

Reflections on Reform of Higher Education in Uttarakhand

B. K. Joshi

Doon Library & Research Centre

21 Parade Ground, Dehradun 248001

Phone: +91 135 2711485; Telefax: +91 135 2713065; Email: doonlib@yahoo.co.in;

website: www.doonlibrary.org

Reflections on Reform of Higher Education in Uttarakhand

B. K. Joshi*

Introduction & Background

Higher, or post-secondary, education has seen major expansion in Uttarakhand during the last few years, especially after the formation of the state. At the time of the formation of the state there were 64 higher education institutions viz., universities, post-graduate and under-graduate colleges, engineering, professional, education, medical, dental and ayurvedic colleges. Their number has gone up to about 248 – an increase of 287.5 percent in less than 9 years.¹ By any standard this is a remarkable growth. Predictably, a growth of this magnitude has thrown up formidable problems that need to be addressed on a priority basis.

The decision to open new institutions by the government or grant of permission to private institutions seems to be quite arbitrary and shows no evidence of being based on an analysis of need or sustainability. In the case of private institutions, all of which are in the field of professional education, some unstated assumption about commercial viability appears to be the guiding factor. The situation in the case of government colleges, all of which fall in the category of general education i.e. arts and science education, is quite unclear. More often than not the decision to start new colleges and their location is guided by political considerations and is not based on an analysis of factors that should be taken into account while arriving at such a decision viz., the need and justification for the institution, area to be served, numbers of post-secondary students likely to be available, infrastructure and financial needs, feasibility of alternatives to starting a new college (e.g. scholarships and hostels in existing institutions). The result is a proliferation of colleges lacking in basic facilities like buildings, libraries, laboratories etc., low enrolment, and shortage of teachers. Of the 65 colleges for which data are available on the website of the Directorate of Higher Education for the year 2003-04, 23 had no building, 13 had less than 100 students on rolls and another 28 had between 100 and 500 while at the upper end 17 had more than 1000 students.

The responsibility for overseeing, formulating policy and regulating the functioning of these institutions is shared by four different departments of the state government. The Higher Education Department is responsible for the three general universities (including the Uttarakhand Open University), and the colleges of general education. Technical institutions,

* Director, Doon Library & Research Centre, Dehradun; former Vice Chancellor, Kumaon University, Nainital

including the Uttarakhand Technical University, fall within the scope of responsibility of the Technical Education Department. Medical and dental colleges are the responsibility of the Medical Education Department and agricultural education falls within the purview of the Agriculture Department. Uttarakhand is not unique in this respect. This is the general pattern in most of the states in the country. While this arrangement follows an obvious logic based on the rules of business of the government, it suffers from the all too familiar ills of excessive departmentalism and a lack of inter-departmental coordination. The result is absence of an integrated approach to policy in higher education.

A glaring infirmity resulting from the unplanned growth of higher education institutions in the state is a clear mountain-plain divide in the location of institutions. Of the 67 government colleges of general education in the state as many as 52 (78%) were located in the mountainous districts or mountainous parts of composite (mountain-plain) districts. Barring a few exceptions (e.g., the older colleges located in Pithoragarh, Ranikhet, Bageshwar, Gopeshwar and Uttarkashi) most of these colleges lack basic minimum facilities and staff. On the other hand the distribution of self-financing technical and professional institutions, which are all private, shows an entirely different pattern. Of the 89 such colleges for which information could be obtained only 6 were in the mountainous part of the state (2 each in Mussoorie, Bhimtal and Almora); the remaining 83 being in places like Dehradun (50), Roorkee and Haldwani (7 each), Rudrapur (6), Hardwar (4) Rishikesh (3), Kashipur (2), Kotdwar, Jaspur, Sitarganj and Gadarpur (1 each)².

The quantitative expansion in higher education that we have witnessed in the state in the current century is not matched by a qualitative improvement. We cannot, in all fairness, claim that our universities compare with the better institutions of the country. Some news magazines periodically publish rankings of higher education institutions in India. Uttarakhand-based institutions do not figure in these lists of best institutions in the country in various fields. The honourable exception is IIT Roorkee, for which the State Government can claim no credit, as it is now a central institution. Using another indicator of the academic standing of our higher education institutions, we find that the number of students from these institutions qualifying in competitive examinations like all-India and central services, UGC and CSIR fellowships is also quite small. We cannot even begin to compare ourselves with global institutions. Referring to a McKinsey report, Philip Altbach makes the startling disclosure that 75 percent of India's engineering graduates are too poorly educated to function effectively in the economy without additional on-the-job training (Altbach: 2009, p.39). Kiran Karnik also makes a similar point when he writes: "The butterfly that flapped its

wings and triggered a storm, to borrow a metaphor from chaos theory, was Nasscom's much-reiterated statement that hardly a fourth of graduating engineers, and even a smaller percentage of other graduates, was of employable quality for IT-BPO jobs." (Karnik: 2009).

