Report of
4th Roundtable of
Open Universities' Vice Chancellors

Implementation of NEP 2020 in ODL Universities: Offline and Online Mode



Organised by

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (COL-CEMCA), New Delhi, India

In Collaboration with

Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU), Maharashtra, India

at

Yash Inn International Convention Centre
YCMOU Campus, Nashik
Maharashtra, India

6th - 7th March 2025

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Background

The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system, including Open Universities (OUs), has emerged as a critical pillar of India's higher education landscape, contributing to nearly 11 percent of total enrolments in the country's higher education institutions. Despite the presence of over 1100 conventional universities and more than 45,000 affiliated and autonomous colleges, a modest network of just 18 Open Universities plays a pivotal role in expanding access to education, particularly among women, persons with disabilities, and marginalised communities. Open Universities contribute significantly, accounting for over 50 percent of female enrolment in the ODL system.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has set ambitious targets, including raising the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) to 50% by 2035. In this context, the Open Universities, with their unique strengths in technology-enabled learning, flexible delivery mechanisms, and focus on inclusion, are well-positioned to play a key role in achieving these goals.

To harness this potential and align the Open Universities with the transformative agenda of NEP 2020, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU), convened the First Roundtable of Vice Chancellors of State Open Universities in August 2023. This historic meeting led to the Ahmedabad Declaration, a collective commitment of the Open Universities to actively support the objectives of NEP 2020 through collaboration, open educational resource (OER) sharing, skills integration, and learner-centric innovations.

Building on this momentum, the Second Roundtable was held in Hyderabad in April 2024, where the Vice Chancellors committed to establishing a Consortium of Open Universities to facilitate the exchange of Open Educational Resources (OER) across institutions. Further, in May 2024, CEMCA facilitated engagement between the Open Universities and the National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET) to secure dual recognition for OUs as awarding bodies under both National Skill Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF). Subsequent capacity building programmes in Haldwani (June 2024) and Chennai (August 2024), supported by COL-CEMCA, enhanced the understanding of Open Universities regarding Long-Term and Short-Term Training Programmes and Micro-credentials, further equipping them for their evolving role in vocational education and skilling.

The Third Roundtable, held in October 2024, reaffirmed the collective resolve of Open Universities to integrate skill-based education, micro-credentials, and collaborative

programmes into their offerings. This commitment gained further traction when NCVET started processing applications from Open Universities to become dual-recognition awarding bodies.

In December 2024, Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University hosted the launch of COL's Graduate Employability Project, a three-year initiative designed to assist Open Universities in developing and implementing a Graduate Employability Framework tailored to the needs of diverse learners across the country.

The Roundtable at Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) builds on this series of collaborative efforts and policy engagements. It serves as a vital platform for reviewing progress, sharing best practices, and fostering deeper collaboration among Open Universities to strengthen their role in achieving NEP 2020 goals, particularly in the areas of open education, skills development, employability, and inclusive learning.

Objective of fourth roundtable conference of OUs

- Revisiting Ahmedabad Declaration of OUs to prioritise measures towards identifying their unique role in the implementation of NEP 2020 in both online and offline modes, beyond the Open and Distance mode of operations
- Reviewing COL-CEMCA's Graduate Employability project as a means to developing and implementing graduate employment framework in each OU
- Formation of the Consortium of Open Universities for knowledge sharing, advocacy and collective action

Expected Outcomes:

- It was envisaged that the Fourth Roundtable of OU VCs will result in achieving the following outcomes:
    - Agreement on the creation of institutional graduate employability framework across OUs.
    - Action Plan to implement key priorities from the Ahmedabad Declaration.
    - Strengthened partnerships and shared goals among OUs.
    - Formation of the Consortium of Open Universities.

List of Participants

16 Vice Chancellors from 4 Countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka participated hybrid mode in the fourth Roundtable. The list of participants is at ***Annexure I.***

Session Wise Proceedings



Introduction and Overview

The fourth Roundtable Conference of Open University Vice Chancellors 'was designed and structured with 8 sessions including Inaugural Session, Best practices towards skilling and employability in Asian OUs, Graduate Employability Project at OUs: Highlights of the project, Visit to YCMOU campus at KVK, YCMOU, Ahmedabad Declaration: Highlights of the declaration, Formation of Consortium of Open Universities: Proposal, Governance of Consortium of Open Universities and Valedictory Address for creating a pathway for the Implementation of NEP 2020 in ODL University for this conference focused on the following three themes for implementing NEP 2020 successfully.

- Revisiting Ahmedabad Declaration
- Graduate Employability Framework at OUs
- Formation of the Consortium of Open Universities

Schedule is in ***Annexure II***

Day 1st: 6th March 2025

Session 1- Inaugural Session

Professor Sanjeev Sonawane, Vice Chancellor, Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nashik, Maharashtra

Date: 6th March 2025

Time: 10:08 am–10.24am



Prof. Sanjeev Sonawane, Hon. Vice Chancellor of Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) in his welcome address highlighted the importance of forming the Open University's consortium as discussed in Ahmedabad Declaration which will lead towards providing quality education in ODL through collaborative efforts of all the Public Open Universities across India. He discussed about present status of implementation of NEP 2020 in ODL and emphasised the Open University's role in providing skill based education. He also shared the initiatives taken by YCMOU to implement NEP 2020. Government of Maharashtra has recognised YCMOU as nodal university for coordinating the development of educational resources on Mahaswayam platform in the form MOOC's in Marathi Language. The first course on general IKS in Marathi Language will be offered from the month of April 2025 and many more courses will be made available in Marathi Language. Mahaswayam consortium is an initiative of Government of Maharashtra were YCMOU is Nodal University for coordinating the consortium. He also informed that YCMOU has collaborated with Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust Authority (JNPTA) for skilling the youth so as to fulfill the need of skilled manpower in upcoming Wadhwan Port in Palghar District in making it operational. Nearly one lack skilled manpower is required not only for Wadhwan Port but all Ports across India and it will not be feasible for YCMOU to meet this requirement alone so, Prof. Sanjeev Sonawane stressed on having partnership with

all Open University through this consortium to come together and contribute towards Nation building achieve Vikasit Bharat by 2047.

The first Program under this MoU will be offered from 18th march 2025. He also emphasised that various skill based technical and non-technical courses can be designed and foreign language courses be offered to create employable youth which can be done by collaborating with industry. He also shared that YCMOU in collaboration with CEMCA has developed AI literacy program for Farmers in Marathi Language for which already 10000 farmers are registered across Maharashtra.

He stressed upon providing skill based education as per the industry requirement and benefits of forming consortium for resource sharing.

Ahmedabad Declaration and the objectives of the 4th Roundtable of OUs

Dr B. Shadrach, Director, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (COL-CEMCA), New Delhi

Date: 6th March 2025

Time: 10:25 am-10.37am



Dr B. Shadrach emphasized the significance of the Ahmedabad Declaration, focusing on strengthening lifelong learning through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and online education. He mentioned that the declaration aims to promote collaboration among Commonwealth nations to implement innovative educational practices. He also mentioned that CEMCA is extensively involved in supporting digital transformation, enhancing capacity-building programs, and bridging the digital divide to ensure equitable access to quality education. A strong commitment was made towards inclusive, skill-based, and accessible learning, with an emphasis on integrating ICT and emerging technologies into education systems. The declaration proposes key policy recommendations for improving ODL and online learning while fostering partnerships among various stakeholders for global educational

development. The CEMCA Head urged policymakers, educators, and institutions to actively adopt the recommendations of the Ahmedabad Declaration, ensuring continuous collaboration and future advancements in education.

Vote of thanks

Time: 10:38 am–10.39am

The Inaugural session was concluded by expressing gratitude to all esteemed dignitaries, present physically and online mode, including Dr. Vineet Joshi, Hon'ble Secretary, Higher Education, Government of India, and Dr. Madhukar Waware, Hon'ble Joint Secretary, UGC Distance Education Bureau. Smt. Shubhangi Patil extended heartfelt thanks to representatives from CEMCA, UGC-DEB, and Vice Chancellors from various Open Universities for their participation. The efforts of the university authorities, staff members, and organizers in ensuring the success of the session were also acknowledged.

Session 2

Best practices towards skilling and employability in Asian OUs:

Presentations by Vice Chancellors of Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan (Online)

Date: 6th March 2025

Time: 11:45 to 12:10



Prof. Nasir Mehmood, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Islamabad, delivered an insightful presentation on "Employability in Asian Open Universities." He highlighted AIOU's pioneering role in open and distance learning (ODL) since its establishment in 1974, being one of the first universities in Asia to implement online and distance education. He emphasized the university's digital transformation, where admissions, coursework, assessments, and degree issuance are now conducted entirely online.

