with the regular teachers a part of the additional workload that comes with the tutorial system. The research students should be inducted to conduct tutorial classes. Motivation is the key to teaching and learning. Extrinsic incentives like attractive service conditions for teachers and prospects of immediate employment for students are very important motivating factors. But these are not enough. Teachers and students would become joint explorers in learning only when they share the joy of learning on the one hand and cultivate healthy interpersonal relationship. An effective tutorial system and democratic governance through representative bodies consisting of teachers and students will go a long way to foster mutual understanding and trust between teachers and students. An objective, transparent, ameliorative system of mutual evaluation by teachers and students would be beneficial to both. It could ensure self-improvement and academic accountability of teachers and students.

(VII) Commercialization

(1) A contentious area of governance in higher education in the State has been the status of educational institutions run by religious minorities. The minority question in Kerala has its unique dimensions. The minorities run a majority of the educational institutions in the state. Traditionally, these institutions imparted quality education with charitable motives and the services rendered by such institutions used to be widely acclaimed. But of late, there has been a growing tendency to commercially exploit the demand for quality education in the state. The minority tag was sought to be pressed into service in this context to extract special concessions in governance of the institutions, especially with a view to controlling the admission process and the fees levied from students. Every attempt by the state government to rein in the commercial practices in education has been resisted by raising questions of constitutional privilege of minorities in the field of education. There can be no two opinions on the need to protect the special privileges of minorities. It is a constitutionally guaranteed right. But the moot questions are the following: (1) Who are the minorities? (2) What are their special rights? Minority right is a part and parcel of the constitutional right to equality. Positive discrimination for achieving equality is justifiable only when it does not amount to reverse discrimination. More over, an equitable right for education cannot be equated with entrepreneurial rights for commercial

exploitation of education. So long as special rights are sought to practice charity, religious minorities which suffer from educational deprivation need to be given special privileges in education. It is necessary work out an appropriate deprivation index in respect of various communities to identify minority educational institutions deserving special privileges.

(2) Another aspect of commercialization of higher education is the practice of extending distance education through off campus centres licensed by universities. The off campus education through franchising arrangements adversely affects both quality and equity. Universities act as rentiers of education by entrusting the business of running off campus centres to educational entrepreneurs. Distance education is the most inexpensive form of higher education. It is estimated that it is six times cheaper than face-to-face learning. It has the potential for democratization of higher education. But the noble objective is defeated to raise resources to close the gap between revenue and expenditure in universities. This is sought to be justified in the name of internal resource mobilization for the benefit of regular students. Comparatively better off students who pursue face-to-face education in universities and colleges are subsidized by their less fortunate cousins through this arrangement. This unethical and unhealthy practice has to be discontinued forthwith.

(3) A third aspect of commercialization of education is the predilection towards foreign collaboration by institutions in the state. It is a part of the general global trends as also of the fascination for foreign degrees which is largely sustained by money earned through Non Resident Indians (NRIs). What is needed is a policy that promotes quality and prevents commercial exploitation of students. Academic collaboration among educational institutions in the state and reputed institutions outside the state /country need to be encouraged. However, such collaboration has to be worked out within the parameters of state specific regulatory mechanisms. The state should resist the temptation to join the GATS regime, which is intended to facilitate commercialization of education at the international level. Internationalization of higher education, as opposed to globalization of higher education, should aim at creative collaboration for academic innovation rather than commercial exploitation through academic colonization.

VIII. Democratic, Decentralized Administration

(1). The Government, universities and affiliated institutions have different but mutually complementary roles in higher education. Broad policy decisions which

have long term implications on the system of higher education in the entire state have to be taken by the Government. Since constant changes in policy could adversely affect the pace and priorities of development, the Government in power may take the initiative to arrive at a political consensus on the broad direction of development through a process of dialogue. Though such an exercise, may not be always be fully successful, it might help narrow down areas of divergence. Even this would be no mean achievement. The universities should be able to translate the educational vision of the State into viable academic programmes and implement them directly through their departments and constituent colleges and indirectly through affiliating institutions. Individual institutions should have the freedom to innovate within the broad framework developed by the universities concerned.

(2) The reforms in the governance of higher education is an area which requires immediate attention. It is important to break down the question of administrative reform into separate units that deal with various aspects. However, the basic principles of governance in all educational institutions at all levels should be the same. A system of decentralized administration with appropriate mechanism for ensuring social accountability at each stage of decision making and implementation should be put in place in all educational institutions starting from universities to individual colleges.

