



ISSN: 0975-8585

# Research Journal of Pharmaceutical, Biological and Chemical Sciences

National Knowledge Commission: An Overview

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## INTRODUCTION

On 13 June, 2005, the Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, constituted the National Knowledge Commission, as a think-tank charged with considering possible policy that might sharpen India's comparative advantage in the knowledge-intensive service sectors. In particular, the Commission was to advise the Prime Minister's Office on policy related to education, research institutes and reforms needed to make India competitive in the knowledge economy. The Commission was to recommend reform of the education sector, research labs, and intellectual property legislation; as well as consider whether the Government could itself upgrade its use of the latest techniques to make its workings more transparent. The NKC website was launched in February 2006.

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) consists of the following eight members.

- Sam Pitroda, Chairman,
- Dr. Ashok Ganguly, corporate leader
- Nandan Nilekani, Infosys,
- Dr. Deepak Nayyar, former Vice-chancellor, University of Delhi
- Dr. Jayati Ghosh, economist at Jawaharlal Nehru University
- Dr. Sujatha Ramadorai, TIFR
- Dr. P Balaram, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore
- Prof. Amitabh Mattoo, Former Vice Chancellor, Jammu University

The Terms of Reference of the NKC are:

- Build excellence in the educational system to meet the knowledge challenges of the 21st century and increase India's competitive advantage in fields of knowledge.
- Promote creation of knowledge in Science and technology laboratories.
- Improve the management of institutions engaged in Intellectual Property Rights.
- Promote knowledge applications in Agriculture and Industry.
- Promote the use of knowledge capabilities in making government an effective, transparent and accountable service provider to the citizen and promote widespread sharing of knowledge to maximize public benefit."

The organizational structure of the NKC is flat. The Secretariat is headed by an Executive Director and consists of around 8-9 research associates. It also has four advisors who advise the commission on different issues. The Secretariat of the Commission is located in Chanakypuri, New Delhi. In December 2006, the Commission brought out a 'Report to the Nation 2006'. It includes the following recommendations submitted to the Prime Minister:

- Libraries,
- Knowledge,
- E-governance,
- Translation,
- Languages,
- National Portals

Many of the recommendations of the NKC are already in the implementation stage by different ministries of the Government. This includes areas such as Libraries, e-governance and translation. Some of the major areas under work are higher education, vocational education, entrepreneurship, school education etc.



The NKC consults a wide range of stake-holders and experts on each area before submitting the recommendations to the Prime Minister. Each area has a working group which is headed by a prominent person in that field. The Working Group members meet several times to submit a report to the NKC. The NKC members then hold discussions on the report before submitting it to the Prime Minister. After submitting the recommendations, an extensive coordination also takes place with the Planning Commission of India and relevant ministries of the Government. As many of the components of the education sector remains state subjects in India, NKC representatives also visit various state governments and conduct deliberations with secretaries of education departments for reforming of the education sector at the state level. The Commission was mandated to last till October 2008. But now, looking at the good work the Commission has done, it has been extended until March 2009.

## Controversies

Since its inception, the commission has been surrounded by different controversies. In May 2006 the Commission spoke out against the Human Resource Development Ministry's plans to increase quotas for backward castes in institutions such as the IITs. Following Arjun Singh's subsequent remarks on their credentials, two of the members, Andre Bêteille and Dr Pratap Bhanu Mehta, sent letters of resignation to the Prime Minister. A difference of opinion also took place between Dr. P.M. Bhargava and rest of the commission members in early 2007, which resulted in reconstitution of the commission.

Majority of Vice-Chancellors had rejected the policy direction given in NKC report to nation 2006 on the Higher Education during the discussion on the NKC report in the 82nd Annual meeting of the Association of Indian Universities. However, some of the former and present vice-chancellors of various leading universities accept major directions like structural reform, augmentation of university number, freeing appointment of Vice-Chancellors from direct or indirect intervention on the part of government, etc. It is a major set back to the NKC. Consequently the commission has released "FAQs on NKC recommendations on Higher Education".

The National Knowledge Commission deliberations have focused on five key areas of the knowledge paradigm access to knowledge, knowledge concepts, knowledge creation, knowledge application and development of better knowledge services.

