

THE KERALA STATE HIGHER EDUCATION COUNCIL

THE SCHEME OF CLUSTER OF COLLEGES

REPORT

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Committee for the Scheme of Cluster of Colleges

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THE SCHEME OF CLUSTER OF COLLEGES

A. Vision Statement

- 1. Concepts and Practices:** The idea of establishing clusters of advanced centres was mooted by the Kothari Commission as one of the possible means for extension of excellence from the centre to the periphery. The UGC has been pursuing the project of clustering higher education institutions with the objective of optimum utilization of the existing facilities for the expansion of higher education. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) has recommended that autonomous status be given to some clusters of colleges, as a part of restructuring undergraduate education. The clusters of colleges have come up in Western systems, bringing together the advantages of bigness and smallness, that of independence and interdependence. Different models have emerged in the process. Clusters have been set up around administrative structures, which would coordinate the functioning of the units. Individual institutions have also grouped together on their own to share the benefits of mutual cooperation. There are also clusters with one dominant member supporting smaller units. Clusters have been formed for specific purposes, like sharing Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in teaching-learning, civic engagement by institutions of higher education etc. Apart from sharing resources, the Clusters have provided opportunities for teachers to develop and offer new courses. Students have gained by exposure to experts in different institutions. The possibilities of opening up new areas of knowledge have emerged in the process. Obviously clusters have developed in response to the infrastructure and academic needs. The College Clusters proposed to be set up in different parts of the State could draw upon the above concepts and practices.
- 2. Shared Vision and Principles of Association:** Each cluster would be a voluntary association of partnering colleges. A shared vision of the broad objectives of higher education and the immediate needs of the partnering institutions are crucial to the conceptualization and implementation of a scheme of cluster of colleges. The national goals of access, equity and quality of higher education should be shared by all partnering colleges as part of a common vision. A governance structure and administrative mechanism for ensuring the realization of the triple objectives through the optimum

utilization of existing infrastructure and promotion of new co-operative ventures will have to be evolved. Similarly, the functions of teaching-learning, research and extension should all be promoted by the clusters. But the implementation of the triple functions through various programmes could be taken up incrementally, depending on the feasibility of the programmes and the preparedness of the participating colleges. However, the basic principle of association would be the same for all clusters: the benefits accruing to each institution must be greater than the energy each institution expends.

3. Principles of Governance: Apart from the common vision, the following basic principles should inform the governance of all college clusters.

(1) **Equal Status:** Irrespective of the differences in the infrastructure available in the partnering institutions, all institutions joining the cluster will have equal status. This could be institutionalized by incorporating provisions for equal status of all partners in the governance and administration of the cluster and by ensuring equality of opportunity in sharing existing facilities and developing new facilities.

(2) **Collective Decision Making:** All decisions concerning the cluster would be taken collectively through democratic process. Since commonality of purpose is important in the effective functioning of the clusters, all decisions shall be taken unanimously as far as possible and by two thirds majority of those present and voting, in case of a division.

(3) **Autonomy and Accountability:** The academic objectives sought to be achieved by clustering cannot be realized without a certain degree of autonomy in the functioning of the clusters. But the additional freedom has to be earned by incorporating provisions for social accountability in the governance and administrative structures of the clusters. The principles of democratic representation and decision making should be incorporated in the governance systems of the college clusters.

(4) **Independence and Interdependence:** The partnering colleges will have a dual identity, as independent colleges and as partners in the cluster. Necessary adjustments will have to be made by the partnering colleges for the simultaneous implementation of the programmes particular to the college and that of the cluster. The Principal of the college concerned will be responsible for coordinating the cluster programmes in his/her institution along with other regular programmes.

(5) **Physical Proximity:** The effectiveness of the cluster arrangement is partly dependent upon the physical proximity of the clustering institutions. The sharing of physical and human resources would be possible only if the member colleges belong to the

same locality. Only colleges within a radius of 15 kilometers need be considered for partnership within a cluster.

