CHANGE IN EDUCATION POLICY OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) is currently developing the National Education Policy 2015-16. The announcement of the new NPE comes after a long hiatus in the sector that has undergone unprecedented changes since the last policy (1986-92), especially since the introduction of the economic reforms of the 1990's. In this duration, there has been an enormous rise in the social and economic aspirations that has led to multifold increase in the demand for education across the unequal social fabric of India. There has thus been a massive expansion and diversification of education at all the levels — also seen as having been shaped by the pressing demands of the global 'knowledge economy'. This expansion has been accompanied with concerns about 'quality' of and 'equity' in education across levels — at the school level in particular. Balancing the demands of quantitative expansion with the needs of maintaining quality and equity have become the challenges facing education today.
Key board: Human Resource Development, Education, population

INTRODUCTION

Higher education in India is undergoing considerable change. With over 600 million people in India under 25 years old, the system is under tremendous pressure to expand. India's young population has a huge appetite for education and, as -the growth in the size of the middle classes escalates, millions are increasingly able to pay for it. By 2020, India will have the largest tertiary-age population in the world and will have the second largest graduate talent pipeline globally, following China and ahead of the USA . The opportunities for the UK to engage with India through education are considerable. Government plans are in place to transform the sector over the next five years. Every aspect of higher education is being reorganised and remodelled: funding, leadership and management, quality assurance, accountability, relationships with industry, international collaboration, and the way research and teaching are conducted. If these reforms succeed, the breadth and depth of the change will be transformational.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

The Indian higher education system is facing an unprecedented transformation in the coming decade. This transformation is being driven by economic and demographic change: by 2020, India will be the world's third largest economy, with a correspondingly rapid growth in the size of its middle classes. Currently, over 50% of India's population is under 25 years old; by 2020 India will outpace China as the country with the largest tertiary-age population. Despite significant progress over the last ten years, Indian higher education is faced with four broad challenges:

The supply-demand gap: India has a low rate of enrolment in higher education, at only 18%, compared with 26% in China and 36% in Brazil. There is enormous unmet demand for higher education. By 2020, the Indian government aims to achieve 30% gross enrolment, which will mean providing 40 million university places, an increase of 14 million in six years.

● **The low quality of teaching and learning:** The system is beset by issues of quality in many of its institutions: a chronic shortage of faculty, poor quality teaching, outdated and rigid curricula and pedagogy, lack of accountability and quality assurance and separation of research and teaching.

● **Constraints on research capacity and innovation:** With a very low level of PhD enrolment, India does not have enough high

quality researchers; there are few opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary working, lack of early stage research experience; a weak ecosystem for innovation, and low levels of industry engagement.

● **Uneven growth and access to opportunity:** Socially, India remains highly divided; access to higher education is uneven with multidimensional inequalities in enrolment across population groups and geographies.

MANY MORE ABLE AND WILLING TO PAY FOR EDUCATION, BUT MANY LEFT BEHIND

In the next decade, India will experience enormous growth in its middle classes: from 50 million now, to 500 million by 20257. By 2020, India will be the world's third largest economy. The relationship between economic growth and growth in the tertiary enrolment ratio is particularly strong for economies with lower levels of GDP (purchasing power parity) per capita. As India's economy continues to grow, a huge number of first generation learners will demand access to higher education. In ten years' time, 25 million households across India will have an income equivalent to $15,000 and will be able to pay fees for higher education, an increase of 15 million on today's enrolment rates8. However, growth will be uneven; India will be challenged by a growing disparity between those who have access to better life chances, and those who do not. Despite huge strides in primary enrolment rates, India still has the largest number .of out-of-school children in the world, more than the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, and 69% of India's population still lives on less than $2 a day. The World Bank categorises India as "an extreme dual economy".

THE WORLD'S BIGGEST TERTIARY-AGE POPULATION

Another significant driver for educational change is population growth and the demographic profile. More than 50% of India's population is under the age of 25.By 2020, India will have one of the youngest populations in the world, with an average age of 29 years. India will outpace China in the next ten years as the country with the largest tertiary-age population and its relative success in boosting primary enrolment, access to secondary education and improved retention rates should see it have the largest growth in tertiary enrolment in the world in 2020. The OECD predicts that in 2020, 200 milliom of the world's 25-34 year olds will be university graduates and 40% of these will be from China and India, representing a huge proportion of the global talent pool.

