

Renovation and Rejuvenation of Universities

(An Interim Report)

1 March 2009



**Report
of
'The Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of
Higher Education in India'**

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Preamble

The government of India, through a notification issued by the MHRD in February 2008, constituted a committee to a) review the functioning of the UGC and the AICTE and, b) critically assess their role and preparedness in providing institutional leadership to the emerging demands of access, equity, relevance and quality of higher education/technical education and the university system. The terms of reference also included assessment of the role that the UGC and the AICTE play in determining and enforcing standards of higher/technical education in state universities and looking into the possibilities of introducing a system of incentives and disincentives so that national standards of higher education/technical education are not compromised or diluted. The committee was also mandated to examine UGC's mechanisms in coordinating standards of higher education vis-à-vis the functional role of other statutory agencies such as AICTE, MCI, DCI, NCI, NCTE, DEC, etc. Later, the nomenclature of the committee was changed and it was named as 'The Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education in India'.

The committee felt that it was important to understand contemporary realities of the higher education sector in India and also the expectations that people in general have from this system before making any recommendation regarding restructuring of the agencies that monitor and regulate it. The efficacy of any monitoring or regulatory agency would be judged by its ability to respond to these changes and expectations. Any measure to restructure the UGC and other regulatory bodies will have to be determined by a clarity on the new challenges that have emerged in higher education. These challenges emanate from the dynamic growth of this sector in India. Going by the recent debate on higher education, it seems that there is a general agreement in the Indian society that there is a need for new policy directions. Absence of a coherent policy frame will cause chaos leading to a crisis.

The committee is aware of the work that has been done by various other committees and commissions on this issue, the most recent being the report of the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) on Higher Education. The committee shares the concerns articulated by the NKC regarding several issues on higher education. It feels that these concerns will have to be addressed keeping in view the geo-cultural and geo-political diversities In India, which play a crucial role in the shaping of higher education in the country. This also requires wide-ranging consultation with the academic community.

The urgency of reform in the higher education system has arisen because this sector has hardly seen any major reform in the last forty years. The world around us has changed dramatically but our higher education continues to operate in the old policy frame. There is a need for a major paradigm shift in this sector which would not happen with small incremental and unrelated changes here and there.

Recognizing the need to understand the complex ground reality, the committee travelled across the length and breadth of the country and had direct interactions with a wide range of academia. It held consultations with the heads of the academic institutions, which included public and private universities, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), different professional institutions along with the members of the academic community, including teachers, researchers and students. These consultations were held at Thiruvananthapuram, Pune, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Amritsar, Kolkata, Varanasi, Guwahati, Bangalore and Delhi. Individual interaction with scientists, other professionals, and representatives of industry, students, researchers and teachers helped the committee to gain an insight into the nature of the problems and challenges facing higher education in India. The committee also invited comments over the internet. Its consultations were widely covered by the media, generating further feedback from various sections.

The absence of institutionalized and well-structured research on different aspects of higher education in India has led to a situation where many different kinds of perceptions and prescriptions are articulated without any supporting data and research. Despite this limitation, the committee gained a deeper understanding of the critical issues afflicting the Indian higher education sector by direct interaction with the academic community and has made some suggestions which could help to resolve them. The committee has sought to reflect the consensus in the academic community at large on the desired direction of higher education in India. Even though many eminent academics have reflected on the issues of higher education in the past, the committee recognizes the unique call of the present moment when the higher education system has grown and expanded in a way radically altering its character.

The committee is aware of the numerous problems that the system of higher education is facing in India. They range from the issues of shortage of competent faculty, their service conditions, the access to higher education, the fee structure, regional imbalances and a host of others. The committee does not seek to suggest or prescribe solutions to each of these problems. It has very consciously kept its focus on the essential and fundamental aspects of the critical educational processes, which, if not understood and addressed properly, would keep creating further distortions. These aspects include issues of the holistic nature of education, curricular renovation, autonomy of academics in general and institutions in particular and the desirable regulatory processes.

Higher education is primarily a state responsibility though there is a substantial role for the private sector. Issues of access, equity and social justice have to be considered concomitantly with the need for fostering quality and excellence so as to develop a creative and innovative human resource base. With this in view, the report seeks to reconstruct the basic idea of university.

The challenge that the universities and other higher educational institutions have to respond to is how to connect up the fragmented reality that has resulted from the powerful forces of modernity. It is the multi-vocal and contemplative nature of the university, which puts it in a most advantageous position to meet this challenge. It is desirable that there are different kinds of universities known for their different approaches and areas of strength. It is also necessary to avoid attempts to enforce uniform curricula and standards. It will be necessary to go beyond mere reform of the regulatory systems for higher education and to revisit the important epistemological issues underlying higher education. Creative and flexible mechanisms that ensure the autonomy of the diverse institutional responses should not be curbed. Such an approach is a precondition for producing an environment that nurtures a democratic, tolerant and inquisitive mind, ready not only to engage with but also create new ideas, free of regimentation. The committee hopes that the implementation of its suggestions will help to bring about the much needed paradigm shift in higher education.

1. Executive Summary

Calls for reforms and renovations in higher education are not new. The context in which this issue is being discussed now is, however, radically different. We are passing through a phase, which is witnessing an unprecedented growth in the number of aspirants for university education. This is also an era of emergence of new kinds of knowledge areas.

There is a resolve on the part of the state to enable 20% of the 18–22 age-group to enter the campuses of the Indian universities in the 11th Plan periodⁱ. A far greater number of young boys and girls, who are first generation school-goers of their communities, are now passing through the middle-level phases of their schooling. This has been possible due to various consistent efforts by society to ensure enrolment from social groups like the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, women, minority religious communities and other economically depressed groups, mostly coming from the rural areas. Their entry into the hallowed spaces of higher learning should critically change the way we have been looking at the goals and direction of the policies and institutional framework of higher education. The culture of the classroom and pedagogic methods will have to change drastically. This is keeping in view the fact that with the entry of a large number of first-generation university goers, the very profile of the university campus, which has remained unchanged since the colonial times, would be transformed. There is an urgent need to further democratize universities to make them more equitable and inclusive places which would relate to the real life demands of the society. At the same time, universities should be able to excite the creative imagination of the young minds and create an ambience which helps generate diverse kinds of creative and academic innovations.

Any new effort to suggest renovation of higher education will also have to take into account the fact that for the past two decades new economic forces have already made a decisive impact on the systems of higher education.

Opening up of new, technology-based, work areas has created a huge demand for the training of youth on a mass scale in these fields. Since the university structure had not anticipated this development, it was caught unawares. It has adversely impacted the work of knowledge creation, which was supposed to be the primary task of the institutes of higher learning.ⁱⁱ Chaotic expansion in many areas of higher education, largely outside the ambit of the university system, has not proved to be friendly to the majority of aspirants.