Access to Knowledge: Providing access to knowledge is the most fundamental way of increasing the opportunities and reach of individuals and groups. Therefore, means must exist for individuals who have the ability to receive and comprehend knowledge to readily obtain it. This also includes making accurate knowledge of the state and its activities available to the general public. Certain issues that are being examined in this context by the National Knowledge Commission are:

1. Right to education
2. Language
3. Translation
4. Libraries
5. Networks
6. Portals

Knowledge Concepts: Knowledge concepts are organized, distributed and transmitted through the education system. It is through education that an individual can make better informed decisions, keep abreast of important issues and trends around him or her and most importantly, question the socio-economic arrangements in a manner that can lead to change and development. NKC's concern with many aspects of the Indian education system covers:

1. School Education

2. Vocational Education
3. Higher Education
4. Medical Education
5. Legal Education
6. Management Education
7. Engineering Education
8. Open and Distance Education
9. Open Educational Resources
10. More Talented Students in Mathes and Science
11. More Quality Ph.D.

Creation of Knowledge: A nation can develop in two ways either it learns to use existing resources better, or it discovers new resources. Both activities involve creation of knowledge. This makes it important to consider all activities that lead to the creation of knowledge directly or help in protecting the knowledge that is created. India must therefore examine issues such as :

1. Science and Technology
2. Legal Framework for Public Funded Research
3. Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs)
4. Innovation
5. Entrepreneurship

Knowledge Applications: Knowledge can be productively applied to promote technological change and facilitate reliable and regular flow of information. This requires significant investment in goal-oriented research and development along with access models that can simplify market transactions and other processes within an industry. Initiatives in the areas of agriculture, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and traditional knowledge can demonstrate that knowledge can be very effectively applied for the betterment of the rural poor.

1. Traditional Knowledge
2. Agriculture
3. Enhancing Quality of Life

Delivery of Services: Knowledge services have the potential to simplify many different points at which citizens interact with the State. Traditionally, these points of interaction have been vulnerable to unscrupulous activities and rent-seeking. Technology provides us with an opportunity to ensure accountability, transparency and efficiency in government services. E-governance is one of the ways in which citizens can be empowered to increase transparency of government functioning, leading to greater efficiency and productivity.

Objectives of the National Knowledge Commission for Higher Education:

- Prevent chaos in the expansion of higher education and to stop fragmentation of related policy-level decisions;
- Ensure autonomy of the universities and shield them from interference by external agencies;
- Encourage distinct institutional initiatives and protect the unique features of each university;
- Ensure continuous reforms and renovation in the area of higher education;
- Internationalize the nature of academic programmes while creating our own world class standards;
- Promote greater engagement with the State universities with an aim to eliminate the divide between the State and Central universities;
- Enable the rural masses to interact with universities; and
- Use the available funds efficiently and creatively and generate new resources.

## Restructuring Universities

Universities have become strongly centralized at the levels of the VC and registrars with little or no participation of individual faculty. Institutions that are faculty governed (when it comes to academic leadership) are found to be more nimble and reactive to changes in the environment. This rigidity is largely derived from the controls currently exercised by the government. Delays in appointment of VCs, approval of faculty positions, approval of funds for new programmes, disbursement of funds etc., and even pensions at times, are not uncommon. In addition, the academic institutions that are controlled either by the Central or State governments are found to suffer from certain rigidity in developing innovative academic as well as compensation-related practices.

Persons associated with administering and managing academic institutions are most often not trained or equipped with knowledge of best or next practices in academia globally. Universities have not been able to attract talented administrators for a variety of reasons.

The leadership of universities is in the hands of government administrators as well as executive councils or similar agencies that are far removed from the institutions and do not have a good understanding of the issues of concern, needs of development and growth of institutions. In addition, these councils are too large in numbers to make nuanced decisions. Many a time, the boards or equivalent bodies are filled with ex-officio members who change so often that their presence on these bodies becomes disruptive. The VCs most often have low degrees of freedom in terms of administrative stretch.

Universities need the autonomy to operate in a healthy competitive setting. The university leadership must be driven by the objects of the institution and draw only macro policies from the government. They need to set their own policies and thereby experiment with strategies on university governance. They need to be accountable to the various stakeholders – the society, government, students, recruiters, alumni etc. It needs a governance system which is engaged with the university and comprising people who understand the ethos of the institutions. The role of the VC is to attract the best of students, faculty and staff to the institution by making their institution very attractive to these talents.