(3) The affiliating universities in the state have a top-heavy over-bureaucratized system of administration which is inimical to academic governance. Till an alternative is put in place, the system of affiliation has to be so reformed to make it manageable and governable. The affiliating system which can facilitate academic collaboration among a number of institutions and monitor their working has continued relevance in this age of global competition, as individual institutions may not be able to withstand the challenges of corporate intervention in education. One of the suggestions debated today is reducing the burden of affiliating universities by reducing their size. Smaller universities with not more than 25 to 30 institutions affiliated to them would be the optimum size. The affiliating universities should also dispense with their responsibilities for distance education and private registration. An Open University may be established which could cater to the requirements of distance learning , private learning and continuing education in a much more effective manner than is being provided at present by the affiliating universities. Properly planned and executed, the Open

University System could ensure quality on par with traditional universities, especially in the context of the latest developments in Information Communication Technology (ICT). The governance structures of the universities like the Senate, Syndicate, Academic Council, Faculties and Boards of Studies should be constituted democratically, giving representation to different segments of society and the academia. The size of these bodies should be such as would promote functional efficiency and adequate consultations. A system in which responsibilities are shared by these bodies would be more effective than a hierarchical system of decision making in which responsibility is carried over from a lower body to a higher body. However, the effectiveness of a system of shared responsibilities would depend much upon cultivation of healthy practices like mutual recognition and respect.

(4) The scheme of autonomous colleges has not found favor with the state for a long time. Despite its promotion by the U.G.C the scheme has not received wider acceptance in many states. The apprehensions regarding the misuse of freedom on the one hand and the concerns about the academic capabilities of individual institutions to cope with complex curricular demands have become more relevant today than ever before. At the same time, the large affiliating universities have been snail slow in bringing about much needed academic reforms. A way out appears to be the promotion of the scheme of cluster of colleges. The U.G.C had mooted the scheme in the 10th plan. But it could not be implemented. But the scheme is worth trying. The principle of the cluster is that of sharing and co-operation as opposed to exclusion and competition. The operational strategy is for neighbouring institutions to come together on the basis of an MOU. The governance of such clusters could be entrusted with bodies constituted with representatives drawn from all institutions that join together, the representatives of the university and the local body concerned. The programmes that would be undertaken by the clusters could vary from cluster to cluster, depending on the needs and facilities available or proposed to be set up. The principles of equality and mutual sharing should be observed both in the distribution of powers and responsibilities among the institutions that constitute the cluster. The state may set up as many viable clusters as possible within the next few years. The possibility of such clusters eventually developing into universities could be an added reason for promoting the scheme of cluster of colleges.

(5) The governing structures of individual institutions need to be given special attention as a big chunk of actual teaching - learning and most of the extension work take place in these institutions. Eventually these institutions have also to develop into important research centres. The present governance structures of these institutions give little authority to the stakeholders--- the teachers, students and parents--- in governance. The governing bodies of individual colleges should be re-constituted in such a way as would give an important role to elected representatives of teachers, students and parents in them. The College Council could be transformed into an effective body for democratic decision making by altering its present power structure and representation. Elected representatives of teachers, students and the non-teaching staff should have a decisive role in decision making. The decisions taken by the council should be binding, in so far as it relates to the internal administration of the institution. There should also be departmental committees which would be responsible for decision making at their level and for coordinating the implementation of such decisions. Principals should be appointed either on the basis of seniority or through open selection from among teachers with minimum of 15 years of teaching service. The tenure of the principal and the head of the department should be limited to a maximum of 5 years, after which the incumbent should be substituted either through fresh selection or rotation, depending on the mode of appointment.

A FIVE -YEAR PROGRAMME OF ACTION (POA)

- 1.** Increase public spending on education to the tune of 6% of SGDP and 30% of the state budget, of which 1/3rd should be set apart for higher and technical education.
- 2.** Expand and diversify educational facilities to levels adequate enough to provide access to at least 30% of the relevant age group, covering diverse areas in higher and technical education.
- 3.** Give priority to the co-operative and Government controlled institutions in the self-financing sector.
- 4.** Public-Private-Partnership may be permitted in such a way as would make available private resources for public use.
- 5.** Fill up all existing vacancies of teachers on a priority basis and abolish the system of guest/contract faculty
- 6.** Establish Academic Staff Colleges (ASC) in all Universities
- 7.** Set up a College Service Commission for the recruitment of teachers.
- 8.** Institute a centralized system of admission of students through universities.

9. Modernize infrastructure in existing institutions. Improve the use of ICT in all educational institutions.
10. Separate Government, aided and unaided streams from one another, spatially and administratively.
11. Continuously update curriculum and syllabi and review the system of Grading, Semester, Credit, Continuous Internal Evaluation and Student Feedback with a view to further consolidating and improving the reforms.
12. Provide avenues for academic collaboration between higher education institutions in the state with those outside the state and the country.
13. Implement Right to Information Act in all higher education institutions.
14. Set up a comprehensive state-level Data Bank on Higher Education.
15. Establish clusters of colleges across the state and incrementally confer greater and greater autonomy, with a view to gradually transforming them into full fledged universities.
16. Establish an Open University and de-link distance/private learning/ continuing education from regular universities.
17. Establish extensive scholarship and interest free loans schemes with a view to providing equitable access and improvement of quality in higher education.
18. Revise Acts and statutes of Universities to make the governance structures of universities and colleges more academically oriented and socially accountable
19. Protect and strengthen the democratic and organizational rights of students, teachers and non-teaching staff.

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