

Higher Education in Kerala: A Way Forward

“The higher education in Kerala needs immediate upgradation to be able to create a new generation of enlightened graduates in different disciplines. The time has come to design, in the language of technology, Higher Education 2.0, to illumine the future.” (Theme Paper, KSHEC National Seminar, June 2012)

Having made such a determination early in its term, the KSHEC set about designing a Higher Education 2.0. The areas for immediate attention were identified as infrastructure, teachers’ training, use of technology, research, autonomy and internationalization.

In the last four years, the Council has formulated a number of recommendations with the assistance of the best educationists in India, who headed the concerned Committees. If implemented fully, these recommendations can lead to the creation of a new system of education in Kerala.

Policy

A new Higher Education Policy is contained in the relevant report. This is in the nature of a menu of activities, from which the Government could pick and choose. Closely related to this is the report on the review of university acts. The universities could examine the model act recommended by the Committee within a period of six months so that legislation could be introduced in the legislature.

Infrastructure

The advent of RUSA was welcomed for improving the infrastructure in Government and aided colleges. But the Government decided that RUSA would apply to the Government institutions only at the initial stage. A grant of Rs.20 crores each for five universities and 2crores each for 15 colleges has been allotted, but no fund has reached any institution till the end of September 2015. MHRD should be pressed to make further allocations and include the aided colleges in RUSA.

Teachers’ Training

One of the first recommendations we made was to set up a Faculty Academy for mandatory training of every faculty recruit. The Government approved this, but no appointment has been made to lead the Academy. The Council has been organizing training programs for

teachers and administrative staff. The Higher Education Department and the Academic Staff Colleges also have training programmes. But early establishment of the Academy is essential to have a composite programme of training of teachers.

Use of Technology

Every HEI claims to use technology for teaching, but in actual fact, working systems are not in place and there is no interest among the teachers or the students to use the academic resources available on the net. MOOCs are still not well known in the academic community. A survey made by the KSHEC revealed that new equipment should be purchased to enable the HEIs to use technology. A report on IT@Colleges with recommendations to supplement the equipment is available. Once this is done, MOOCs could be made compulsory to obtain credits.

Research

The quality of facilities for research and the research itself are very poor in the universities and colleges. A detailed study of research in the universities is under way and its recommendations should be implemented as soon as possible.

Autonomy

This is an area in which results of the efforts of the KSHEC are on the ground, with a number of colleges having autonomous status. Most of them have already begun to show improvement in quality. More eligible colleges should be made autonomous. The target should be to have about 100 autonomous colleges in the next 10 years.

Internationalization

KSHEC has been successful as a catalyst of internationalization of HEIs. A Semester Programme was conducted in the Kerala University for the first time. Serious efforts should be made to continue and expand the programme. Universities have been funded to prepare special programmes for foreigners and to disseminate the information abroad. Funding should be provided for building suitable hostels for foreign students.

The foreign students in Kerala have a number of problems on account of no attention being given to them. A one window facility to deal with their problems has been promised, but nothing is in place yet. Long waiting for public defence of theses and degrees create hardships for foreign

students. Long delays take place in admitting ICCR scholars. These should be streamlined if we are to attract more foreign students to Kerala.

Global Education Meet 2016

A Global Education Meet with the objective of increasing international cooperation is taking shape for early next year. The Meet is expected to contribute to the International Higher Academic Zones the Government proposes to establish. The focus of the Council in the next few months will be on the GEM 2016.

Assessment Council

One of the first proposals made by the Council was to establish a Kerala Assessment and Accreditation Council. The NAAC and UGC have indicated that they will welcome the formation of a Council. But the formation of the Council has been delayed. Early action on this will be desirable.

KSHEC is proposing a workshop for the colleges not yet accredited by NAAC. Director, NAAC is expected to participate.

Gender Justice

A Committee headed by Prof. MeenakshiGopinath has submitted a major report on Gender Justice on campuses. The issues are serious and urgent. Immediate implementation of the report is essential to avert major problems on campuses.

Police University

KSHEC report on a Police university is pending with the Government. It assumes importance in the light of major security problems facing the state. Such a university will meet the needs of security in the public and private sectors.

International Arabic University

KSHEC has recommended an International Arabic University to enhance cooperation with the Arab countries. Kerala's Arabic asset must be utilized to build bridges with the Arab world.

Private Universities

KSHEC has recommended allowing private universities in Kerala. Establishment of private universities will enhance quality of higher education by bringing in resources for a new generation of universities. Adequate safeguards have been built into the system to avoid profiteering and exploitation.

Cluster of Colleges

The creation of Clusters of Colleges has not worked well on account of prejudices and unwillingness to accept anything new. Most aided colleges have remained outside them and the Government Colleges have been half-hearted about the idea. A beginning has been made with the commencement of common courses, a sports meet and setting up of common smart classrooms. The purpose of the clusters is to share resources with a view to turning them into new universities. The programme needs to be revamped and implemented with vigour.

Erudite Programme

The programme has brought very many eminent people to our colleges and universities, giving our faculty and students the opportunity to interact with the thought leaders of the world. The programme has been energized, but the resource crunch is an impediment.

KSHEC Scholarships

The KSHEC scholarships have grown over the years and benefitted the student community across the board. Voluntary contributions have been very low, in spite of our efforts to raise resources from the public. The Government has been contributing most of the resources. This must be continued as the scholarships are meeting a dire need for support of needy and bright students.

New Education Policy

The KSHEC has been part of the recent state level consultations on a New Education policy. Most of the issues being considered have already been examined in detail by the KSHEC. The consultations have taken a bottoms-up approach, which has facilitated discussions at the village, block and district levels. The expectation is that the process will result in formulating a policy, based on the established values of democracy,

secularism and public well-being, will ensure continuity and meet the requirements and challenges of the twenty-first century.

The higher education in Kerala is in dire need of reform and the recommendations of the KSHEC show the way forward. The sooner the recommendations are implemented, the better it will be for the younger generation.

Apart from the financial crunch, administrative delays and lack of coordination, the mindset of the people is also an impediment in reforming higher education. A sense of resignation that nothing can be done in Kerala provides an alibi for inaction. The Government, universities and colleges should work in unison to change the mindset of the public to make them accept change. Earlier experience has shown that measures implemented for the public good get accepted eventually. The leadership of the Government should go a long way in changing the mindset of the public at large.

The time for study and review is over. Now is the time for concerted action. Time is running out for reform of the higher education system in Kerala.

T.P.Sreenivasan