

## CHAPTER – 11

**THE UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION:  
ROLE; and REORGANIZATION:****Importance:**

In view of the importance of the University System for the socio-economic and technological development of the country, almost all the developed and developing countries have an Inter-university Body to oversee and coordinate the Higher Education System. The most prominent examples are the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Kenya, Bangladesh, India and Turkey. With an increase in the number of degree-awarding institutions both in the private and public sector, the diversity of their teaching programmes and proliferation of the disciplines taught by them, the need for a coordinating body is recognized everywhere.

The need for such a body has always been felt for the promotion and coordination of Higher Education. A prototype of a body like this was already there in the form of an Inter-university Board, which had been working since 1952.<sup>(1)</sup> Almost all major government policy documents, such as the first Pakistan Educational Conference (1947),<sup>(1)</sup> Commission on National Education (1959),<sup>(2)</sup> and the Education Policy (1972-80),<sup>(3)</sup> had emphasized the need for the creation of an Inter-university Body. However, with the changed circumstances of the 1960s, expansion of Higher Education in the 1970s, the large scale flow of funds to the University Sector, and in view of the

autonomous status of universities, the government felt the need of a strong Inter-university Body to look after the general health of Higher Education in the country.

Under the 1973 Constitution<sup>4</sup>, a number of important matters in the Educational Sector have been placed on the Concurrent Legislative List. The significance of this is that the Federal Parliament can legislate on those subjects, and federal legislation will override the provisions of any provincial law which is in conflict with it. The Education-related Subjects which were placed on the Concurrent List were as under:

- a) Policy.
- b) Planning.
- c) Curriculum and Syllabus.
- d) Text Books.
- e) Centres of Excellence.
- f) Standards of Education.
- g) Islamic Education.

Thus, the Federal Government has assumed the role of overall policy making, coordination of educational development, promotion of research, building of institutional capabilities and the development of manpower in the country.

Prior to the 1973 Constitution almost the entire subject of Education was a Provincial Subject, and hence the Federal Government had very little role to play in the

Educational Sector. Experiences gained from the break-away of East Pakistan showed that education had a vital role to play in national integration and social cohesion. It was also felt that Education was the foundation on which the development of a province or a region depended. Thus, if it were desired that ultimately all regions in the country were to come up to a common standard of development, then the Federal Government must have an important role in the field of Education. It was with the above objectives in mind that certain important aspects of Education, as enumerated above, were brought on the Concurrent List. As a result the Parliament passed the University Grants Commission Act in 1974. <sup>(5)</sup> The Federal Parliament also passed an Act for the Federal Supervision of Curricula, Textbooks, and Maintenance of Standards of Education in 1976. <sup>(6)</sup> This act authorizes the Federal Government to supervise curricula, textbooks and standards of Education at all levels. For the sector of Higher Education, the Federal Government has designated the UGC to be the authority for enforcing the provisions of this Act.

### **Statutory Role of the University Grants Commission**

The role of the UGC can better be seen in the perspective of its statutory functions. The UGC performs advisory functions to the Federal and Provincial Governments on issues relating to Higher Education. The main statutory functions of the Commission can be spelled out as given below: <sup>(5)</sup>

- a) To inquire into the financial needs of universities;
- b) To allocate and disburse grants to universities;

- c) To collect information and data on higher education;
- d) To institute fellowships and scholarships;
- e) To support and coordinate research programmes of universities;
- f) To support and promote extra-mural and extra-curricular activities;
- g) To supervise the academic programmes and development of university education;
- h) To advise the government on the opening of new universities or up-gradation of existing institutions; and
- i) To perform other functions as may be prescribed or consequential to the above functions.

Among other functions, the statutory role of the UGC is to inquire into the financial needs of the universities and to disburse grants; to support and coordinate the academic programmes of universities; and to advise the government on the problems of Higher Education. It coordinates academic, research and development programmes of universities for greater national development, and maintains permanent liaison with universities, Provincial Governments and the Federal Government. It serves as an effective link between the Governments and Universities, to make an objective assessment of university requirements, on the one hand, and securing adequate funds for their speedy development, on the other.