Among its best practices Allama Iqbal Open University offers over 3,000 open-source courses covering diverse fields, including vocational and technical education, digital skills, and professional training. Special initiatives provide free education to marginalized communities, including prison inmates, differently-abled students, and underprivileged youth.

AIOU actively promotes employability and entrepreneurship by integrating technical and vocational training into its curricula. The university collaborates with industries, Chambers of Commerce, and international organizations to facilitate skill development and job placements. Special programs focus on interview skills, communication training, and job readiness for students. Additionally, AIOU has partnered with Japanese organizations to provide job opportunities in Japan for students in agriculture, computer science, and other fields.

Best practices towards skilling and employability in Asian OUs: Presentation by Vice Chancellors of Bangladesh Open University

Date: 6th March 2025

Time: 12:15 to 12:35



The Vice Chancellor of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) gave an overview of the evolution, achievements, opportunities and challenges of open and distance learning in Bangladesh. Distance education in the country began in 1956 with the distribution of 200 radio receivers to support learning. Today, BOU offers 67 formal and 19 non-formal programs across 24 schools, catering to a vast number of students. As of June 2024, the total student enrollment has reached 5,79,000 (over five lakh students).

BOU provides diverse educational programs, including Primary Education, Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), ICT in Education, and Social Sciences & Languages. The university emphasizes quality assurance in content development, ensuring customization, adaptation, and

alignment with international standards. Collaboration with global institutions enhances the impact and effectiveness of its educational offerings.

Despite its growth, BOU faces several challenges, including a lack of funding, limited access to digital devices (laptops, PCs, and tablets), and a shortage of trained content developers, designers, and operators. To address these issues, the university has initiated training programs for existing faculty and staff to improve content creation and digital learning methodologies.

Recently, BOU signed new agreements to expand its reach and enhance learning opportunities through technology-driven solutions. These collaborations aim to strengthen student engagement, digital infrastructure, and global partnerships. The Vice Chancellor emphasized the need for continued investment, resource mobilization, and international cooperation to improve the quality and accessibility of open and distance education in Bangladesh.

Best practices towards skilling and employability in Asian OUs: Presentations by Vice Chancellors of Sri Lanka Open University

Date: 6th March 2025

Time: 12:40 to 1:15



The presentation highlighted the role of Sri Lanka Open University in expanding education through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and online learning. The university offers program in various faculties, including Engineering, Technology, Business, Humanities, and Social Sciences, providing learners with access to skill-based programs. Collaboration with public sector institutions helps in learners screening, internships, and job placements, while workshops focus on career planning and skill development. The university also engages with the private sector for innovation, patents, and trademarks, ensuring industry-driven solutions. Export development initiatives expose students to international trade shows, fostering global employability.

Efforts are being made to bridge the gap between academic qualifications and industry requirements. The university is working on micro-credentialing through self-paced learning, interactive assignments, and real-world projects. These programs include essential skills such as technology competence, time management, public speaking, and critical thinking. The goal is to enhance employability and align students with global market demands. Partnerships with institutions from Sri Lanka, India, Australia, and the UK ensure curriculum recognition and articulation arrangements.

The discussion also addressed the regulatory framework for ODL programs in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. It was noted that while open universities are permitted to offer various programs, some professional degrees, such as Engineering, require additional regulatory approvals. Admission tests are mandatory for programs like Law and Nursing. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the introduction of online courses, YouTube-based learning, and independent study models to ensure flexible education.

An important aspect discussed was industry collaboration for soft skills development. Private sector engagement in training students on workplace etiquette, grooming, and communication skills is being encouraged. The university also facilitates real-world learning by placing students in hotels and other industries to gain hands-on experience. Furthermore, the potential of micro-credentials was emphasized, with a focus on certifying skills through industry partnerships rather than relying solely on university-issued certificates.

The session concluded with discussions on developing a mass model for skill-based education, integrating flexible learning opportunities, and ensuring that universities take the lead in industry-driven education reforms. The importance of sharing best practices and fostering international collaborations for knowledge exchange was highlighted as a crucial step toward enhancing educational standards and employability.

Session 3

Graduate Employability Project at OUs: Highlights of the project

Professor Sanjay Tiwari, Vice Chancellor, M P Bhoj (Open) University, Bhopal

Date: 6th March 2025

Time: 2.38 pm – 3.10pm



Professor Sanjay Tiwari gave the brief information about the Graduate Employability Project at OUs. M.P. Bhoj (Open) Univeristy conducted the 3 day workshop of academic leaders and practitioners in December 24 (10-12 December) with the partnership of CEMCA.

The focus of this initiative is to bridge the gap between what the students learn and what industry needs. By adopting this project OUs can align the curricula considering the demands of the rapidly evolving job market and strengthen the graduate employability of their students. Soft skills, technical skills and digital skills need to be included in the curricula. It is possible to adopt and adapt the COL Employability Model to the Indian context.

The GE project aims to equip the faculty members of OUs to embed skills and competencies essential for employment into curricula, aligning higher education with the needs of the workforce. There are four phases of the project – assessment and sensitization, planning, implementation and evaluation. Drafting Action Plan and conducting follow-up sessions are required.

He emphasized the need to focus on global best practices, longer internships, enhanced placement services, Alumni Networks, specialization focus, self-training culture, skill diversifications, alternative career pathways, collaborative strategies, work integrated learning, fostering industry-university linkages, future readiness and try to prepare industry ready graduates.

He also mentioned that there are challenges which need to be addressed. Designing and keeping the programmes Industry relevant, providing hands on development and internships, attracting

the industrial engagement, providing career support and lifelong learning support are few of the challenges.

Graduate Employability Project

Prof. Nilesh K. Modi, M P Bhoj (Open) University, Bhopal

Date: 6th March 2025

Time: 3.11 pm – 4.14 pm



Professor Nilesh Modi explained how GE project is important for empowering the graduates for becoming future ready. He discussed the strategic plan for implementing Graduate Employability Project at OUs in India in phased manner.

1. Baseline survey to identify the gaps
2. Curriculum enhancement and skill development
3. Industry collaboration and Internship programme
4. Digital and technology enabled learning
5. Monitoring and Evaluation

He also explained how ensuring the participation of the industry is essential in this process.

In the discussion, Professor Satyakama expressed his concern about the actual reality regarding assignment, projects, examinations, and outcome. He also raised the issue of regulations.

The necessity of preparing the road map and monitoring the progress was expressed by Professor Sanjeev Sonawane.

There are four phases of the project – assessment and sensitization, planning, implementation and evaluation. Drafting Action Plan and conducting follow-up sessions are required.

Day 2: 7th March 2025

Session 1

Ahmedabad Declaration: Highlights of the declaration

Professor Ami Upadhyay, Vice Chancellor, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad

Date: 7th March 2025

Time: 10.00 am–10.47 am



Discussions included pooling Swayam courses, developing quality self-learning materials (SLM), and ensuring regulatory compliance. A centralized platform for discussions and resource-sharing was proposed. The Ahmadabad Declaration reaffirmed the commitment to sustainable development, inclusive education and flexible eligibility for certificate and diploma programs. Task forces will implement policies aligning with national regulations. NEP 2020 priorities include learning in mother-tongue learning, quality assurance, and increasing the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) to 50% by 2035. Strengthening Open Educational Resources (OER) was emphasized, with a 60-40 content-sharing model among OUs. Technical support should be extended through CEMCA, requiring funding and collaboration with SAMARTHA. It was unanimously agreed that monthly online meetings will ensure timely implementation.

Highlights of the Ahmadabad Declaration

OUs should prepare and share lists of Minors (2 credits) to optimize course development costs. OUs contribute 11% of India's higher education enrolment, with 50% female participation. Commitment to UN SDGs ensures inclusive and quality education. NEP 2020 promotes 21st century skill development, including critical thinking. Open schooling must remain accessible. Expanding GER to 50% by 2035 is a priority, with ODL playing a key role. Community Radio, AI, and Virtual Tutoring should ensure connectivity-independent learning. Recognition of

Prior Learning (RPL) should streamline credit mapping for disciplines like Indian Music and Bharatnatyam. Universities must address restrictions preventing students from taking exams. Compliance monitoring is crucial as conventional universities enter ODL. Micro-credentials and skill-based programs should enhance women's enrollment in higher education. The consortium aims to drive collaborative growth, policy alignment, and technological advancements in ODL.

