

Reaching the unreached- Leading change and reforms: UKIERI MHRD consultation workshop on Higher Education Leadership Development Programme



UKIERI in partnership with Indian Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) brought together over 70 policy makers and senior government representatives from across 18 states to deliberate on the needs of Higher Education sector and the model for developing a scalable sustainable higher education leadership programme. The representation from states was very

encouraging and participants included principals from autonomous colleges, vice chancellors from state universities and senior representatives from higher education councils and state governments like Orissa, Nagaland, Manipur, West Bengal, Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir, Tamil Nadu and many more.

This workshop aimed to focus on achieving the outcome of an action plan which will be implemented through UKIERI and MHRD over the following year in collaboration with the States through **Rashtriya Uchattar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)**. RUSA is a centrally sponsored scheme proposed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development to ensure holistic planning at the state level and enhancement of allocations for the state institutions with focus on state higher educational institutions.

RUSA states that higher education needs to be viewed as a long-term social investment for the promotion of economic growth, cultural development, social cohesion, equity and justice. The globalisation era has necessitated inculcation of competitive spirit at all levels. Therefore, the quality of higher education has become a major concern today.



Academic leadership and leadership development of educational administrators, in this context is highlighted as an area of focus.

Shri Ashok Thakur, Secretary Higher Education from Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India in his inaugural address stated that maintaining quality in the face of a large enrolment of 25 million students is a huge challenge.

The Ministry has initiated key reforms recently around mandatory accreditation and incentivising state governments through RUSA; which can only succeed with good leadership. He pointed out that Higher Education quality improvement is not about improving quality of students or infrastructure but about faculty development and participation. He mentioned that through UKIERI, MHRD is keen to look at appropriate leadership development programmes for thinkers, policy makers, institution builders and senior faculty. He reiterated that any reform will only succeed with good leadership and by educating the faculty to be a part of this change.

Martin Davidson, CEO British Council

in his special address endorsed UKIERI as a flagship bilateral programme being increasingly recognised in the UK for transforming the relationship between the two countries. He stated that vision, communication and creating genuine action are key attributes for effective leaders. He emphasised communication lies at the heart of transformational leadership, and development of communication competencies in leaders should be at the heart of any leadership development programme. He reiterated the UK's commitment in partnering with India on their vision of the Indian Higher Education sector with increased focus on quality, access and expansion.



Prof H Devraj, Chairman University Grants Commission (UGC) spoke about the new initiatives that UGC have taken towards supporting highly effective leaders in institutions. These have been across universities, colleges and also include faculty development programmes to improve the overall ecosystem of higher education.



The joint presentation by **Mr Harpreet Singh, Director Higher Education, MHRD** and **Prof Venkatesh Kumar, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)** emphasised the need for mentoring of upcoming leaders by senior and experience leaders. It stated that in the context of multi-tiered leadership, leadership skills that are imparted have to be customized to different levels of leadership. There is a need for transformation of state universities in order for them to meet the RUSA goals of access, equity and quality. They strongly advocated that such transformation of state universities can only be achieved through the means of transformational leadership.

Some of the key points that emerged from the initial discussions reflected the importance and need for a more comprehensive and scalable leadership development programme.

1. Existing leadership development initiatives such as Academic staff colleges are not taken seriously. It is pertinent to examine the reasons for failure of such initiatives in order to prevent their recurrence in the upcoming leadership development project, and ensure that leadership capacity building programmes are taken seriously by the faculty and leaders of Indian HE institutions.



2. Lack of autonomy, resulting from political and other pressure on leaders can detract from a focus on quality in HE institutions. Therefore HE leaders should possess autonomy in their functioning, and such autonomy should be balanced with governance controls in order to achieve a balance between autonomy and accountability. Autonomy of HE institutions and their governing bodies is for the benefit of students and society, and not for the benefit of faculty members themselves.
3. The problem of planning deficit and ad hoc planning of HE are evident, seen for example in the uncontrolled growth of educational institutions on some areas and the neglect of other areas. Therefore development of planning and budgeting capacities should have a very important place in the leadership development project, giving special importance to specific skills related to formulation of the state plans and institutional plans.
4. Affiliated colleges are a crucial part of our HE system, since a major share of the student enrolment is in affiliated colleges. However, in the past, not much attention and effort has been paid to the capacity building of affiliated colleges. Furthermore leaders of these collages have themselves been preoccupied with basic issues related to the survival and sustainability of these colleges. Leadership development should be at the core of the advancement of these institutions.
5. It is heartening that small colleges also want to be part of the larger higher educational discourse, and one may thus expect that they will be receptive to the leadership development project and its components. The leadership training targeted at these institutions should not ignore what their leaders perceive as the essential problems – teacher management, optimum utilization of teachers, motivation of teachers and management of students belonging to diverse socio economic and other backgrounds, and management of institutional finances.