The governance structure of a university should be such as to minimize the role of government representatives in the university affairs. The role of a VC is to provide academic leadership to the university, develop and execute the vision of the university including its growth and to ensure that the university is academically and financially healthy. This requires skills that reach beyond academic talent. The VC must enunciate a sound financial model for the university and undertake the fiduciary responsibility of the university. He/she also ensures that the regulatory requirements are met. He/she works with the Pro-VC and the Deans to manage the activities of the institution.

## Recommendations

- i. Universities to be self-regulatory bodies to be assisted by hassle-free and transparent regulatory processes;
- ii. Universities to be made responsible regarding the academic content of professional courses. Professional bodies like the AICTE, NCTE, MCI, BCI, COA, INC, PCI to be divested of their academic functions, which would be restored to the universities;
- iii. Creation of an all-encompassing Commission for Higher Education, a central statutory body to replace the existing regulatory bodies including the UGC, AICTE, NCTE etc. (See Annex A)
- iv. Curricular reform to be the topmost priority of the newly created HEC which would create a curricular framework based on the principles of mobility within a full range of curricular areas and integration of skills with academic depth.

- v. Undergraduate programmes to be restructured to enable students to have opportunities to access all curricular areas with fair degree of mobility;
- vi. All universities to have the full range of knowledge areas. No single discipline or specialized university to be created;
- vii. Institutions of excellence like the IITs and IIMs to be converted into full-fledged universities, while keeping intact their unique features, which shall act as pace-setting and model governance systems for all universities;
- viii. Universities to establish live relationship with the real world outside and develop capacities to respond to the challenges faced by rural and urban economies and culture;
- ix. All levels of teacher education to be brought under the purview of higher education;
- x. New governing structures to be evolved to enable the universities to preserve their autonomy in a transparent and accountable manner;
- xi. Practice of according status of deemed university be stopped forthwith. It would be mandatory for all existing deemed universities to submit to the new accreditation norms to be framed on the lines proposed in this report within a period of three years failing which the status of university should be withdrawn. However, unique educational initiatives which have over a period of time enriched higher education by their innovations to be given recognition and supported properly;
- xii. Creation of a single accreditation window for all institutes of higher education;
- xiii. Quantum of Central financial support to State-funded universities be enhanced substantially keeping in view the needs of their growth; and
- xiv. Expansion of the higher education system to be evaluated and assessed continuously to respond to the needs of different regions in India in order to ensure not only equity and access but also quality and opportunity of growth along the academic vertical.

#### Role of the Commission for Higher Education

- Becomes the premier advisory body to the government on policy issues regarding higher education in India.
- Prepares and presents a Report on the State of Higher Education in India annually to the nation.
- Serves as think tank on higher education policy in the country: provides a vision of higher education to be reflected in a curriculum framework, benchmarks universities, compares with institutions globally, develops requirements of disciplines, proposes new education policies both for Central and the State institutions, and evaluates the costs and price of education.
- The commission would create appropriate norms; processes and structures for accredit [accrediting or accredited????] universities.
- Establishes transparent norms and process for entry and exit of institutions – the need is to make the process easy for good and serious proposals for setting up new institutions.
  
- Develops sources & mechanisms of funding for universities and other institutions.
- Initiates measures to ensure that governance in universities is done in a transparent and accountable manner.
- Provides the mechanism for a national data base on higher education.
- Helps in creating an environment in academic institutions that is conducive to bring young people to take up academia as a career.
- Creates soft processes for interaction between students and teachers.
  
- Lightens the load of Universities.
- Develops a scheme to gradually free the universities of the colleges affiliated to them

#### Structure of the Commission for Higher Education

The Commission for Higher Education has to be a body which would inspire confidence in the academic community of India and serves as the voice of the academic community related to higher education and gains the



serious attention of the policy-makers. Its structure and composition and the process of its formation has to be such that it acquires an autonomous character of its own.

It would have a seven-member board with a full-time chairperson. Of the seven members, one would be an eminent professional from the world of industry and one with the background of a long and consistent social engagement. All other five members would be academic people of eminence, representing broad areas of knowledge.

The Commission will initially consist of five divisions:

**Future Directions:** Developing global benchmarks on student performance; university performance; salaries, potential programmes; new research directions; and articulation of needs of the government in terms of manpower etc.

**Accreditation Management:** Creating an accreditation system that is independent of the government, providing annual feedback to universities, and organizing workshops etc.

