

NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

At the Start of the Learning Curve



Rajendra S Pawar

Even if GoI does nothing else but, as promised, allocates 6% of India's GDP to education, it will be transformational. Funding lies at the heart of India's education ills and will remain pivotal to the roll-out of the new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Shortage of good teachers has always been the bane of higher education, and it's here that more liberal government budgets can make all the difference. Teaching has to be positioned as a viable and attractive career choice. Teachers must be paid more, so that the best and brightest academics and students can be drawn to the profession. Faculty development also requires a shot in the arm, so that it paves the way for more motivated and empowered teachers who can design their own curricula and take on leadership roles.

Research requires deep pockets as well. Higher grants can draw the sharpest minds, help build that much coveted pool of PhDs and intellectual property (IP) and imbue India with a 'scientific temper' and global edge. When it comes to students, generous funding is needed for the economically and socially disadvantaged to maximise inclusion. Meanwhile, the bright and meritorious require scholarships to fulfil their aspirations.

In this context, NEP 2020 lights a spark of hope. The policy not only assures a more generous financial outlook for the education sector, it also aims to usher in a slew of reforms across its various categories, segments and dimensions.

First, there is the most change-inducing concept of 'holistic and multi-disciplinary undergraduate education'. What this spells is flexible curricula, innovation in the combinations of subjects, focus on vocational education and an all-new Academic Bank of Credits (ABC). This crucial multi-disciplinarity and flexibility has the power to create more well-rounded, multi-faceted and creative learners. This will, in turn, mark the beginning of an 'era of



Yes, ma'am, it works!

synthesis'.

Second, GoI has acknowledged the centrality of technology in education and training. Technology can play a revolutionary role in making learning more effective and efficient, in terms of learning outcomes. With technology as the backbone, activities such as learning, assessment, planning and administration, as well as classroom processes and the professional advancement of teachers, can all be enhanced. As a result, learner engagement is virtually a given. At the school level, India will be able to bring 'fun back into learning'. At the higher end, it will make education more seamless, inclusive and impactful.

Third, there is NEP's focus on academic reform — on both the institutional and faculty fronts — which can raise the relevance of education,

taking it closer to what students and industry need. The recommended push for a stronger industry-linked orientation, implying a stepping up in internships, greater industry-academia engagement, and co-creation of curricula with active involvement of students, can be a game-changer.

As our colleges and universities become more autonomous, they can evolve into large, vibrant, well-resourced and sustainable institutions offering high-quality teaching, research and community engagement. The cherry on the cake is, of course, the independent National Research Foundation (NRF), which can bring research out from the wings, where it has been languishing in obscurity, into the spotlight.

NEP 2020 has all the ingredients that can make it a potent elixir for the higher education segment. We now have a policy vision for education that will stay with us for a decade. We have a cohesive plan for curricular advancement and have the financial piece in place. What we now require is concerted implementation to make NEP 2020 work, and take it to fruition.

The writer is chairman, NIIT