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Commonwealth Educational
Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)
New Delhi

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Ministry of
Human Resource Development (MHRD)
Government of India
New Delhi

Meeting of
Vice Chancellors of
State Open Universities

Open Educational Resources (OER):
Policy and Implementation Issues

4th September, 2015
Chennai

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Introduction

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) is an international organization established by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Vancouver, Canada, to promote meaningful, relevant and appropriate use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to serve the educational and training needs of Commonwealth member states of Asia. It has been in the forefront of popularizing Open Educational Resources (OER) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in Commonwealth countries. CEMCA has also formulated a Quality Framework on OER as a benchmark for Quality Assessment (QA).

The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) System in India has undergone a great deal of change since the first establishment of the School of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education, under the University of Delhi in 1962, and the establishment of the first Open University at Hyderabad in 1982. Today, there are 14 State Open Universities and one National Open University in the country. In addition, there are around 200 Directorates/Institutes of Correspondence Courses providing distance education services to learners. There has been a paradigm shift from correspondence courses, to distance education, to open and flexible learning. ODL has become a powerful medium for enhancing knowledge, acquiring skills and promoting life-long learning opportunities to a large segment of society, especially disadvantaged groups.

The National Policy on Education (1986) emphasized on making provisions for distance education to meet the diverse needs of learners in the country. The XII Five Year Plan of the Government of India focused on Excellence, Equity and Expansion as the three pillars for promoting higher education. Issues of quality, access and innovation pose major challenges for the higher Open Education sector in India.

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was constituted on 13th June, 2005 with a three-year term. As a high-level body to advise the Prime Minister, the NKC was given the mandate to guide policy and direct reforms, focusing on key areas such as education, science and technology, e-governance, etc. Easy access to knowledge, creation and preservation of knowledge systems, dissemination of knowledge and better knowledge services were the core concerns of the

Commission. The NKC in its Report (2009) under section "Open and Distance Education and Open Educational Resources" gave the following recommendations:

> *Development of open and distance education and open educational resources is imperative to achieve the objectives of expansion, excellence and inclusion in higher education. More than one-fifth of the students enrolled in higher education are in the Open and Distance Education stream. NKC recommendations on distance education focus on creating a national ICT infrastructure, improving regulatory structures, developing web based common open resources, establishing a credit bank and providing a national testing service. To supplement this, NKC also recommends that the production of quality content and leveraging global open educational resources, needs to be focused on in a comprehensive manner. We need to encourage open access for all material-research papers, books, periodicals etc.*

The Open Universities have a big role to play in realizing the goals envisaged by NKC. OER are a significant component of making open education possible. As COL embarks on its new Strategic Plan (2015-21), and being a world leader in ODL and OER, it continues to build on its commitment to promote lifelong learning, leading to sustainable development. With the mandate to promote ODL and OER, CEMCA felt it would be pertinent to convene a meeting of all the Vice Chancellors of State Open Universities in collaboration with Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to discuss the implementation of OER Policy, and development and sharing of OER.

Accordingly, a day-long meeting of Vice Chancellors of State Open Universities was held under the aegis of CEMCA, New Delhi and the MHRD on 4th September, 2015 at Chennai.

Objectives

The objectives of the meeting were:

- *To deliberate on the use, creation and adoption of Open Education Resources for improving Quality, Access and Innovation*

- *To formulate a strategy for national and institutional OER Policy.*

Simultaneously, the MHRD had also initiated the process of nation-wide consultations for the formulation of the National Education Policy for which 33 themes had been identified. Keeping in view its domain expertise, the theme of 'Promoting Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Online Courses' was assigned to IGNOU. To prepare recommendations for it, IGNOU has constituted a working group and a conceptual framework is being prepared and shared with universities and institutions offering programmes through distance mode. To contribute to the deliberations and make a high impact difference on COL's behalf, IGNOU was invited to make a presentation before the Vice Chancellors of State Open Universities with the purpose of getting their feedback and viewpoint on 'Promoting Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Online Courses'.

OER Policy Meeting

The meeting began at 9.00 am with registration of guests. Vice Chancellors or their representatives from State Open Universities, officials of MHRD and IGNOU participated in the meeting. (The list is placed as Annexure – 2).

Inaugural Session of the Meeting of Vice Chancellors of State Open Universities on OER Policy Issues

Prof. Chandrakantha Jeyabalan, Vice Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai welcomed the guests from State Open Universities, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Ministry of Human Resource Development and Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia. This was followed by a brief presentation on the status of ODL in India and appreciation of the role played by CEMCA and MHRD in promoting various initiatives and policies.