**Funding & Development:** Developing funding needs of universities, developing mechanisms for funding institutions, helping universities with development of corpus and good endowment management, managing the guaranteed student loan/scholarship programme, and funding the apex requirements of universities etc.

**New Institutions & Incubation** including training workshops for first-time VCs as well as on themes like accounting, investing the corpus, communication within & outside the university, negotiations & managing vendors, good office practices, human resource management etc.

**Information & Governance:** This division will focus on managing the data needs of the commission, display of information on universities, develop performance parameters on the governance of universities, support other divisions with information as well as provide students with information on each university. This division will also inform the Accreditation and Funding & Development divisions of the performance or lack thereof, for each university, each year. An eminent individual with tenure of five years will head each division. Each board member will be an overseer of one or two of the divisions. Each division will have an advisory board. The advisory board will comprise eminent persons from India or abroad.

The chairperson and the five heads of the above-mentioned divisions would form the executive body of the commission, which would oversee all its functions. A search committee comprising the Prime Minister of India, The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India would select the Chairperson of the Commission. This committee would also be selecting the members of the board.

The Commission will be independent of all ministries of the Government of India. It will have the autonomy to hire talent at various levels within and outside the government. It will also have the autonomy to define the compensation of the employees. It is also crucial that HEC develops a talented group of employees who understand the proposed philosophy and see the difference between the existing and proposed processes.

Following striking features of the report on higher education in India submitted recently by the National Knowledge Commission to the prime minister are too conspicuous to miss:

1. The report does not seem to have been based on any in-depth analysis of the higher education system in India.
2. The Commission seems to be strongly favoring privatization of higher education, the growth of private and foreign universities, and correspondingly and more importantly a drastically reduced role of the state.
3. While some of the recommendations made by the Commission are important, familiar and less

controversial, many are not supported by any evidence – theoretical or empirical, nor are their strengths and weaknesses even discussed.

In this review article a few of these aspects are critically examined. The Commission notes that there is “a quiet crisis” in higher education in India which runs deep, though no single feature of the crisis is analyzed in depth. The Commission admits, “It is difficult enough to provide a complete diagnosis of what ails our universities. It is even more difficult, if not impossible, to outline a set of prescriptions for our universities”. Yet, the Commission lists a set of major recommendations. A neat diagnostic analysis of the present higher education system as it developed over the years and the socio-economic and political milieu in which it is situated is missing in the report. One need not necessarily make a fresh analysis. But a fair understanding of the analysis available is necessary. Substantial research exists on higher education in India and the reforms needed for improvement therein. Even in the recent past, quite a few committees have discussed in detail some aspects, such as autonomy and financing of higher education. Hardly any feature of the existing system or as it developed over the years has been noted in the report, except for making a few highly general, pedestrian observations on the quality of higher education or on the governance of universities. No reference could be found in the report to any earlier research or reports.

According to the available official statistics of the ministry of human resource development (MHRD), the 10-million plus students in higher education account for a gross enrolment ratio of nearly 10 per cent in 2003-04, the latest year for which such an estimate is available (see the table). The ratio ranges between 5.8 per cent in Jammu and Kashmir and 32.2 per cent in the union territory of Chandigarh. In as many as 11 states/union territories the enrolment ratio is above 10 per cent. That the Commission did not care to discuss any issue with the MHRD or the University Grants Commission (UGC) or others at any time cannot be the reason for this factual error relating to the gross enrolment ratio in higher education. Perhaps the Commission did not care to look at any available database. The error is seemingly a minor one but such errors may lead to setting wrong targets for the future. The underestimate of the current enrolment ratio has in fact led the Commission to set a target of a 15 per cent enrolment ratio by 2015, which according to the Commission means doubling the enrolment ratio in about a decade. But actually, the target is only about 50 per cent higher than the current level. Thus, the targets, and also the recommendation on the number of new universities to be set up are based on a questionable base.

