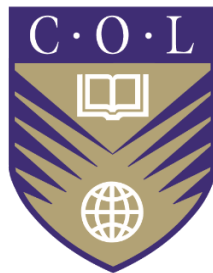




REVIEW OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMMES AND ONLINE PROGRAMMES REGULATION, 2020

Welcome Remarks



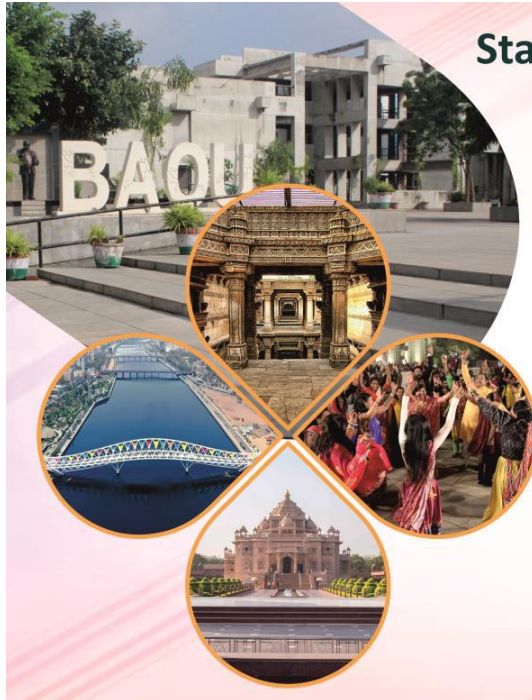
CEMCA

OCTOBER 7, 2024

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COMMONWEALTH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CENTRE FOR ASIA, COMMONWEALTH OF
LEARNING

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State Open University Vice Chancellors' Round Table Meet

Organized by

 **BAOU**
Education
for All
(Established by Government of Gujarat)

and

 **Commonwealth Educational
Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)**

Theme:
**Finalizing Open Universities' Inputs to
University Grants Commission
(ODL and OL) Regulations.**

Date: 7th October, 2024

Venue:
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat

Inaugural Session

10.00 am – 11.30 am

Opening Remarks

B. Shadrach, Director, COL-CEMCA (bshadrach@col.org)

My warm greetings to **Dr Nirmaljeet Singh Kalsi**, IAS (Retd) and the Former Chairperson of the National Council for Vocational Education and Training, my very personal greetings to Professor **Ami Upadhyay**, the Vice Chancellor of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University; my warm greetings to all the vice chancellors present here in Ahmedabad and the ones joining us online, **Dr Madhukar Maruti Waware**, Joint Secretary, the Universities Grants Commission, **Dr Suhas Deshmukh**, Director of NCVET, **Professor Modi** and all colleagues here at BAOU.

I am **thankful to the partnership with BAOU** in organising this Round Table Meeting – a tradition that we began in August last year; followed by the one in Hyderabad in April 2024 and now this one in October 2024, again in Ahmedabad. True to our commitment and the promise in August last year, we have been holding these meetings every six months. We

believe that our next stop would be Nashik when we hope to meet up once again in January 2025.

We have made huge strides since we met last August 2023. And I wish to outline the following milestones that we have achieved together:

- We spelt out our commitments to the NEP 2020 in the form of our **Ahmedabad Declaration** in which we undertook to realising ten distinct goals.
- We undertook one of the ten goals and met in April in Hyderabad to agree to share our resources under the banner of **Open Educational Resources (OER)**.
- We took the offer from Dr Kalsi very fervently and applied to become awarding bodies of NCVET with dual recognition. NCVET officials have handheld the OUs in this process, and we see most of us having placed our **applications for consideration**.
- We met online to discuss the **Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes regulations**, and we are here today to finalise our input into the process.

In the meantime, we also encouraged our senior officials to participate in the following workshops:

- Status review of our current practices in **OER** in Hyderabad, Telangana
- Orientation to designing and developing **skill** qualifications in Haldwani, Uttarakhand
- Orientation to designing and developing **Micro-credentials** in Chennai, Tamil Nadu
- Training workshop on **blended learning** design and delivery in Guwahati, Assam

I am pleased that my organisation, COL-CEMCA, has been with you in all the above processes. And, today, we are joining hands with BAOU to enable the OUs to demonstrate their value proposition and the key role played by them in the higher education landscape of the nation, not only through offering affordable education without compromising on the quality, but also reaching the unreached; thus, truly helping India to attain its commitments towards SDG4 and to its own commitment of enhancing the gross enrollment ratio in higher education to 50 percent by 2035. Today, we stand with the government to take forward its national as well as international goals and commitments.