Discussion on each of the points highlighted in the Declaration: Align recommendations and goals with respective OUs

Open Discussion, moderated by Professor Satyakam, Vice Chancellor, U P Rajarshi Tandon Open University

Date: 7th March 2025

Time: 10.48 am –11.32am



Key discussions included pooling and mapping Swayam courses, developing self-learning materials (SLM), and ensuring regulatory alignment. Readily available courses should be adapted to specific needs with rigorous quality checks. A dedicated platform for discussions and sharing best practices is essential, alongside a centralized website for updates and resource sharing. Governance and policy challenges were categorized into those that cannot be changed, those controllable by all OUs, and decisions left to individual universities. The Ahmadabad Declaration emphasized sustainable development, lifelong learning, flexible eligibility criteria for certificate and diploma courses, and regulatory advocacy. Task forces should be established to implement necessary policies, aligning the consortium with national regulations. Key priorities under NEP 2020 include promoting mother-tongue learning, maintaining quality in distance education, and achieving a 50% Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) by 2035. Strengthening Open Educational Resources (OER) was emphasized, advocating for a 60-40 content-sharing model among OUs while excluding conventional universities. Technical support should be extended to all OUs through CEMCA,

requiring additional funding and collaboration with initiatives like SAMARTHA. Moving forward, monthly online meetings will track progress, with an emphasis on immediate action based on the Ahmadabad Declaration. The consortium aims to ensure collaborative growth, policy alignment, and technological advancements to enhance the impact of distance education in India.

Session 2

Formation of Consortium of Open Universities: Proposal

Proposal for a Consortium by Professor K Seetharama Rao, Former Vice Chancellor, Dr B R Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad (Online)

Date: 7th March 2025

Time: 12.17 pm – 12.36 pm



A session was held to discuss the formation of a Consortium of Open Universities (OUs), with a key focus on the 9th regulation, which provides guidelines for establishing such a consortium. The discussion emphasized the significance of collaboration among Open Universities, particularly in resource sharing and the promotion of Open Educational Resources (OER). The participants examined the legal and operational aspects, including jurisdiction, governance mechanisms, and institutional responsibilities, to ensure a well-structured and efficient consortium. The primary goal of this initiative is to enhance academic partnerships, promote cost-effectiveness, and improve the overall quality of open and distance education.

One of the major agenda items was the establishment of the Consortium of Open Universities, which aims to bring together institutions in the region for better academic cooperation. The consortium will facilitate the sharing of infrastructure, digital learning materials, research resources, and expertise among member institutions. By fostering collaboration, the universities can collectively work on academic resource development, faculty and student

exchange programs, and joint research initiatives, leading to a more integrated and enriched learning experience.

A significant advantage discussed was cost-effectiveness, as the consortium would allow member universities to optimize resources by reducing duplication in content development, faculty training, and technology implementation. Shared access to educational materials and research findings would not only enhance financial sustainability but also expand the reach and accessibility of quality education. Moreover, fostering institutional collaboration was highlighted as a key objective, with discussions focusing on joint research projects, faculty development programs, student mobility, and cross-institutional certification mechanisms.

The session concluded with a consensus on the necessity of forming the Consortium of Open Universities, particularly the Consortium of Open Universities, to drive collaborative efforts in open education. The next steps will involve formalizing the framework, defining governance structures, and ensuring compliance with regulatory guidelines. This initiative is expected to strengthen academic partnerships, improve cost efficiency, and enhance the accessibility and quality of education in Open Universities, paving the way for a more inclusive and resource-efficient educational ecosystem.

Discussion on each of the points highlighted in the proposal for identifying actionable steps and assign responsibilities

Open discussion, moderated by Professor O P S Negi, Vice Chancellor, and Uttarakhand Open University
Date: 7th March 2025
Time: 12.37 pm to 1.38 pm



The conference focused on collaboration and policy advocacy for Open Universities (OUs). Key points included:

1. **Resource Sharing & Customization**: Emphasized pooling and mapping educational resources,

including Swayam courses, and developing Self-Learning Material (SLM) to meet specific learning needs.

2. **Quality Assurance & Collaboration**: Suggested creating a platform for sharing best practices and capacity-building in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) to enhance academic quality.
3. **Information Sharing & Platform Development**: Proposed a centralized website for resource sharing and better coordination among OUs.
4. **Task Force & Governance**: Recommended establishing a task force to implement key objectives from the Ahmedabad Declaration and restructuring governance to align with contemporary needs.
5. **Policy Advocacy**: Discussed revising eligibility criteria for certificate and diploma courses, urging prompt action and a collective approach to policy changes.
6. **Regulatory Alignment**: Suggested aligning OUs with existing regulations and engaging with national organizations like the Green Skill Council and NCTE for alignment with national frameworks.
7. **NEP 2020 Implementation**: Emphasized the need for regional language SLM and robust faculty support for new programs.
8. **Multidisciplinary Approaches & GER Target**: Focused on increasing the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) to 50% by 2035 through skilling and multidisciplinary education.
9. **OER & Technical Support**: The need for structured OER sharing, technical support for OUs lacking infrastructure, and CEMCA's role in facilitating resource sharing was discussed.
10. **Action Plan & Strengthening Efforts**: It was proposed monthly online meetings, immediate regulatory actions, and enhancing technical capabilities for effective implementation of the Ahmedabad Declaration.

The next steps include finalizing policies, forming a task force, and developing a centralized platform for ongoing collaboration.

Session 3

Governance of Consortium of Open Universities: An open discussion to establish foundational governance structures, operational processes and accountability mechanisms, moderated by Professor Rajendra Prasad Das, Vice Chancellor, K K Handiqui State Open University, Assam

Date: 7th March 2025
Time: 2.47 pm to 3.23 pm



Professor Rajendra Prasad Das expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to be part of the conference, highlighting that much of the groundwork had already been laid by Dr. Negi and through prior discussions. He acknowledged the significant efforts of Prof. Sanjeev Sonwane and Dr B. Shadrach in organizing the event at a spiritually significant location. Reflecting on the journey of discussions, he credited Dr B. Shadrach and Prof Ami Upadhyay for their pivotal role in bringing Open Universities together, with the initial momentum starting at Ahmedabad. Through multiple roundtable discussions, the necessity for a unified forum became evident, fostering collaboration and confidence among Open Universities. He emphasized that the deliberations of the conference should now be shaped into actionable outcomes. Observing Dr B. Shadrach continuous engagement during the event, he acknowledged his efforts in drafting a structured proposal based on the discussions and suggested that the draft be presented for further refinement and decision-making.

Best Practices of YCMOU

Date: 7th March 2025

Time: 3.26 pm to 16.12 pm

Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) has embarked on a transformative digital journey through innovative initiatives, as presented by Shri. Satesh Kumar. In collaboration with Sapphire Systems, YCMOU has successfully integrated blockchain technology into its academic processes, ensuring secure, immutable, and tamper-

proof digital certificates. This initiative not only enhances transparency and efficiency but also allows for seamless third-party verification, reducing administrative workload while providing students with instant access to their credentials. Since 2023, YCMOU has issued over 3 lakh blockchain-based certificates and mark sheets, integrating its solution with MKCL for a smooth transition of digital data.

Further advancing its digital ecosystem, the university introduced the Yash Card, a dynamic digital identity card that centralizes student records and university services. Equipped with a blockchain QR code, the Yash Card provides real-time access to exam timetables, bonafide certificates, home assignment statuses, and even alumni credentials upon program completion, all at a minimal cost of 30 rupees per student. This innovative approach minimizes paperwork, enhances accessibility, and streamlines university operations.

Another remarkable milestone is YCMOU's on-screen evaluation system, a significant step toward automation that accelerates assessment processes, ensuring accuracy, transparency, and efficiency in result declaration. By leveraging cutting-edge technology, YCMOU continues to set benchmarks in digital education, reinforcing its commitment to academic excellence and operational efficiency.

Digital initiatives in Higher Education

Date: 7 March 2025

Time: 16.05 pm to 16.12 pm

Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Ltd. (MKCL), Pune, represented by Shri Amit Ranade, showcased digital innovations in e-learning, digital credentialing, and AI-driven education tools, improving accessibility and employability. These initiatives reflect YCMOU's commitment to leveraging technology for academic excellence and efficiency.

Session 4: Valedictory Session

Date: 7 March 2025
Time: 04.18 pm to 05.23 pm



In valedictory address at the Fourth Roundtable Conference of Vice-Chancellors of Open and Distance Learning Universities, Mrityunjay Behrasar, Economic Advisor at the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India, expressed his deep gratitude to all the dignitaries and participants. He acknowledged the invaluable contributions of the Honourable Vice-Chancellors from Open Universities across India and neighboring countries for their active involvement throughout the two-day conference.

Mr. Behrasar emphasized the significance of collaboration and sharing knowledge, noting that such gatherings provide an opportunity for universities to exchange ideas, learn from one another, and stay updated on evolving trends in education. He pointed out that Open Universities are playing a crucial role in providing accessible education, particularly for those in remote areas or facing financial constraints. He also addressed the challenge of maintaining the quality of education, stressing that while Open Universities offer flexible learning opportunities, there should be no compromise on educational standards.