A sea-change of perception in the public mind about higher education has taken place. Traditional universities are now looked upon only as certifying agencies, with suspicion, and do not create public confidence, which is now drifting towards privately run universities and institutes. While there exist some centres of excellence in the private sector, most private institutions, instead of helping rejuvenation of higher education, have become commercial entities with very low quality.

The fear of the loss of the agency of the university and the pressure of the ever-expanding demand for quality education has been met with a nervous and hurried response. Creation of a few institutions of excellence and some Central universities, without addressing the issue of deprivation that the state-funded universities are suffering from, would only sharpen the existing inequalities. Mere numerical expansion, without an understanding of the symptoms of poor education would also not help.

A major area of concern which this expansion has not been able to address is an impoverished undergraduate education. The prospect of 6 millions of first degree holders passing through this system which has not renewed itself and has not been able to provide opportunities to the students to avail of a variety of curricular experiences which would be of relevance to their real life needs should lead us focus our attention on revitalizing our undergraduate programmes and prioritize them in our new scheme of higher education.

Renovation of higher education in India requires a focus on the very epistemology of knowledge, which has, since colonial times, determined the way the universities are designed. The dimensions of the growth in knowledge have begun to challenge the boundaries of disciplines, which so far have kept knowledge fragmented. The aim of education is to help the young find their role in the world at large and find ways to address the problems facing the society. It demands a holistic approach towards the human enterprise of knowledge and would lead us to walk away from the fragmentary attitudes responsible for the creation of stand-alone, specialized centers of higher education and the multiple structures of regulation that are set up to run such institutes.

Recent reforms in school education must now be reciprocated by significant changes in the university system, especially in curriculum and examination policies and governance systems. Treating education in a holistic manner logically implies an all-encompassing university system, dynamically and creatively responding to the ever-changing needs of life and society. Universities should thus become bodies of scholars growing in organic connection with society, taking responsibility for their decisions. Any regulatory system which has to cater to this sector should facilitate and catalyze this process.

There is an urgent need today to revitalize higher education and free it from an intrusive bureaucracy, mindless regulation and commercial pressures. Revitalizing the idea of university in an entirely new egalitarian context is the need of the hour.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) was set up as a statutory body with the mandate to perform an overarching function of steering higher education in the country. However, new structural necessities have emerged in the field of higher education, which could not have been visualized earlier while designing the UGC. Moreover, emergence of numerous national-level bodies, each looking

after a separate area of professional education in isolation, has further fragmented the policies and resulted in poor coordination in their implementation. To keep pace with the changes impacting education, the higher education sector in India would require a radically different and new regulatory organizational architecture replacing the existing ones, including the UGC and other bodies.

In this context, it is proposed that an all-encompassing apex body, to be called the Higher Education Commission (HEC), be set up to replace the UGC and other regulatory bodies with a larger mandate of overseeing all areas of post-secondary education. The new HEC would be academic in nature and exist to help universities and other centres of learning identify their roles and activities and in guarding their autonomy and facilitate the distribution of resources available among them, keeping in view their various needs.

2. The Idea of University

A university is a place where new ideas germinate, strike roots and grow wings. It covers the whole of the universe of knowledge. It is a place where creative minds converge, interact with each other and construct visions of new realities. Established notions of truth are challenged in the pursuit of knowledge. To be able to do this, universities have to be autonomous spaces. They are diverse in their design and organization, reflecting the unique historical and socio-cultural settings in which they have grown. Through research and teaching, they create, evaluate and further knowledge and culture. The principle of moral and intellectual autonomy from political authorities and economic powers is ingrained in the very idea of the university. This autonomy ensures freedom in research and training and it is expected that the governments and the society would respect this fundamental principle. Teaching and research have to be inseparable because the task of the university is not only to impart knowledge to the young people but to give them opportunities to create their own knowledge. Active and constant engagement with the young minds and hearts of the society also implies that the universities are to serve the society as a whole and, to achieve this, a considerable investment in continuing education is essential.

The founders of the Indian Republic, with these essential features of a university at the back of their minds, realized even during the freedom struggle that the future of Indian democracy depended largely on the ability of the society to create new knowledge. The enrichment and development of cultural, scientific and technical resources was to be done in centres of culture, knowledge and research, as represented by true universities. These expectations were to be fulfilled in a social context characterized by a sharp division between the rural and the urban, the elite and the masses, and between men and women. Since a university is based on the fundamental principle of transcendence and meeting of minds from diverse backgrounds, higher education was increasingly perceived as a means to overcome caste and class hierarchy, patriarchy and other cultural prejudices and also a source of new knowledge and skills, a space for creativity

and innovations. Higher education, therefore, was considered a national responsibility and the state had to make necessary provisions to realize its potentials.

The university has been also regarded as the trustee of the humanist traditions of the world and it constantly endeavors to fulfill its mission by attaining universal knowledge, which can be done only by transcending geographical, cultural and political boundaries. By doing so, it affirms the need for all cultures to know each other and keeps alive the possibilities of dialogue among them. It is also important to remember that the university aims to develop a scholarly and scientific outlook. This outlook involves the ability to set aside special interests for the sake of impartial analysis. Standing for more than specific factual knowledge, a scientific outlook calls for an analytical and questioning attitude and the continuous exercise of reason. All this requires us to go beyond specialized knowledge and competence. This universal approach to knowledge demands that boundaries of disciplines be porous and scholars be constantly on guard against the tendency towards cubicalization of knowledge.

Apart from resisting fragmentation of knowledge, the idea of a university should aspire to encompass the world of work in all its forms. Work constitutes the human sphere where knowledge and skills are born, and where new knowledge takes shape in response to social and personal needs. Indeed, the experience and culture of work represents that core space where the humanities and the sciences meet.

3. Problems of the Indian Higher Education Sector

Loss of the primacy of university in the scheme of higher education sector in India, erosion of their autonomy, undermining of the first stages of higher education, i.e., the undergraduate education, growing distances between knowledge areas and the isolation of universities from the real life outside etc., are the problems that characterize the growth of Indian higher education system. It is important that we develop an understanding of these issues before suggesting strategies to renovate and rejuvenate higher education in India.

3.1 Undermining undergraduate education

The years following school education form the most important stage of induction into adult life, including academic life and employment. In our country, the undergraduate years have remained the precinct of affiliated colleges, i.e., not as part of mainstream university life. Indeed, quite a few universities do not have undergraduate classes. In many universities, the faculty serving undergraduate colleges is given some opportunity to participate in postgraduate teaching at the university, but there is no such provision for the university faculty to serve in colleges. This arrangement illustrates the perceived hierarchy of the UG and PG stages of higher education. Treating UG education as a 'lower' level of learning, the Indian university system has perpetuated a source of its own intellectual malnourishment. It is the younger student studying in UG classes who is in the best position to raise basic questions on a host of issues while participating in the entrenched discourses of various disciplines. By not exposing oneself to UG-level teaching, university faculty, especially the senior faculty, deprives itself of a rejuvenating pedagogic experience.