THE CHANGING POLITICS OF EDUCATION

The third factor affecting educational change is political. Education in India is highly politicised and complex. Throughout the political system to the highest levels, the education sector is powerfully represented; reforms in education are controlled by political processes and interests at both central and state levels. Many education reforms, plans and ambitions are highly contested. There is a complex interplay beneath the formal structures affecting the distribution of power and resources in education in India; underlying pressures, interests, incentives and institutions can influence or frustrate future educational change. This is particularly complex in the higher education sector. There is a great deal of centralisation in decision-making in education, driven primarily through the five year plan system, which sets out priorities and central budget allocations to states. However, there has been increasing frustration from the states that central government is too slow and 'interfering' and has held back progress in education. Education bills can languish for years in parliament without being put to the vote.

In reality, central government does not have a strong mandate to control education at the state level, and the mechanisms to ensure that states are following central decisions are not completely effective. There is now central government approval to devolve more decision-making power to the states, and this has widespread support. States are taking education reform into their own hands, albeit within the confines of central legislation. However, there are considerable variations in the ability and the political will of states to achieve this. In the more immediate future, India is due to hold national elections this year

in 2014. This will almost certainly have an impact on the progress of bills through parliament, particularly through non-cooperation in legislative voting. There are likely to be significant changes in key posts in education under the new government, which will further disrupt decision-making on pending issues and bills. Nevertheless, the devolution of key areas of responsibility for higher education to the states is set to continue. Indications are that and state parties will occupy influential positions within the next government.

The Indian government is planning huge expansion at all levels of education. While there is no doubt that this will be the decade of change at a transformational

Scale and pace, India's rise faces daunting challenges. The education system as a whole is beset with issues of quality, access and equity, and change is happening much faster in some states than others. The general standard of education in India is low. There are not enough places in schools, colleges or universities to cope with the enormous and increasing demand. Traditional approaches to meet this demand will not be sufficient in the time-scale needed. With the rise of the middle classes, an increasing number of people need not rely on the state to provide an education service. As a consequence, India has seen a dramatic shift towards private provision across the entire education spectrum, including higher education. The private sector is already playing a significant role in the development of education in India, and its influence and presence will increase substantially. Education is vital for India's competiveness and economic growth, but also for social stability. The disparity between rich and poor is growing, and expectations on the part of young people and their parents are high. Geographical differences arc vast, compounded by social divisions and inequalities in education provision.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW A brief overview of the Indian higher education system provides an essential backdrop for the following research findings and comments. There are three main types of tertiary institution in India: 1) universities and university-level institutions, 2) colleges and 3) diploma-awarding institutions. These are categorised by funding source: central government, state government and private.

Table-1
Higher education institutions in India

Type of Institutions	Central	State	Private	Total
University & University level institutions	152	317	200	669
Colleges	669	13028	19933	33030
Diploma awarding Institutions	0	3207	9541	12748
% age enrolment in 2015	2.6	38.7	59.1	100

Source: 'Higher education in India: twelfth five year plan and beyond', Ernst and Young (2014)

If there is one overall structure which defines Indian higher education, it is the affiliated college system. The vast bulk of students study at public and private colleges which are affiliated to state universities. These colleges do not have their own degree awarding powers; they deliver the courses, curricula and examinations specified and regulated by their parent state university. The affiliated college sector is huge, enrolling over 90% of undergraduates, 70% of postgraduates and 17% of doctoral students. Some universities have as many as 1000 colleges affiliated to them. There are considerable challenges in regulation and quality control; and while there arc notable exceptions, many are perceived to be sub-standard. Last year, accreditation through the National Assessment and Accreditation Council and the National Body for Accreditation of all universities and colleges was made

mandatory. A huge exercise is underway to accredit the two-thirds of universities and four-fifths of colleges that do not have accredited status.

State universities, therefore, through their activities, form by far the greatest element of higher education in India. They are run and

funded through their respective state governments. There is wide variation in the amount of funding they receive, but in general, they have beeii critically underfunded over the last 20 years. State universities depend on affiliation fees paid by the colleges for their survival. These fees, supplemented by state government funding, are generally used to pay salaries and little else; most have poor infrastructure and conduct little research, although pockets of excellence exist. Many state universities spend much of their time administering the exams and admissions to their affiliated colleges. Places at state universities are highly sought after by students. Most, but not all, state governments have legislation in place to grant university status to private colleges, providing them with their own degree-awarding powers and much more autonomy. Over the last two decades, central universities and Institutes of National Importance have been the focus of central government priorities and funding. These include the IITs, IIMs and IISERs and several national institutes in specific discipline areas. Most international collaboration is concentrated in these institutes, many of which are research-based. They have high prestige in India and beyond. The private sector has outpaced the state sector in tertiary education and is rapidly expanding. The private sector will continue to be crucial in the growth of higher education in India and already comprises 64% of the total number of institutions and 59% of tertiary enrolment across the country. Currently, private higher education universities are growing at 40% per annum and worth $6.5 billion. Many potential private investors are waiting in the wings. Most research collaboration between India and the UK formed through programmes or initiatives (through UK Research Councils and the UK-India Education and Research Initiative or UKIERI) are focused on the 'best' research institutions in India, primarily the centrally-funded universities and Institutes of National Importance, where only 2.6% of Indian students are enrolled. While Phase 2 of UKIERI has encouraged broader participation with `tier2 and 3' institutions, forming over 20% of the partnership awards, this is still a very small representation. There remains limited international research collaboration with state universities and private institutions, with a few notable exceptions. Therefore, the international higher education community is generally not engaging with the institutions where most students (97.5%) are studying.