The Commission is responsible for overseeing the academic progress and development of institutions of Higher Education. In pursuance of this objective, the modalities used in the implementation of these programmes fall under the categories of

human resource development, institution strengthening, needs assessment, student welfare, including scholarships, and support for extra-curricular activities, improvement of educational standards, incentives for high quality research, books and monographs, and miscellaneous activities like educational pacts with other countries, equivalence of degrees and dissemination of information.

### **Quality Education:**

To improve the standards of education, the main thrust of the UGC activities includes faculty development, development of teaching and research laboratories, funding of faculty research, inter-university exchange of experts, supply of equipment, books and journals, special funding for important emerging disciplines of science and technology, use of expatriate Pakistani experts for transfer of technical knowhow, post-doctoral fellowships for studies abroad for those Pakistani scientists who obtain Ph.D. degrees from Pakistani universities, and linkages of Pakistani universities with foreign universities.

Evaluation of academic progress and assessment of the needs of university departments are carried out periodically. This is essential in view of the rapid advances in various fields of science and technology, and changing demands of university education. Support for students in the form of fellowships and scholarships is the most conspicuous among the student welfare programmes. The UGC keeps a constant eye on the academic standards of universities. Aware of this, the UGC's initiatives for improving the

educational standards include: (1) periodical collection of base-line data on students' enrolment, pass percentage, and quality of graduates, (2) constant review of curricula, (3) support for books and journals, (4) review of the evaluation procedures, (5) improvement of laboratories, (6) supply of equipment, and (7) training teachers on the norms of university teaching.

### **Research and Development:**

A university system must carry out both teaching and research with equal enthusiasm. The support which the UGC provides for faculty research is enormous. It includes the publication of monographs on specialised topics. In order to promote science, the UGC equally rewards scientists who have done quality work. Teachers are also given liberal travel grants and encouraged to present the results of research at national and international conferences. Support is also provided to scholars for organising seminars in disciplines at the frontiers of knowledge. The UGC makes annual recommendations for National Awards to outstanding academics.

Programmes for human resource development and curriculum development are also carried out by the UGC and include teacher training, revision of curricula, seminars, conferences and workshops, publication of monographs and Review of the Problems of Higher Education. These programmes are pursued through a number of activities, such as, pre-service and

in-service training, special diploma courses, etc. The UGC also undertakes periodical revision of courses at the graduate and post-graduate level, with a view to modernize and update the curriculum contents. This is a continuous activity of the UGC.

The UGC maintains a close and continuing dialogue with the government, Vice-Chancellors, university teachers, distinguished educationists and scientists of the country, and provides an effective forum for mutual consultations, discussions and deliberations on important educational issues and for future planning and programming of Higher Education. The Commission is assisted by a number of statutory committees, the most notable being the Vice-Chancellors' Committee. It is the most important forum for general discussion of the problems faced by universities, and for evolving a consensus through free exchange of ideas. It is a platform for the expression of views of universities; and the intermediary functions of the UGC are usually carried out through this body.

As the universities are now federally funded, the scope of the activities of the Commission has greatly enlarged. The Commission is now responsible for disbursing recurring and development grants to universities. Additionally, it also provides funds for a number of senior and junior fellowships; and organizes pre-service and in-service training and orientation programmes, seminars, conferences, and symposia for promotion of intellectual activity. Research grants are freely given to encourage research activity in universities. The UGC also determines the equivalence of degrees and diplomas of local as well as foreign universities. It undertakes continuing efforts

to upgrade laboratories and libraries of universities, arranges continuous revision of curricula and textbooks, and has established more than 700 Book Banks in educational institutions of all levels. It also supports publication of research journals by professional societies and learned bodies.

The UGC is designed to guide and control university development by giving advice on the establishment of new institutions, departments and faculties, or the expanding of older ones, and has the power to inspect faculties and accounts and to withdraw funding.

An overview of the role of the UGC would highlight that these activities cannot be undertaken by the generalist bureaucracy, as this job involves highly professional, academic, intellectual and scientifically trained manpower.