He further discussed the evolving competition between Open Universities and traditional institutions, urging Open Universities to remain relevant and continue innovating. Mr. Behrasar highlighted the importance of offering courses in regional languages to better serve students across different states, thereby promoting inclusivity and aligning with the National Education Policy's goal of reaching the unreached.

Concluding his address, Mr. Behrasar emphasized that the ultimate objective of education is employability. He urged Open and Distance Learning institutions to focus on enhancing

employability through skill-based programs and industry partnerships, making these universities more attractive to students. He also spoke on the potential for internationalization, noting that this could be a significant area of growth for Open Universities.

He thanked the participants, the hosting university, and all involved in organizing the conference, wishing everyone continued success in their efforts to advance Open and Distance Learning.

Key Takeaways from the Valedictory Session:

- The formation of the consortium marks a historic step towards greater collaboration among Open Universities.
- There is a collective need to address regulatory challenges, particularly UGC approvals.
- The sharing of best practices and joint course offerings will strengthen Open and Distance Learning (ODL).
- The exploration of technology (such as Blockchain) can enhance academic efficiency and credibility.
- A dedicated platform for policy discussions and collaboration should be established to streamline future efforts.
- The Sri Lankan model of a regularly meeting consortium provides a useful blueprint for sustained engagement and progress tracking.

The valedictory session reinforced the commitment of all OUs to work collectively through the consortium to address challenges, leverage opportunities, and enhance the quality of Open Education. The discussions set a strong foundation for future initiatives and collaborative progress in Open and Distance Learning.

Key Reflections from Speakers

Prof Sanjay Tiwari emphasized strategic planning and collaborative action among OUs, urging concrete outcomes. Prof Rajendra Prasad Das highlighted regulatory challenges and the role of the consortium in policy advocacy. Prof S Arumugam recognized the consortium as a major opportunity for shared resources, while Professor O P S Negi appreciated the insights for expanding open and distance learning. Prof Indrajit Lahiri praised the event's productivity and hospitality Prof Satyakam stressed regulatory hurdles with UGC and called for streamlined approvals. Prof Sharanappa V Halse, Prof Jagathy Raj V.P and Prof. Ghanta Chakrapani

contributed to discussions, enhancing collaboration. Prof. Uma Kanjilal underscored the consortium's role in joint initiatives, proposing a common platform for policy deliberation and the "One Nation, One Subscription" policy for cost-effective access to resources. Prof. P M C Thilakarathne shared his experience with a consortium-driven model, advocating for Blockchain adoption in education for transparency and efficiency.

Closing Remark by Hon. VC YCMOU

In the closing remarks, the Honorable Vice-Chancellor of YCMOU emphasized three key priorities for Open Universities (OUs) moving forward:

Enhancing the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER):

- OUs must collaborate to increase access to education and improve GER in the country.
- Strategies should focus on flexible learning pathways, technology-enabled learning, and outreach programs to bring more learners into the system.

Improving Graduate Employability:

- OUs need to ensure that graduates possess industry-relevant skills and are job-ready.
- Strengthening skill-based education, industry collaboration, and vocational training is critical.

Establishment of a Consortium for Open Universities:

- The formation of a formal consortium will enable OUs to work collectively on shared challenges and initiatives.
- This will streamline decision-making, policy advocacy, and resource-sharing among all Public Open Universities.

Summary

The conference brought together key stakeholders to discuss initiatives aimed at strengthening academic programs, fostering collaboration, and implementing effective policies across Open Universities (OUs). Several important areas were addressed, with a focus on improving education quality, promoting collaboration, and ensuring alignment with national standards.

A major decision was to integrate skill-based training shall be integrated into Level 4 programs to enhance employability. These courses are designed to offer practical, industry-relevant knowledge, ensuring that students gain the skills necessary to meet current job market demands. This initiative aims to make graduates more competitive by equipping them with the relevant expertise needed in various industries.

In addition to skill-based training, the round table conference emphasized the professional development of faculty members. It was agreed that all faculty would participate in structured capacity-building programs on a monthly basis. This will ensure that faculty stay updated with the latest teaching methods, technologies, and educational trends, ultimately improving the quality of instruction and the overall learning experience for students.

The conference also highlighted the importance of collaboration and resource sharing among Open Universities. It was decided that all OUs should establish Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) to promote academic collaboration and allow institutions to share resources and best practices. Furthermore, Open Educational Resources (OER) will be translated into regional languages, increasing accessibility and outreach to a wider student base, particularly in areas where students may not have access to education in their native language.

A key component of the round table conference was the proposal to have the Vice Chancellors (VCs) of all Open Universities meet quarterly or biannually. These meetings will provide a platform for discussing developments, challenges, and strategies for improving open and distance learning. Such collaboration will ensure that OUs can address common challenges and work together to find innovative solutions.

The YCMOU presented its Teacher Exchange Program, designed to facilitate knowledge sharing, faculty development, and cross-institutional learning experiences. This program aims to encourage faculty from different universities to collaborate and learn from each other, fostering innovation and improving teaching practices across institutions.

The conference also emphasized the role of platforms like Swayam and Swayam Prabha, which provide valuable educational content to State Open Universities (SOUs). Despite the popularity of these platforms, it was noted that many students were enrolling in courses but not taking exams. As a result, it was agreed that a separate meeting would be held to discuss an effective examination policy to ensure students complete their courses and assessments on time.

One of the most significant outcomes of the conference was the decision to form a consortium of Public Open Universities. This consortium will serve as a platform for cooperation, shared resources, and joint policy-making. All participating universities signed a formal resolution to establish the consortium, marking a significant step toward a unified approach to strengthening Open Universities. This initiative will foster collaboration and ensure high-quality education for all, helping Open Universities grow and adapt to the changing educational landscape.

The conference was a milestone in the development of Open Universities. The decisions made, including the formation of a consortium, focus on improving educational quality, enhancing employability, fostering collaboration, and implementing effective policies. These efforts will ensure that Open Universities continue to provide accessible, high-quality education to students across the country.

Conclusion

The conference concluded on a strong note, with a clear roadmap for the future: Consortium Formation: A dedicated body will oversee coordination among OUs. Technology & AI Adoption: Training initiatives will equip OUs with modern digital tools. Graduate Employability: A structured 3-year GE project will enhance job prospects for students.

NCVET Recognition: IGNOU will lead efforts in aligning programs with skill development norms.

Community Radio Expansion: OUs are encouraged to leverage this platform for greater outreach. The Hon. VC of YCMOU reiterated that Open Universities have a crucial role in transforming education, and through collective action, these institutions can significantly contribute to national development.

Vote of Thanks

By Shri. Dilip Bharad, Registrar YCMOU

Date: 7th March 2025

Time: 5.25 pm to 05.29 pm

On behalf of YCMOU Shri Dilip Bharad, Registrar YCMOU extended heartfelt thanks to all dignitaries and participants for making the Fourth Roundtable Conference of Vice-Chancellors of Open and Distance Learning Universities a success. Special thanks to the Honourable Vice-Chancellors for their guidance and leadership, and to the Director of SEMCA, Dr B. Shadrach, and Ms. Monika for their continuous support. Appreciation was also extended to Mr. Mrityunjay Behrasa, Economic Advisor, Ministry of Education, and international guests Professor Abhay Abdul Islam (Bangladesh), Professor Tilak Ratne (Sri Lanka), and Vice-Chancellor Nasir Sir (Pakistan). He also extended thanks to all unseen contributors who made the conference a success.