(6) **Optimum Size:** The size of each cluster should be such as would facilitate the realization of the advantages of interdependence and independence. The principles of togetherness and separateness should be simultaneously recognized in order to preserve the identity of each institution even while being a partner of a larger system. Clusters of five to ten colleges would be ideal for combining the advantages of bigness and smallness.

(7) **Partnership of Public Funded Institutions:** Since one of the objectives of the cluster would be to enhance social justice in higher education by sharing subsidized public facilities among marginalized sections of the people, the cluster partnership must be limited to government and aided institutions. The question of self-financing institutions forming clusters among themselves may be taken up at a later stage, after reviewing the experience of the working of the clusters of public funded institutions.

(8) **Localized Implementation:** While all clusters are expected to share the same vision and the same long term agenda of action, the priorities in the implementation of the programmes and the finer details of implementation of the programmes would be decided within each cluster through a process of democratic decision making, taking into account the local needs and aspirations and the preparedness of the partnering colleges.

(9) **Incremental Implementation:** The success of the cluster experiment would depend on the degree of willingness of all partnering colleges to share existing facilities and to undertake common ventures, on the extent to which they could come together for the common good. The fact that such altruism is slow in developing needs to be appreciated by identifying less complex programmes in the beginning and putting off programmes involving complex relationships to an appropriately later date, giving time for relationships to mature. The principle that patience pays in the long run should be the rule for all clusters, even as there could be exceptions to the rule.

(10) **Role of the Affiliating University:** The affiliating university would continue to regulate the partnering colleges in the conduct of their individual programmes. But the clusters will be free to design their own programmes. Such programmes need be submitted for the approval of the University, only if they are permanent programmes involving certification by the university. The provision for setting up clusters and the details of the relationship between the affiliating university and the college clusters should be spelt out in the Acts and Statutes of the affiliating universities.

(11) **Role of the Government:** The Government should facilitate setting up of clusters through liberal grants and encourage joint ventures by the cluster colleges by approving them and financially assisting them. Only aided programmes approved by the Government would be introduced in the clusters on a permanent basis. Preference should be given by the Government in granting NOC to joint ventures under the cluster arrangement.

(12) **Memorandum of Understanding:** Apart from provisions in the Acts and Statutes of affiliating universities, the partnering colleges in each cluster should enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which will clearly specify the nature and extent of the relationship among partnering colleges and lay down the modalities for the functioning of the cluster.

4. Functions and Responsibilities: The cluster of colleges shall progressively share existing facilities in partner colleges and undertake common ventures for promoting access, equity and quality of education. With the above objectives, the Cluster of colleges shall undertake activities for the promotion of teaching-learning, research and extension. The following list of possible programmes is illustrative:

- (a) Sharing of resources such as laboratory, library, auditorium, seminar hall, playground etc.
- (b) Faculty exchange programmes.
- (c) Common facilities for research
- (d) Introduction of five year integrated programmes
- (e) Introduction of innovative credit courses at UG/PG level
- (f) Organizing training programmes for teachers and office staff.
- (g) Introduction of e-learning and network connectivity
- (h) Digitization and networking of libraries
- (i) Introduction of add-on / certificate / diploma courses
- (j) Clustering among departments in the member colleges
- (k) Institution of scholarships and measures to promote merit and equity
- (l) Introduction of common examinations and evaluation systems
- (m) Conduct of common sports activities / competitions
- (n) Conduct of common cultural activities / competitions
- (o) Organizing common programmes for NCC/ NSS volunteers
- (p) Adoption of a village
- (q) Introduction of other extension programmes

- (r) Common research publications and news letters
- (s) Publication of books for popularization of higher knowledge
- (t) Institution of chairs
- (u) Conduct of extension lectures
- (v) Common hostel accommodation
- (w) Implementing common programmes for entrepreneurship, career counseling and employment
- (x) Development of special infrastructure programmes for differently-abled students
- (y) Introduction of any other programme for the promotion of teaching-learning, research, extension
- (z) Introduction of any other programme for the promotion of access, equity and quality of higher education