It should be mandatory for all universities to have a rich undergraduate programme and undergraduate students must get opportunities to interact with the best faculty.

3.2 Low pedagogic quality

Despite many achievements to its credit in the past, the Indian system of higher education needs a radical recasting of the perception of knowledge entrenched in it. What is treated as knowledge in the prevailing setup is at best a body of facts, which occasionally leads to students gaining knowledge with varying, though usually low, degrees of success. The mode of transmission is generally quite poor in terms of its pedagogic quality. The manner in which the acquisition of knowledge by the student is evaluated is even poorer.

Strategies to improve the methods of teaching, learning and examining are undoubtedly required, and there are a number of cases where a substantial effort at improvement has been made. Yet, time and again, evidence has surfaced that such efforts have proved only temporarily beneficial. Similarly, attempts at restructuring the academic calendar, misconceptions of methods like semesterization, have had limited success. Systemic stubbornness is best expressed in the examination system, which, even in the case of the relatively better equipped and less rigid institutions, has remained quite manifestly traditional and incapable of distinguishing between different talents of students in a reliable manner. Similar to the school level, university-level evaluation practices simply broaden the scope of memorization-based questioning, with the occasional rote-based 'application' question masquerading as real-world problem solving. In doing so, they entrench the student's lack of ability to examine and understand the real world, as a result of which their engagement with people or issues remains scarce once they enter the world of work, with implications for their abilities as workers and citizens.

3.3 Distances: Within and outside

The Indian university has kept itself aloof from the local knowledge base of the worker, the artisan and the peasant. It has kept itself at a distance from the real world outside. Within the system, the distances are between disciplines. Within a single campus, disciplines grow in complete ignorance of each other's

presence even. This lack of dialogue becomes more profound when we talk of areas like engineering, medicine and teacher training. Here, we have ended up with statutory bodies, which exist purely for the task of regulation. While universities award engineering and medical degrees, it is ironic that they do not have the powers to determine whether an institution that claims to train engineers or doctors has the wherewithal to do so. Nor do they have sufficient say in designing the academic programmes, in professional disciplines, as these are largely influenced by statutory bodies like the Medical Council of India and the AICTE. Ostensibly, the university's loss of academic influence in this respect looks like a case of distribution of responsibilities. Yet, at its heart lie the erosion of university's concept of knowledge, and perpetuation of a divisive view of knowledge and skill.

It is important that universities relate to the world outside and the walls of disciplines are porous enough to let other voices be heard. It would also be necessary that the university education be seen in totality and subject areas not be designed in isolation.

3.4 Divide between research bodies and universities

Universities were historically conceived as spaces where teaching and research go together. They are closely linked. Research and teaching are simply different aspects of academic work. To teach effectively at the university level, one needs to actively engage in research. This was not questioned when only a small section of the élite had access to the universities and when university research was comparatively inexpensive. It seemed proper (and feasible) for undergraduates to be taught by people who were actively engaged in research and scholarship. Now, when universities have become mass institutions and research, especially in the context of science and engineering, has become very expensive, things have changed.

Over the years, there has been an increasing tendency to treat teaching and research as separate activities, although for very different reasons, with some wishing to preserve research as an élite activity. This distinction is being reinforced by separate policies, programmes and structures.

This disjoint between teaching and research has led to a situation in which, on the one hand, most of the universities have been reduced to the status of centres that teach and examine masses and, on the other hand, more and more elite research bodies are being created where researchers have absolutely no occasion to engage with young minds.

It would be necessary for all research bodies to connect with universities in their vicinity and create teaching opportunities for their researchers.

3.5 Isolation of Indian Institutes of Technology

One bright spot in the otherwise dismal scenario of higher education in India have been the Indian Institutes of Technology or IITs. There is little dispute over their claim to quality and excellence. They have also fiercely and successfully defended their autonomy over the years. IITs were created in the first phase of nation building, and kept out of the traditional university structure to give them free play to be able to help the nation have a pool of excellent engineering talent. To a certain extent, the IITs have succeeded. There is scope for IITs of India to be models of all-round excellence, like the famous Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the US. This requires rethinking to prevent isolation of the study of engineering from other knowledge areas. This realization is reflected in the initiatives of some IITs to introduce humanities and other disciplines. The desire of IITs to have courses in humanities and social sciences strengthens our argument that they need to expand their scope and assume the functions of full-fledged universities without losing their unique character. We can then look forward to the day when IITs would be producing scholars in literature, linguistics and politics along with engineering wizards.

3.6 University as an inclusive space

The role of higher education in creating an institutional space for dialogue and liberal inquiry is well recognized, but it is seldom appreciated in the context of establishing norms of democratic behaviour and exchange. In India, where social hierarchy and divisions are sharp, institutions of learning serve as sites where powerful social forces vie for dominance. The institutional capacity to maintain peace and a democratic process plays a critical role in shaping the ethos of this site. Peace in this context can be described as a pre-condition for rationally organized dialogue between contending forces, ideologies and viewpoints. If institutions of higher education fail to ensure peace on their own premises in this sense of the term, they cannot avoid failing in a far greater sense when they claim public money on a gigantic scale and lose public faith.

For a considerable length of time following Independence, institutions of higher learning succeeded in providing a space where dialogue between rival social forces and ideologies could take place in a peaceful atmosphere. However, over the last few decades certain distinct signs of the erosion of this space have surfaced quite often in different parts of the country. The situation has worsened over the last few years. Not only organized youth but the official machinery of the university has been willfully used to obstruct or subvert the possibility of peaceful debate and inquiry. Indeed, in several universities a long-term institutional damage to their capacity to serve as sites of peace has occurred. This is a matter of great anxiety, not just because it marks the erosion of institutional sanctity, but also because it distorts the idea of a university and its role in the creation of knowledge by free and open inquiry through research and dialogue.

The issue of geo-cultural diversities is another critical area where our universities have increasingly failed to act as spaces where students would

learn to respect diversity as a value. In a world where boundaries are blurring, it is important that we learn to admire differences and not try to homogenize everything.

3.7 State universities and affiliated colleges

State universities are still the backbone of higher education in India. Majority of our students get enrolled there and yet, it is the State universities which have been treated very shabbily in the matters of allocation of funds or creation of more facilities to help them in enriching their existing academic programmes. Development of all young people, be they in State-run institutions or Central institutions, is a national responsibility and, therefore, there cannot be any discrimination between the two. All benefits, which are thought to be essential for a Central university should be made available to the State universities.

Current structure of the university system has a large number of affiliated colleges associated with a Central or State university (where bulk of the enrollment takes place). This structure has burdened many universities with the management of academic content, examination, and the general quality of these colleges. In addition, while better affiliated colleges feel stifled by the university bureaucracy – delays, controls, and inadequate support – the better universities are affected by the limited thinking of the college leadership and their negative role in university processes. It is obvious that the better institutions are suffering.