Annexure 1- List of Participants

S. No	Vice Chancellor	Name of the University
1	Prof. Sanjeev Sonawane	Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Maharashtra, Nashik
2	Prof Rajendra Prasad Das	Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Guwahati, Assam
3	Prof Sanjay Tiwari	M. P. Bhoj Open University, Bhopal, Madhya Paradesh
4	Prof Ami Upadhyay	Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat
5	Prof Sharanappa V Halse	Karnataka State Open University, Mysuru, Karnataka
6	Prof Jagathy Raj V.P	Sreenarayanaguru Open University, Kollam, Kerala
7	Prof S Arumugam	Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai, Tamilnadu
8	Prof. Ghanta Chakrapani	Dr B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, Telangana
9	Professor O P S Negi	Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani, Uttarakhand
10	Prof Satyakam	U. P. Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh
11	Prof Indrajit Lahiri	Netaji Subhas Open University, Kolkata, West Bengal
12	Prof. Uma Kanjilal	Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi
13	Snr. Professor P M C Thilakarathne	Open University of Sri Lanka, Nawala, Nugegoda, 10250, Sri Lanka
14	Prof Dr A B M Obaidul Islam	Bangladesh Open University, Dhaka, Bangladesh
15	Dr B. Shadrach, Director	Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (COL-CEMCA), New Delhi

Annexure 2- Schedule

Time	Session Theme	Expert
Day 1: 6 March 2025		
10:00 AM – 11:30- AM	**Inaugural Session**	
	Welcome address	Professor Sanjeev Sonawane, Vice Chancellor, Yashwantrao Chavan Open University, Nashik, Maharashtra
	Ahmedabad Declaration and the objectives of the 4th Roundtable of OUs	Dr B. Shadrach, Director, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (COL-CEMCA), New Delhi
	Guest of Honour	Dr. Vineet Joshi Hon. Secretary, Higher Education Government of India, New Delhi (Online)
	Keynote Address	Dr. Madhukar Waware, Joint Secretary, UGC-DEB, New Delhi (Online)
	Vote of thanks	Representative of OUs
Group Photo and Tea Break		
12:00 Noon – 01:30 PM	Best practices towards skilling and employability in Asian OUs	Presentations by Vice Chancellors of - Bangladesh Open University - Open University of China (Online) - Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan (Online) - Virtual University, Pakistan (Online) - Open University of Sri Lanka
Lunch Break		
02:30 PM – 03.45 PM	Graduate Employability Project at OUs: Highlights of the project.	Moderated by Professor Sanjay Tiwari, Vice Chancellor, M P Bhoj (Open) University, Bhopal
Tea Break		
04:15 PM – 05:45 PM	Visit to YCMOU campus Nariyal Pani pe Charcha at KVK, YCMOU	Facilitated by Professor Sanjeev Sonawane, Vice Chancellor, YCMOU
05: 45 PM – 07:30 PM	Visit to Goda Ghat & Ramkund (only for interested participants)	Participation Goda Arti at Ramkund (Kumbhmela 2027 Holy Place)
Dinner hosted by YCMOU Vice Chancellor		

Time	Session Theme	Expert
Day 2: 7 March 2025		
10:00 AM – 11:30- AM	**Ahmedabad Declaration:** Highlights of the declaration	Professor Ami Upadhyay, Vice Chancellor, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad
	Discussion on each of the points highlighted in the Declaration: Align recommendations and goals with respective OUs.	Open Discussion, moderated by Professor Satyakam, Vice Chancellor, U P Rajarshi Tandon Open University
Tea Break		
12:00 Noon – 01:30 PM	Formation of Consortium of Open Universities: Proposal	Proposal for a Consortium by Professor K Seetharama Rao, Former Vice Chancellor, Dr B R Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad (Online)
	Discussion on each of the points highlighted in the proposal for identifying actionable steps and assign responsibilities	Open discussion, moderated by Professor O P S Negi, Vice Chancellor, Uttarakhand Open University
Lunch Break		
02:30 PM – 03.15 PM	Governance of Consortium of Open Universities	An open discussion to establish foundational governance structures, operational processes and accountability mechanisms, moderated by Professor Rajendra Prasad Das, Vice Chancellor, K K Handiqui State Open University, Assam
03.15 PM	1) Best Practices of YCMOU	Block-chain & Yash Card, on screen evaluation - Shri Satesh Kumar
03:30 PM – 04.00 PM	2) Digital initiatives in Higher Education	Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Ltd. Pune - Shri. Vivek Sawant Shri. Amit Ranade
Tea Break		
04:15 PM – 05:15 PM	**Valedictory session**	Remarks by all OU VCs
	Next Steps	Dr B. Shadrach, Director, COL-CEMCA
	Valedictory Address	Dr. Shailendra Deolankar Director, Higher Education Government of Maharashtra
	Vote of Thanks	Dr. Jogendrasingh Bisen, Pro-Vice Chancellor, YCMOU, Nashik
05: 15 PM	Closing	National Anthem

Memorandum of Association
Consortium of Indian Open Universities

A Draft Note

By Professor K Seetharama Rao and Dr B. Shadrach

1. Prelude

In India, it is recognised that the Open University (OU) system has democratised higher education opportunities by providing access to quality higher education to all sections of society to meet the changing individual and social needs. Since the establishment of the first Open University in Andhra Pradesh in 1982, we have witnessed the arrival of 17 other Open Universities, including the Indira Gandhi National Open University. These universities have become a significant part of Indian tertiary education system, contributing to more than ten percent of the total enrolments, offering high quality education in an affordable manner. These universities support the Indian Government's commitment to achieving Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by India in 2015 by ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and by promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.

Further, these OUs mitigate entry barriers such as costs and fees for pursuing higher education by not only offering high quality education at low-cost, but also providing financial assistance and scholarships to socially and economically disadvantaged students. The admission process, curriculum design, student support services and the personalised attention offered make it truly inclusive. By undertaking measures towards graduate employability, these universities aim to increase the potential of employability among their learners.

1.1. Historical Background of Open University System in India

With a view of reaching out to students who do not make it to the conventional campus institutions due to a variety of reasons, the idea of offering educational programmes through correspondence was introduced in Delhi University in 1962, followed by Punjab University in 1968 and in 1969 at the universities of Rajasthan, Meerut and Mysore, which ultimately led to the establishment of what is now known as Dr B. R. Ambedkar Open University in 1982 by the visionary efforts of Professor Ram Reddy. It can be considered a landmark development in the field of distance education in the country. This further resulted in the establishment of the Indira Gandhi National Open University in 1985 and subsequent establishment of 16 other Open Universities in the country.

These OUs also created the need for the promotion and coordination of the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in the country, thus, a Distance Education Council was established in 1991.

After a decade and half, a Joint Committee was formed in 2007 through a memorandum of understanding among the Universities Grants Commission, All India Council for Technical Education and the Distance Education Council to develop guidelines for 'Recognition of

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Institutions'. These regulatory measures led to the establishment of eighteen Open Universities, including IGNOU, in the country, and many more such Universities are expected to be established in the years to come.

The National Education Policy also envisions granting permission to highly performing conventional institutions to start Open and Distance Learning programmes, mainly to expand access to education further. As of now, more than 200 institutions have been recognised by the UGC to be eligible for offering online and ODL programmes in the nation.

2. The NEP 2020 and the ODL System in India

The National Education Policy 2020 pins its hope in Open, Distance and Online Educational Systems to address the ever-increasing demand for tertiary education in India. By way of recognising the three modes of education – face-to-face on campus, open and distance, and online – the policy envisions increasing the gross enrolment ratio to 50 percent by 2035. Recognising the need for high quality ODL and online educational programmes at par with the conventional face-to-face on campus education, the policy treats education as a public good.

All performing institutions are likely to be provided with the option to run ODL and Online programmes. In this context, all ODL programmes and their components leading to a diploma or degree must meet high standards equivalent to the highest quality programmes offered by higher educational institutions on their campuses. These institutions, accredited for ODL, shall be encouraged and supported to develop high-quality online courses, which shall be suitably integrated into the curricula to make the blended mode of delivery more attractive, appealing, and effective. Further, in order to promote creativity, faculty members in institutions will be provided with the autonomy to innovate curriculum, pedagogical and assessment methods in ODL, online and traditional 'in-class' modes.

Considering the learners' perspective and aiming to create an optimal learning environment for them, NEP 2020 recognises that ODL and online education provide a natural pathway to increase access to quality higher education. Hence, to realise its potential, the policy calls for the renewal of ODL through concerted, evidence-based efforts toward expansion while ensuring adherence to clearly articulated quality standards. To achieve this, new ODL and Online Programme guidelines are being prepared under the chairmanship of Dr. N.S. Kalsi, who believes that these guidelines will enable institutions offering ODL and online programmes to attain global standards of quality.

In addition, NEP 2020 calls for 50 percent of learners in the school and tertiary systems to have exposure to vocational education, aligning with SDG 4.4, which emphasises the integration of vocational skills and capacities alongside academic capabilities. Higher education institutions will offer vocational education either independently or in partnership with industry and other stakeholders. The possibility of delivering vocational courses through ODL will also be explored.

3. The Need for Collaboration among the OUs

Initially, the need to create a Consortium of Open Universities (OUs) was raised during the

73rd meeting of the Board of Management of IGNOU in 2002. This led to the Vice-Chancellors of all Open Universities discussing the details of the Consortium. In the 94th meeting of the Board of Management of IGNOU, Prof V N Rajasekharan Pillai, the then Vice-Chancellor, mooted the idea of the establishment of a Consortium that would function as a nodal point to undertake all types of collaborative activities involving ODL, e-learning and new knowledge creation. It was recognised that the Consortium shall provide technology-enabled education and training for the overall development of the country.