Key reforms in India planned in the next five years

The central government operates a five-year planning cycle. The twelfth five-year plan (2013-17) for higher education addresses three overarching challenges: excellence, equity and expansion.

Excellence : Priority issues include improvements in teaching and *learning, and a* focus on [earning outcomes; faculty development to improve teaching; increased integration between research and teaching; more international partnerships in teaching as well as research; better links between industry and research to stimulate innovation; and connecting institutions through networks, alliances and. consortia.

Equity*Further initiatives targeted* at underprivileged and underserved populations in society and geography, addressing urban/rural, gender, people with disabilities and community divisions and inequities.

Expansion : Scaling up capacity in existing institutions, rather than creating many new government-funded institutions; enabling discipline diversity, counteracting the skewed growth towards engineering and other technical subjects; enabling *flexible and skills-based* learning; ensuring a more even spread across the country; alignment to the needs of the economy; and encouraging private investment.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE 12TH FIVE YEAR PLAN

These three interrelated areas are not new: all have been addressed in various forms in previous five-year plans dating back to 1980. The main difference in the 12th plan is its *holistic nature, with* a clear focus on quality, or 'excellence', as an overarching guiding principle for expansion and equity. The excellence principle incorporates the diversification of higher education courses in response to changing economic and industry needs, the provision of greater choice and career paths for

students and brings teaching quality to the fore, alongside research capability.

Underpinning these reforms are:

- ❖ An emphasis on leveraging technology: a huge investment in ICTs and internet access under a 'meta university framework', which enables multi-disciplinary collaboration and development of technology-enhanced learning and teaching, including MOOCs and online courses
- ❖ A national mission for 'teachers and *teaching'*
- ❖ Further support for multi-disciplinary research
- ❖ Further support to vocational education institutes
- ❖ More autonomy and transparency for institutions, and better coordination between regulatory bodies

Key proposals in the 12th Five Year Plan include:

- ❖ A strengthened accreditation system along with more autonomy for states and universities
- ❖ Improving the quality of teaching and doubling the number of faculty
- ❖ Doubling of investment in R&D to 2% over five years
- ❖ Significant investment in ICT in terms of infrastructure and content development
- ❖ A shift to a credit-based and internationally recognised assessment system
- ❖ Strengthening the capacity of existing institutions, establishing 20 'innovation and research universities' and 50 centres of excellence, training and research in
science, technology, social sciences and humanities
- ❖ A review which could pave the way for for-profit private education in some areas
- ❖ The introduction of schemes to target underprivileged and underrepresented students
- ❖ Support for further internationalisation through a broad range of initiatives, including increased international research collaboration, international programmes for faculty development and attracting foreign faculty to India.

INDIAN REVOLUTION IN DIGITAL LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

The majority of interviewees predicted that digital learning technologies will transform higher education in the coming decade, and some believed this would occur in the next 2-3 years. All indicated that international collaboration was urgently needed in this emerging area. Most interviewees emphasised the importance of educational technologies for higher education for two reasons: a) to meet the expanding future student demand, and b) to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Most saw future educational technologies having most impact through blended approaches (a mix of faco-to-face classroom teaching enhanced by technology-enabled learning). A smaller number foresaw a strong growth in fully distance education (degrees and modules), which would probably be provided by a smaller number of Indian institutions, although there was scepticism around the appropriateness of digital learning/teaching for disciplines which required lab skills and hands-on learning. The development of Open Educational Resources (OERs) and bespoke interactive courses will be very important for India. Several interviewees were despondent about the current state of affairs, particularly the general low quality of the digital content and poor learning outcomes on current distance education courses; despite pockets of innovation and good practice, there is a dearth of good educational content being developed in India.

CONCLUSION

The interview data and the extensive reforms in higher education in India reveal a system undergoing considerable transformation. There is a sense of urgency in policy makers, institution leaders and faculty to expand the system at a fast enough pace to meet the surge in demand, while increasing quality and ensuring equitable access. There is a great deal of caution about the way reforms will unfold; progress is likely to follow an unpredictable course. The federal government is enabling states and institutions more autonomy to drive through reforms, which is creating greater potential for international engagement

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