The Commission recommends the expansion of the number of universities to 1,500 in the country. This, it is believed would enable India to attain a gross enrolment ratio of at least 15 per cent by 2015. Increase in access to higher education does require an expansion in the number of universities and colleges but the question is: do we need 1,500 universities? The recommended number is not based on any detailed analysis. No clear rationale is provided. It is based on very simple logic that as there are about 350 universities in the country with a current enrolment of about 10 million students, a four times increase in enrolment to about 40 million would require a four times increase in the number of universities. The figure of 40 million is also not supported by any detail or reason. Note that the UGC (2006) has found that the enrolment may have to increase to 22 million, about double the current enrolment, by 2011-12 to reach a gross enrolment ratio of 15.5 per cent. A detailed diagnostic analysis of the existing higher education system would have helped the Knowledge Commission to come up with a more reliable and credible recommendation. Further, even if the enrolment has to be increased to 40 million, it seems too simplistic to believe that an increase in enrolment by four times would require an increase in the number of universities by four times. Such a recommendation can be accepted only if we refuse to acknowledge the evidence that shows that many universities are much below any “optimal” size that one can think of. The average enrolment size of the universities in India may be around 6,000 but there are several universities with a very small level of enrolment. For example, while the total student enrolment in Jawaharlal Nehru University is 4,890 and Viswa-Bharati 5,020, it is as low as 790 in Mizoram University, 627 in Tezpur University and 280 in Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar and also somewhat better funded universities. More than 100 of the current 367 universities are institutions deemed to be universities, which are mostly single faculty universities or specialized institutions with a very small number of students on roll, sometimes making a mockery of the very concept of “university”. Among the deemed universities some have enrolments as low as 40 (Devi Sanskriti Viswavidyalaya); in many it is around 1,500. It is not just special/professional universities such as the National Law University (Jodhpur) and

Tamil University which have an enrolment of only 85 and 265 respectively, there are a good number of central and state universities with an enrolment of below 3,000 [AIU 2006].

In general, small universities may turn out to be, as is the case now, academically and economically “unviable” institutions. The point is that there is a lot of scope for strengthening small universities and helping them to grow into bigger universities which would function academically as well as economically efficiently. If one adopts such an approach and makes a detailed analysis, one may come to the conclusion that we may not need as many as (or more than) 1,500 universities. But, surprisingly, the Commission argues that we need smaller, “appropriately scaled and more nimble” universities, ignoring the well recognized fact that there are economies of scale in higher education. It is desirable to have a fewer number of large universities, with sprawling campuses, and excellent facilities in terms of high quality teachers, libraries, laboratories, classrooms, playgrounds and other infrastructure, with large areas of student and faculty residences. Such large campuses may provide a better, more vibrant and stimulating learning environment, attracting students and faculty from various corners of the country and abroad to study various disciplines, ensuring a true culture of an ideal university. In addition, this will help in efficient utilization of physical, financial and human resources and in reaping scale economies. Similarly, the Commission recommends the establishment of 50 national universities – by the government or by private sponsoring bodies that set up a society or a charitable trust or a section 25 company. The 50 is also an arbitrary number. Of the 50 – a long-term goal – the Commission recommends that 10 will have to be set up in the next three years. The recommendation to set up national universities is not a new suggestion. The Education Commission (1966, p 542) recommended the development of some “major” universities, where first-class postgraduate work and research would be possible and whose standards would be comparable to the best institutions of their type in any part of the world. Note that there is a difference between the national universities proposed by the Knowledge Commission and the Education Commission’s proposal on major universities. The now proposed national universities are also not like national universities in Japan, where national universities mean state universities funded by the government, in contrast with private universities. The Education Commission had proposed liberally funded high quality public universities, having close links with other universities. The Knowledge Commission’s proposed national universities can be public or private, in principle, but the Commission’s preference seems to be in favor of private universities. Another major recommendation that the Knowledge Commission makes is the establishment of an Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE) holding all powers and responsibilities, and a re-defined, reduced role for the UGC, the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), the Medical Council of India (MCI), the Bar Council of India (BCI) and such other bodies. It clearly argues for the abolition of the AICTE, and limiting the role of the MCI, BCI, etc, to work as professional associations, conducting nationwide examinations to provide licenses.