After brief interactions between participants to get to know each other, **Dr. Ramesh C. Sharma, Director, CEMCA** conveyed the greetings and message of Prof Asha Kanwar, President and CEO, COL. He also spoke about COL and CEMCA's plans to hold another expert consultation after all the feedback is incorporated into the draft recommendations on "Promoting Open and Distance Learning and Online Courses" under the New National Education Policy for which IGNOU has been identified as the nodal agency.

Dr. Sharma focused on the problems of ODL in India and stressed the relevance of academic programmes in the context of national priorities and digital India. He also spoke on pedagogy, learner support, quality control and recognition issues and preparedness for the 21st century. He discussed the role of web technologies, multimedia, mobile learning, and other ICTs for the promotion of ODL. He emphasised that these learning innovations helped the Open and Distance learning institutions to review their institutional mechanism, policy matters and technical framework. He also pointed out that OER have brought a paradigm shift from teacher-centred education to life-long learning. He expressed the hope that this meet would provide a platform for deliberation on technological advancements in the realms of open and distance learning and OER.

Prof. Nageshwar Rao, Vice Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi in his address focused on the need to formulate recommendations for the New Education Policy and how IGNOU has been assigned the task. He thanked COL for accomodating IGNOU and allotting it an entire session in this meeting so that the views, opinions and feedback from this premier distance learning institution could be obtained.

He spoke about the worth of distance education degrees in the eyes of employers, skills based education, MOOCs, expanding quality

of learning through DTH and the role of UGC and MHRD in promoting ODL in the country. He also stressed on the importance of Open and Distance Learning and explained the entire online facilitation process, from enrolment to examination. He expressed his concerns about the issues of inclusive and equal access of online learning which could be addressed by providing clarity on digital literacy. He appealed to State Universities to discuss the potential of online facilitation and come forward and discuss with their suggestions with MHRD and IGNOU. He assured that MHRD and IGNOU would examine and incorporate their suggestions in policy formulation.

Dr Nageshwar Rao emphasised that there are a number of issues that need to be addressed. The major ones are:

- While on-line services have been implemented by Open Universities in Admission, Counselling, Students Support Services, Examination/ Assessment is yet to be made on-line.
- Skill components have to be incorporated in the curriculum at various levels for the benefit of learners for suitable placement.
- ODL as a new concept has evolved through several stages to reach the present level of maturity. The system needs to be revamped and reviewed to help it evolve with changing time and newer technology.
- The implementation of MOOCs should supplement and complement the conventional education and as well the ODL. State Open Universities should provide impetus for the successful launch of MOOCs.
- The role of MHRD in supporting and promoting Open and Distance Learning in India is extremely crucial.

Dr. B. K. Bhadri, Assistant Educational Advisor, MHRD explained the proposed National Educational Policy (NEP) at length and stressed that the outcome of this meeting of Vice Chancellors would help shape the new policy.

He said that this meeting was crucial as the issues being discussed were of national importance. He thanked COL and CEMCA for organising for this meet and hoped that the inputs from experts would be valuable. He requested the Vice

Chancellors to come up with concrete suggestions so that they could be incorporated in the new National Education Policy. He assured that decisions taken in consultative meetings would be acted upon immediately for the benefit of students. He expressed his concerns that degrees of the ODL institutions are not being recognised by employers. For instance, Tamil Nadu Open University's B.Ed. degree is not recognised by the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission. He added that though IGNOU's self-learning material is considered very good, its degrees are not being given value. Why is this, he asked. He said that MHRD is a facilitator and the participants here should tell what us what is best for the ODL system in the country.

He informed that MHRD has nominated IGNOU as a nodal body to discuss the ODL system keeping in view the concerns of NPE. He emphasized that the aim is to facilitate our learners to reach their destination going through a convenient, comfortable, flexible and a relevant system as these are the priorities of MHRD. The relevance of ICT maximization in ODL system has become a paramount factor to improve and dissemination of knowledge. In this context, he felt the deliberations of the Vice Chancellors in this meet should provide useful suggestions and experiences of other distance learning institutions of other countries which could be considered for incorporation in the National Education Policy of Government of India that may show the country further next 20-30 years.

