

Auditing UGC

At a time when the UGC has been the focus of controversy, the recent CAG report on its activities provides food for thought. In its 20-odd page report that forms part of its report on autonomous bodies of the union (civil) government, it reveals how the UGC has failed to deliver on several counts. Not only has the UGC failed to bring about qualitative changes in academic systems, it has also allowed some of its well-intentioned initiatives to go waste due to half-hearted measures. The report labels the UGC's management of scarce development resources as 'unimaginative and reckless', while maintenance grants have been disbursed, in disregard of all accountability parameters.

The present review – there have been two earlier ones – based on UGC records and selected programmes it funded over 1992-93 to 1999-2000, however, found that the PAC's recommendations made over 25 years ago, still remain to be implemented. While the PAC had recommended that disparities in disbursements across universities be eliminated, the share of development grants to 15 central universities has increased steadily to 53.43 per cent and the 212 deemed and state universities received only 46.57 per cent of the grants. While mandatory inspections were conducted by the UGC inspection committees in 146 universities and 3,525 colleges in 1997-98, only six universities and 79 colleges had been assessed for standards of teaching till 1999-2000. This was conducted under the aegis of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) set up at Bangalore in 1994, to assess and accredit institution of higher education.

In a decision taken last year, the UGC made value education a compulsory part of the curriculum for aspiring engineers, with IIT Delhi forming the hub of a national resource for value education. However, its recommendations on the setting up of Curriculum Development Centres (CDC) still flounder for lack of any mechanisms to monitor its implementation in universities. Much-needed reform university curricula remain unaddressed. The UGC's 27 CDCs were first set up in 1986 to suggest measures to modernise and restructure courses and to develop alternative models. While CDC recommendations have been made available to all universities since 1992-93, UGC did not have any information on whether these recommendations had been adopted. In 1997, the R P Rastogi committee observed that only about one-third of the universities reported implementation of CDC reports on different subjects. Again in November 1991, the UGC constituted panels in 27 subjects for a period of two years; these were again reconstituted in March 1996 to formulate a more stimulating, innovative and job-oriented syllabus.

Following its criticism by the CAG, in a hasty, much delayed move, the UGC prepared its own model curricula in 32 subjects for undergraduate and postgraduate courses. All national universities have been strictly directed to adopt these either in full or after making necessary amendments which have to be presented to the UGC before July 31, 2002. The CAG is also critical of the UGC's inability to formulate an acceptable package of examination reform. For all its enthusiasm in promoting 'jyotir vigyan' and 'purohitya', the UGC has still no mechanism in place to identify the various unnotified degrees being run in various universities. For some time now, the Delhi University, the Jawaharlal Nehru University

and the Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi have been conducting eight degree programmes that still await formal notification from the UGC.

The UGC however, continues to step into areas where it has no jurisdiction. It courted controversy once again for seeking to recruit teachers for a new course on 'simple spoken Sanskrit' to be started in various universities and colleges when recruitment of teachers is not part of the UGC's mandate. Much desired courses, on the other hand, like undergraduate courses in anthropology and geology in Delhi University colleges remain a non-starter, owing to paucity of funds. Its role, as the UGC needs to be reminded, is primarily that of a funding agency and a regulatory body. **EW**