Of late, it has become very fashionable to suggest setting up new bodies rather than strengthening and restructuring the existing ones. After all, the suggested structure of governance of the IRAHE starting from setting it up by an act of the Parliament, the appointment of the chairperson and members, their tenure etc – is more or less the same as that of the UGC. The UGC and similar bodies were all set up with noble ideas but they were not allowed to function autonomously; they were given limited funding, they were subjected to all kinds of avoidable interventions and distortions and now we say that they have become defunct and should be replaced. If the UGC was not provided with sufficient funds, how could it adequately fund various universities, command respect from universities and perform its functions properly? If the UGC has deteriorated over the years, then how do we ensure that the IRAHE will not deteriorate to the same level of the present UGC in years to come? The rationale for setting up the IRAHE and the mechanism that will ensure its superior functioning compared to that of the UGC are not clear. Instead of arguing for the setting up of another organization, one might favor strengthening and even revamping an organization like the UGC to ensure its autonomous efficient functioning as was originally conceived and for it to strive for maintaining the quality and standards in all levels and types of higher education. In fact, the UGC may be entrusted with the larger responsibility of coordinating the development of the entire higher education system in the country, with the help of other bodies. Some of the recommendations of the Commission are not altogether new, though they might look like fresh proposals. As the Commission does not refer to any earlier recommendations, it is probably not aware that such recommendations were made in the recent past. For instance, the Commission recommends that government support for higher education should be increased to at

least 1.5 per cent of GDP, out of a total of at least 6 per cent of GDP for education. It is the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee (2005) on financing higher and technical education, that, for the first time argued (not necessarily based on any detailed calculations on the financial requirements of higher education sector but recognizing the need for balanced development of the total education system) for the allocation of 1.5 per cent of national income to higher education (1.0 per cent for higher general education and 0.5 per cent for higher technical education), out of 6 per cent of national income for education. The recommendation to allocate 6 per cent of national income to education was made long ago by the Education Commission (1966). Also, the Knowledge Commission recommended that student fees should meet at least 20 per cent of the total expenditure of universities. This was also a recommendation made by the Justice Punnayya Committee on central universities [UGC 1993] and the Dr Swaminadhan Committee on technical education [AICTE 1994]. However, the recent CABE Committee (2005) has recommended that this 20 per cent should be regarded as the maximum, as increases beyond this limit would jeopardize equity in higher education. The Knowledge Commission emphasizes at least 20 per cent and favors no limit on this. The Commission remembers that “public finance is an integral constituent of universities worldwide”, and recommends financial support from the government, including “substantial allocation of public land, in excess of its spatial requirements”, even to private universities. The Commission fails to note that many private “not for profit” (and of course “for profit”) universities in north America, western Europe and east Asia do not depend upon state support but generate huge funds on their own without substantially relying on student fees. The Commission further recommends autonomy for the universities to set student fee levels, tap other sources, and also for the commercial use of university facilities. Land grants are recommended as a mechanism to attract “more” not-for-profit private investment, and develop public-private partnerships in higher education – the government providing land and private sector the finances. This indirect method of subsidization of private universities has no justification, particularly if these universities are to be “autonomous” in setting fee levels, admission criteria and in all their functioning, as proposed by the Commission. A somewhat new recommendation made by the Commission now is to use the land available with universities as a source of finance. But this can create more problems than it can solve. The use of land as a source of finance might mean either sale or renting (or leasing) out land to the private sector for commercial purposes. This means that land received either free or at a highly subsidized price from the government will be put to commercial use, essentially for the benefit of the private sector. This cannot be justified. Further, there is a danger that the universities and government may eventually be fatally attracted to note that the use of their land for commercial purposes would yield higher returns than its use for academic purposes. Other suggestions related to mobilize alumni contributions and encouragement of philanthropic contributions are often made earlier. The Commission, however, now goes further and suggests that universities should be allowed to engage professional (private) firms to generate alumni contributions and licensing fees contributing to further privatization of the system! The overall approach adopted by the Commission is largely pro-private, and even anti-public. Noting that college education in engineering, medicine and management is de facto privatized, the Commission favors similar privatization of university education – setting up private universities and enabling public-private partnerships. The Commission feels that “it is essential to stimulate private investment in higher education as a means of extending educational opportunities”. The Commission also recommends the entry of foreign institutions into India, promotion of Indian institutions abroad and formulation of appropriate policies to promote competition in higher education. The underlying assumption that increases in the number of private (and foreign) institutions will increase substantially, if not proportionately, the educational opportunities in higher education is not based on any empirical evidence. For example, while private universities account for 75 per cent of all universities in the US, they account for only 35 per cent of the student enrolment; in Uruguay private universities account for 89 per cent but only 12 per cent of the student’s enrolment; in Mexico the respective figures are 73 and 42 per cent. Even in countries like Thailand, where nearly half of all universities are private only 17 per cent of the students are enrolled in them [PROPHE 2005; OECD 2004].