As enshrined in the Ahmedabad Declaration, COL-CEMCA will support the OUs in gearing themselves up towards **designing and delivering employment-oriented courses**; thus,

helping to create the workforce for the future and to strengthen our young people with skills required in the marketplace. All our Universities shall focus on graduate employability and to fill the skills gap prevailing in our market. I am **pleased to announce a two-year long project of COL-CEMCA to enable each of the 17 OUs to align their curriculum towards and within a forward-looking employability framework.** We have commenced work already. I will be making a brief presentation on the project before we depart today to see if you wish to be a part of the project.

Having mentioned all the above, I wish to focus on today's agenda to mention the following points:

The agenda today is that of providing OUs' input to the Review of ODL and OP regulations, 2020. Dr Nirmaljeet Singh Kalsi, the Chairperson of the Committee, is with us today. So also, Professor Ami Upadhyay who is a member of the eight-member Committee. We are pleased to welcome Dr Madhukar Waware, who joins this Committee as the coordinating officer. While the Committee comprising experts shall review the regulations, it is the input that we offer today, and the inputs that Dr Kalsi has been gathering for some time shall inform the Committee in its deliberations and making the revised regulations. We are pleased that the first and the prime stakeholders, OUs, 12 of the 17 of them are in the room today.

When we met online to discuss this, all of you made an appeal to my organisation, COL-CEMCA, that a face-to-face meeting with the officials of UGC, Dr Kalsi and NCVET (as well as AICTE) may be organised at the earliest. And we are privileged today to join hands with BAOU in responding to the call. It is at the behest of Professor Ami Upadhyay that Dr Kalsi has agreed to meet us today, and I am thankful to both for facilitating the meeting.

What are these OUs? I have had the opportunity to work with colleagues from various OUs around the world. These range from the New Zealand Open Polytechnic to the Allama Iqbal Open University and University of the Philippines Open University and the likes of the UK Open University. I have known UNISA in South Africa and NUON in Nigeria. I have also had the privilege of partnering with the Virtual University of Pakistan and the Smart University in Dubai too. These universities are seen as their respective countries' national assets! Having been established through national or regional Acts, these universities are expected to be the **Universities of the Future.** I believe that the 17 State Open Universities and the only national open university in India are doing some stellar work in the lives of the unreached.

OUs in India are the national assets; these are promoting high quality education at very low cost for communities that would, otherwise, may not have any access to education and skills. The combined efforts of the 18 OUs in India surpasses any Open University system anywhere in the world. **The future of education is** open, flexible and just in-time, largely linked to skills and competencies. Days are gone when a student will remain in a three-year or four-year degree programme and complete education within the stipulated period. Our young people are in a hurry. When there is a mismatch between what is offered and what the marketplace demands, education is likely to become outdated. Not many of them are craving the degrees that you offer. The recent ILO India Employment Report 2024 is categorical that 83 percent of India's young population makes up for the unemployed workforce, of whom 66 percent have secondary or higher qualifications.

There have been some innovations in recent years. **Apprenticeship-embedded Degree Programmes (AEDP)** is one such innovation in which a year-long apprenticeship is recognised as a form of learning where credits are awarded. Other than the traditional degree programmes, there are programmes such as BBA in retail, healthcare, logistics and BSc in gaming, etc., which are becoming popular. The days are gone when education is confined to BA in History, Philosophy or Economics and BSc degrees confined to Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics and Biology.

We shall see education and skill development pursued in the short term and the choices of flipping education channels are likely to be rampant. Recognising this, the National Education Policy provides multiple exit and multiple entry points and the NCVET has already been promoting what they call long-term training and short-term training. And it is inevitable that micro-credentials are too likely to become popular where bite-sized learnings are likely to be credited and stacked for redemption in the long run. Every learning needs to be monetised. This is the reason the government has come up with programmes such as APAAR ID and ABC, etc. These are not merely concepts, these are real programmes now.