While implementing the NEP the mistakes that had happened in the past should not be repeated and only useful suggestions find place in the NEP keeping in view the interest of the whole country.

National Policy on Education-IGNOU's Session

Chair Person: **Prof. Suresh C. Garg,** Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Presentation: **Prof. Manjulika Srivastava,** Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Prof. Manjulika Srivastava in her presentation on the ODL system in India explained the Consultation Frame Work and the key issues of ODL.

She said that the 265 educational institutions (Central Government/State Governments /Private Institutions) offering ODL in the country are in dire need of improvement and innovation. She focused on Self-Learning with online education, Mobile Learning, Recognition of Prior Learning, and introduction of OER and MOOCs.

She pointed out the lacunae in the system notably the lack of parameters by NAAC to accredit ODL institutions, absence of a Credit Transfer Mechanism, and Technology Enabled Learning, and suggested the establishment of Open Universities in all states and planning suitable educational opportunities for people in rural areas, persons with disabilities, home-makers etc.

She emphasized the need for easy transfer and mobility of credit values for online courses like MOOCs and for job oriented and industry oriented Programmes. She suggested redesigning and revamping the system keeping the target group in mind. For this she said, it is imperative to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach, ICT based programme design and effective delivery system through e-modules. She felt that Prior Learning Assessment needs to be set up in all Open Universities with a 24/7 learner-support service. She reminded that a Centre for Internal Quality Assurance at Open Universities is mandatory. And stressed that Open Universities need a strong and independent regulatory authority.

Prof. Suresh Garg in his intervention focused on the emergence and growth of distance education in India. He stressed on improving quality of services in ODL and said that providing effective student support services is crucial to the success of the system.

He underscored the need of promoting systemic research in ODL, adding that technical, financial and human resource support has to be given to all Open Universities in India. He suggested that the material of distance education institutions be made available to learners online and be open for public scrutiny. He emphasized that excellence, innovation, quality control are necessary preconditions to improving quality.

The Vice Chancellors also shared their views on different aspects of "Promoting Open and Distance learning and Online courses" under the New Education Policy.

Although the Bill for the establishment of the Distance Education Council of India (DECI) is under consideration, we need to have Distance Education Commission for regulating ODL.

Dr Ramesh Sharma informed the gathering that the recommendations of the consultative meeting on NEP held on 01st September, 2015 with regard to the sub theme "On-Line Courses" discussed the issues of Capacity Building, Cultural Awareness, Infrastructure, Learning Resources, Offering of On-Line Courses, Establishment of an Accreditation Agency, Framework for Auditing, Monitoring and Evaluating the effectiveness of Online Courses, Personalised Learning, Learners e-Safety, Access Devices, Technology Enabled Assessment and Research and Innovations. These issues were also taken up for discussion with vice chancellors of State Open Universities.

The detailed minutes of this session are presented in Annexure-1.

Relevance and Strategies: Open Education Resources

Dr. Ramesh Sharma, Director, CEMCA made a presentation on the relevance of OER and strategies to be adopted for its implementation. Dr. Deka, Vice Chancellor, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), Guwahati talked about how KKHSOU adopted the OER policy and its benefits and challenges.

Deliberations on OER : Policy and Startegies

Prof. Rash Bihari Prasad Singh, Vice-Chancellor, Nalanda Open University (NOU), Patna raised the issue of legal status of online courses. He informed that the NOU is currently offering only one Course i.e., Certificate Course in Network Administration, which is yet to get recognition of the State and Central Government. He stressed that a Government notification in the Gazette Declaration of the Government of India is required for all Open Universities stating that the Certificates awarded by conventional universities and Open Universities are equal. He also emphasised the need of a separate Commission for Distance Education. He appealed that the credibility of the ODL system be restored with the support of the authorities.

Dr. Jeetendra Pande, Associate Professor, Uttarakhand Open University (UOU), Nainital opined that all the State Open Universities should have an OER policy and the wherewithal to implement OER. Duplication of work in OER ought to be avoided, but translation in other Indian languages ought to be promoted. He suggested opening an OER cell in Open Universities and that their facultys starting from Assistant Professors right up to Professors be trained and oriented towards OER. He suggested that every Open University should develop at least one OER. This should be vetted by others to enhance its quality.

Dr. Ravi Gor, Vice-Chancellor (Incharge), Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad spoke about the transformation in ODL over the years. He, stressed on conservation of resources and said that duplication of work in OER must be avoided but translations are necessary. He also stressed that communication among Open Universities must be strengthened for better development and growth.