It has been a plea of many academic planners that the colleges need to be treated as the foundation of higher education as are primary schools for school education. Qualitative development of these colleges should be our priority. While the initiative by the Central government to create more Central facilities in the field of higher education should be welcomed, one must not forget that money needs to be made available for the qualitative

development of colleges. Or, that even when new universities are created, they should begin with undergraduate education and build on this base their post-graduate programmes, thus becoming not only role models for the colleges in their States but also as resource for them.

The need is to “lighten the load” of these universities and freeing the better and large colleges to become independent of the university processes. It has been argued that underperformance of the State universities has a direct relation to their size. Many of the State universities have, over the years, more and more colleges affiliated to them, which has made it very difficult for them to perform the role of maintaining academic quality.

There is a view that optimum size of a university has not only a quantitative but also a qualitative dimension. The optimality of university has to take account of a critical level of students, teachers, disciplines, programmes of study and the needs of society and its emergence as a nurturer and creator of knowledge, which may vary across universities.

3.8 Poor governance of universities

Universities remain one of the most under managed organizations in the society. The governance structures are archaic and have not changed with changing environment to meet the expectations of its various stakeholders. While most other organizations in society, both public and private, have adapted themselves in terms of organizational design, mechanisms for conducting their business and motivating people, use of technology to bring effectiveness in operations etc., universities have not changed much. Hard rules that were framed for a past era still dominate rather than soft-processes and collegial consensus-making. All of these have led to centralization of decision-making and low involvement of faculty and students in most policy decisions affecting academics. These may have been the direct outcomes of low autonomy as well as low management skills amongst administrators at these institutions.

3.9 Interference in university functioning

Interference, from various political or commercial vested interests, in the functioning and priorities of the universities comes in many different forms and intensities. It touches all aspects of higher education and involves improper admission of students, pressures in selection of teachers, manipulation in appointment of senior functionaries like vice-chancellors, registrars and deans, purchase of equipment and allotment of construction contracts and so on.

A society with high propensity for corrupt practices in the higher education system should reflect on the long-term damages this entails. It should be possible to reduce this effect either through persuasion or exposure by a vigilant society failing which a significant number of disappointed and frustrated youth may take to ways that may lead to violence and social disorder. An attempt was made by the UGC not long ago, to demand academic and administrative audit of higher educational institutions, to be eligible for its support. This was meant to be essentially an introspection process with a viable internal quality assurance cell to overcome undesirable practices and enforce quality norms. This has now become defunct.

Making a cursory review of the quality of Indian institutions by whatever yardstick one may choose, it is gratifying to note that a substantial number of higher educational institutions demonstrate a credible record of quality and ethics. Most of these are Centrally funded institutions like Central universities, institutions of national importance such as IITs, several higher technology and management institutions and Some state-funded institutions. One common feature they share among them is their structure of governance, consisting of eminent persons, excluding politicians and including only a limited number of bureaucrats. Autonomy in the true sense is available to these institutions with the guidance and support of such governing bodies.

Similarly, the appointments of heads of such institutions, like vice-chancellors, directors etc., are made by Search Committees with candidates of impeccable credentials, keeping the best interest of the institution in view. It is deplorable that in recent years, choosing persons for such high-level appointments is becoming scandalous in several States involving political and financial considerations at the cost of qualifications and competence.

3.10 Interference and loss of autonomy

At this point of time when the university system in India is subjected to harsh criticisms, it would be worthwhile to examine the underlying processes that influence the functioning of our universities. The Kothari Commission recognized the imperatives of university autonomy and cautioned that, *“only an autonomous institution, free from regimentation of ideas and pressure of party or power politics, can pursue truth fearlessly and build up in its teachers and students, habits of independent thinking and a spirit of enquiry unfettered by the limitations and prejudices of the near and the immediate which is so essential for the development of a free society”*.

The report of the Knowledge Commission recognizes this phenomenon. It states that, *“the autonomy of universities is eroded by interventions from government and intrusions from political processes.”* It further adds that, *“experience suggests that implicit politicization has made governance of universities exceedingly difficult and much more susceptible to entirely non-academic interventions from outside. This problem needs to be recognized and addressed in a systematic manner within universities but also outside, particularly in governments, legislatures and political parties”*. The university system in India is unfairly condemned by comparing it with world-class institutions without pondering over the disabling resource crunches and vexing political interferences. It has been proved that wherever the higher educational institutions have a governance system which functions with a high degree of autonomy, their performance have earned national and international respect. The

absence of any sense of academic and administrative autonomy, introduces a high degree of educational and social distortion.

3.11 Subversion of the principle of autonomy

One needs to realize that blaming private initiative, political interference and other forces for the loss of autonomy of universities is not sufficient. An objective observer of the university system in India would accept that there was no rigorous resistance from within the academic community to the role played by socio-political and market forces to manipulate and subvert the normative structures of the university system. The subversion ranges from matters of policy implementation to appointments and the day-to-day functioning of the institutions. There is a need for deep introspection by the academia on the origins and the extent of the crisis that the higher education system is going through and on its own role in exacerbating this crisis. This introspection would reveal that there has been a willing abdication on part of the academic community, of the autonomy which was available to it. Education was made subservient to ideological compulsions which led to its loss of respect.

The independence of scholarship from power has often been put to test and regrettably the academic community has, on most crucial occasions, failed. It has resulted in a situation where it has become easy for those in power and the bureaucracy to curtail it as the academic community has proved itself to be unworthy of practicing it.

3.13 Growth of private-commercial providers

During the past two decades, even though there has been a rapid expansion of the higher education system, it has been mainly through private investments, since successive governments started reducing their investments in higher education. A large number of colleges and university-level institutions, including deemed universities and private universities established through State

legislation, have come into existence in recent years. There is a growing demand for further expansion of private institutions.

The implications of the increasing trend towards privatization of higher education need to be understood in terms of the system's enrolment capacity, programme focus, regional balance, and ownership pattern, modes of delivery, and degree of regulation, quality and credibility as well as the social concerns of inclusiveness.

To begin with, there was no policy or guidelines to measure the competence of the investor in starting and managing a technical institution other than the requirement that it should be registered as a non-profit or charitable trust or society. This lacuna was exploited by many investors, who have no understanding or experience of the responsibilities associated with higher educational institutions. The trusts or societies that were formed largely consisted of immediate family members — some of whom had little or no educational background, with some exceptions. All investments on the institution and all appointments and service conditions and, to a considerable extent, most decisions on admission of students in the management quota were under the control of such family trusts or societies. The principal or the other academic staff members were mostly excluded from these processes. They were asked to mind only the requirements of the university in terms of syllabus and examinations.

Though no specific studies have been done, it is widely believed the sources of funds utilized by such family trusts or societies are either unaccounted wealth from business and political enterprises (occasionally with some bank loans for purposes of legitimacy) or from the capitation fees charged from the students in addition to a plethora of unexplained fees charged whimsically by these managements. A few institutions, which were established by the joint contribution of a few decent citizens, were exceptions to this characterization.