6. Research is not seen a high priority by the leaders of affiliated colleges; development of research competence is however, an important RUSA priority and the leadership development project should aim to develop some basic research leadership- related competencies among the leaders of affiliated colleges.
7. Leadership development should also be customized to distinct groups of colleges and leaders, such as women principals, minority managed colleges and autonomous colleges.

The **UK models of leadership** were detailed through presentations made by senior representatives from Higher Education Funding Council for England, Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, National College for Teaching and Leadership, University of Edinburgh and Nottingham.



Alison Johns, Head of Leadership, Governance and Management, Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) presented the overall Higher Education regulatory framework along with the roles and responsibilities of each of the organisations, bodies in the UK HE sector. She also elucidated the National framework for Leadership and Management activities for UK Higher education institutions and the systemic approach to leadership development. She also explained the role of the four UK funding councils which invest strategically in governance development, developing capacity to manage strategic change and transition and support research, enquiry and dissemination.

Ms Jaspal Kaur, Director HR, University of Nottingham spoke about interesting leadership development initiatives that are being carried out at Nottingham University, such as future potential programme, preparing for senior leadership and for newly appointed professors. She also shared details on the mandatory first 100 days induction programme for newly appointed heads of schools which could be considered for implementation in the Indian context. She reiterated the fact that given that faculty sometimes are reluctant to take on the additional burden of leadership on top of their teaching and research responsibilities, a year's sabbatical for intensification of research after the period of leadership is also worth considering for implementation in Indian institutions. She emphasised on the notion that research funding can incentivize continuation of research endeavours even in the midst of leadership and administrative responsibilities.



Her presentation also highlighted the challenge of ensuring credible, relevant and stimulating content for senior, very experienced participants of any leadership development programme which is flexible to ever changing needs.

Graham Thompson, Director of the Scottish Centre for Studies in School Administration (SCSSA) & Academic Coordinator for Professional Learning, University of Edinburgh detailed the strategic plans of his University and the key factors linking mentorship and leadership. He emphasised on the importance of communication for leaders and how effective communication is the cornerstone for leadership in any institution. He endorsed the need for institutional leaders to also focus on improving student experiences, develop partnerships and inculcate social responsibility with global impact.



Prof R Govinda, Vice Chancellor, National University for Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) highlighted that contextualization is the biggest challenge, and there is no single mode of leadership development. The logistics and resources required to cater to the huge number of interested HE leaders from affiliated colleges also have to be worked out. A network of anchor institutions, that channelize the findings of educational research into the leadership development curriculum and content, is needed for the delivery of leadership training for leaders of affiliated colleges.

Prof Suranjan Das, Vice Chancellor, Kolkata University mentioned that effective leadership and continuity in leadership can be achieved even in the context of politicization of HE institutions, provided leaders exercise the right leadership skills. The integrative and participatory models of leadership are especially suitable for such contexts. A further exploration of the specific leadership skills required to deal with the challenge of political interference would be very useful for content development for any leadership development programmes. A collegial, collaborative style goes a long way in overcoming opposition and mobilizing different stakeholders and groups in contributing to the fruition of a HE institution's vision. Networking with peers and honing of leadership skills of talented faculty by placing them in unfamiliar or challenging assignments/positions also helps in developing leadership competencies of faculty members.



Dr Barrie Morgan representing Leadership Foundation for Higher Education revealed the self-identified needs that came up in the course of his interaction with HE leaders and faculty in Haryana and West Bengal. These insights are

valuable for development of HE leadership in the Indian state universities and could be incorporated into the training curriculum for the leadership development programme being envisaged. These self-identified needs included skills to engage professionally and credibly with external stakeholders, HR management skills to motivate and manage staff, skills to generate new income or fund sources, financial management, skills to maximize benefits from ICT, and personal development of leaders. The management structure and the managers/leaders have to be professionalized so that leaders and managers take personal responsibility for the tasks that are devolved to them.

The group also highlighted the need to devote close attention towards the issue of infrastructure for leadership development training involving issues such as number of centres, ownership and management structure of centres etc. It was felt



that one way to effectively cater to the large number of expected trainees is to establish the cascade model of training, whereby leaders will be trained to train their peers, and the trained pool can be instrumental in reforming institutions. Universities could be made responsible for training leaders in affiliated colleges. However for doing this, exemplary universities which can effectively perform training functions and serve as role models have to be developed. Most of the participants recommended that UKIERI should help facilitate a comprehensive programme of capacity building of institution along with faculty development. These include designing programmes for mentoring, exposure and training on teacher training, quality assurance and research excellence.