He called for inter university exchanges of visits by the faculty to understand the working of other institutions. According to him, research needs to be promoted and projects on MOOCs and its pedagogy needs to be taken up with seriousness. He talked about the Omkar platform with student tracking. He also supported uploading eContent of all courses on the website which can be downloaded by learners.

Dr. Srikant Mohapatra, Officer on Special Duty (OSD), Odisha State Open University (OSOU), Sambalpur represented the youngest Open University of India. He said that higher education as a whole, is today at a crossroad.

Open Universities are not being allowed to offer Programmes in Medicine, Paramedical, Engineering and Law. This needs to be reviewed so that professionals in these sectors can upgrade their knowledge and skill through ODL. He said that Open Universities can be an effective means of serving this need of in- service professionals.

Highlighting the problems faced by learners, he said, that the print material of Open Universities often does not reach students on time leading to a lot of inconvenience. To avoid this, we need to move on to on-line courses. He recommended going in for OER. Focussing on the challenges of content design and delivery, he asked why we cannot have a consortium of Open Universities for content development and delivery on the lines of NPTEL.

Prof. S. C. Garg, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi favoured incorporating ODL initiatives on a national level (like eGyankosh) because such initiative have wider implications for the system. It will ensure that changes in a particular instutitions will not derail the entire scheme.

He refered to ePathshala and recommended OER and MOOC as a central repository.

Prof. M. G. Krishnan, Vice-Chancellor, Karnataka State Open University, Mysore expressed his disappointment with UGC's descision to stop Open Universities from launching on-line courses.

He stressed on the need for better coordination between MHRD and UGC. He pointed out that the Indian Parliament establishes National and Central Universities, while State Legislatures establish state universities but the latter do not enjoy the same status. This needs to change in the interest of the student community.

Dr. B. K. Bhadri, Assistant Educational Advisor, MHRD felt that MHRD's main concern is the welfare of students and suggested that universities should aim to provide assistance whevever necessary to student communities.

Student's needs should be the priority and only programmes useful for them should be offered.

ODL is always looked upon as a complementary or supplementary stream to the conventional system of education and if anything is developed using government funds, the same should be made available to the public through open access. OER-MOOCs have to be seamlessly accessible to all Open Universities. An OER Policy is required at the national and institutional Level to facilitate this.

Vice Chancellors of State Open Universities should write to their state's Public Service Commission to give recognition to programmes offered by Open Universities through ODL and on-line mode.

Prof. Praveen Jain, Director (IT), M. P. Bhoj (Open) University, Bhopal appealed for strengthening the ODL system through effective coordination between MHRD and UGC.

Prof. Subha Sankar Sarkar, Vice-Chancellor, Netaji Subhas Open University, Kolkata also asserted that the MHRD and UGC should work together to sort out the issues plaguing ODL.

He suggested that just as conventional universities have a Directorate of Distance Education for Distance Education Programmes, Open Universities should have a separate department for conducting face to face teaching.

Prof. (Smt.) Chandrakanta Jeyabalan, Vice-Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai focused on promoting skills development. She said that the

TNOU is a pioneer in providing skill education to rural people in Tamil Nadu. She emphasised that MOOCs have to be promoted in all Community Colleges and UGC should come forward to promote Community Colleges run by Open Universities. Offering Distance Education Programmes through MOOCs in regional languages needs to be encouraged, she said.

Dr. Hitesh Deka, Vice-Chancellor, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Guwahati said that the Bachelor's Preparatory Programme (BPP) has a two year duration, but it is still not considered as an equivalent qualification for admission to Bachelor's Degree. Responding to it, KSOU Vice-Chancellor, Prof. M. G. Krishnan added that BPP has been withdrawn from KSOU.

Dr. B. K. Bhadri, Assistant Educational Advisor, MHRD said that National Institue of Open Schooling (NIOS) may be linked with Open Universities for 10th and 12th Standard in states wheren there are no open schools. States which have State Open Schools (SOS), the SOS can be asked to take care of Bridge Courses for such students.

Dr. P. Thiyagarajan, Professor and Director, School of Continuing Education, Tamil Nadu Open University submitted that the BPP should be continued for the benefit of students who wish to obtain degree for social recognition and self enrichment.

Panel Discussion on Open Licences

Chair Person: **Prof. M. G. Krishnan,** Vice-Chancellor, Karnataka State Open University, Mysore.