Indian universities do not figure in some of the well-known rankings of world universities published periodically³. Making international comparisons is not such a far-fetched idea. In the current phase of globalization, control over knowledge and knowledge production is what gives the decisive edge in determining the power and influence of nations in the international arena. Hence we should be aiming to be among the best in the world.

Here it is necessary to emphasize that the basic aim of institutions of higher learning, especially universities, is knowledge-creation and knowledge-dissemination. Knowledge is to be distinguished from either skill or information. Knowledge, in the true sense of the term, involves engagement with ideas in a creative manner and innovativeness in thinking and application of ideas. Unfortunately our universities and colleges are, at best, purveyors of skill and information. As a result even the best of our institutions are not setting standards for others to follow. They are merely consumers of ideas produced elsewhere, mainly in the western industrialized countries.

For building a modern higher education system it would therefore be necessary to start with re-visioning the nature and role of universities as the corner stone of the structure. In this context it is well to reflect on what the Report of the Committee on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education, 2009 (hereafter Yashpal Committee, or YPC for short) has to say about the essential feature of a university:

A university is a place where new ideas germinate, strike roots and grow tall and sturdy. It is a unique space, which covers the entire 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.

The university has also been regarded as the trustee of the humanist traditions of the world and it constantly endeavours to fulfil 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. (YPC: 2009, pp. 9-10)

Unfortunately, despite such lofty ideals, an instrumentalist concept of higher education has taken deep roots in India at the institutional, societal and even the highest policy-making levels,⁴ especially during the last two decades or so. Its role in preparing young women and men for the world of work by imparting skills that are needed in the job market has been receiving increasing (or one may add, exclusive) attention, to the detriment of its knowledge-creation role. Witness the large numbers of private professional colleges, universities and deemed to be universities in the fields of engineering, medicine, dentistry, computer applications, pharmacy, management, teacher education, para-medical education etc. that have mushroomed in recent years. Many of them do not measure up to any quality standards, not even that of decent polytechnics. As a result questions are being raised about the role and functioning of regulatory bodies, especially AICTE and UGC, that have approved their establishment. The scramble for starting so-called job-oriented courses, often without adequate preparation or qualified staff has also affected our universities. In many cases this is seen as an easy way of augmenting resources. By classifying such courses or programmes as self-financing, the universities are able to charge much higher tuition fee than that for regular undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The latter, it may be recalled, are still stuck, in many cases, at the level fixed almost half-a-century back.

Providing skilled human power with necessary technical knowledge and skills to meet the needs of a rapidly growing and globalizing modern economy is undoubtedly important from the perspective of the national economy; yet it is an incomplete and partial understanding of the role of higher education in the modern globalised world. It ignores the crucial importance of knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination in the emerging world. Knowledge has now also become the basis of power. Gone are the days when nations could hope to build their power on the shoulders of borrowed ideas, borrowed knowledge and borrowed money. The signs are unmistakable that in the emerging world, knowledge, and control over knowledge, will define the power of nations, rather than mere possession of weapons or money, as in the past. It is therefore essential that India should aim to become a global knowledge power. That is also the vision and blueprint drawn up for the country by the National Knowledge Commission.

Higher education in India has been plagued by lack of clarity about its role and the ends it should seek to maximize. It has been buffeted, on occasion violently, between the three goals of access, equity and quality, by the prevailing political and/or ideological wind.

Among these three goals access and equity have proved to be stronger than quality. Quality has also had a relatively weak constituency rooting for it. As a result, access and equity have come to occupy the centre-stage in educational policy at the expense of quality. Higher education (and indeed education generally) is best conceived as a triangular structure resting on the three pillars of access, equity and quality. The stability of the structure demands that each pillar be of the same strength, otherwise it will become lop-sided or even collapse. Something of this kind seems to be happening to higher education in India today (Joshi B. K.: 2008, p. 144).

