

Consultative meet on New Education Policy – Promoting Open and Distance Learning and Online Courses- 22/09/2015

The Consultative meet to discuss the New Education Policy – Promoting Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Online Courses took place in the seminar hall of Jorhat Science Centre and Planetarium on 22nd September, 2015. It was attended by many educationists (directly or indirectly related with the education system), Coordinators, Asst. Coordinators, Counsellors of IGNOU, Academicians from various educational institutions, students and well wishers. The meeting was chaired by Prof. Mridupawan Goswami, former Principal, Govt PGT College, Jorhat. After completion of formalities and felicitations the Regional Director i/c, Dr. Anil Ch Borah gave a brief introduction and highlighted the theme to be discussed at the meet. This was followed by self introduction of the participants. The Chairperson then opened the discussions with his own views on the importance of promoting Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Online Courses in the era of globalization. He then requested all present in the meeting to deliberate, put forward, advise, give comments, suggestions etc. for further enhancement of this system and analyze its future outcome.

The enthusiastic participants discussed the issues related with the Open and Distance Learning system at great length and put forward their views from various perspectives keeping the needs of the changing world in general and the North East in particular. Everyone agreed that this was the only viable alternative in the present time as immediate change is the need of the hour. Time of collective thinking has arisen and this alone can bring about positive changes in the education system as well as the Nation. The discussion was mainly on ODL. Here are some of the important points put forward in the deliberation:

1. ODL institutions particularly IGNOU can collaborate with the Agricultural University and other similar Institutions to reach to small tea planters and other farmers with skill development programs to revamp the agriculture which is the main basis of economy in North East India .
2. Professional courses should be started by ODL institutions, particularly short term medical courses to cater to the needs of the marginalized and downtrodden section. Medium of instruction however should be vernacular. This is in view of the less number of medical practitioners in this region (NE).
3. Open Universities (OU's) should work in close coordination with National Institute of Open School (NIOS) in providing skill based programmes.
4. Keeping the challenging needs of the time the SLM's provided by OU's should be revised and updated from time to time and reach the learners in the beginning of the program
5. Due importance must be given for enhancement of qualitative improvement in all aspects particularly in appointment of Counsellors.

6. Discriminatory attitude should not be shown to any students completing their education under this system at the time of their appointment from Institutional point of view.
7. Course fees for any programs under this system should be uniform all over the country for all the OU's.
8. Existing gap between policy formation and policy implementation should be removed.
9. Lacuna in governance needs to be filled up to pave the way for further progress of the ODL mode.
10. Motivators or Counsellors needs to be appointed for creating awareness amongst people, particularly the deprived sections.
11. Before introducing any courses under this system it should be examined from the functionality point of view.
12. All programs should be professionally managed.
13. Some diploma/certificate programs should be offered as modular programs particularly in library science for benefit of lower grade employees working in libraries.
14. OU's can work in collaboration with technical institutions to provide apprenticeship facilities, wherever necessary for learners.
15. There should be total understanding of OU's and conventional system to make choice based credit system and credit transfer more popular.
16. Target groups should be provided with all kinds of knowledge based skill to help them in reaching their future goal.
17. Survey work should be done under this system (or by Govt) to find out the needs of students of particular regions and introduce programs accordingly to serve their purpose.
18. Scholarships to be provided to the needy students.
19. There should be specific guidelines for introducing programs of relevance in particular regions – keeping the needs of the people in mind. In the North East there are many marginalized communities particularly the tea community who has been lagging behind in all areas from time immemorial. Some special programs may be offered for them after carrying out a survey to assess their requirement (keeping their educational status in mind). Some courses will go a long way in helping the neglected youths of this community. The Government can appeal or request the Management to provide infrastructural facilities to enable OU's to start such programs in remote garden areas.
20. OU's should also provide skill development programs like those provided by ITI's for lower income group people. They can tie up with technical institutions to introduce technology based programs like electricians, plumbing, welding etc. Programs having self employability potential like carpentry, statue/mask making, wood, bamboo, cane related work, handloom and weaving etc.

21. Occupational courses should be offered to post metric and higher secondary students in commerce stream.
22. OU's should start programs which can help juveniles with utility value from both academic and realistic perspective providing counseling to delinquents, particularly those hailing from tea garden community in NE.
23. Life skill/Soft skill education program may be formulated particularly for youths from NE so that they the hindrance of social assimilation is reduced.
24. Introduction of new programs (viz on foreign languages – Chinese, Japanese and those of the South East Asian Countries) considering the employability in view of Look East policy will help the youth from North East.

In conclusion the Chairman said that all visible and invisible barriers should be removed from the present ODL system to make way for any new changes in this fast changing world. Only if the govt succeeds in bridging all existing gaps, fruitful and effective implementation of the new policy will take place. It is hoped that the suggestions and views expressed will be taken seriously and the needful done to take out nation forward in the field of education.