Presentation: **Dr. Ramesh Sharma,** Director, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), New Delhi.

Dr. Sharma talked about Open Access, Open Content, Open Courseware, Open Source Software, Open Education, Open Educational Resources etc. The Web generations and the importance of Internet were also explained to the participants.

A brief was given by him about the factors which have lead to the popularity of sharing of educational resources. The major factors, according to him are Change in Philosophy, Affordability of Internet, Alternative Copyright Licences. He felt that social, technical, financial, and legal factors also give a boost to the OER.

It was in the year 2002 at the UNESCO Conference that the term OER was used first. In 1998 David Wiley coined the term 'Open Content'. The 5 R's Framework [1]-Reuse; [2]-Revise; [3]-Remix; [4]-Redistribution; [5]-Retain were also discussed. Technology and Platforms used to create OER were also explained. The recommendations from the OER Paris Declaration-2012 to government, institutions and teachers were also discussed. In India, the National Knowledge Commission recommended adopting OER and the government set up a national repository managed by the National Council for Educational Research and Training. Dr Sharma also informed that cooperation between academics and students, academics and institutions, academics and academics is also required to implement OER. The policies on OER from the countries like Japan, Thailand, South Africa, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Korea and India and the National Repository of OER, Open Author Creation, Open Text Book, On-line Educational Resources were also explained. In India, IGNOU, Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University, Kota and KKSHOU, Guwahati have adopted the OER policy.

Dr Sharma also talked about activities of COL and how member countries and institutions are supported. An overview of TIPS Frame work as quality assurance for OER was given. Its various parameters like T-Teaching and Learning Process; I-Information and Content; P-Presentation; S-System Technology were explained. An introduction on APTUS, a device developed by COL that works on solar power and is pre-loaded with contents like Khan Academy videos or Wikipedia, was also given, highlighting its use in areas where there is no electricity and Internet.

Recommendations

Various recommendations emerged from the discussion:

- Each State Open University would set up a Quality Assurance Cell (QAC).
- Manner of implementing OER in Open Universities has to be through a Policy decision and for this each Open University would create its own OER Policy.
- Sharing of OER among institutions should be clearly mentioned in the policy if learning material is prepared using public fund.
- OER may be developed in various forms like PDF, Audio, Video, Multimedia etc.
- Open Universities should have pool a of resource and other Indian languages OER may also be developed to address the needs of the local community.

Dr. Bhadri, Assistant Educational Advisor, MHRD wrapped up the meeting with his final comments highlighting the significance of OER and its adoption by Open Universities.

The meeting of Vice Chancellors of State Open Universities concluded with a vote of thanks by Prof. Chandrakantha Jeyabalan, Vice Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai.

Minutes of the Consultative Meeting for Formulation of the New Education Policy

held on 4th September, 2015 at Chennai

The CEMCA, COL had organized a meeting of Vice-Chancellors (VCs) of State Open Universities (SOUs) to discuss the adoption of the OER policy by SOUs. IGNOU was given a special role in this programme to discuss the New Education Policy for "Open and Distance Learning and Online Courses".

Prof Nageshwar Rao, Vice Chancellor, IGNOU, briefed the participants about the NEP and the strategy of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to develop the NEP through a consultative process at all levels — from the Block and District level up to the National level. He outlined the role of IGNOU to coordinate the formulation of this policy. He also mentioned that keeping in view its domain expertise, the theme of 'Promoting Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Online Courses' was assigned to IGNOU. He provided a background of the activities undertaken and consultations held so far. He informed that the university has constituted a working group for the purpose and a conceptual framework has been prepared and forwarded to various universities and institutions offering programmes through distance mode. The framework has also been discussed with the Directors of Schools, Heads of Divisions and senior faculty in IGNOU. He informed that based on the inputs received from all quarters a Discussion paper on Perspectives for New Education Policy on ODL has been prepared.

Prof Rao highlighted the important issues identified by MHRD under this particular theme. He asked participants to think beyond Act and Statutes of their universities and capitalize on this great opportunity to include all that is required for the improvement of the ODL system.

Assistant Education advisor, MHRD, Mr. Bhadri mentioned, the unique responsibility entrusted to IGNOU of developing one theme exclusively, because

of its contribution and expertise in the field of ODL. He also pointed out that this was the time for IGNOU and all SOUs to identify the reasons/factors responsible for the non-recognition of their degrees by employers and to rectify the problem faced by ODL students in securing employment. This could help sort out the issues, set things right and restore the credibility of the system. He appreciated CEMCA's positive role in providing the logistical support to MHRD and the stakeholders in taking the ODL system forward.