In many private educational institutions, the appointment of teachers is made at the lowest possible cost. They are treated with scant dignity, thereby turning away competent persons from opting for the teaching profession. A limited number of senior positions are filled at attractive salaries, especially from other reputed institutions, mainly for prestige. Otherwise, there are many horrible instances of faculty being asked to work in more than one institution belonging to the management; their salary being paid only for nine months; actual payments being much less than the amount signed for; impounding of their certificates and passports; compelling them to award pass marks in the internal examination to the “favourites” and fail marks for students who protest illegal collections and so on.

It is true that in order to reach the goals of doubling the higher education capacity from the present level, it will be necessary to encourage participation of the private sector. Governments alone will not be able to cope with this demand. At the same time, governments cannot afford to abandon the responsibility for further augmentation of the existing capacity entirely to the private sector. From the experiences gained during last two decades, there are sufficient pointers to orient the higher education system towards a more respectable and credible system than what exists at present.

All private institutions, which seek the status of a university, will have to submit to a national accreditation system. An Institution working with a motive of private profit does not have the right to be called a university.

3.14 Affordability problems

Many private institutions charge exorbitant fees (beyond the prescribed norms) in the form of many kinds of levy (not accounted for by vouchers and receipts) and are unable to provide even minimum competent faculty strength.

The non-affordability of the programmes of such institutions to a vast majority of eligible students is a matter of public concern.

The regulatory agencies have been unable to come to grips with the problems of capitation fee and unauthorized annual fees mainly due to deficiencies in enforcement instruments, and partly due to high-level reluctance to sort out this problem.

Since the norms for fixation of fees are vague, the quantum of fees charged has no rational basis. The illegal capitation fees range from: Rs. 1-10 lakh for the engineering courses; Rs. 20-40 lakh for MBBS courses; Rs. 5-12 lakh for dental courses; and about Rs. 30,000-50,000 for courses in arts and science colleges, depending on the demand.

Studies and research show that most of the private investment in higher education is in the field of engineering, management and medicine whereas the majority of enrollment is taking place in traditional disciplines. The private providers are, therefore, not putting their money in areas, which attract bulk of the students, especially, first generation university goers. This remains the responsibility of the state. It is the middle class, which has for long benefited from the state education system and is now breaking away from it.

3.15 Other apprehensions about private universities

The behaviour of the private universities has become a matter of serious concern to a large body of students and parents. There have been several instances of campus violence and related litigations. A detailed probe into the basic reasons for the concerns revealed that many of them were professional colleges that got approval from the regulatory bodies for university status. Immediately thereafter, they started admitting five to six times their intake capacity, without a corresponding increase in faculty strength or academic infrastructure. The classes and laboratories were conducted at strange hours like a factory production operation. The students who paid huge capitation fees

felt cheated. The students from the underprivileged sections could not get admission in many of them due to heavy capitation fees.

The existing guidelines and the Memoranda of Association (MOA) with the UGC were ambiguous and inappropriate to the new situation. Compounding the stigma is the offers made by some of them, after obtaining university status, to give “guaranteed” degrees at any level, including Ph.D., for a price. This has dealt a serious blow to the credibility of the Indian university degree.

3.16 Unhealthy growth in the number of deemed universities

Indiscriminate recognition of newly established educational institutes as deemed universities is another area of concern. Some of the private institutions took the deemed-to-be university route to get degree-granting powers. Between 2000 and 2005, 26 private-sponsored institutions got the deemed university status. Since 2005, the number of private deemed universities has increased to 108. By a notification of the UGC, it is no longer necessary for them to use the adjective “deemed” and they all call themselves simply universities. In Tamil Nadu alone, the number of private deemed universities has increased from 18 in 2007 to 35 in 2008 and many are in the queue. Though, the deemed universities do not have affiliating powers, many of them have a number of campuses spread throughout the country.

The provision for the status of deemed universities was made with a noble intent. It was felt that the institutions which had unique and distinct character of their own could enjoy the privileges of a university without losing their distinct character and autonomy.

According to the University Grants Commission, in its guidelines for considering any proposal for declaring an institution a deemed university under Section 3 of the UGC Act, "the institution should generally be engaged in teaching programmes and research in chosen fields of specialization which are innovative and of very high academic standards at the master's and research

levels. It should also have a greater interface with society through extramural extension and field-action related programmes."

In the first 10 years after the enactment of the UGC Act, eight institutions were notified as deemed universities. In the 1970s, the UGC decided that notification under Section 3 should be made only rarely in special cases and three institutions were conferred the deemed university status. There was a slight shift in the policy in the 1980s and 18 more institutions were added under Section 3.

Between 1956 and 1990, in 35 years, only 29 institutions were granted the deemed university status. In the last 15 years, 63 institutions were declared deemed universities and particularly in the last 5 years, 36 institutions, excluding RECs, have been notified as deemed universities. It may be argued that the increase in the number of deemed universities is commensurate with the increase in the number of institutions of higher learning in the country. What has raised the concern of the academic world is the fact that majority of these institutes are not established with any educational purpose, and they only end up deluding the students.

It would, therefore, be appropriate to stop the practice of according *de novo* deemed-to-be university status to any institution. Other institutions wishing to get deemed university status should demonstrate special capabilities as was originally intended and should be rigorously evaluated to see if they fulfill the holistic and universal concept of university outlined in this report. The institutions, which have somehow managed to secure such status should be given a period of three years to develop as a university and fulfill the prescribed accreditation norms failing which the status given to them would be withdrawn.

3.17 Multiplicity of regulatory systems

While in 1950, a few years after Indian Independence, there were only 25 universities in all, by mid-2008 there were 431 universities including 25 Central

universities, 230 State universities, 113 deemed universities and 28 private universities. There were also 20,677 colleges, over 5 lakh teachers and 11.6 million students enrolled in all these educational institutions.

Table: Growth in Higher Education in India

Institutions	1950	1990	1996	2008
Universities*	30	177	214	431
Colleges	750	7346	9703	20,677
Enrolment ('000s)	263	4925	6755	11612
Teachers ('000s)	24.0	272.7	321.0	505

Note: *includes institutions deemed to be universities.

Source: Compiled from *Higher Education in India: Issues Related to Expansion, Inclusiveness, Quality and Finance, UGC 2008* and <http://planningcommission.nic.in>

The expansion in higher education has been particularly rapid in the past two decades, with student enrollment growing at about 5 percent annually over the past two decades, a growth rate that is about two-and-half times the population growth rate. Recent growth is much greater in professional colleges, especially engineering, management and medicine, as well as in private professional courses catering especially to the IT sector.

The responsibility for the establishment and monitoring of the performance of this large variety of institutions has been exercised by many different statutory regulatory bodies as well as governments and universities, often leading to multiplicity of authorities and duplication of inspection and control. In this process, the need for stimulating innovations of curricula, experimenting with the approaches to teaching and learning, and establishing meaningful links with the society have rarely been emphasized.

