

West Bengal State Council of Higher Education

Summary Record of Discussions in the Meeting of the West Bengal State Council of Higher Education held on 13 June 2016 at Bikash Bhaban, Salt Lake, Kolkata

Dr. Partha Chatterjee, Hon'ble MiC, Higher Education Department and Chairperson of the Council presided over the meeting.

The list of attendees is attached.

The Chairman welcomed the participants and said that in the previous five years, the State Government had considerably expanded the higher education system with an emphasis on equity; now the time had come to focus on excellence and quality issues. He exhorted the Vice Chancellors to play a leadership role in restoring the State's higher education system to the glorious position it had once enjoyed.

The minutes of the last meeting of the West Bengal State Council of Higher Education held at Town Hall on 11/12/2015 were read and confirmed.

The Principal Secretary, Higher Education Department made a short presentation of the priority issues that needed to be addressed in the days ahead, and sought suggestions from the distinguished participants.

After a thorough discussion, the following decisions were adopted:

- a) Efforts to be made to introduce the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) at the UG level, as per UGC's Guidelines. While all the Universities were following CBCS at the PG level, there was a need to introduce the same at the UG level also. For this, several preparatory steps would be required, primary among them being shifting to a semester system, reducing the disparities or differences between the syllabi of different Universities (for allowing for a lateral entry of students between different universities), etc. The Vice Chancellors agreed that they would take time bound steps to study UGC's Guidelines on CBCS and make efforts to implement them at the UG level. It was agreed that the Council undertake a study for preparing the roadmap for CBCS implementation at the UG level, clearly bringing out the reform issues and administrative and financial implications involved.
- b) A related issue was updating the syllabus of all universities, starting with the UG level. It was felt that the course content and syllabi in most higher education institutions were in urgent need of being updated and modernised to keep in step with the demands of the country and economy. To ensure students of West Bengal perform well at the national

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and global level, and also to improve their employability quotient, it is imperative that the syllabus of all universities in the State adopt the latest syllabus, especially at the UG level. To achieve this objective in a time-bound manner, it was unanimously resolved that the WBSCHE undertake an effort nodally to update, revise and reform the syllabus for each subject (starting with the sciences) in close consultation and collaboration with the Universities, and circulate the same to the Universities for deliberation and adoption in terms of their Statutes and official procedures. It was felt that a committee of eminent academicians be formed for overseeing the task of syllabus revision at the UG level in a time-bound manner.

- c) In this context, it was reported that a similar exercise has already taken place in respect of the B. Tech. (Engineering) courses in the State, where based upon feedback from the chambers of commerce and industry, and in association with eminent subject experts from IIT, Kharagpur, the revised syllabus is ready to be introduced in MAKAUT, Jadavpur University and Burdwan University, to start with, and later, in Calcutta University and Kalyani University. This exercise, it is felt, will render the pass-outs from the State's engineering colleges more up-to-date and thus more employable.
- d) In this context, it was also reported that based on the recommendations of an Expert Committee headed by Prof. Mita Banerjee, Vice Chancellor, West Bengal University of Teacher Training, Education Planning and Administration (WBUTTEPA), all teacher training institutions conducting B. Ed./B.P.Ed./M.Ed./M.P.Ed courses had switched to a uniform syllabus from the academic session 2015-16, based on the NCTE Regulations, 2014.
- e) The UGC's concern over incidents of ragging was delved upon, and it was informed that the Higher Education Department was launching a strong publicity and awareness-generation drive about its zero-tolerance approach towards ragging on the campuses of all higher education institutions. The Vice Chancellors were requested to display prominently the publicity material (printed and distributed by the Higher Education Department) on their campuses and also ensure the same on the campuses of their affiliated colleges. Vice Chancellor, MAKAUT was requested to arrange distribution of the flex banners to all the engineering colleges centrally. Similarly, the Director of Public Instruction was requested to centrally distribute the material to all the Government and Government-aided colleges in the State. It was also reiterated to the Vice Chancellors that their Anti Ragging Committees should be vigilant during the admission season and in its immediate aftermath. Similarly, Anti-Ragging Squads in each of their affiliated

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institutions should be made functional and active. All-out efforts to be made to prevent incidents of ragging, and take exemplary action against any incidents of ragging.

- f) Since admission season has started, and some institutions hold on to candidates' original testimonials to discourage them from applying elsewhere, there was a need for the Universities to stop such practices from taking place. A candidate's freedom of choice cannot be restricted by an institution by detaining his original documents. Also, UGC's instructions on refund of fees in the event of a candidate withdrawing his candidature after admission, are very clear and unambiguous. Based on the timelines, a candidate is entitled to the refund of fees paid by him, if he decides to withdraw his candidature. All the Vice Chancellors were requested to sensitise the institutions, especially the private ones, under their affiliatory control about the UGC's instructions in this regard, so that students seeking refund of fees do not face any harassment.
- g) The contents of the Higher Education Department's G.O. no.65-Edn(U) dated 16/1/2016 in terms of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 were discussed, including the various provisions for persons with disabilities (PWD) such as reservation of seats in admission/ recruitment exercises, reduction in examination/ application fees charged by the Universities, relaxation of marks for admission/ recruitment exercises, relaxation in the duration of exams (allowing extra time), relaxation in the upper age limit in admission/ recruitment. The Vice Chancellors were requested to ensure implementation of the provisions of the above mentioned Government Order.
- h) The Sexual Harrassment of Women at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 was discussed and it was agreed that a proactive approach would be taken in this regard in all higher education institutions in the State. The Vice Chancellors were requested to ensure that the Internal Complaints Committee, as envisaged under the Act, are in place and operational in all the Universities and their affiliated institutions.
- i) The West Bengal Delivery of Public Services Act, 2013 was discussed and the Universities which had still not identified the services to be notified under the Act, were requested to do so immediately and forward the draft proposal to the Department of Higher Education so that a Notification could be made early. Officially notifying the different services would make the delivery of services time-bound and render the University / college administration more accountable to the stake-holders. In this regard, the Hon'ble Minister particularly reminded the Vice Chancellors to publish their Academic Calendars by the end of June and their Examinations Schedule by the end of August

