

Educating the Teacher

The human resources development ministry last June made moves to close down the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE), the nodal agency that regulates and monitors every aspect of teacher education across the country. The decision was made following the suggestions of the three-member Sudeep Banerjee Committee that noted, among other issues, that the NCTE had become more an agency sanctioning institutions and fostering privatisation in teacher education than carrying out its mandate of monitoring and setting quality standards. There had also been complaints from state governments that they were rarely consulted by the NCTE in sanctioning teacher-training institutions, as well as allegations that the council presided over lop-sided development, as a result of which Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra brimmed over with teacher-training institutions while there were few such institutions in Orissa, Bihar and Jharkhand.

The NCTE was set up as an advisory body in 1974 and elevated as a statutory body in 1995 as per the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the passage of the NCTE Act 1993. Its responsibility was to carry out essentially regulatory functions, ensure maintenance of standards in teacher education and prevent proliferation of substandard institutions. Before the NCTE took over as the nodal agency, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) had its own regional colleges of education for training teachers. While the bachelor's degree in education remains primarily under university jurisdiction, diplomas in education and nursery teacher training were provided by institutions recognised by the NCTE. According to the Banerjee Committee's recommendations, the 7,000 institutions under the NCTE will now be affiliated to university education departments so that teacher education is not disturbed. As for curricular input, the NCERT would be asked to step in.

In the last decade, the NCTE had drafted two curricula frameworks (1998 and 2005), but these were not rigorously implemented due to insufficient monitoring and the differences that came to prevail between universities, state governments and the NCTE on matters of appointment, affiliation and even the academic schedule. For the NCTE's part, there was always more an emphasis on setting up institutions for training teachers. Partly, this was due to the demand

for teachers under the government's many programmes for elementary and primary education, as well as the mushrooming of private education institutions across the country. But the NCTE's role was stymied in good measure by the other regulatory bodies already on the scene. There were evident overlaps between the UGC Act and the NCTE Act with regard to the regulation of teacher education in the universities and colleges and, again, there were other overlaps between the latter and different Acts by the legislature at the centre and states for the setting up of universities.

Critics opposed to the NCTE's closure have argued that universities are already strained for resources and remain inadequately staffed – ills that afflicted the NCTE as well. Closing down the NCTE, however, little solves the wider crisis in teacher education. The poor pupil-teacher ratios in several schools are often sought to be improved by appointing ad hoc "para" teachers even as education remains the loser.

With or without the NCTE, there is the complete absence of a system of building a cadre of teacher educators trained in elementary education. Most of the NPE's ideals framed two decades ago remain unmet. Teacher's education functions in isolation in most universities and there is little stress on practice teaching and in-service education. It is widely known that most students join teacher education courses only as a last resort and even after joining, student-teachers are inclined to look for opportunities other than school teaching. The need is to provide opportunities and to promote the entry of appropriate talent in the field of teacher education through a series of structural and process interventions. The most popular programme for preparing teacher educators continues to be the bachelor's or master's degree in education, which is, by and large, of a general nature and does not train specialists in different areas. Locating programmes of teacher education within colleges of general education as suggested by the NPE and as demonstrated by the four-year integrated model of Delhi University is one way of breaking this insularity. Other ways could include the design of post-graduate programmes in education in a manner that allows students to choose course academic credits across different disciplines of humanities and social sciences. ■■