5. Governance Structures: The governance structures of clusters should be such as would ensure equal and adequate representation of partnering institutions, democratic decision making, effective implementation of academic programmes, functional autonomy and social accountability. The following structures may be common to all clusters:

(1) **Governing Body:** The Governing Body will be responsible for taking policy decisions on behalf of the cluster and for approving the annual budget and audited statement of expenditure and for initiating all new schemes. It shall consist of the following members:

- (a) Principal of each partnering college
- (b) Representative of the management of each partnering college
- (c) Elected representative of the teachers of each college
- (d) Elected representative of the college union of each college
- (e) Nominee of the State Government
- (f) Representative of the District Panchayath
- (g) Representative of the Syndicate of the affiliating University
- (h) Two educationists nominated by the Government

The Principal of a partnering college shall be the chairperson of the Governing Body. The term of the Chairperson will be limited to two years. Vacancies will be filled up on the basis of rotation among partnering colleges. While every effort should be made to fill up the post of the Chairperson through consensus, the principle of seniority among incumbent Principals may be followed, if there is no consensus. The Chairperson- in-

waiting shall be the Member Secretary and shall be selected through the same process as that of the Chairman. The Governing Body shall meet at least three times a year. It shall be competent to decide the procedure for its meeting and implementation of the decisions taken by it. The quorum for the meetings of the Governing Body shall be one third of the total membership and decision shall be taken by two third majority of those present and voting.

(2) **Executive Body:** The Executive Body shall be responsible for carrying out the decisions of the Governing Body and for preparing the budget and annual statement of expenditure for the approval of the Governing Body. It shall consist of all the Principals of the partnering colleges. The chairperson of the Governing Body shall preside over the meetings of the Executive Body and the Member Secretary of the Governing Body shall be the Member Secretary of the Executive Body as well. The Executive Body shall meet at least once in two months. The administration of the college cluster shall be vested in the Executive Body. The day to day administration shall be carried on by the Member Secretary in consultation with the Chairman. The administration of the funds shall also be vested in the Executive Body. Over head expenditure for the administration shall be budgeted and shared by the partnering colleges. There would be no need for a Central Secretariat, at least initially. As the cluster network grows in complexity, a permanent administrative set up may be established. The Executive Body will be responsible to the Governing Body.

(3) **Academic Committee:** The Academic Committee shall be constituted as decided by the Governing Body, observing the principle of equal representation to all partnering colleges and rotation of headship. The functions and responsibilities of the Academic Committee would be as decided by the Governing Body. Sub-committees of the Academic Committee may also be constituted by the Governing Body for the performance of various academic functions, as and when required.

6. Funds: The funds of the college cluster shall include all funds received from the Government, UGC and similar funding agencies as also funds collected by the Cluster and donations /endowments received.

B. Programme of Action (P O A)

- (1) The State Government may initiate steps for setting up clusters of colleges at Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Trissur, Kozhikode and Kannur over the next three years.
- (2) A three-member Implementation Committee consisting of the representatives of the Government, University concerned and Higher Education Council may identify the partnering colleges at various locations and take steps for the constitution of Governing Bodies of various clusters.
- (3) The Implementation Committee will coordinate with the Governing Bodies of various cluster colleges for setting up the clusters. A mapping of facilities available in the partnering colleges would be undertaken to arrive at an understanding on the facilities which partnering institutions are willing to share and on the common facilities that could be built up over the first two years of the inception of the cluster.
- (4) The State Government may release grant-in-aid @ rupees one crore per cluster to the implementation committees concerned which shall constitute the initial capital investment for setting up the clusters.
- (5) Necessary amendments may be made in the Act and Statutes of the affiliating universities after discussing the proposals in various Universities.
- (6) UGC and Central level funding agencies may be approached by the State Government for special grants.
- (7) Extensive awareness programmes may be organized in the partnering colleges.

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