The Fourth Session of the Roundtable Conference of All India Vice Chancellors of Open Universities and Heads of Distance Education Directorates, organised by the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) in collaboration with Dr B R Ambedkar Open University in November 2018 also focused on 'Internalisation, Inter-Institutional Cooperation and ODL Consortium'.

As part of the Roundtable Conference, it was also agreed to establish a 'Consortium of all ODL institutions across the country to enable efficient distribution and sharing of resources, dissemination of various forms of information and, most importantly, reduction of cost'. The former Vice-Chancellor of BRAOU, Prof. V. S. Prasad, also stressed the need for an 'agency' role for the Consortium, mainly to improve the capabilities of the institutional leaders, learners and the staff of ODL institutions. The meeting of the Vice Chancellors held in Jaipur, coordinated by Professor Kailash Sodani two years ago, also discussed this need.

4. Recent Call for a Consortium of Open Universities

In recent months, with support from the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, the OU VCs met several times, starting with the first meeting at Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University in August 2023. This meeting led to the commitment of the OUs towards the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020. With support from COL-CEMCA, this meeting also led to the Vice Chancellors committing their support to NEP 2020 in the form of their *Ahmedabad Declaration*[1].

The nineth clause of the Declaration was to establish a Consortium of Indian Open Universities with intentions to share benefits for mutual advantages. The broad objective of the Consortium is to develop competencies of ODL institutions and promote quality of education by providing an institutional framework for optimum utilisation of available resources.

As an answer to the long-standing need felt by the OUs, it is proposed that the OU VCs at their forthcoming meeting in Nashik in March 2025, shall finally establish the Consortium, in line with their demand over the last many years, as also pronounced in their Ahmedabad Declaration. Although attempts to develop the Consortium remained in talks, the Nashik meeting of the VCs shall become a watershed moment for the Open Universities in India.

4.1. Ahmedabad Declaration of OU Vice Chancellors

[1] Ahmedabad-Declaration-FINAL.pdf

The Ahmedabad Declaration of Indian Open Universities' Vice-Chancellors in August 2023 categorically mentions that the OUs commit to collaborate by forming a Consortium of Open Universities with the intent of achieving the following:

- Share best practices and learn from each other.
- Organise face-to-face and online conferences and workshops to devise implementable strategies and lines of action for realising the vision of NEP 2020.
- Share resources as Open Educational Resources (OER) on a mutual basis to facilitate the right of universities, who enter into such agreements, to retain, reuse, revise, remix and redistribute the OERs for educational purposes, and also use upto 40 percent of OER content in their course development; and,
- Exchange ideas and strategies, especially towards strengthening our partnerships with government and non-governmental actors towards education and skill development.
- Further, the Declaration also touches upon action items, such as:
    - Developing a Common Credit Transfer Framework among the OUs.
    - Developing Institutional-level Blended Learning Policies.
    - Identification and use of appropriate technologies.
    - Commitment for innovation and creativity.
    - Working towards a common future of OUs and ODL institutions through policy advocacy.

4.2. Second Roundtable of OU VCs

The Ahmedabad Declaration of OU VCs is being realised by all the State OUs in a collaborative manner. Following the Declaration, again supported by COL-CEMCA, the VCs met in Hyderabad in April 2024 to review one of the major commitments towards declaring all of their knowledge resources as OERs. The Second Roundtable of OU VCs[2] in Hyderabad was instrumental in producing a *Ahmedabad to Hyderabad Roadmap* in which they expressed their deep commitment towards the formation of a Consortium of Open Universities to facilitate the exchange of their entire collection of Open Educational Resources, on a mutual basis, with all members of the Consortium.

4.3. OUs as Awarding Bodies of NCVET (with dual recognition)

Subsequently, to help realise other commitments made in the Ahmedabad Declaration, COL-CEMCA facilitated a meeting between the OUs and the National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET) in May 2024 to help recognise each of the State OUs as awarding bodies of NCVET with dual status for offering skill courses, and assessing learners within the National Skill Qualifications Framework (NSQF) alongside their role in the implementation of the National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF). This effort resulted in each of the State OUs being considered for membership in the NCVET.

[2] open-university-vice-chancellors-roundtable-meeting-20-april-2024-telangana-india.pdf

COL-CEMCA helped the OUs in the preparation of their application forms as well as in gaining a deeper understanding of the provisions of Long-Term Training Programmes, Short-Term Training Programmes and Micro-credentials through capacity building efforts that took place in Haldwani, Uttarakhand,[3] in June 2024 and in Chennai, Tamil Nadu,[4] in August 2024 for which COL-CEMCA collaborated with the Uttarakhand Open University (UOU) and Tamil Nadu Open University (TNOU), respectively.

4.4. Third Roundtable of OU VCs

The third roundtable of Vice Chancellors[5] facilitated by COL-CEMCA and BAOU in October 2024 took note of the aspects of skilling and convergence with vocational education and various opportunities presented in NEP 2020. The Vice Chancellors agreed to invigorate skill-based education in their course and programme offerings, including the introduction of micro-credentials in their respective universities. They also agreed to collaborate in offering joint programmes with other OUs. At this meeting, COL-CEMCA committed to initiating a project around skilling and graduate employability involving all OUs.

The aspect of employability and skills gained momentum when NCVET started accepting applications of the OUs for their membership to become awarding bodies with dual recognition. As a timely effort, COL-CEMCA organised a meeting of OUs together with the Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University to launch COL's Graduate Employability project[6] in December 2024. The three-year long project shall result in each of the OUs developing and implementing the Graduate Employability Framework in their respective Universities.

5. Fourth Roundtable of OU VCs: Pathway for the Implementation of NEP 2020 in ODL Universities: Offline and Online Mode

The fourth roundtable of OUs is, therefore, aimed at further concretising and systematising the collective efforts undertaken by the OUs and shall have the following major agenda points:

- Formation of the Consortium of Open Universities for knowledge sharing, advocacy and collective action
- Reviewing COL-CEMCA's Graduate Employability project as a means to developing and implementing graduate employment framework in each OU

Revisiting Ahmedabad Declaration of OUs to prioritise measures towards identifying their unique role in the implementation of NEP 2020 in both online and offline modes, beyond the Open and Distance mode of operations.

[3] CEMCA :: Open Universities Poised to Integrate Skill Courses in their Mainstream Academic Programmes
[4] CEMCA :: Faculty members from 14 open universities trained on micro-credentials design in COL-CEMCA workshop
[5] CEMCA :: COL-CEMCA and BAOU Facilitate a Roundtable Meeting on ODL Regulations 2020
[6] CEMCA :: Bridging Education and Employment: The Graduate Employability (GE) Project Launched in India

5.1. Nashik Action Plan: Formation of a Consortium of Indian Open Universities

It is proposed that the OU VCs fourth roundtable meeting to be held in Nashik shall consider the following aspects as the primary goals of the Consortium of Indian Open Universities:

1. Collaboration and Resource Sharing: to promote collaboration among member Universities in the areas of curriculum development, research, faculty exchange and technology integration while ensuring efficient use of resources (intellectual, physical, technological) for mutual gain.
2. Quality Assurance: to establish and maintain high standards of education through the development of Common Quality Assurance Frameworks (CQAF), accreditation processes and regular assessment mechanisms.
3. Innovation in Education: to foster innovation in teaching-learning methodologies, digital learning platforms, and course delivery mechanisms, ensuring that Open Universities remain at the forefront of educational development.
4. Learners/Students Support Services (LSS): to enhance LSS across member Universities, including academic advising, career counseling and access to digital libraries, virtual labs, and other resources.
5. Advocacy and Policy Influence: to collectively advocate for policies that support the growth and development of Open Universities (OUs) and represent their interests in national and international forums.
6. Research and Development: to promote research (system-specific) in the field of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Online Programmes, contributing to the global body of knowledge and improving the effectiveness of ODL and Online Programmes in India.
7. Internationalisation of HE through ODL and Online Programmes.

It is also proposed that the Consortium shall adopt certain long-term, mid-term and immediate-term measures on regular and periodical basis. After formal approval of the draft of the Memorandum of Association of the Consortium, establishment of the Governing Council and the Secretariat may be considered. In consultation with the Governing Board, the Secretariat may undertake collaborative activities that benefit all of its members, and suggest measures for deepening and broadening the work of the Consortium, going forward with a five-year plan.

Consortium of Open Universities in India

Memorandum of Association

The name of the Consortium will be the **Consortium of Open Universities.** In general terms, the Consortium can be explained as "an association of institutions/ companies formed together with a particular purpose/s to carry out certain activities for their stakeholders' mutual benefits and advantages." The same analogy/ logic can be applicable to Open Universities that wish to be a part of the Consortium for shared benefits.

1. Parties of the Consortium of Open Universities

All recognised Open Universities, established through Acts of States or the Union shall be the primary parties involved in the establishment of the Consortium. However, the primary members may choose to have allied partners and other stakeholders, who are involved in the promotion of Online, Open, Distance and Blended Learning pathways as the secondary parties of the Consortium in due course.

2. Purpose, Scope and Jurisdiction

The Consortium of Indian Open Universities will serve as a collaborative platform for Open Universities to share resources (institutional, academic infrastructural and technical), best practices, innovative strategies, mainly for enhancing the quality and reach of Open Universities and ODL institutions in the nation.

The sustainability of the Consortium has far-reaching implications, including that of survival and growth of Open Universities and other ODL systems in the nation. The growth of ODL and Online Learning systems, in turn, contributes to socio-economic development, and leads the learners to contribute constructively to nation building.

Mainly the skill oriented short form customised courses can be effectively designed and implemented through ODL and Online Learning systems in collaboration with industry and business organisations, and NGOs.

3. Membership of the Consortium

The membership shall be open, primarily, to all recognised Open Universities in India. However, stakeholders involved in the promotion of Online, Open, Distance and Blended Learning pathways may be invited to join as associate members. This may include the conventional institutions that are being granted permission to run online and open and distance learning programmes, who demonstrate commitment to the objectives of the Consortium. Membership shall be granted upon approval by the Governing Body of the Consortium.

4. Objectives of the Consortium

While the primary goal of the Consortium is promoting and facilitating the growth and development of ODL institutions through facilitation of knowledge sharing and resource

pooling across them, leading to enhancing quality assurance, ensuring academic standards and sharing of best practices in teaching and learning methodologies, the following are the specific objectives of the Consortium:

- To strengthen national priorities of inclusive and equitable quality education and skill building and lifelong learning and to bring about transformation and innovation in the way education and skill development is carried out, especially for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society as envisaged in the Indian Constitution.
- To expand access to education and skill development and lifelong learning opportunities for every individual, especially by reaching the last learner, such as, the migrant workers, indigenous people, rural population, persons with disabilities, learners in conflict zones and other vulnerable groups, and to make open education as their first choice of education.
- To share best practices, organise face-to-face and online conferences, workshops to devise implementation strategies and lines of action for realising the national goals of education and skill development, especially through mechanisms for sharing Open Educational Resources on a mutual basis and enter into agreements to retain, reuse, revise, remix and redistribute for educational purposes.
- To strengthen partnerships on behalf of its members with governmental and non-governmental actors for open education and skills development, and to increase awareness and understanding of open and distance learning among stakeholders, including government bodies, educational institutions, and the general public.
- To promote research and development, contributing to the advancement of educational theories and practices and to organise training programmes and workshops for competency building of faculty and administrative staff.
- To promote the use of appropriate technologies in distance education, ranging from community radios to artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies, for enhancing the delivery of educational content and supporting interactive learning environments and creating support systems for learners, including counseling, academic assistance, and career guidance, to enhance the learning experience in distance education.
- To engage with policymakers and educational authorities to advocate for policies that support and promote open and distance education and to work towards expanding access to education for diverse populations, including marginalised communities, by utilising open and distance learning models.

These objectives aim to enhance the effectiveness and reach of open universities in the country and abroad, thereby contributing to the larger goal of improving accessibility to quality education and skill development and to enhance prospects of graduate employability.

5. Responsibilities

The Consortium of Open Universities should assist the OUs in realising each of the above objectives. All the member institutions shall be responsible for the realisation of the above objectives by way of nominating their representatives to the Governing Body of the Consortium. It is expected that the members of the Governing Body shall actively participate in the deliberations and discussions and other lawful gatherings of the Consortium.

All the member institutions shall abide by the Memorandum of Association and strive for the promotion of the objectives of the Consortium.

6. Governance

The Governing Council of the Consortium shall be the representative body of member institutions/organisations that approves policies, provides strategic direction, and oversees the activities of the Consortium. The Governing Council shall consist of Heads of member Universities/ODL institutions. The term of office shall be for Three (3) Years, and the Governing Council shall meet once in Three Months.

a. Executive Committee:

The day-to-day management of the Consortium shall be overseen by an Executive Committee elected/nominated by the General Body with mutual consensus. The Executive Committee shall consist of a Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Member Secretary/Executive Director and other Office Bearers as deemed fit. The Executive Members shall be elected during the Annual General Council Meeting for a term of three years, with the possibility of reelection. The decisions shall be made by a simple majority vote unless otherwise specified.

b. Regular Meetings

The Consortium shall hold an Annual General Body Meeting (AGBM) once in a year and special meetings may be convened as required by the Executive Council. The Notice of meetings shall be provided to all members at least 15 days in advance. Each member of the Consortium shall have one vote in the decision-making processes of the Executive Council.

c. Terms of Agreement

The purpose of the Consortium, as outlined above, is to share the resources, best practices, innovative strategies for not only their mutual gain but also to enhance the quality and reach of Open Universities and ODL institutions in the country; hence, the terms of agreement shall commence on the date from which all the member institutions shall mutually agree and continue until terminated by the mutual consent of 2/3rd members of the proposed Consortium.

Further, each member shall agree to contribute to the Consortium's objectives and all members are expected to attend the meetings regularly once in a quarter and share information regarding their respective activities relevant to the Consortium.

The Consortium shall be governed by a Steering Committee consisting of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Member Secretary. Member Institutions of the Consortium are required to make financial contributions to support its activities as agreed upon. The financial management of the Consortium shall be overseen by the Steering Committee consisting of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Member Secretary. All the Members shall agree to keep confidential, proprietary or sensitive information shared within the Consortium. Any intellectual property developed as a direct result of Consortium activities shall be owned jointly by the Members unless otherwise agreed.

In the event of any dispute arising out of or relating to this Agreement, the Member Institutions shall first seek resolution through friendly consultation.

Any Member may terminate its participation in the Consortium upon giving thirty (30) days written notice to the General Council.

This Agreement may be amended only by a written agreement signed by all Members.

d. Secretariat

The Secretariat consists of a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson and assisted by a Member Secretary/Executive Director. All these members of the Secretariat are nominated by the General Council of the Consortium with a common consensus to manage its regular affairs. However, the nomination of the Member Secretary/Executive Director shall be the choice of the Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson.

e. Costs and Expenses

The Consortium shall be funded through membership fees, grants, donations, and other fundraising activities. The major funding sources of the Consortium would be:

- Membership fees, Government grants,
- Contributions from industry partners,
- Exploring possibilities for generative revenue through consultancy services, and
- Other income-generative activities can also be taken up in due course of time.

Regarding the human and technical resources, there are two ways – either by using from member organisations, to the maximum possible extent, or hiring from the available consultancy services/man power markets, keeping in view the cost effectiveness.

The financial year shall be coterminous with that of the public institutions i. e., 1st April to 31st March. An annual budget shall be prepared by the Governing Body and approved by the members at the Annual General Body (AGM).

7. Non-Legal Binding Obligations

The Memorandum of Association is framed in consideration of various legal, operational, and structural elements relevant to the Consortium. These include fostering collaboration, trust, and cooperation within the institutional members of the Consortium. The members are expected to agree on common objectives that guide collaborative efforts, that are not legally enforceable.

The member institutions of the Consortium are expected to commit to provide mutual support to one another, such as sharing resources, expertise, or information, based on trust and cooperation rather than legal obligation. These may include data sharing practices; collaboration in research initiatives; agreed upon norms and best practices for collaboration and cooperation without legal ramification; foster transparency and accountability within the Consortium; member institutions may commit to resolving conflicts amicably and collaboratively; and members are expected to agree on a commitment to strive towards achieving the Consortium's goals collectively.

In the event of dissolution of the Consortium, assets shall be distributed in accordance with the objectives of the Consortium, as determined by the Executive Council.

8. Indemnity:

Members of the Governing Council shall be indemnified by the Consortium against any liability incurred in the course of their duties, except in cases of gross negligence or willful misconduct.