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positively. This would serve as a confidence-building measure amongst the students, who would be afforded more certainty in planning their future, including pursuing studies outside the State or even abroad.

- j) The House was informed that more than 110 higher education institutions in the State have obtained NAAC accreditation (A or B) in the current cycle, and many more are in the pipeline. It was reminded that funds under RUSA have been tied to obtaining NAAC accreditation. At least a Letter of Intent (LoI) was necessary for an institution to be considered for funding assistance under RUSA. All the Vice Chancellors were requested to expedite obtaining NAAC accreditation for themselves as also pursue their affiliated institutions to obtain NAAC accreditation at the earliest. UGC has made accreditation mandatory for all higher education institutions and failure to do so entails disincentives as well as penal provisions.
- k) The National Ranking Framework was discussed, and it was seen that due to lack of awareness, most higher education institutions in West Bengal did not participate in the first round conducted by UGC/MHRD. If West Bengal is to be promoted as a Higher Education hub, then its institutions must feature high in the national rankings. The Vice Chancellors agreed that data collection for the NIRF and similar ranking exercises should be a continuous process in each institution, through a dedicated team. It was agreed that in the second round of NRF, efforts would be made by all higher education institutions to participate strongly. The documents/ details can be accessed from the NIRF website.
- l) It was also felt that the State-aided Universities need to increase their monitoring of their affiliated institutions. Regular inspections by the Inspector of Colleges and their staff are necessary to enhance the University's supervisory control and discipline. This would help improve the academic and administrative performance of the colleges. The Vice Chancellors agreed to send quarterly reports to the Department of Higher Education, for which a common proforma would be designed.
- m) Implementation of e-governance was discussed at length and the House was unanimous that use of ITeS was a must in improving the academic, financial and administrative efficiency of the universities. VC, West Bengal State University mentioned the critical role of encryption and other technologies to bring in transparency in the examination and evaluation system, besides granting digitised marksheets and Degrees by the universities. A 'Degrees Depository/ Vault' was also discussed where all Degrees issued by a University could be digitized and accessed at the click of a button by the University

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authorities. This would especially help in verification of Degree requests received from various employment authorities from across the country and even abroad.

- n) To promote the use of ITeS in higher education, it was decided that all the higher education institutions would be encouraged to install high-speed data links/ wifi in their designated e-learning spaces, so as to provide internet connectivity to the students and other stakeholders, free of cost. The introduction of virtual classroom was also discussed, and it was decided that to start with, two virtual classrooms could be set up in each of the State-aided Universities and Government colleges in 2016-17. The virtual classroom would have a high- end computer, projector, audio system, projection screen and other ancillary fixtures to enable presentation of educational material in audio-visual format as well live streaming of lectures from the internet.
- o) As a measure of abundant caution, the reservation of seats for SC/ST and OBC students was highlighted and the attention of the Vice Chancellors was drawn to the statutory requirements and obligations in this regard, and they were asked to sensitise all concerned in view of the ongoing admission season. The process of de-reservation of seats has been described in the Rules and has to be followed in letter and in spirit by all the authorities. All the Universities will be asked to send the reservation status once the admission process is over.
- p) All the Universities were requested to complete the updation of their Statutes/ Ordinances/ Regulations, etc. in a time-bound manner. They were advised to adopt the Uniform Leave Rules as finalized by the Higher Education Department so that the teachers can start getting the benefit of the same without any further delay. The same is the case with encashment of leave salary, where universities have been asked to suitably amend their Statutes for teachers to start getting the benefits.
- q) All RUSA-funded institutions were reminded that registration under the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) is mandatory since all funds in 2016-17 from GoI will flow through this electronic banking channel. RUSA institutions were also reminded to expedite utilization of funds and submission of UCs so that the remaining funds could be obtained from GoI.
- r) It was also agreed that once the registration of newly admitted students (UG and PG) is over (expected by end of September), the ideal time frame for the conduct of students union elections in the State's higher education institutions would be from 1 November 2016 to 31 January 2017, with the same methodology and arrangements to be made as were notified by the Higher Education Department in September 2013.

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The Chairman emphasised the importance of discipline in maintaining an academic ambience on the campuses, for which the students and teachers would have to collectively work together. He requested all the Vice Chancellors to take time-bound action on each of the action points deliberated and decided upon.

The meeting ended to and from the Chair.

Sd/
(Dr. Partha Chatterjee)