In this context, it is important to note that (a) only very few strong and vibrant higher education systems in the world have large private higher education systems, (b) higher education systems even in market economies in north America and western Europe are predominantly public, and (c) many economies with a large share of private higher education continue to remain as developing countries, with social and political unrest for several decades [Tilak 2006].

1 According to a member of the Commission, the ratio was only 3 per cent; and it should be raised to 8 per cent! Chandrasekhar and Ghosh (2005). 2 According to the National Sample Survey, the estimate of gross enrolment ratio in post-senior secondary education in the country can be above 13 per cent and according to the census it could be nearly 15 per cent [UGC 2006]. 3 The UGC (2006) also seemed to be setting a target of 15 per cent enrolment ratio but by the end of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, i e, by 2012. 4 AIU (2006) provides some useful information on each university. But all the universities do not necessarily provide up-to-date or detailed enrolment data. Most of them do not separate the enrolment in affiliated colleges from enrolment in university departments; and many do not provide any information on enrolment at all.

Lastly, an important assumption widely circulated and shared by the Commission is that the government will not be able to finance the needed massive expansion of higher education in the country, and hence feels the need for privatization. Some detailed, though tentative, calculations reveal that an increase in the allocation as per cent of GDP from 0.65 per cent in 2007-08 to a little above 1 per cent may enable us to reach the enrolment ratio of about 15 per cent by the end of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan [Srivastava 2007]. The CABE Committee (2005) recommends an allocation of 1 per cent of GDP to higher education and 0.5 per cent to technical education; and the Knowledge Commission also recommends allocation of 1.5 per cent of GDP to higher education. While this 1.5 per cent of GDP may not necessarily satisfy all the needs of the higher education system, it clearly shows that government can finance the needed massive expansion of higher education to a great extent, if it so desires, without necessarily depending upon private sector or on the foreign universities. Basically, the Knowledge Commission does not recognize the importance of public education and the significant role that the state plays in the development of higher education for it to contribute to national development in most civilized parts of the world.

The abolition of various councils and creation of knowledge commission is contradicted due to following reasons:

1. Overthrowing the UGC and all the Councils—is the violent, not the reformist, path.
2. It has become very fashionable to suggest setting up new bodies like knowledge commission rather than strengthening and restructuring the existing ones.
3. The suggested structure of governance of knowledge commission – starting from setting it up by an act of Parliament, the appointment of chairperson and members, their tenure etc which is more or less same as that of various councils.
4. UGC and similar bodies were all set up with noble ideas but they were not allowed to function autonomously.
5. If various councils have deteriorated over the years, then how do we ensure that the knowledge commission will not deteriorate to the same level of the present councils in years to come?
6. Who would guarantee that the new knowledge commission would not become impure afterwards, as imperfect as all the Councils seems.
7. The rationale for setting up the knowledge commission and the mechanism that will ensure its superior functioning compared to that of various councils are not clear.
8. Instead of arguing for the setting up of another organization like knowledge commission, one might favour strengthening and even revamping an organization like UGC to ensure its autonomous efficient functioning for maintaining the quality and standards in all levels and types of higher education.
9. Dr Manmohan Singh & Dr Yashpal, both are former Chairmen of UGC, they got a chance to improve it and have time to improve it now—if it needs improvement. In fact, UGC has been performing most of the duties described in the recommendations of knowledge commission & UGC may be entrusted with the larger responsibility of coordinating the development of the entire higher education system in India, with the help of other bodies.
10. The knowledge commission must be rejected because it is an attempt to centralize the entire authority to determine the destiny of higher education in India, concentrating all powers in the hands of a few favourites of the powers. It is the powerful who decide the 'eminence' heading important bodies in the field of education as well as in other fields. We know how 'eminence' comes handy for appointing substandard and unqualified people to higher positions and we shall not like to have more of their kind. We shall rather call for democratization of all educational bodies including the universities and the UGC. Besides, we shall like to



replace the convenient qualification of 'eminence' by some more concrete and specific merit of the persons who should head these bodies.

## CONCLUSION

Following are the remedies for higher educational development:

1. Punish corrupt and law-breaking persons & managements severely.
2. Keeping political considerations out of picture in crucial areas like as appointment of VCs.
3. Weeding out redundant bodies and authorities.
4. Making academia accountable and conform to high professional standards
5. Can establish a National Board of Higher Education as a coordinating body for all these councils which is more practical & purposeful than abolishing all councils.

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