Prof Shailendra Mehta, Visiting Professor-Business Policy, Indian Institute of Management-Ahmedabad made a very interesting and original argument that alumni leadership and management comprise the most effective models of management and leadership. As far as the Indian context is concerned, the role of distinguished and accomplished alumni in leadership development should be creatively integrated into the leadership development plan; however wide spread or dominant alumni control may be very difficult to achieve.

Jonathan Dale, Managing Director- International, National College for Teaching and Leadership and Tony Richardson, Education Director, National College for Teaching and Leadership, shared their ideas on what constitutes good leadership (i.e. leadership standards) which is pivotal for development of the content and curriculum of the leadership development programme. Leadership standards have to be developed keeping in mind the needs of the audience, needs and goals of individual trainees (as far as possible) and contextual factors. This would be followed by a structuring and planning of the steps and components of an actionable leadership development programme.

The session led by state representatives focussed on how leadership is inextricably linked with management, and good governance is indispensable for the efficient, transparent and accountable functioning of HE institutions. They also shared the challenges state institutions face and the models currently underway in identifying potential leaders. *Some of the key issues* that participants highlighted for development of a national sustainable scalable leadership programme included:

- Parameters for monitoring the performance of leaders against the standards
- Importance of induction and performance management
- Autonomy for institutions
- Clarity of roles and developing positive attitudinal skills
- New policy implications and budget allocations



The group members identified the major challenges and problems being faced by their respective institutions. **Several group members identified faculty shortages, quality education as key concerns. Another problem identified was around lack of interest and emphasis on arts and social sciences as compared to demand for engineering and**

medicine courses. The representative from North East identified the lack of connectivity and absence of engineering and medical colleges in their states as major problems, because of which many students were migrating to neighbouring states for their HE.

The discussions also focused on the action planning framework for leadership standards. The following inputs were contributed by the delegates during this session:

- The VC (Vice Chancellor) should have capacity for collective decision making and participation, and consult all, from young teachers to senior leadership. The spirit of team leadership is very important.
- Leaders should be institution builders. If the institution is strong, then it can perform even if the leader leaves.
- Skills relevant to planning, development of organizational capacity and scheduling are very important. The leaders should have strong academic backgrounds but also keen administrative skills. There is therefore a strong need to expose leaders to administrative acumen. Academic merit cannot be the only deciding factor for appointments and transfers. Leaders need to consolidate from an administrative point of view i.e. coping with finances, accounts, and dealing with stakeholders.

- There is a need for transformational leaders. Transformational leaders can change institutions irrespective of the institution's past. Transformational leaders are those who take initiative, motivate young as well as seniors.
- Policy makers like VCs are temporary. There is therefore a need for leadership development among the permanent officials/personnel who are the actual implementers and the second level of leadership. Institutional leadership is permanent and objective and more important, whereas individual leadership is temporary and subjective.
- Leaders should have vision and mission to make university centre of excellence. But different vision is required for different areas. For e.g. research vision is different from institutional vision.
- Leadership should institute strong grievance redressal mechanisms along with good communication channels.
- Induction programme for senior leaders should be strengthened. Curriculum of induction programme needs to be changed.

The groups also deliberated on the design and development of the leadership development programme. The following inputs were contributed by the delegates during this session:

- Course curriculum may consist of examples and case studies, including of similar institutions and also university comparison
- Focus on knowledge of administrative procedures, good governance, managerial skills including financial management and resource allocation skills
- Skills in dealing with industry should be covered in the content, since industry can be source of funds, jobs for students and also a research partner
- Integration of different topics for preparing leadership programmes for different levels of leaders.
- Minimum benchmark to be set and minimum levels of performance by leaders to be set along with monitoring of leaders to see if standards are being met. Leaders to be picked on basis of past performance. Need for academic audit according to achievement indicators, in addition to financial audit.
- Incentivising schemes like new UGC guidelines that stipulate orientation courses and journal publications for advancement to leadership positions are desirable



These recommendations, issues and feedback were collated and presented to MHRD in the

summary session. The positive feedback from the workshop has resulted in MHRD endorsing UKIERI as one of the international programmes that could support leadership and capacity building initiatives under RUSA. Development of leadership standards, identification of HE leadership framework, assessment of current leadership quality, designing and development of leadership programme and preparing a route map for programme delivery and timeline have been identified as the most urgent priorities for developing a sustainable and scalable Higher education leadership development programme.

As next steps, UKIERI will now be participating in regional consultations with MHRD to identify potential partners, development of leadership standards and facilitate state workshops for capacity building.