Before it can emerge as a global knowledge power the country will have to overcome the obstacles that have held it back so far. The basic infirmity of the higher education system in India, according to Altbach, is the absence of a “coherent differentiated academic system” and of a strategy for moving towards such a system (Altbach, 2009, p.42). All effective mass education systems, according to Altbach, are differentiated by function and funding sources, and most also include a private sector as well. He further explains what a differentiated academic system implies:

Typically, differentiated academic systems are characterized by a hierarchy of institutions, with highly selective research-intensive universities at the top, comprehensive universities in the middle, and an array of less selective and non-baccalaureate colleges at the bottom. An array of specialized institutions also composes part of the system. The elite sector typically enrolls only a small proportion of the students and is, disproportionately, generously funded. Except in the United States and Japan, almost all elite universities are public (Altbach, 2009, p.42).

Uttarakhand needs to draw inspiration and ideas from the reports of the National Knowledge Commission and the Yashpal Committee, and revamp and restructure its higher education system in order to take full advantage of the emerging opportunities in the knowledge arena. The State has certain strengths which it can build upon and emerge as a premier knowledge destination in the country: literacy rate in the state is higher than the national average; it is an important centre of secondary education and houses a number of well-known private schools, which attract students from all over the country and even abroad. The following should constitute the basic building blocks for revamping and rejuvenating the State’s higher education system:

- Holistic education system
- Differentiated education system
- Clarity about the role of the private sector

- Appropriate institutional framework

Holistic Education System

A holistic system of higher education, as the very name implies, does not compartmentalise higher education institutions into separate unrelated categories with no links to each other, especially at the level of policy. On the contrary, it considers all higher, or post-secondary educational institutions, irrespective of whether they belong to general education, professional education or vocational education streams, as part of a common structure. Consequently, a holistic higher education policy encompasses all these streams in an integrated manner. For the sake of administrative convenience different departments/agencies of the government may be given responsibility for overseeing the implementation of policy in specific areas viz., general education, technical and professional education, medical education etc., but at the policy level there has to be one agency that takes an overall or holistic view of higher education. This will enable a comprehensive and reasoned response from the state government to the various opportunities and challenges emanating from the fast-paced developments at the national and global levels. It will also help in developing linkages between the various institutions imparting post-secondary education. For instance, ITIs and polytechnics provide certificate and diploma level instruction in various trades and branches of engineering and technology, but they function independently of each other and of engineering colleges. At present a person passing out of an ITI with a trade certificate has no chance of upgrading his qualifications to diploma level without securing admission to a polytechnic as a regular student. The same holds true for diploma holders from polytechnics aspiring to become degree holders. This process could be facilitated by designing and putting in place a system of credit-based modular courses and transfer of credits from one institution to another within the state to start with. It could first be experimented with in broad disciplinary streams e.g., technical education, professional education, medical education, general education etc. and later extended across disciplines as well.

One can visualise a number of advantages of such a system from the point of view of both the youth of the state and the state government. For instance a hard-working young person from a remote hill district who does not have the wherewithal to enter an engineering college in Dehradun or Roorkee or Haldwani or similar place, either due to lack of money or non-availability of “coaching” centres can go to a polytechnic or ITI in her area and yet not feel frustrated that her chances of becoming a degree-holding engineer are forever blocked. Taking another example, we find that in the field of medical education there is no provision

for a diploma (except at the post-graduate level), although such a system did exist in the past in the form of Licentiate Medical Practitioners. If say a two or three year diploma in basic medicine were introduced with possibility of upgrading to a medical degree through a modular curricular framework we would be able to train a cadre of motivated “barefoot” doctors, qualified to take care of common ailments and medical emergencies, who may perhaps be more willing to serve in remote PHCs and sub-centres in the mountain areas, many of which otherwise function without proper medical staff. The concurrence of the Medical Council of India will, of course, be necessary before such a system can be introduced.

In its application to universities the concept of holistic education implies that they should provide facilities at various levels – undergraduate, postgraduate and research – in a number of subjects in the humanities, social sciences and the sciences in a transferable credit-based mode. They should also encourage the students to take courses in different subjects, instead of encouraging very narrow subject-based specialization. The importance of universities as centres of holistic education has also been emphasized by the Yashpal Committee:

We would like to point out that there are no great universities in the world that do not simultaneously conduct world class programs in science, astronomy, management, languages, comparative literature, philosophy, psychology, information technology, law, political science, economics, agriculture and many other emerging disciplines. Indeed the emerging disciplines do their emerging because of infection or triggering by other fields in the same university. That is the reason that such universities are so great and our academics keep going to them. Our argument is that they would not be great if they could not accommodate people from many other disciplines. Put together, all the disciplines breed value into each other. If forced to stay in isolation from each other they would not have the character demanded for greatness (YPC: 2009, p. 4).

Within this framework there is hardly any justification for single discipline or specialized universities, which is a comparatively recent development. Most of them have come up in the private sector, albeit with the approval of the state government. This tendency needs to be curbed in the interests of a holistic higher education system through universities that provide facilities for education in a variety of disciplines. Where instruction in specialized fields is considered necessary this should be done through colleges or institutes, which would necessarily rank lower in status than universities.

Differentiated Education System

A differentiated education system, as explained above, can best be characterized as a pyramidal structure consisting of a hierarchy of institutions. Highly selective research intensive universities form the apex of the pyramid. They have been defined as “the link to the international network of science and scholarship, producers of much of research in the academic system, and educators of the elite for key positions in society” (Altbach: 2009, p. 44). Below them come comprehensive universities. A large number of less specialized institutions form the base of the pyramid. If this structure were to be implemented in Uttarakhand, as indeed we would like to argue for, it would be necessary to develop one or a few universities as research intensive ones. Uttarakhand, at present, has three general universities: Doon University, Kumaon University and Uttarakhand Open University (the last is yet to take off)⁵. The others, including state and private universities, are specialised ones and do not qualify for being developed as research intensive universities. Of these three general universities, the Doon University is a new institution which has started its teaching programme in two disciplines from the current (2009-10) academic session. Kumaon University is a much older institution, having been established in 1973. Though it has a number of science, humanities and social science departments spread over three campuses and a large number of colleges – postgraduate, undergraduate and self-financing – in the five districts of Kumaun Division affiliated to it, developing it as a research intensive university would be an uphill task since over the years there has been considerable erosion in its standing as an institution of higher education. The baggage that it has come to acquire would constantly act to weigh it down. The effort, therefore, should be to develop it as a good comprehensive university occupying the second level in the differentiated pyramid. The Uttarakhand Open University cannot be expected to take on the role and responsibility of a research intensive university, since that is not really its mandate, apart from the fact that it is still to start functioning. It can, however, play a very useful role in extending the facility of higher education to people living in remote parts of the state where access and connectivity is a major constraint and which are devoid of any facility or opportunity of higher education.

This would automatically narrow the choice of a research university to the Doon University. The major advantage of the Doon University is that being a new institution it is free of any negative baggage yet. Hence it can be developed in a desired direction without fear of running into opposition by vested interests. It needs to be emphasized in this context that the mark of a good university is a close integration of teaching and research. The two cannot be seen in isolation from each other; they are synergistically interrelated.⁶ This

integration, moreover, should also include the undergraduate level. Hence a good research university should compulsorily have undergraduate teaching and its best faculty should be involved in teaching at that level. The lasting impression that this creates on young minds and inspires them throughout their life constitutes the real “romance” of higher education.⁷

In order to create a differentiated higher education system a few other changes in the existing structure are necessary. An important reason behind the decline of the state universities has been the affiliation of an ever increasing number of colleges and students enrolled in them. The universities have literally been overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the problems that this entails. It would not be unfair to say that the major time and effort of the university administration is devoted to planning for examinations, conducting examinations, getting scripts evaluated and declaration of results. The implication of this for our present analysis is that if the only remaining state university is to be developed as a comprehensive university it should be freed from the responsibility of the colleges presently affiliated to it. This can be done in one of two ways.

(1) The state government establishes a new affiliating university to which all colleges of general education are affiliated. All technical and professional colleges, including the self-financing ones, are affiliated to the Uttarakhand Technical University. This may be easy to do politically and administratively, but it would be a second-best solution because it would leave untouched the basic structure of the higher education system in the State, which is in need of a radical overhaul.

(2) A comprehensive plan for restructuring the higher education system in the state is initiated. This would involve a taking a number of related actions:

- Development of existing postgraduate colleges as autonomous colleges so that they can frame their own curriculum and conduct their own examination and evaluation system, freeing the university from this responsibility to concentrate on more urgent academic tasks. Autonomy could also be granted to clusters of colleges selected on the basis of similarity of standards or geographical proximity as suggested by the National Knowledge Commission (NKC, 2006: p. 53).
- Development of undergraduate colleges on the pattern of community colleges combining some features of open learning. Their emphasis should be on a combination of vocational or livelihood-related and general education courses. They should have a flexible system of education so that students earn course

credits, transferable to the mainstream system, which enables them to get a certificate or diploma after obtaining a certain specified number of credits. There should also be a system of practical training through apprenticeship/internship in industrial, commercial or government establishments for academic credit. Students enrolling in such colleges should have the possibility of completing their education in stages through a modular curriculum which should also enable them to acquire a degree after completing specified course requirements. These colleges should be de-linked from existing universities and affiliated to an Undergraduate Education Board. A similar proposal has been made by the National Knowledge Commission in respect of those undergraduate colleges, which in its view cannot be converted to autonomous colleges. Two alternatives are proposed for such colleges – either remodelling them as community colleges providing vocational education through two year courses and formal education through three year courses, or affiliating them to a Central Board of Undergraduate Education along with State Boards of Undergraduate education which would set curricula and conduct examinations (NKC. 2006: pp. 52-53).

- All technical and professional colleges to be affiliated to the Uttarakhand Technical University, which should also draw a road map and initiate steps for gradually developing them as autonomous colleges. Institutions that fail to make the grade as autonomous colleges, for whatever reason, should not be permitted to grant degrees. They may grant diplomas either as associated institutions of the Uttarakhand Technical University or the Board of Technical Education.

Clarity about the Role of the Private Sector

There is no denying the fact that the private sector has today become a major player in the sphere of higher education in India. This is so in Uttarakhand as well. In fact there are more institutions established and run by the private sector in the state than by the government. Except colleges of general education, private institutions outnumber government institutions in every other field. Hence not recognising the important role of the private sector in higher education would amount to burying our heads in sand.⁸ Our universities and the regulatory bodies like the AICTE, MCI, Bar Council, NCTE etc., have failed to ensure that proper norms and standards are followed in the opening and functioning of these institutions. As a result a large number of poor quality teaching shops have sprung up. They charge high

fees but in very many cases do not have adequate infrastructure, facilities and qualified faculty.

Despite the quantum increase in the number of private technical and professional institutions, they do not find any place in the official policy framework of higher education. In fact, they are likely to be viewed with considerable suspicion by government agencies. Part of the reason for ambiguity in official policy towards the private sector educational institutions may be the general rejection of the notion that provision of education can be a legitimate source of profit by the private sector. Traditionally, as well as contemporaneously, philanthropy is regarded as the legitimate role for private players, whether individuals or corporates, in the field of education. Any attempt at earning profit through education does not find social approval. The irony, as Kiran Karnik, remarks is that “While there are strong arguments for free or subsidised higher education, we are not writing on a blank page: education in India has already been hugely commercialised. Politicians and businessmen have entered this sector in a big way and found devious ways of making money, though the law stipulates that educational institutes must be not-for-profit trusts or societies.” He goes on to argue that we should permit well-run corporates to enter the field of higher education “within an appropriate regulatory framework”. This in his view would be “far better than the so-called trusts and societies which – barring some noteworthy exceptions – are a blot on education.” (Karnik: 2009)

The issue is not about making a choice between the state and the private sector as the sole (or main) provider of higher education. Both are equally important and necessary. We cannot do without the private sector not only because it is already playing a dominant role, but also because the state does not have the resources to expand higher education on the scale and pace needed. In any case, primary and secondary education should have a higher claim on the state’s resources. There is, thus, a strong case for not only permitting the private sector to continue alongside the public sector, but creating conditions in which the legitimacy of the role of the private sector in higher education, as well as earning reasonable profits, is recognised. Insistence on investment in education as a philanthropic activity rather than a legitimate business activity will not get us any purchase today. We need to accept that the spread of the private sector in education (and also in health) is only partly due to the failure of the state to make adequate provision for these services. It is also deeply rooted in our political

economy, more specifically the inequalities of income, wealth, social status and power that exist in the country. In fact the failure of the state is itself a product of the prevailing political economy. What is needed, therefore, is (a) a regulatory system for higher education based on transparency, accountability and competition (for quality education, one may add); and (b) a system of scholarships, tuition waivers, education loans etc. to ensure that no deserving student is deprived of access to higher education because of lack of means.

Appropriate Institutional Framework

In order to radically restructure the higher education system it is necessary to create an appropriate institutional framework for policy planning and regulation while ensuring transparency and accountability. This does not imply that government departments that are at present responsible for various aspects of higher education should be divested of their responsibility. Given the rules of business in the government this may not be possible without creating an entirely new department vested with this responsibility. This is neither necessary nor desirable. The objective can be realized by creating a new institution with responsibility for policy formulation, coordination, and regulation. The remaining functions of disbursing grants and funds, exercising control etc. should remain with individual departments as at present.

Inspiration for an institution of this kind is provided by reports and recommendations of various recent commissions and committees in the sphere of higher education. In particular we can draw upon three recent documents: The National Policy on Education, 1986 as modified in 1992; the Report to the Nation of the National Knowledge Commission: 2006; and the Report of the Yashpal Committee on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education in India, 2009. Salient features of the relevant recommendations of these documents are highlighted below.

The NPE '86 recommended the establishment of State Councils of Higher Education with responsibilities encompassing planning and coordination, academic development, advisory and administrative functions. It had also recommended the setting up of “a national body covering higher education in general, agricultural, medical, technical, legal and other professional fields” in the interest of “greater co-ordination and consistency in policy, sharing of facilities and developing inter-disciplinary research”. Our record in this regard has not been particularly encouraging. Only a few states viz., Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal set up properly constituted and functioning State Councils. In most of the others they have either not been established, or their establishment has been a mere formality. Uttar Pradesh belongs to the latter category. Uttarakhand, which was carved out of Uttar Pradesh,

did not even bother to consider the desirability of having such an institution. The Administrative Reforms Commission of the state has recommended the establishment of a State Council of Higher Education. The ARC went to the extent of including a draft Universities Act in its report on higher education, which also had provision for a State Council of Higher Education. The national body proposed by the NPE did not see the light of day.

The National Knowledge Commission, in its recommendations on higher education, has made a strong plea for the setting up of an Independent Regulatory Authority on Higher Education (IRAHE) to be established by an Act of Parliament. The case for IRAHE rests on the fact that in India universities can only be established through legislation; the deemed university route is much too difficult for new institutions. As a result there is a steady increase in the size of existing universities and a steady decline in quality. The NKC has argued that due to the multiplicity of regulatory agencies the mandates are both confusing and overlapping making the system "over-regulated but under-governed". The functions of IRAHE, according to the National Knowledge Commission, would include:

- Setting criteria and deciding on entry
- Only agency for granting degree granting power
- Monitoring standards and settling disputes
- Licensing accreditation agencies

With the establishment of the IRAHE the role of the UGC would be re-defined to focus on the distribution of grants to, and maintenance of, public institutions. The Eleventh Five Year Plan has proposed the need for an Inter-university Centre on higher education to undertake specialized research for policy formulation.

Finally, the Yashpal Committee has proposed the setting up of an omnibus National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER). This all-encompassing apex body would replace the University Grants Commission. The academic functions of the 13 or so professional regulatory bodies set up under various Acts of Parliament are also proposed to be subsumed under the NCHER. Consequently, the role of these bodies would be confined to looking after the fitness of people wishing to practice in the relevant profession. The justification for an omnibus NCHER, according to the Yashpal Committee, is based on the holistic nature of higher education.⁹ Keeping in mind the federal nature of our country and the role of the States in the sphere of higher education (which, it may be added is much more extensive than that of the Union) the Committee has proposed the establishment of State

Higher Education Councils “which would be in constant dialogue with the NCHER with an aim to create a comparable national system of higher education which respects regional diversities and also allows different kinds of institutions, created by the state or the centre, to grow on equal footing.”

Proposed Uttarakhand Higher Education Council

Drawing inspiration from the above reports and documents and looking at the problems and needs of the higher education sector in Uttarakhand, it is proposed that an institution known as the Uttarakhand Higher Education Council (UHEC) should be set up in the state.

The objectives of the Council, adapted from the Yashpal Committee Report, should be as follows:

Objectives

- Be responsible for comprehensive, holistic evolution of Higher Education sector in the State;
- Strategize and Steer the expansion of higher education in the State;
- Ensure autonomy of the universities and shield them from interference by external agencies;
- Act as a catalyst and also as a conduit to encourage joint/cross-disciplinary programmes between and amongst Universities and Institutes;
- Spearhead continuous reforms and renovation in the area of higher education;
- Ensure good governance, transparency and quality in higher education;
- Connect with industry and other economic sectors to promote innovations.

Role and Functions

The role of the Council should encompass the three broad areas of policy planning & co-ordination, regulation and academic development.

Policy planning and co-ordination would include:

- Preparation of perspective plans for development of higher education in the state
- Preparation of consolidated programmes for higher education in the context of overall plans and priorities and monitor their implementation
- Promotion and co-ordination among institutions of higher education

- Policy advice and guidance to the state government for the development of higher education

Regulation would include the following functions:

- Setting norms for establishment of new universities, colleges and courses
- Setting quality standards and assisting universities and colleges in achieving and maintaining standards
- Monitoring higher education institutions with a view to ensuring that they fulfil the minimum norms and standards prescribed

In the area of academic development, the functions of the Commission would include:

- Initiating reform of curriculum, restructuring courses and updating of syllabi
- Promoting research and integrating teaching and research
- Initiating reforms in the system of evaluation and examinations
- Promoting publication of quality text books

Once the UHEC is formed no new higher education institution, whether in the private or public sector, should come into existence without its concurrence. The UHEC should ensure that the norms prescribed by it are strictly complied with. This should go a long way in preventing the proliferation of sub-standard institutions of indifferent quality.

Composition

The UHEC should have a full-time Chairperson and three full-time members. The Chairperson should be an eminent educationist. The other members should also be known educationists drawn from the broad streams of general education (science, social science and humanities), technical and professional education, and medical, including para-medical, education. The Council would be organized in three divisions dealing with general education, professional education and medical education. Each member would head the division corresponding to their area of expertise. The Chairperson should have the status of the Chairman of the State Public Service Commission and the members that of a university Vice Chancellor. The Council would be assisted by an advisory body consisting of all Vice Chancellors of universities (public and private) in the state, Secretaries to Government of Uttarakhand in the departments of higher education, technical education, agricultural education and medical education, two representatives of the corporate sector, six college principals – two each from postgraduate colleges, proposed livelihood colleges and self-financing colleges – by rotation, and six eminent educationists belonging to the three broad

streams identified above. The Council would have its own secretariat headed by a Secretary. Each division would have a small complement of professional and support staff.

The UHEC should preferably be created as a statutory body.¹⁰ This will give it the necessary importance in the institutional hierarchy at the state level. Once it is made a statutory body it should also be required to present an annual report of its activities and achievements to the State Vidhan Sabha. Hopefully, this will not simply be tabled in the legislature but also debated upon. The idea behind making it a statutory body is to enlarge the stakeholder base for higher education reform by including legislators and enlightened citizens. It is high time higher education became a matter of concern for all of them.

Notes

¹ See Annexure 1 for break-up of these numbers into different category of institutions.

² An important reason for most of the self-financing colleges being located in the plain areas of the State is perhaps the All India Council of Technical Education norm of a minimum land area of necessary for granting recognition to such institutions. It is difficult to get such large chunks of land in the mountains.

³ Not a single Indian university figures in the top 100 in either the Shanghai Jiao Tong University's ranking of world universities (2008), or the Times Higher Education Quarterly's ranking (2008). China had 2 universities in the list while tiny Hong Kong (though now a part of China, but with a distinct education system) had 4 (Altbach: 2009).

⁴ Even the Eleventh Five Year Plan, which has significantly enhanced allocation to higher education, seems to subscribe to an instrumentalist view of higher education when it says: "Despite the expansion that has occurred, it is evident that the system is under stress to provide a *sufficient volume of skilled human power, which is equipped with the required knowledge and technical skills to cater to the demands of the economy.*" (emphasis added)

⁵ The HNB Garhwal University, which is the third general university in the state, has recently been converted to a Central University from a State University. It has, for this reason, been excluded from this analysis which is directed at the role and responsibility of the state government in the field of higher education.

⁶ Writing to the Prime Minister on November 06, 2008 on the subject, Mr. Sam Pitroda, Chairman, National Knowledge Commission had this to say about the relation between teaching and research: "Throughout the world, universities are the natural home for the interface between teaching and research. But this is far from reality in the vast majority of Indian universities. In fact, the overall current situation in Indian universities is dismal largely due to the lack of quality infrastructure and the inability to recruit good young faculty and gifted students." (Report on "More Quality Ph.Ds")

⁷ A Souvenir published by the University of Allahabad as part of its centenary celebrations in 1987 contained letters by its alumni. Many of the older alumni, who attended the University during the period of academic domination, wrote with great respect about the great teachers like Dr Meghnad Saha, Dr Neel Ratan Dhar, Dr Shafat Ahmad Khan, Dr Beni Prasad, Dr Amar Nath Jha, Dr Ishwari Prasad, Dr Gorakh Prasad who had taught them. In the words of P. N. Haksar "All these men of great distinction and tremendous sense of integrity lived up to the standards prescribed for a Guru, who according to the best of our *Parampara*, is like *Param Brahma*." (Joshi, Lalit: 2008, p. 257).

⁸ Analysing data from all medical and engineering colleges in India Kapur and Mehta point out "In the case of engineering colleges, the private sector, which accounted for just 15 per cent of the seats in 1960, accounted for 86.4 per cent of seats and 84 per cent of all colleges in 2003." In the case of medical colleges the private sector dominance is less stark, but the trend is unambiguous: the proportion of private seats has risen from 6.8 per cent in 1960 to 40.9 per cent in 2003. While we do not have precise data the situation in more than 1000 business

schools suggests that ninety per cent are private.” (Kapur and Mehta: 2008, p. 155). It is fair to presume that after 2003 the dominance of the private sector in higher education would have increased manifold. The Eleventh Five Year Plan points out that the share of private unaided higher education institutions increased from 42.6 per cent in 2001 to 63.21 per cent in 2006. Their share in enrolment increased from 32.89 per cent to 51.53 per cent during the same period. (Eleventh Five Year Plan, Vol. 2, Para 1.3.7, p. 23).

⁹ “A holistic view of knowledge 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, law and distance education, is brought within the purview of a single, all-encompassing higher education authority.” (YPC, p. 54)

¹⁰ The Yashpal Committee has recommended according constitutional status to the proposed NCHER, and has also included a draft for for this purpose in its report (YPC, pp. 69 & 72-75)

References

1. Altbach, Philip G. (2009), “The Giants Awake: Higher Education Systems in China and India”, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.44, No. 23
2. Joshi, B. K. (2008), “Equity vs. Quality”, in Pande (Ed.)
3. Joshi, Lalit (2008), “The Alumni Remember”, in Pande (Ed.)
4. Kapur, Devesh and Pratap Bhanu Mehta (2008), “Mortgaging the Future”, in Pande (Ed.)
5. National Knowledge Commission, Report to the Nation: 2006 (www.knowledgecommission.gov.in/reports/report06)
6. National Knowledge Commission, “More Quality Ph.Ds” in Report to the Nation 2006 – 2009 (www.knowledgecommission.gov.in/downloads/documents/moreQualityPhD.pdf)
7. Pande, Ira, (Ed.), Beyond Degrees (IIC Quarterly, Vol. 34, Nos. 3 & 4, Winter 2007 – Spring 2008
8. Planning Commission, Government of India (2008), Eleventh Five Year Plan: 2007-2012 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press)
9. Report of the Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education (Yashpal Committee) (2009), <http://education.nic.in/HigherEdu/YPC-Report.pdf>

Annexure 1

Distribution of Institutions of Higher Education in Uttarakhand: 2000 & 2009

Institution	2000	2009
State Universities	4*	6
Private Universities	-	5
Deemed Universities	1	3
General Colleges (Government) (Post-graduate) (Under-graduate)	35	67 (16) (51)
General Colleges (Aided)	10	16
Engineering Colleges (Government)	2	2
Hotel Management Colleges (Government)		2
Self-financing Colleges – Engg., Mgmt., Pharma, Para-med., Hotel Mgmt. Education – (Private)	8	136
Medical Colleges (Government)	-	1
Medical Colleges (Private)	1	2
Dental Colleges (Private)	1	3
Ayurvedic Colleges (Government)	2	2
Ayurvedic Colleges (Private)	-	2
Homeopathic Colleges (Private)	-	1
Total	64	248

*Includes Roorkee University, which subsequently became an IIT.

Sources: Information provided by Director, Higher Education, Uttarakhand; information obtained through personal contacts from the Kumaon University and HNB Garhwal University; www.utech.in/CollegeList.aspx; www.uttara.in/hindi/apexinstitutes/hnbg/college_list/self_finance; www.uttara.in/hindi/apexinstitutes/kumaon/affiliated_institutes/self