Only a few organizations such as the UGC took major initiatives in fostering educational innovations such as setting up of inter-university centres to facilitate

national synergy in research efforts among universities and to optimize the investments in sophisticated research infrastructure. The creation of country-wide educational communication facility through multiple platforms and creating large-scale contents; the setting up of national network of libraries including e-journals for convenient access to higher educational institutions across the country; special incentives to advanced centres of research; and additional resources to institutions with potential for excellence were some of the other initiatives of the UGC in the recent past. However, the initiatives occurred randomly with no sustainable goals for further multiplication.

Given the national aspirations to promote a knowledge society, it is essential that the regulatory system propel the growth in the right direction. A well-designed regulatory system will also help to promote a high degree of professionalism in managing higher education institutions.

The higher education institutions in India are regulated by many statutory agencies such as University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE), Medical Council of India (MCI), Bar Council of India (BCI), Council of Architecture (COA), National Council on Teacher Education (NCTE), Indian Nursing Council (INC), Pharmacy Council of India, and so on. In addition, there are regulations of the institutions by Central and State universities as well as by the Directorates of College and Technical Education. Each of the regulatory agencies is governed by its own individual Acts.

The regulatory provisions of the various Acts are substantially different from each other since they were created at different periods by different ministries. The overall responsibilities for the entire higher education system assigned to the UGC are not validated in the provisions of other Acts. There is very little coordination among the statutory bodies in respect of degree durations, nomenclatures, approval mechanisms, accreditation process etc. There are

various stages of regulation such as approval, recognition, affiliation and accreditation.

A highly over-regulated system consists of interference by multiple agencies which tend to stifle innovation and creativity, increase inefficiency and breed corruption and malpractices. An under-regulated system encourages exploitation, contributions to disorder and erosion of social justice. Therefore, it is important to design a balanced regulatory system that is transparent and ensures accountability.

It needs to be realized at this stage that the creation of bodies like the AICTE, ICAR, MCI and so on has certainly helped in focusing attention on specialized areas. It has, at the same time, fragmented the higher educational sector in the country from a policy perspective. This has, on many occasions, created situations where different agencies have taken different views on issues of regulation and promotion of higher education. While the need to pay focused attention on some important aspects of education remains valid, it is imperative that a holistic view of education is not lost.

4. Recovering the Idea of the University

4.1 Theory and practice

It is often pointed out that our undergraduate and graduate programmes are too 'theoretical', the implication being that they are devoid of 'practical' experiences. Without going into familiar epistemological issues, we can say that a theory is as good as the power it has to explain the world. A theory is put to practice when a student attempts to use it to make sense of what she notices in the world. Conversely, by noticing something in the world and seeking an explanation for it, a student feels the need to have a theory.

The chasm that exists between theory and practice combined with the fragmentation of the idea of knowledge leads to the confusion that our system of higher education is suffering from. To overcome this, it would be necessary that the universities adopt a curricular approach which treats knowledge in a holistic manner and creates exciting opportunities for different kinds of interfaces between the disciplines, which is unthinkable today in most of the universities and institutions of higher learning.

4.2 The challenge of local knowledge

Engaging with the immediate world surrounding us is an important aspect of learning, both as a means as well as an end. Knowledge pursued with reference to the milieu is qualitatively different from knowledge, which is pursued in isolation from the surroundings. The difference becomes apparent both in the depth to which the acquisition of knowledge shapes the learner's mind and personality, as well as in the nature and productivity of the relationship between the learner and the teacher. Institutions of higher learning need to evolve their academic programmes by making them responsive to the problems of everyday life.

4.3 Curriculum issues and syllabus-making

Several aspects of the present-day system discussed above can begin to get addressed if the processes by which curriculum is designed and then syllabi are determined undergo improvement. There is need to ask a particular question as to what is the purpose of a university, especially at the undergraduate level, and then use the answers to develop a curriculum. At present, the design of syllabi is reflective of the entrenched examination system under which the student is asked to face a question paper at the end of the year, or in some universities, at the end of the semester. If the syllabi were to be designed with a view to inducting the student into a community of participant citizens, a new kind of institutional culture and ethos can be created in our general and professional colleges. For this to happen, all syllabi need to include a substantial part wherein the teacher and students are required to apply what they have learnt in the rest of a course on studying a local situation, issue or problem. The two parts need not be separate, but there should be sufficient room for the use of local data and resources to make the knowledge covered in the rest of the syllabus come alive as experience. Examples of this process of syllabus designing will need to be worked out in different disciplines, since an engineering or science course will clearly engage with local matters differently from history or political science. For this strategy of syllabus redesigning to succeed, evaluation and examination practices will also have to change, and certainly, there will have to be a change in pedagogic practices used by teachers.

4.4 Work experience as an aspect of learning

Exposing students to the world of work plays two related and essential roles. First, by helping them to understand the reality of different kinds of work, and those who perform this work, ranging from manual labour to intellectual tasks, it sensitizes them to the conditions of a universe of persons outside of their own. Second, it allows them to apply what they have learnt in the classroom to real-world situations, and in doing so not only makes them better prepared for their own entry into the world of employment or academic research, but also

strengthens their understanding of the underlying concepts they are supposed to have learned.

Curricular reform in this regard would include compulsory exposure and engagement with different kinds of work, in the form of summer jobs or internships, according to the circumstances and surroundings of the particular university, and should include both manual and other kinds of work/occupations, with a certain minimum set of occupational exposure compulsory for all students, irrespective of discipline. Evaluating students on these fronts would necessarily have to analyse how well they have understood, and are resultantly capable of applying themselves to work and problem-solving in these situations.

4.5 Learning across disciplines

Specialization in a given discipline is only valuable or remarkable in so far as it links that discipline with the real world, or allows the learner to contextualize her understanding of the discipline by seeing what implications it holds for her own conceptions of life and its various phenomena. At present, much of our education is uni-disciplinary or within a narrow spread, and where it does involve inclusion of disciplines other than the major one which the student is studying, it is in the form of 'subsidiary' subjects, which by their very nomenclature are seldom regarded as serious, either for the assessment they carry, or, least of all, for what content they may teach. Likewise, the teaching and syllabi of these subjects also respond, becoming poor in quality and motivation. Hence, the current provisions for learning across disciplines are unacceptable in most cases.

Yet, contextually understanding a particular subject or discipline, and making possible the application of its concepts, ideas or beliefs to worldly questions or issues is an acknowledged aim of education, particularly at the higher levels such as undergraduate education. Re-conceptualizing the latter in terms of integrating a given subject to which the student devotes a majority of her/his time with other subjects that are relevant to the primary subject, and which the student studies

with the aim of broadening her/his understanding and ability to apply different problem-solving techniques and approaches is therefore an essential addition to the current undergraduate education structure.

In order to make the teaching of these additional disciplines of high quality, and likewise to stimulate students' interest in these, it would be important to allow the students of a given subject to study their additional subjects along with those students for whom these additional subjects are primary. For instance, a mathematics student who opts to study philosophy or economics would attend philosophy or economics classes, and undergo the same evaluation in those particular papers, as would the students for whom philosophy or economics constitutes the primary subject. In conjunction with the following point, the integration of these additional, relevant subjects to the study of a given, primary subject would enrich, contextualize, and make undergraduate education more useful.

4.6 Rehabilitating professional education in the university

Substantial damage has been done, both to our universities and to institutions of professional education, by separation of the two. The pursuit of engineering and medicine, in particular, in colleges or institutes, which exist like islands, has incurred an incalculable social and cultural cost. Seventeen year-olds who move from a higher secondary school straight into an engineering or medical college, and who thereby have no means to gain exposure to any in-depth knowledge of society, its economy, politics and culture, have as much potential to become an impediment to holistic social development as they have for turning into excellent engineers and doctors in a very restricted sense. In the context of medicine, this matter has received some attention in a few exceptional institutions, but as institutions of professional education, medical colleges have evolved in isolation from the rest of the university, with the latter acting merely as a degree-granting or certification authority. In order to build strong epistemic bridges between different fields of professional education and the different

disciplines of science, social sciences, and humanities, it is necessary that professional institutions are returned to universities in a complete administrative and academic sense by the abolition of intermediary bodies set up to issue licenses to professional colleges alone, and to inspect them. Such a measure will open the possibility of new kinds of course-designing for professional learning in all fields from management and architecture to medicine and engineering, along the lines indicated in other sections of this report.

4.7 Teacher education

The preparation of teachers for all levels of school education is a responsibility of institutions of higher education. For historical reasons, the involvement of universities in school-level teacher education has been confined to secondary and senior secondary-level school teachers' pre-service training under the B.Ed. degree programme. The preparation of teachers for the primary and pre-primary levels is managed by the State governments. Although these levels have been recognized as being fundamental to the development of children and the nation, the absence of university-level interest has resulted in poor academic quality. One exception to this general picture is the Bachelor of Elementary Education (B.El.Ed.) course of the University of Delhi. The success of this course in establishing a benchmark of quality indicates how necessary it is to recognize teacher education – for all stages of school education – as a sector of higher education. The rationale for such a move is self-evident. Irrespective of the level at which a teacher serves, he or she deals with knowledge. Higher education is where knowledge is produced and therefore it makes sense to regard teacher education as a whole as a sector of higher education.

It is also necessary to introduce teacher education within higher education. At present, academic staff colleges are serving to provide refresher courses required by faculty to acquire eligibility for promotion. While this role is important, the manner in which in which it is being fulfilled is far from

satisfactory. It is necessary to develop full-fledged orientation programmes for newly recruited teachers in colleges and universities. Such courses should orient teachers towards the proposed curriculum framework as well as to impart communication and assessment skills.

4.8 Few premises on institutional autonomy of universities

- Any agency whose intention is to protect students from sub-par education is better off by providing information on the programmes and universities to the student rather than walk the slippery path of establishing minimum standards of quality (for education is about academic over-reach rather than reaching the minimum). The objective is also to ensure that universities follow national policies on equity and ensure that no student is turned away for want of financial resources.
- The above, however, may not ensure that certain national or social objectives will get achieved. Here, the above suggestion has to be supported with targeted subsidies to induce certain desired behaviour. This will be a wiser way of persuading universities to behave in a certain manner without coercion or intrusion in the autonomy of the institutions.
- The rest of the areas of failure in policy design & implementation (especially, when it comes to public interest) is hoped to be plugged through good judgment of policy-makers and university administrators.
- Decentralize decision-making to universities vis-à-vis the Central or State agencies.
- Decisions regarding an institution must be taken by its board of governors or other similar bodies as opposed to agencies in national or State capitals. The latter do not understand well the nuanced requirements of individual institutions.
- Learning and innovation requires un-encumbered thinking and building a sense of infinite possibilities in the minds of young students and faculty.

5. Reforming the Regulatory System

A holistic view of knowledge, as advocated above, would demand a regulatory system which treats the entire range of educational institutions in a holistic manner. All of higher education has to be treated as an integrated whole. Professional education cannot be detached from general education. It would be, therefore, imperative that all higher education, including engineering, medicine, agriculture and law, is brought within the purview of a single, all-encompassing Higher Education Authority.

The National Policy of Education (1986) and the Plan of Action, 1992 envisage the establishment of a national apex body for bringing about greater co-ordination and integration in the planning and development of higher education system which would include research.

The UGC has performed its overarching function of steering the higher education in this country. However, over time, new councils have been set up to promote and regulate specialized areas of education. Presently, there are 13 such professional councils created under various acts of Parliament.

It is proposed that the academic functions of all these professional bodies, including the UGC, be subsumed under an apex statutory body, an all-encompassing Commission for Higher Education. Rather than acting as bodies engaged in giving licenses to professional institutions, they should be looking after the fitness of the people who wish to practice in their respective fields. Similarly, any 'vocational' or technical education, which is post-secondary, should be the concern of the universities.

The Commission for Higher Education (HEC) would perform its regulatory in a manner that does not interfere with academic freedom and institutional autonomy. It would not take recourse to inspection-based approval

method. From the current inspection-approval method, it would move to a verification and authentication system. Universities are to be seen as self-regulatory bodies and the Commission is to be seen as a catalytic agency which is more interested in creating more and more space for the individuality of each university.

5.1 Objectives of the Commission for Higher Education:

- Prevent chaos in the expansion of higher education and to stop fragmentation of related policy-level decisions;
- Ensure autonomy of the universities and shield them from interference by external agencies;
- Encourage distinct institutional initiatives and protect the unique features of each university;
- Ensure continuous reforms and renovation in the area of higher education;
- Internationalize the nature of academic programmes while creating our own world class standards;
- Promote greater engagement with the State universities with an aim to eliminate the divide between the State and Central universities;
- Enable the rural masses to interact with universities; and
- Use the available funds efficiently and creatively and generate new resources.

5.2 Restructuring Universities

Universities have become strongly centralized at the levels of the VC and registrars with little or no participation of individual faculty. Institutions that are faculty governed (when it comes to academic leadership) are found to be more nimble and reactive to changes in the environment. This rigidity is largely derived from the controls currently exercised by the government. Delays in appointment of VCs, approval of faculty positions, approval of funds for new programmes,

disbursement of funds etc., and even pensions at times, are not uncommon. In addition, the academic institutions that are controlled either by the Central or State government are found to suffer from certain rigidity in developing innovative academic as well as compensation-related practices.

Persons associated with administering and managing academic institutions are most often not trained or equipped with knowledge of best or next practices in academia globally. Universities have not been able to attract talented administrators for a variety of reasons.