The guidelines put out by NCVET are highly progressive in nature where the idea of blended learning has been enshrined. Seven forms of learning are recognised, and each form is seen to be important. a) Theory/lectures that impart theoretical knowledge; b) Imparting soft skills, life skills, employability skills and mentorship to learners; c) showing demonstration to learners; d) imparting practical skills of working with hands and in labs; e)

tutorials, assignments, drills and practice; f) proctored assessments and evaluations; and g) on-the job training, internship and apprenticeship training.

While these are some of the many ongoing reforms in India, in the context of today's meeting, let us quickly review the ongoing experiences around the world, especially, the ones that are relevant to the people in this room. Of the 33 Open Universities and a few more higher education institutions that are virtual and fully online, I wish to highlight the following:

The Philippines case is a good one. Ten years ago, when they established the UPOU, from the very day one, they allowed them to work with CHED and Technical Education and Skill Development Authority (TESDA), thus becoming a university that offers both academic and technical/vocational skill-based programmes, following the guidelines offered by both the authorities. While the Commission of Higher Education regulated traditional degree programmes, TESDA provided guidelines for skill-based education. Practicum or on the job training has been the mode of jump starting their learners into the workplace. And interestingly any donations to ODL have been tax exempt! UPOU reaches out to 70 nations.

Athabasca in Canada, on the other hand, since the year 1970, provides 800 courses for undergraduate and graduate programmes. In addition, they offer 7 levels of certificates and diplomas in over 30 specialisations. Over 30 professional development programmes, courses and micro-credentials are offered through their PowerED platform. Over 1200 faculty members work in a virtual environment. And they have over 350 collaborations with partner institutions. There is no pre-requisite other than the age of 16. Anyone above this age can pursue any course at Athabasca. There is no need for any school education certificate! And it is fully digital. Even subjects that are open for registered nurse practitioners and for those who wish to become one, are conducted through online mode.

Open University China offers programmes in Agroforestry and medicine as a part of their undergraduate programme. They have come up with a varsity for the elderly – Seniors University of China. OUC credit bank is very popular because it allows credit transfer for almost a decade now.

In the UK, the Open University caters to four nations – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It has its eyes set out for sustainability, social impact, greater reach, students' success and equity. Governed by internal processes, and for externals, it is guided

by the **Office for Students** (OfS). It has its own statutes, charters, ordinances, regulations, strategic plans, work plans, etc. Their success is guided by their own values, use of technologies, approach to change, data-driven decisions, students and faculty support and their stewardship. OfS remains as a guiding force rather than one that exercises control over their affairs.

The OfS has a singular approach to ensuring that all students from all background, and with the ability and desire to undertake higher education are supported to access, succeed in, and progress; receive high-quality academic experience and their interest are protected while they study or in the event of provider, campus or course closure; are able to progress into employment or further study, and their qualifications hold their value over time; and, receive value for money.

OfS' regulatory approach is to ensure a **student focus** (rather than providers' focus), **clarity** (primarily regulated by one body), **accountability** (open to public scrutiny), **consistency** (being a single register), **proportionality and targeting** (low risk to student means less regulation and less secure elements of provision would mean high regulation) and **competition** (when market regulates and drives innovation, diversity and improvement, all is good; but for equity, participation and access, when the market forces are no good, there will be direct regulation of providers). Sectoral level regulations are aimed at removing all unnecessary barriers. OfS maintains relationship with Students on one hand and with the Providers on the other.

Based on global experiences, the question to be asked is: Is it regulation for facilitation or for restrictions?

In similar vein, one may need to ask if we are celebrating success and thriving on innovation rather than being the typical 'risk-averse' and 'cautious guardian of taxpayers' interest?

And there are many more questions looming my mind. I wish to enlist some of those for our consideration this morning:

- Should there be a single register? A single regulation?

- A single body? As in the case of many other nations?
- And is regulation aimed at facilitation or restriction?
- And where do we place the OUs in a country like India?

And regarding the education sector and the OUs:

- **Can Competition be a good enough reason for soft-touch regulation of the industry?**
- **Does the education market today drive innovation, diversity and improvement or does the industry (as they may put it) care less about participation, equity and access?**
- **Where are the OUs placed?**
- **So, do we conclude that the OUs have a special place in the history of India's Higher Education?**
- **If so, how do we manifest it?**

Perhaps, here is where the ODL and OL Programme Committee has a lot to contribute?

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention.