

## The National Higher Education Mission (RUSA): Challenges and Prospects

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### ABSTRACT

Government of India has launched its ambitious programme 'Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan' (RUSA) to revamp the higher education sector in the country. Through RUSA, it aims mainly to provide central funds to states public universities and colleges across the country with the objective to help them move towards achieving key result area of equity, access and excellence in higher education. With respect to the planning and funding approach, some key changes are envisaged such as that funding will be more impact, norm based and outcome dependent; various equity related schemes will be integrated for a higher impact, instead of unplanned expansion; there will be focus on consolidating and developing the existing system adding capacities and there will be a greater focus on research and innovation. In order to be eligible for funding under RUSA, States will have to fulfill certain prerequisites which include creation of a SHEC, creation of accreditation agencies, preparation of the State perspective plans, commitment of certain stipulated share of funds towards RUSA, academic, sectoral and institutional governance reforms, and filling faculty positions. Some funding powers of the UGC would be subsumed. This scheme will spread over two plan periods (12th and 13th) facing many challenges. Present paper examines the problems of universities in India with specific reference to funding, autonomy and quality, describes the guidelines of the RUSA scheme along with its opportunities, challenges, and suggestions for strengthening. To conclude RUSA has tried to revamp the higher education in an exhaustive manner but still many areas need to be comprehensively touched.

**Key Words :** RUSA, UGC, GER, CABE.

### Introduction

Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has launched its ambitious programme to revamp the higher education sector in the country, Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA). Today, the higher education system as a whole is faced with many challenges.

### Problem of Universities

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is only 18%, and associated with wide disparities between various social groups GER is quite low compared to world average of 23.2%, far below those of most developed countries (45%) and even below those of developing countries (36.5%), other BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia and China). Although number of universities and colleges has increased, it still

remains inadequate to meet the present demand (UGC, 2013).

In order to raise funds, most universities rely heavily on the affiliation fees they receive from affiliated institutions and on self-financing courses. This kind of revenue-generation has led to further dilution of quality and perpetuation of inequity. Most affiliated institutions depend heavily upon the University for administrative, examination-related and curricular matters. This adds to the burden of the university as it is reduced to an administrative and exam conducting unit rather than an institution focused on promoting teaching, research and faculty development of associated colleges.

Present system also takes away the autonomy of affiliated institutions in teaching and conducting examinations. Instead of increasing access in a positive way, the affiliation system creates a highly centralized and inefficient institutional structure, which does not allow its constituents any room for creativity in teaching, learning, curriculum development or research. In such a structure, quality enhancement can only be brought about by reducing the burden at the university level and giving greater autonomy and accountability to the constituents through affiliation reforms.

There is a lack of vision and planning for the development of institutions and the higher education sector at the state level. Given the complexities of managing the access and equity issues within and amongst states as well as the large number of institutions that already come under the state university system, there is a crying need for planning in higher education focusing on the state as the basic unit. This planning should be done by an autonomous body that can raise and allocate funds from the state as well as central governments.

The State Universities are already provided some funds from the central government through the UGC. However, UGC's mandate allows it to fund only a limited number of institutions that are Section 12B and 2f (UGC Act) compliant. This excludes about 33 per cent of the State Universities and 51 per cent of the colleges under such universities.

UGC is also not allowed to channelize funds through the state government or through any entity

other than an educational institution, which makes it impossible for the UGC to fund any planning, and expansion activity through a state level higher education body. UGC as a regulator should be actively involved in planning for new institutions but the present system does not permit it to do so. Thus states often complain of being unaware of the development funds that come to the state institutions from the centre; this makes planning and funding very difficult.

Various types of control over state universities lead to degradation of their quality. Many of the problems in the state universities are linked to the archaic systems and regulations that govern them. Without bringing about reforms in the existing governance and regulatory systems, it will not be possible to unleash the potential of the state universities (MHRD, Jan., 2013).

## RUSA

The 12th Five Year Plan of India proposed a holistic plan for the development of higher education in the country by ensuring access, equity and quality through strategic shift in central funding. RUSA is a new Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) in compliance of the Plan recommendation of strategic utilization of central funds to ensure comprehensive planning at the State level. The Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE), the highest advisory body of the Government of India in education on policy matters, in its meeting held on 08.11.2012 gave in-principle approval to RUSA. The Expenditure Finance Committee approved the scheme on 11th September 2013 and with the approval of Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on 3rd October, 2013, RUSA became the final tier of the CSS of the MHRD which began with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, graduated subsequently to Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan.

RUSA would be spread over the 12th and 13th Plan period for funding the State universities and colleges to achieve equity, access and excellence in higher education. The most significant paradigm shift proposed by the Planning Commission is in the

arena of funding of state higher education system. Strategic funding of this sector has been strongly proposed in order to make a marked difference in the overall resource endowment for the state higher education sector. The allocation of funds under RUSA would be based on well-defined norms and linked to certain key academic, administrative and governance reforms in the in the State higher education system which currently enrolls over 96% of the students. The Scheme will be implemented through the MHRD with matching contributions from the State governments and Union Territories (UTs) (MHRD, Oct., 2013).

## Objectives

Vision of RUSA is to attain higher levels of access, equity and excellence in the State higher education system with greater efficiency, transparency, accountability and responsiveness. Its objectives are:

- To achieve the GER target of 25.2% by the end of 12th Plan and 32% by the end of 13th Plan.
- To improve the overall quality of existing State higher educational institutions (HEIs) by ensuring their conformity to prescribed norms and standards.
- Adoption of accreditation as a mandatory quality assurance framework.
- To usher transformative reforms in the State higher education system by creating a facilitating institutional structure for planning and monitoring.
- To ensure governance, academic and examination (and evaluation) reforms and establish backward and forward linkages between school education and the job market.
- To expand the institutional base by creating additional capacity in existing institutions and establishing new institutions in un-served and underserved areas by way of upgradation and consolidation.
- To create opportunities for states to undertake reforms in the affiliating system.

- To ensure adequate availability of quality faculty in all HEIs and ensure capacity building at all levels.
- To create an enabling atmosphere in institutions to facilitate research and innovation.
- To integrate the skill development efforts of the government through optimum interventions.
- To correct regional imbalances in access to higher education.
- To improve equity in higher education by providing adequate opportunities to socially deprived communities; promote inclusion of women, minorities, SC/ST/OBCs and disabled persons.
- To identify and fill up the critical infrastructure gaps in higher education by augmenting and supporting the efforts of the State governments.
- To promote healthy competition amongst states and institutions to address various concerns regarding quality, research and innovation.
- Clearly define role of State government vis-à-vis HEIs.
- To facilitate the creation of State Higher Educational Councils (SHECs).

## Implementation

RUSA would be implemented and monitored through an institutional structure comprising various bodies at the central, state and institutional levels:

- At Central level: RUSA Mission Authority, Project Approval Board, Technical Support Group and Project Directorate at MHRD.
- At State level: SHEC, Project Directorate in State government and Technical Support Group.
- At Institutional level: Board of Governors and Project Monitoring Unit.

## Prerequisites

Prerequisites would be at two levels:

- Commitment given by the States to the Centre: setting up of SHEC, State Higher Education Plans (SHEP) including Perspective Plan, Annual Plan and Financial & Work Plan, State funding commitment share and timeliness, filling of faculty positions, affiliation reforms, setting up of accreditation agencies, governance and administrative reforms, academic and examination reforms.
- Commitment given by institutions to the States: institutional governance reforms, academic reforms, examination reforms, Project Management Teams, equity commitments, commitments on research and innovation efforts, faculty recruitment and improvement, establishment of Management Information System (MIS), regulatory compliance.

## Guiding Principles

RUSA is structured on inviolable guiding principles for funding and decisions taking. These are performance based outlays and outcome based reimbursements, incentivizing and disincentivizing, apolitical decision making, disclosure based governance, autonomy, equity based development and, quality and research focus.

## Features

- RUSA is an umbrella scheme operated in mission mode that would subsume other existing similar schemes in the state higher education sector.
- Norm based and performance based funding.
- Commitment by States and institutions to certain academic, administrative and governance reforms will be a precondition for receiving funding.

- Funds would flow from the MHRD to universities and colleges, through the State governments.
- Funding to the States would be made on the basis of critical appraisal of SHEPs. SHEP should address each State's strategy to address issues of equity, access and excellence.
- Each institution will have to prepare an Institutional Development Plan (IDP) for all the components listed under the Scheme. It will be aggregated at the State level, after imposing a super layer of State relevant components into the SHEP.
- SHEC will have to undertake planning and evaluation, in addition to other monitoring and capacity building functions.
- SHEC will be the key institution at the state level to channelize resources to the institutions from the State budget.
- Two ongoing Central schemes of Model Degree Colleges and submission on polytechnics will be subsumed under RUSA.
- UGC Schemes such as development grants for State universities and colleges, one time catch up grants, etc. will be dove tailed in RUSA. Individual oriented schemes would continue to be handled by UGC.
- Centre State funding would be in the ratio of 90:10 for North Eastern (NE) States, Sikkim, J&K, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and 65:35 for Other States and UTs.
- Funding will be provided for government aided institutions for permitted activities, based on certain norms and parameters, and in a ratio of 50:50.
- States would be free to mobilize private sector participation (including donations and philanthropic grants) through innovative means, limited to a ceiling of 50% of the State share.
- State-wise allocations would be decided on the basis of a formulaic entitlement index which would factor in the population size of the relevant age group, GER and Gender Parity

Index (GPI) across categories, State expenditure on higher education, institutional density, teacher student ratio, issues of access, equity and quality and excellence in higher education, etc. Further allocation of funds would be dependent upon performance of the state and its demonstrated commitment to the reforms agenda.

## Approach and Strategy

- RUSA would follow a bottom-up approach for planning and budgeting to redress multiple and graded inequalities.
- States would also become equal partners in planning and monitoring. The yardstick for deciding the quantum of funds for the States and institutions under RUSA comprise the norms that reflect the performance in key result areas of access, equity and excellence.
- Access, equity, and excellence would to be the main thrust areas. Considering the inter linkages between them and taking into consideration the current realities existing in the country, these objectives would be pursued differently.
- This would necessitate reforms in governance arrangements at all levels (national, state and institutional), with suitable implementation frameworks and monitoring arrangements.
- Planning process would begin at the institutional Level, with the IDP based on inputs/ discussions with the stakeholders within the institution. These IDPs would be aggregated to form the SHEP. The SHEP would have mainly two components; State component and institutional component. The SHEP would be further broken down into annual plans, by taking the various factors under the eighteen components into consideration. These annual plans will constitute the basis for determining the funding to states.
- In order to be eligible for funding under RUSA, States will have to fulfill certain prerequisites

towards reform process which include academic, sectoral and institutional governance reforms.

- Each State must undertake a baseline survey against which performance and progress would be measured.
- Once eligible for funding under RUSA, the States will receive funds on the basis of achievements and outcomes. Future funds flows would be determined based on outcomes and achievements against the targets.

All land will be provided by the State governments. The State government shall acquire and have undisputed possession of land in any case where a new institution is proposed to be set up or expanded. Central share for civil works under any component shall be restricted to either RUSA estimate or the State SSR, whichever is lower. However States would be free to enhance its own share for any component provided it is willing to bear the entire additional expenditure.

The States would be free to mobilize up to 50% of their share through private grants and donations, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contributions, Public Private Partnerships (PPP) etc. States, especially in the NE region, may also consider availing of Viability Gap Funding (VGF), administered by the Department of NE Region. Similarly, States located outside the NE Region may avail the VGF administered by the Department of Economic Affairs. Additionally States may make use of the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) for financing of infrastructure projects under RUSA in rural areas. States may engage any of the Central/State agencies for civil works or procure in accordance with the State procurement policy. Affiliation reforms and accreditation norms should be followed by States.

- I. **Creation of universities by way of upgradation of existing autonomous colleges:** 45 autonomous colleges (autonomy granted by UGC atleast in 2008 or earlier) that have necessary infrastructural facilities, antiquity,

teaching strength and quality will be considered for up gradation to universities.

- II. Creation of universities by conversion of colleges in a cluster:** Cluster universities aims essentially at addressing the critical gaps in the spatial distribution of HEIs across the States. 35 new cluster universities would be created during the current Plan period with an average allocation of Rs.55 crore per university and 65 during the next Plan period through the clustering of existing affiliated government and government aided colleges. These universities will be created by pooling the resources of 3 to 5 existing colleges that have adequate academic, physical and technical infrastructural facilities. All the participating colleges in a cluster would eventually become constituent colleges of the newly created university. Colleges identified as Colleges with Potential for Excellence or any other criteria which amply demonstrate the various quality parameters of an institution will be considered as the lead institution or a nucleus around which the cluster university would be established. Colleges joining the cluster must have the capacity to function as a university.
- III. Infrastructure grants to universities:** Infrastructure grants shall be utilized for meeting critical infrastructural needs that would lead to immediate quality gains such as upgrading of libraries, laboratories, equipments, hostels and toilets, etc. 150 public universities will be given a grant of Rs.20 crore each during the current Plan period.
- IV. New Model Colleges (General):** Districts that are listed as Educationally Backward Districts under the existing 374 Model College Scheme and have not been supported so far would be considered for funding. 60 new model colleges will be sanctioned during the current Plan period.
- V. Upgradation of existing degree colleges to model degree colleges:** Out of the 640 districts in the country, 288 districts would be covered under the New Model College Scheme. Funds will be provided for the upgradation of 54 colleges in the 12th plan period.
- VI. New Colleges (Professional):** Grants will be provided for establishing new professional colleges in each of the 22 states having below the national average GER in technical education. The number of colleges for each state will be based on the evaluation of the proposals submitted by the States. 40 new engineering colleges would be sanctioned in the 12th Plan period. States which are over saturated in terms of institutional density and vacant seats will not be considered for grants.
- VII. Infrastructure grants to colleges:** Infrastructure grants can be utilized by the colleges to address critical needs in institutional infrastructure, especially for creating/upgrading laboratories, libraries, hostels, toilets etc. 3500 colleges will be given grant of Rs.2 crore each during the 12th Plan period.
- VIII. Research, innovation and quality improvement:** During the current plan period, 10 States will receive funds under this component to facilitate research and innovations.
- IX. Equity initiatives:** During the 12th Plan period, 20 States will receive funds under this component. All State universities will be eligible to receive grants for equity initiatives. Innovative approach/schemes to ensure greater inclusion will be considered on priority.
- X. Faculty recruitment support:** Support will be provided to fill positions in the category of Assistant Professor or equivalent cadre against vacancies. 5000 such positions would be supported during the current plan period. All the State universities will be eligible to receive grants under this programme. The recruitment



process will have to adhere to UGC norms and regulations.

- XI. Faculty improvement:** Academic Staff Colleges will be given funds to improve infrastructure and resources for training and capacity building activities.
- XII. Vocationalisation of Higher Education:** Funds for vocationalisation will be given to all the States/State universities.
- XIII. Leadership development of educational administrators:** This is a centrally administered program for professional development for the professional development of educational administrators/academic leaders/policy makers. This scheme will support leadership development programmes for department heads, deans, registrars, principals, vice principals, vice chancellors, pro vice chancellors, SHEC members, state project directors, commissioners, secretaries, etc. Besides, capacity building initiatives will be provided to State level policy makers and members of governing bodies at the institutional level.
- XIV. Institutional restructuring and reforms:** Funds will be provided to States and Union Territories (depending on the size of the states) to enable them to create/strengthen necessary institutional framework for efficient and effective sectoral reforms. These funds can be utilized for setting up/strengthening SHEC, State Resource Centers and State Project Directorate.
- XV. Capacity building and preparation, data collection and planning:** Funds will be given to States and Union Territories to undertake baseline surveys, data collection and compilation, organize meetings, consultations, workshops, trainings, to hire consultants and, for preparation of State perspective plans/strategy reports.
- XVI. Management Information System:** Funds will be provided to create and maintain strong data

systems at the State level for surveys and analysis that could provide information to the national MIS.

- XVII. Support to Polytechnics:** In consonance with the Planning Commission guidelines, the existing scheme regarding Sub Mission on polytechnics will be merged with RUSA.
- XVIII. Management Monitoring Evaluation and Research (MMER):** This scheme is envisaged to provide support to resource centres and support groups for the effective implementation of various programmes under RUSA. All States which qualify for funding under RUSA by meeting the pre requisites would be eligible for MMER funds.

Now the states are marching toward implementation of RUSA by making requisite amendments in their Acts. Although API and PBAS were initially launched in 2010 but U.P. state incorporated it recently to receive grant under RUSA. The state government has, in accordance with UGC guidelines, directed all state universities and degree colleges to prepare and publicize a report card of teachers within six months. UGC has also, for the first time introduced anonymous students' feedback system to improve the quality of classroom teaching (Times of India, January 23, 2014).

## Challenges & Prospects

- Setting up of SHECs in all states needs big infrastructure and financial commitment. These are also expected to perform multiple roles which need full commitment from pre occupied over burdened SHEC (Jeelani, 2013).
- Plan preparation is usually challenging and inadequate. Plan preparation should also incorporate (a) the Need Base Analysis and, (b) data collection in form of Portal or Database, Enterprise Resource Planning before the preparation of the Perspective Plan. (c)

- Perspective Plan must be sent only after sincere academic and administrative discussions (Singh, 2013).
- Release of 65% funds from RUSA is linked to 35% state funding but it may be a big burden on the States as they are already struggling to meet the increased demand. It is envisaged that the State expenditure must gradually increase to 4% of its GSDP for higher education but this is a challenging task as at present in almost all the states, this figure is less than 1% (Rao, 2013).
  - Filling of faculty requires grant and commitment from States as statistics shows that nearly 35-35% faculty shortage being faced in the state universities and the number is increasing (Singh, 2013).
  - Accreditation is mandatory but at present there are large numbers of colleges not accredited. For example in Andhra Pradesh, there are more than 4000 affiliated colleges but only 320 colleges have been accredited (Rao, 2013). RUSA reiterated need for multiple QA agencies including State level Accreditation Agencies (SIAs) even for individual departments/programs, but it has not suggested the framework that will govern the operations SIAs vis a vis national agencies like NAAC, needing National Quality Assurance Framework (Patil and Roy, 2013).
  - Majority of enrolment in higher education is in affiliated colleges and most of these colleges are self-financing types. Regulating these colleges is most crucial and challenging. Bringing in reforms in affiliation system as proposed by RUSA is most essential and the scheme may have to include such colleges that have come up in rural areas for financial assistance provided norms are strictly enforced (Rao, 2013). Though UGC is trying to provide one-time catch-up grant to uncovered institutions, the quantum of assistance is very meager, therefore private funding is also very much needed with the introduction of schemes like PPP (Ninawe, 2013).
  - Limit of the number of colleges in affiliation system is 100. However, but requires establishment of more affiliating universities that involves a lot of funding from the states for non plan commitment. Similarly establishment of separate own campus of the parent university and new constituent colleges requires more funding. Encouraging university for more autonomous colleges will take away affiliation fee (Jeelani, 2013).
  - Sectoral reforms mainly focus on providing greater autonomy to universities and at the same time gradual withdrawal of the state from decision making, but it requires considerable legislative exercise to modify the university Acts (Rao, 2013).
  - State level politics will enter into the state funding reimbursement mechanisms, so 'Apolitical decision making' need further elaborations. The mechanism for curbing the political intervention in the funding should be developed before implementation of the 50:50 shares (Singh, 2013).
  - While looking the philosophy of RUSA, the scheme seems to support the 'Capitalistic' approach to education. The value based education, morals and ethos based learning, research supporting life for each species and world peace, educational action plans preserving indigenous culture are missing here (Singh, 2013).
  - As per National Knowledge Commission (NKC) report, library and Information Services should be given the necessary fillip to ensure that people from all walks of life and all parts of India must have easy access to knowledge relevant to their needs and aspirations. Some of the challenging issues under consideration of NKC are institutional framework of libraries, networking, education, training and research, modernization and computerization of libraries, maintenance of private and personal collections and, staff requirements to meet changing needs



(NKC, 2013). These issues should be incorporated in RUSA.

Apart from the suggestions required to tackle above challenges, following suggestions needs further consideration (Singh, R., 2013):

- Due care must be taken that States get ample autonomy to plan the kind of courses relevant to their needs and specific to their geographical, socio-economic conditions within the ambit of a nationalized systems of education to avoid heterogeneity.
- To fulfill the pre-requisites, initial amount will be paid to the State Governments to satisfy a-priori requirements. Common time limits must be prescribed for all the states to fulfill the a-priori requirements. Only after the a-priori requirements have been met by all the states, should RUSA be made functional to start common journey and to avoid disparity.
- Emphasis must not be only vocationalisation, but on ensuring financially very sound and attractive employment rather than awarding degrees, preparing the youth also for setting up their own enterprises adding jobs for others.
- Colleges and teachers needs greater autonomy for innovation and excellence in teaching and research work with due care on uniformity. It should also be ensured that degrees are worthy of their names.
- The approach should not be based on bringing about uniformity or even standardization but to bring about a harmonization with common scaffoldings. Government has given emphasis on 3E's (Expansion, Equity, and Excellence) but 4<sup>th</sup> E (Employability) would have been included to narrow down the gap between what our education system is providing and what is the need of the day, may be in the corporate world.

## Conclusion

Under RUSA, the centre aims at an 'optimum' solution to create an alternate way of providing funding to a larger number of institutions and channelize fund through a body that ensures cohesive and integrated planning at the state level. It has a sharper focus on equity-based development, and improvement in teaching-learning quality and research. The far reaching reforms initiated under RUSA will build a self-sustaining momentum that will push for greater accountability and autonomy of state institutions and impress upon them the need to improve the quality of education., RUSA has holistic vision to revamp the higher education in an exhaustive manner inspite of several challenges but still many areas need to be comprehensively touched requiring sincere amalgamated approaches. However we need to wait for the quantum of assistance and specific norms for receiving the support from RUSA to state universities.

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