The leadership of universities is in the hands of government administrators as well as executive councils or similar agencies that are far removed from the institutions and do not have a good understanding of the issues of concern, needs of development and growth of institutions. In addition, these councils are too large in numbers to make nuanced decisions. Many a time, the boards or equivalent bodies are filled with ex-officio members who change so often that their presence on these bodies becomes disruptive. The VCs most often have low degrees of freedom in terms of administrative stretch.

Universities need the autonomy to operate in a healthy competitive setting. The university leadership must be driven by the objects of the institution and draw only macro policies from the government. They need to set their own policies and thereby experiment with strategies on university governance. They need to be accountable to the various stakeholders – the society, government, students, recruiters, alumni etc. It needs a governance system which is engaged with the university and comprising people who understand the ethos of the institutions. The role of the VC is to attract the best of students, faculty and staff to the institution by making their institution very attractive to these talents.

The governance structure of a university should be such as to minimize the role of government representatives in the university affairs.

The role of a VC is to provide academic leadership to the university, develop and execute the vision of the university including its growth and to ensure that the university is academically and financially healthy. This requires skills that reach beyond academic talent. The VC must enunciate a sound financial model for the university and undertake the fiduciary responsibility of the university. He/she also ensures that the regulatory requirements are met. He/she works with the Pro-VC and the Deans to manage the activities of the institution.

6. Recommendations

- i. Universities to be self-regulatory bodies to be assisted by hassle-free and transparent regulatory processes;
- ii. Universities to be made responsible regarding the academic content of professional courses. Professional bodies like the AICTE, NCTE, MCI, BCI, COA, INC, PCI to be divested of their academic functions, which would be restored to the universities;
- iii. Creation of an all-encompassing Commission for Higher Education, a central statutory body to replace the existing regulatory bodies including the UGC, AICTE, NCTE etc. (See Annex A)
- iv. Curricular reform to be the topmost priority of the newly created HEC which would create a curricular framework based on the principles of mobility within a full range of curricular areas and integration of skills with academic depth.
- v. Undergraduate programmes to be restructured to enable students to have opportunities to access all curricular areas with fair degree of mobility;
- vi. All universities to have the full range of knowledge areas. No single discipline or specialized university to be created;
- vii. Institutions of excellence like the IITs and IIMs to be converted into full-fledged universities, while keeping intact their unique features, which shall act as pace-setting and model governance systems for all universities;
- viii. Universities to establish live relationship with the real world outside and develop capacities to respond to the challenges faced by rural and urban economies and culture;
- ix. All levels of teacher education to be brought under the purview of higher education;
- x. New governing structures to be evolved to enable the universities to preserve their autonomy in a transparent and accountable manner;
- xi. Practice of according status of deemed university be stopped forthwith. It would be mandatory for all existing deemed universities to submit to the

- new accreditation norms to be framed on the lines proposed in this report within a period of three years failing which the status of university should be withdrawn. However, unique educational initiatives which have over a period of time enriched higher education by their innovations to be given recognition and supported properly;
- xii. Creation of a single accreditation window for all institutes of higher education;
 - xiii. Quantum of Central financial support to State-funded universities be enhanced substantially keeping in view the needs of their growth; and
 - xiv. Expansion of the higher education system to be evaluated and assessed continuously to respond to the needs of different regions in India in order to ensure not only equity and access but also quality and opportunity of growth along the academic vertical.

Annex A:

Role of the Commission for Higher Education

- Becomes the premier advisory body to the government on policy issues regarding higher education in India.
- Prepares and presents a Report on the State of Higher Education in India annually to the nation.
- Serves as think tank on higher education policy in the country: provides a vision of higher education to be reflected in a curriculum framework, benchmarks universities, compares with institutions globally, develops requirements of disciplines, proposes new education policies both for Central and the State institutions, and evaluates the costs and price of education.
- The commission would create appropriate norms, processes and structures for accredit [accrediting or accredited????] universities.
- Establishes transparent norms and process for entry and exit of institutions – the need is to make the process easy for good and serious proposals for setting up new institutions.
- Develops sources & mechanisms of funding for universities and other institutions.
- Initiates measures to ensure that governance in universities is done in a transparent and accountable manner.
- . Provides the mechanism for a national data base on higher education.
- Helps in creating an environment in academic institutions that is conducive to bring young people to take up academia as a career.
- Creates soft processes for interaction between students and teachers.
- Lightens the load of Universities.
- Develops a scheme to gradually free the universities of the colleges affiliated to them

Structure of the Commission for Higher Education

The Commission for Higher Education has to be a body which would inspire confidence in the academic community of India and serves as the voice of the academic community related to higher education and gains the serious attention of the policy-makers. Its structure and composition and the process of its formation has to be such that it acquires an autonomous character of its own.

It would have a seven-member board with a full-time chairperson. Of the seven members, one would be an eminent professional from the world of industry and one with the background of a long and consistent social engagement. All other five members would be academic people of eminence, representing broad areas of knowledge.

The Commission will initially consist of five divisions:

- ✓ **Future Directions:** Developing global benchmarks on student performance; university performance; salaries, potential programmes; new research directions; and articulation of needs of the government in terms of manpower etc.
- ✓ **Accreditation Management:** Creating an accreditation system that is independent of the government, providing annual feedback to universities, and organizing workshops etc.
- ✓ **Funding & Development:** Developing funding needs of universities, developing mechanisms for funding institutions, helping universities with development of corpus and good endowment management, managing the guaranteed student loan/scholarship programme, and funding the capex requirements of universities etc.
- ✓ **New Institutions & Incubation** including training workshops for first-time VCs as well as on themes like accounting, investing the corpus, communication within & outside the university, negotiations & managing vendors, good office practices, human resource management etc.
- ✓ **Information & Governance:** This division will focus on managing the data needs of the commission, display of information on universities, develop performance

parameters on the governance of universities, support other divisions with information as well as provide students with information on each university. This division will also inform the Accreditation and Funding & Development divisions of the performance or lack thereof, for each university, each year.

An eminent individual with a tenure of five years will head each division. Each board member will be an overseer of one or two of the divisions. Each division will have an advisory board. The advisory board will comprise eminent persons from India or abroad.

The chairperson and the five heads of the above-mentioned divisions would form the executive body of the commission, which would oversee all its functions.

A search committee comprising the Prime Minister of India, The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India would select the Chairperson of the Commission. This committee would also be selecting the members of the board.

The Commission will be independent of all ministries of the Government of India. It will have the autonomy to hire talent at various levels within and outside the government. It will also have the autonomy to define the compensation of the employees.

It is also crucial that HEC develops a talented group of employees who understand the proposed philosophy and see the difference between the existing and proposed processes.

ⁱ Higher Education in India: Issues Related to Expansion, Quality, Inclusiveness and Finance, UGC 2008

ⁱⁱ Kothari Committee Report, 1964