After these introductory remarks Prof. Manjulika Srivastava, Professor of Distance Education, IGNOU, made a presentation and gave an overview about higher education system, the growth of the ODL system, the important issues confronting the system. She also outlined the areas that could be included in the NEP under ODL and Online Courses namely:

(i)   Expansion of the ODL base

(ii)   Reaching out to new target groups

(iii)   Identifying new domains of knowledge and skills

(iv)   New approach to curriculum design and development

(v)   ICT-based programme design and delivery

(vi)   Introduction of OERs and MOOCs

(vii)   Recognition and certification of prior learning

(viii) Choice based credit system and credit transfer

(ix)   Technology driven infrastructure and governance

(x)   Anywhere, anytime learner support

(xi)   Innovative methods of assessment and evaluation

(xii)   Strengthening human resource base

(xiii) Promoting Research and Development

(xiv) Qualitative enhancement of ODL institutions and their programmes through Assessment and Accreditation

(xv)   Setting up of an independent regulator for ODL and Technology Enabled Learning

(xvi) Addressing information security concerns in an open learning world

Prof. Suresh Garg, former PVC and Professor of Physics at IGNOU stressed on the overall monitoring of the system, particularly the learner support services, which according to him is the weakest link in the system. He mentioned that

there is a need for setting up of an independent regulator, which could be in the form of a Distance Education Commission with full regulatory powers. According to him, research is another grey area, particularly systemic research. OUs can create a niche for themselves by systemically undertaking research and development in the area of ODL. He added that the role of state governments should be more facilitative towards the ODL system, its institutions and that the Policy must highlight adequate physical, financial, and human resources and infrastructure at all ODL institutions. Equally important is the development of quality learning resources that are open to public scrutiny. He summed up by saying that we need to look at the rear view mirror and look through the windscreen to look ahead. According to him, excellence, innovation and quality are the new areas we need to focus on and go beyond access and equity.

Dr. Ranesh Sharma, Director CEMCA who had participated in the National Consultative Meet held on 1st September 2015, briefed the participants about the deliberations that had taken place on Online Education (of which he was a part). He drew the attention of the participants towards the implementation of online education. He informed the group about the government initiative of "SWAYAM" – Open edX platform on which all the OUs could be asked to mount their courses on. He also gave an overview about MOOCs and the issues confronting the introduction of MOOCs and how they should be integrated in the mainstream of higher education.

After these introductory remarks, participants were asked to give their considered views and feedback on the Discussion Paper developed by IGNOU and circulated among all the participants to enable them to develop a perspective on the NEP for ODL and Online Courses, and use it for organizing consultative meets at their own institutions. The feedback received from these consultative meets at SOUs would help IGNOU in further refining the Discussion Document.

Some of the issues raised and discussed at length are as follows:

- ODL institutions are not allowed to offer online courses by the regulatory authority, and the ban needs to be immediately lifted.

- Distance learners are facing problems regarding their employability, for which a Gazette notification is required stating that all qualifications obtained through ODL are equivalent to those acquired through conventional mode.

- Entry is easy, but exit is not so. Only OUs are taking care of life-long learning. There is a need for strengthening the hands of distance

- learners by providing legal status to them through government notifications.

- There is a need for an OER policy and a separate OER department at each OU for the purpose of implementing OER and training the faculty for it.

- Each OU should select a particular area and develop OER in that particular area so as to avoid duplication of efforts. All programmes and courses should be placed in a Centralized Repository.

- ODL institutions should be allowed to encourage MPhil and Ph.D students to take up research projects in the area of ODL i.e. systemic or system-based research. Research findings should be ploughed back into the system for its betterment. There is a need for a policy on sharing of resources to avoid reinvention of the wheel.

- Vertical mobility of students should be promoted through the credit transfer system.

- Self learning materials (SLMs) need to be translated into other Indian languages in order to improve the outreach. Also SLMs should be converted into digital resources to draw learners towards online mode.

- New domains of knowledge need to be identified particularly in technical and professional areas presently outside the ambit of ODL providers who are not allowed to offersuch programmes leading to degrees.

- There is also a need to change from developing print materials to online learning resources.

- All services from registration to convocation should be introduced in online mode.

- All OUs should adopt UGC's standardized curricula by adopting the Choice Based Credit System.

- There is a need to develop a blended approach by integrating the conventional and ODL systems by allowing learners to seamlessly move from one mode to another.

All participants were requested to conduct consultative meetings at their own institution and provide feedback to IGNOU before the next National Consultative Meet scheduled for 28th September 2015. This is a big challenge for IGNOU which has to incorporate all critical feedback received from stakeholders.

Participating Vice Chancellors and Representatives of Open Universities

S No	Name	
1	Prof. Rash Bihari Prasad Singh, Vice-Chancellor, Nalanda Open University, 3rd Floor, Biscomaun Bhawan, Gandhi Maidan, Patna-800 001. Tel: 09431021277 E-Mail: nou@nou.ac.in **BIHAR STATE**	
2	Prof. M. G. Krishnan, Vice-Chancellor, Karnataka State Open University, Mukhtagangotri, Mysore-570 006. Tel: 0821-2500873 E-Mail: vcksou@gmail.com **KARNATAKA STATE**	
3	Dr. Ravi Gor, Vice-Chancellor Incharge, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Jyotirmay Parisar, Opp.Shri Balaji Temple, Sarkhej-Gandhinagar Highway Chharodi, Ahmedabad-382481 Tel: 09825140363 E-Mail: baouvc@gmail.com **GUJARAT STATE**	

S No	Name
4	Prof. Subha Sankar Sarkar, Vice-Chancellor, Netaji Subhas Open University, DD-26, DD Block, Sector – I, Salt Lake City, Kolkata 700 064 Tel: 033-40663213 E-Mail:sarkarsubha55@gmail.com **WEST BENGAL STATE**
5	Prof. Praveen Jain, Director (IT), M. P. Bhoj (Open) University, Raja Bhoj Marg (Kolar Road), Bhopal-462016 Tel: 09425007376 E-Mail: drpraveenjainmpbou15@ gmail.com **MADHYA PRADESH STATE**
6	Dr. Hitesh Deka, Vice-Chancellor, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Block III, Housefed Complex, Last Gate, Dispur, Guwahati-781006 Tel: 0361-2235642 E-Mail: kkh_sou@yahoo.com **ASSAM STATE**
7	Dr. Jeetendra Pande, Associate Professor, Uttarakhand Open University, Teen Pani By Pass Road, Vishwavidyalaya Marg, Behind Transport Nagar, Haldwani, Nainital District -263139 Tel: 09927050094 E-Mail:jpande@uou.ac.in **UTTARAKHAND STATE**

S No	Name	
8	Dr. Srikant Mohapatra, Officer on Special Duty (OSD), Odisha State Open University, G.M. University, Modipada, Sambalpur- 768002 Tel: 8802714059 E-Mail: srikant_mohapatra@rediffmail.com **ODISHA STATE**	
9	Dr (Smt.) Chandrakanta Jeyabalan, Vice-Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Open University, Saidapet, Chennai - 600015 Tel: 09442171613 E-Mail: vc@tnou.ac.in **TAMIL NADU STATE**	
10	Prof. Nageshwar Rao, Vice-Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Maidan Garhi, New Delhi -110068 Tel: 011 -29532707 E-Mail: pvcnroffice@ignou.ac.in **NEW DELHI**	
11	Prof Manjulika Srivastava, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Maidan Garhi, New Delhi – 110068 Tel: 09871441324 E-Mail: manjulika@ignou.ac.in **NEW DELHI**	

S No	Name	
12	Prof. S. C. Garg, Indira Gandhi National Open University , Maidan Garhi, New Delhi – 110068 Tel: 011-29534180 E-Mail: scgarg@ignou.ac.in **NEW DELHI**	
13	Dr. B. K. Bhadri, Assistant Educational Advisor, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi Tel: 09810050763 E-Mail: binod_bhadri@yahoo.co.in **NEW DELHI**	
14	Dr. Ramesh Sharma, Director, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, 7/8 Sarvpriya Vihar, New Delhi-110016 Tel: 09599107990 E-Mail: rsharma@col.org **NEW DELHI**	
15	Dr. P. Thiyagarajan, Professor and Director, School of Continuing Education, Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai-600015 Tel: 044-24306625 E-Mail: thyagu34@yahoo.com **TAMIL NADU STATE**	

CEMCA