### **The Organizational Set-up of the University Grants Commission** (3)

The UGC carries out its functions through the following divisions at its headquarters:

- a) Academic Division.
- b) Accreditation & Coordination Division.
- c) Administration Division.
- d) Curriculum & Training Division.
- e) Finance Operation and Planning Division.

- f) **Planning & Development Division.**
- g) **Media / Press Publications.**
- h) **Operation and General Services Division.**
- i) **Sports and Culture Division.**

**Besides the above the UGC has its regional centres at the following locations:**

- a) **Karachi.**
- b) **Lahore.**
- c) **Peshawar.**

**These Regional Centres have been necessitated for the following functions:**

- a) **Facilitating and attestation of documents of foreign students located in the relevant cities. This was a function previously performed in a centralized manner by the Ministry of Education, but due to the inconvenience caused to foreign students, the functions were passed on to the UGC.**
- b) **For effective liaison with public and private sector universities located in the above centres.**
- c) **For carrying on teacher training programmes and meetings of the Curriculum Revision Committees in different subjects.**
- d) **For closer liaison with provincial educational authorities.**

The UGC has a total staff strength of 396 members, out of whom 81 are officers in BPS-17 and above. Governmental grant for running the UGC structure in the year 2000-2001 is Rs.35.110 million.

### **The Need of a University Grants Commission**

The need for an Inter-university Body in Pakistan will always be there, in view of the large variety of educational institutions in the Higher Education Sector. The scene of Higher Education in Pakistan does not present a uniform system of University Education. It has a variety of institutions, ranging from mono-discipline universities/institutes to multi-discipline universities, emphasizing various aspects of education, from distance education to Islamic learning and agro-technical education. All these systems necessitate the existence of an inter-university body to carry out the educational policy functions of the Federal Government, under the constitution. The essential feature of the UGC is that it provides a platform where these institutions can interact with each other on an equal but collegial level, rather than in a bureaucratic manner.

The mandatory role of the UGC is necessitated more than ever in view of the current policy of the government on the liberalization and induction of the private sector in Higher Education in the country. With the proliferation of higher educational institutions in the private sector and the proposed establishment of the National Council for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (NCAQA), the need for the continuation of the UGC will increase as a national body for monitoring the

quality and standards of higher education. The NCAQA, under the aegis of the UGC, will provide regulatory mechanism for monitoring minimal educational standards.

It has been accepted by some educationists that if the UGC did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it. The World Bank's report on "Higher Education and Scientific Research for Development" (7) while assessing the role of the UGC, also recommended its strengthening, to make it more effective, and proposed many amendments in its Act for the said purpose.

### **Criticism of the University Grants Commission**

The UGC has been criticized by some bureaucratic and academic quarters on the following grounds:

- a) For effecting Austerity: The position taken before the Downsizing / Austerity Committees has been that in a situation of financial stringency, the expenditure on the UGC is wasteful, and can be better utilized by giving it to the educational institutions. Consequently, their stress is on the total abolition of the UGC.
- b) Downsizing of the UGC: There are others who have argued for a considerable downsizing of the strength of the UGC. As many as 150 posts, mostly in the lower grades, have been suggested to be reduced.

The counter argument is that, besides a whole host of technical functions, the UGC is handling the budgets of universities estimated in the year 2000-2001 to be

Rs.5342 million. The grant given by the Federal Government for running the UGC is only Rs.35.310 million. (8) Thus the UGC is getting less than even 1% of the university budgets, and hence no significant saving can accrue. On the other hand, it is discharging important functions, which the government, whether it is federal or provincial, will have to discharge through a similar body. The direct handling by the government of institutions of higher learning has never succeeded, and will create more problems than the expected good that may accrue from the abolition of the UGC.

- c) Hand over the universities to the provinces: The argument that is used is that traditionally, Education has been a provincial subject, and intervention in it by the Federal Government is not justified. Therefore, the argument goes, the federal funding of universities must be discontinued and the function handed over to the provinces.