9. Signatures of the Primary Parties of the Consortium

No.	Name of the Institution	Signature of the Head of the Institution
1.	Krishan Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Assam	
2	Nalanda Open University, Bihar	
3	Pandit Sundarlal Sharma Open University, Chhattisgarh	
4	Indira Gandhi National Open University, Delhi	
5	Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Gujarat	
6	Jharkhand State Open University, Jharkhand	
7	Karnataka State Open University, Karnataka	
8	Sree Narayanaguru Open University, Kerala	
9	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University, Madhya Pradesh	
10	Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Maharashtra	
11	Odisha State Open University, Odisha	
12	Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Punjab	
13	Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Rajasthan	
14	Tamil Nadu Open University, Tamil Nadu	
15	Dr B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Telangana	
16	Uttarakhand Open University, Uttarakhand	
17	U. P. Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Uttar Pradesh	
18	Netaji Subhas Open University, West Bengal	

Annexure 4- Resolution

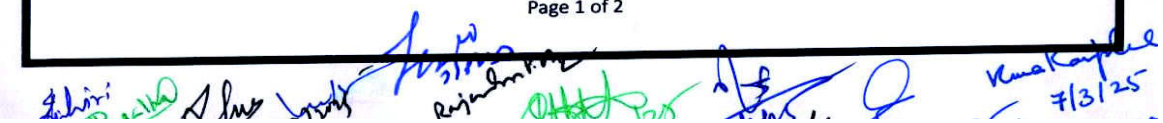
Consortium of Public Open Universities

Resolution by Vice Chancellors
7 March 2025

We, the Vice Chancellors, resolve to form the Consortium of Public Open Universities in India for mutual cooperation with the formal resolution below:

1. It is resolved that a Consortium of Public Open Universities in India shall be established this day, the 7th March, 2025.
2. The process towards the legal formalities shall be completed within 90 days from this day.
3. An interim working committee with the following members has been constituted to complete all legal formalities towards establishing the Consortium.
    a. Vice-Chancellor, Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nashik, Maharashtra, Professor Sanjeev Sonawane – Chairperson
    b. Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, Professor Ami Upadhyay – Member
    c. Vice-Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, Professor Uma Kanjilal – Member
    d. Vice-Chancellor, Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, Professor Sanjay Tiwari - Member
    e. Vice-Chancellor, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, Telangana, Professor Ghanta Chakrapani – Member Secretary
4. We hereby adopt the resolution.

Page 1 of 2



Signed by:

Name	*University*	*Signature*
Professor Uma Kanjilal	Indira Gandhi National Open University	
Professor Rajendra Kumar Das	Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Guwahati, Assam	
Professor Ami Upadhyay	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat	
Professor Sharanappa Halse	Karnataka State Open University, Mysuru, Karnataka	
Professor Jagathy Raj V. P.	Sreenarayanaguru Open University, Kollam, Kerala	
Professor Sanjay Tiwari	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh	
Professor Sanjeev Sonawane	Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nashik, Maharashtra	
Professor S Arumugam	Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu	
Professor Ghanta Chakrapani	Dr B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, Telangana	
Professor Om Prakash Singh Negi	Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani, Uttarakhand	
Professor Satyakam	U. P. Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh	
Professor Indrajit Lahiri	Netaji Subhas Open University, Kolkata, West Bengal	

Facilitated by:

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, New Delhi, India

Ahmedabad Declaration

By the State Open University Vice Chancellors of India
August 2023

We, the Vice Chancellors, and other delegates, who participated in the State Open University Vice Chancellors' Forum, organised by the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) and the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) on 4-5 August 2023 at BAOU Campus in Ahmedabad, on the theme, 'National Education Policy 2020: Opportunities and Challenges for Open and Distance Learning Universities', hereby declare that:

1. The Open Universities Vice Chancellors' Forum was organised to:
    a. Take stock of the vision and objectives of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) and the opportunities and challenges it presents for Open and Distance Learning Institutions.
    b. Discuss the current practices of State Open Universities in the wake of the introduction of NEP 2020.
    c. Reflect upon effective ways to translate the vision of NEP 2020 into robust implementation measures and strategies.
    d. Identify the 'niche' of ODL institutions and the opportunities for seizing a leadership position.
    e. Continue to demonstrate and ensure that higher education is accessible, affordable, equitable and inclusive.

2. The Open Universities Vice Chancellors' Forum also took note of the facts that:
    a. The Open Universities in India, contribute to almost 11 percent of the learners enrolled in higher education institutions in India.
    b. This achievement is remarkable given that as opposed to more than 1100 conventional universities and more than 45,000 constituent, affiliated and autonomous colleges, the meagre number of 18 Open Universities and other open systems in the nation contribute to one tenth of the enrolments.
    c. The Open Universities contribute to more than 50 percent of the female enrolment ratio in India.
    d. The ODL system is the most preferred choice of education for persons with disabilities and marginalised sections of society.
    e. There are many exemplars of best practices from various Open Universities in India, including reaching the unreached.

3. We continue to commit to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, on inclusive and equitable quality education, and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. Advocating for SDG 4 as a vantage point to achieve the remainder SDGs, particularly SDG 5 emphasising gender equality and women empowerment, and SDG 8 promoting sustained and inclusive sustainable economic growth, we note the significant contribution of ODL institutions, especially the Open Universities, in this regard.

4. We, recognising the transformative nature of the NEP 2020, commit to the all-round development of the learners in alignment with the 21st Century skills, capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper, and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values. We aim to produce critical, creative, engaged, productive, contributing, and ethical citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society as envisaged by our Constitution.

5. We, recognising the aspirations of the nation in enhancing the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) to 50 per cent by 2035, commit all our resources and efforts towards expanding our reach and sustaining our contribution to the GER growth in the nation, while disregarding any compromise in the quality of education.

6. We reiterate our commitment to lifelong learning opportunities for every individual through our ODL system, especially by reaching the last learner, such as, the migrant workers, indigenous people, rural populations, persons with disabilities (divyang), learners in conflict zones, and other vulnerable groups as the “first choice of education.”

7. We commit to responding to continuous skilling, upskilling, and reskilling of individuals to meet the demands of the future of work by creating courses with involvement from the industry and the marketplace, especially for the marginalised groups through flexible pathways, internships, workplace-learning and other apprenticeship opportunities to enhance skills and employability.

8. We commit to move our Open Universities as multidisciplinary, large, and resilient systems that are agile to changing needs and the demands of the learner-centred curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and student support systems with an overall vision of delivering quality education through ODL, while enhancing and extending our outreach to a diverse set of learners.

9. We commit to collaborate among the Open Universities by forming a Consortium of Open Universities with the intent of achieving the following:
    a. Share best practices and learn from each other.
    b. Organise face-to-face and online conferences and workshops to devise implementable strategies and lines of action for realising the vision of NEP 2020.
    c. Share resources as Open Educational Resources (OER) on a mutual basis to facilitate the right of universities who enter into such agreements to retain, reuse, revise, remix and redistribute for educational purposes, and to also use upto 40% of OER content in their course development.
    d. To exchange ideas and strategies, especially towards strengthening our partnerships with government and non-governmental actors towards education and skill development.

10. We commit to developing a credit transfer framework among the Open Universities to provide flexibility and choice-based educational opportunities to our learners in India by recognising credits earned in our educational systems and enabling learners from Open Universities to obtain credits from each other.

11. We recognise the need for investing in digital technologies and to become one of the prime users of assistive, adaptive, and user-centred technologies to promote blended learning, mainly by transforming our institutions from massification of education to universalization, but rapidly move on to facilitating personalised learning among the millions of learners with diverse interest, potential and aspirations. We extend our commitment to promoting ODL and Online programmes, adhering to the standards and quality equivalent to the highest quality programmes run by campus institutions and commit to developing our institutional-level blended learning policies towards imparting high quality courses in a blended mode.

12. We also commit to tackling the problems associated with the digital divide by identifying and using appropriate technologies, ranging from community radio to extended realities and artificial intelligence-enabled virtual tutoring possibilities, to ensure that equity, inclusion, and diversity principles are adhered to, and use traditional tools and technologies for learners who do not have adequate access and connectivity to the Internet.

13. Finally, we, recognising the pioneering role that the ODL system has played over the last many decades, commit to innovation and creativity, in the way and beyond, we enhanced access to high quality, employment-oriented, short and long-term courses with flexible exit and entry points as a response to market requirements as well as by way of realising NEP 2020's vision of creating lifelong learners, who

have a global outlook and are exemplars of global citizenship, while retaining their pride in being Indians first.

14. Together, we commit to working towards a common future where Open Universities are recognised for their inclusive lifelong learning practices and for their delivery of quality education and skills to every individual and towards building national resilience as India aspires to become the world's knowledge superpower.

15. We hereby adopt the Ahmedabad Declaration.

Adopted by:

Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Guwahati, Assam
Nalanda Open University, Nalanda, Bihar
Pandit Sundarlal Sharma Open University, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh
Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat
Jharkhand State Open University, Ranchi, Jharkhand
Karnataka State Open University, Mysuru, Karnataka
Sreenarayanaguru Open University, Kollam, Kerala
M. P. Bhoj Open University, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh
Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nasik, Maharashtra
Odisha State Open University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha
Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala, Punjab
Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Kota, Rajasthan
Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu
Dr B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, Telangana
Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani, Uttarakhand
U. P. Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh
Netaji Subhas Open University, Kolkata, West Bengal

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