It is true that there is no constitutional obligation on the Federal Government to finance the universities, other than the federal public sector universities. At the time that the Federal Government took over the funding of all the public sector universities, the intention was that universal primary education and eradication of illiteracy were high priority objectives of the government. Obviously, these functions could be best undertaken by the provincial and local authorities. Yet for national development, the University Sector could not be ignored. Consequently, in order to remove the competition for funds at the provincial level between the universities sector and primary / literacy sector, the burden of funding universities was taken up by the Federal Government. It

was hoped that the funds so freed with the Provincial Governments would be used for the early attainment of universal primary education and eradication of illiteracy.

Even with this help given to the provinces, they have been unable to achieve either of the above goals. Pakistan today has yet a long way to go in the eradication of illiteracy and achievement of universal primary education. Hence, the burden of Higher Education would further inhibit the efforts of provinces to discharge their primary goals.

Under the tax sharing formula between the federation and the provinces, the funds currently being given by the Federal Government for funding the universities will not automatically stand transferred to the provinces. At the same time, the provinces will not be able to deal directly with the universities, and hence they will also have to create an agency to act as an intermediary between the government and the universities. As stated above, almost every major commission and committee has recommended the setting up of a UGC-like body.

#### **An Assessment of the Working of the University Grants Commission**

Since its very inception, the UGC has suffered from major handicaps. These handicaps can be summarized as under:

a) **Legal flaws:**

The provisions in the Constitution with regard to Education did not go far enough to arm the Federal Government fully to look after Education as a whole, or even Higher Education. It appears that in order to obtain a consensus for the 1973

Constitution, the demand for provincial autonomy could not be ignored, and hence the role of the Federal Government was limited to a few subjects in the field of Education and confined to a coordinating role.

It was in the light of this background that the UGC Act created an institution which was advisory, recommendatory, and facilitative, but it vests no authority in the UGC to enforce any decision on universities.

To take up only a few examples, it is seen that while the UGC has the legal mandate to examine and recommend the establishment of new universities, in practice in the province of Sindh, a number of charters have been granted by the provincial assembly to the private sector, without any consultation with the UGC. At the other end of the spectrum is the Government of the Punjab and NWFP, who have refused to grant any charter to private institutions in the last few years, despite the issuance of a NOC (No Objection Certificate) by the University Grants Commission. Another disturbing trend is the fact that teaching faculties have, in a number of universities, combined to frustrate the UGC requirements that teachers in the universities must possess at least a Ph.D. degree. If standards are to be raised, then a beginning has to be made by staffing universities with properly qualified teachers. The Bachelor's degree in Pakistan is awarded after 14 years of studies, whereas elsewhere it is at least 15 or 16 years of studies. Thus, the teachers in Pakistani universities who have a Masters degree, can only be equated with a Bachelor's degree from the USA.

The rules laid down by the UGC require that no teacher can become Associate Professor or Professor without a Ph.D. In order to circumvent this provision, in some universities, the teaching staff have had positions up-graded. This means that they did not have to undergo even the normal process of selection for the higher positions. Another serious flaw which has hampered the working of the UGC, is the fact that Provincial Governors are Chancellors of provincial universities, and hence, the only authority legally empowered to keep check and balance on the affairs of universities. At the same time, their funding is being done through the UGC by the Federal Government, and the provinces have totally absolved themselves from any responsibility for funding. This has led to financial indiscipline in universities, and a state of chronic financial emergency in many.

### **The UGC's Functioning**

It appears that with the weak legal base on which the UGC was created, it started functioning rather timidly and devised a number of programmes / areas of activity which it undertook so as not to create any resistance from the universities and the provinces. These programmes generally can be classified as under:--

- a) Curriculum development and training.
- b) Equivalence of degrees and diplomas.
- c) Obtaining federal funding for public sector universities.
- d) Libraries and laboratories development.

- e) Processing the development schemes submitted by Universities.
- f) Giving grants for research.
- g) When funds permitted, sponsoring seminars, conferences, and monograph development.
- h) Extra-curricular activities like inter-university sports and debates.

Universities have always taken the stand of university autonomy and have defied all attempts by the UGC to bring about academic improvement and research in universities. If today the UGC were to devise a programme for carrying out an academic audit of the universities, perhaps they will react very sharply and not allow it.

#### **Staffing of the University Grants Commission**

UGC staffing has also come about as a result of promotions within the organization and inbreeding. There is a need to review the staffing pattern of the UGC, so as to encourage more working teachers to contribute to the UGC for 3 or 4 years at a time and then to go back to their institutions. This will enrich the UGC and enable it to better appreciate the problems and issues confronting universities.

### **Appointment of Vice-Chancellors**

Vice-Chancellors play an important role in the smooth functioning of universities and their overall direction. It has been observed that Provinces never consult the UGC when removing or appointing Vice-Chancellors. In fact, even Governors did not have a Search Committee or any other mechanism for finding suitable Vice-Chancellors for universities. Sudden decisions are taken to remove Vice-Chancellors, often on political grounds, and equally arbitrarily, others are appointed. The UGC can play a substantial role in this regard.

### **A Framework for the Future**

Higher Education in Pakistan is beset by acute problems at all levels, especially the following:

- a) Faculty development support services.
- b) Provision of books and journals.
- c) Adequately equipping laboratories and libraries.
- d) Modernizing the curricula.
- e) Equipping teachers with knowhow to deliver modern curricula.
- f) Proper management of Higher Education.
- g) Introduction of efficiency and effectiveness.

- h) Bringing the quality of teaching and learning process to the international level.
- i) Ensuring quality research.

The prevailing state of affairs thus calls for rethinking of the UGC programmes and strengthening its legal position.

### **Review of the UGC Act**

The UGC Act needs to be reviewed and the UGC given sufficient authority to:

- a) Alter the present system of working out university funding, to include a system of reward and punishment for institutions on the basis of their academic performance and output in research.
- b) To carry out academic audit of the universities. This includes the ability to review the staffing position so as to ensure that there is no under-staffing or over-staffing, and properly qualified staff.
- c) Equip the UGC with sufficient financial resources to be able to meet the basic needs of universities. This can be done by establishing an endowment fund of adequate size.
- d) Authority to inspect non-chartered institutions and to give the status of deemed university to non-chartered institutions for establishing quality.

The present process of chartering every degree awarding institution through the legislature, is cumbersome and time-consuming. It also lends itself to political

favouritism by granting charters to undeserving institutions and withholding charters of deserving institutions.

The Indian Model is that the UGC can give a deemed university status to an Institute of Excellence, enabling it to function and develop sufficiently so that at a subsequent stage it can be granted a charter.

- e) Development of new programmes by the UGC: The UGC should review its programme to determine their relevancy and effectiveness. It should also take into consideration new areas which demand attention like:
  - i) Academic audit of Universities.
  - ii) Spending for enhancing access to university education.
  - iii) How to broaden and modernize the scope of Higher Education.
  - iv) Building partnership between the university and industry.
  - v) Mobilizing resources beyond governmental grants.
  - vi) Strengthening international linkages and cooperation with universities abroad.
  - vii) Improving managerial and analytical capacities within the system.
  - viii) Preparing a data-base on Higher Education.
  
- f) Staffing of UGC: The staffing of the UGC needs to be reassessed. There should be free flow of qualified persons from the universities for limited service with the UGC, and vice-versa.

- g) Qualifications for various posts need to be revised, to bring them in line with modern requirements.

### **Establishment of an Endowment Fund for Higher Education**

- a) Public sector universities are totally dependent on the government for grants given annually.
- b) This system has developed a parasitic attitude amongst universities. They do not want to put in any effort to improve their financing, nor do they make any effort to better utilize existing funds.
- c) Universities being totally dependent on governmental grants, cannot become academically independent.
- d) A sufficiently large endowment must be created for the purpose of sponsoring research, writing books and articles, and improving basic infrastructure in institutions. Such an endowment fund will go a long way in improving the quality of Higher Education within the country.
- e) Institutions in the private sector must also be helped through this endowment fund.
- f) The Iqra Surcharge should be used exclusively for Education – the sole purpose for which it was initiated, and continues to be levied from year to year. It will contribute, effectively to the cause of Education in Pakistan.

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