



Guest Editorial

The Draft New Education Policy 2019: Many Promises for Career Professionals Glenn C. Kharkongor

It's a pretty heavy document, 484 pages in all, and will take a good day of reading to get to the last appendix (Draft New Education Policy, 2019). The country has changed immeasurably in the 33 years since the last national education policy of 1986 and a new road map was long overdue. The appointment of a non-academician, K. Kasturirangan, former chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation, as the head of the committee, was an inspired choice. In stark contrast, the rest of the members are all academicians and almost all from higher education. Leaving education solely in the hands of educationists is ever a risky proposition.

The document, bulky as it is, sits lightly in your hands throughout the reading. The early pages provide a sense of freshness and the succeeding chapters do not disappoint. One is conditioned to policy papers compiled by bureaucratic hacks that make laborious reading, but this is different. New directions have been crafted and the visions that have been laid down make striking departures from our hitherto hopeless education system.

Those that love the paranoia of conspiracy theories will be disappointed. Given the present political dispensation, some would have expected ideological demons in the print, but there are none such, either overtly or between the lines. There is the expected clarion call to recall India's rich heritage and to draw on the wide cultural diversities in the country but this is balanced by a global outlook. The fabric of the policy interweaves everyone in a holistic manner: women, the disabled, rural and urban poor, tribals, SCs, dropouts and the LGBT community.

The introduction records the usual lofty premises but there is a focus on 21st century skills which have been listed, defined and justified. It recapitulates the 1996 UNESCO report 'Learning: The Treasure Within', with its four pillars: i) Learning to know - acquiring a body of knowledge and learning how to learn, ii) Learning to do - acquiring not only an occupational skill but also the competence to deal with many situations and work in teams, and a package of skills that enables one to deal with the various challenges of working life; iii) Learning to live together – developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism and peace; and iv) Learning to be - developing one's personality and being able to act with autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility.

Such a preamble will no doubt appeal to career professionals for it sets the platform for the variegated concepts and tasks that must be integrated into the education system for it to be truly preparatory for fulfilling careers in the world of work.

Career Education for Students

This will begin formally in secondary school (Grades 9-12) with attention to life aspirations. Students will be given increased flexibility and choice of subjects, including physical education, the arts, and vocational crafts - so that they may be free to design their own paths of study and life plans. During the school years, students will be exposed to different careers, and will be kept abreast of the ever-changing world of employment and the corresponding curricular choices available to them.

But before that "Every student will take a fun year-long course, during Grades 6-8, that gives a survey and hands-on experience of a sampling of important vocational crafts such as carpentry, electric work, metal work, gardening, pottery making, etc., as decided by States and local

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communities and as mapped by local skilling needs.” Vocational education will be continued in Grades 9-12 so that students will have plenty of choice regarding the curriculum, being allowed to mix and match academics with skills education, with sports and arts, and with soft skills training.

University education at the undergraduate level will be based on a liberal arts model, patterned on the Ivy League universities of the US. Career education for college students has a clearcut perspective in the policy. The journalist Fareed Zakaria is quoted: “...the purpose of a liberal arts education is not simply to prepare for one’s first job, but also for one’s second job, third job, and beyond. With the coming fourth industrial revolution, and the rapidly changing employment landscape, a liberal arts education is more important and useful for one’s employment than ever before.” All higher education institutions will provide career support for students.

Vocational education is one of the running themes of the policy. There will no longer be a hard separation between vocational and ‘mainstream’ education. Integration will happen in all institutions from school to university. Vocational education will be provided to dropouts and for the upskilling and reskilling of the adult workforce. Vocational courses in each region will be guided by a study of local demands.

More Teachers will be needed and Others too

A slew of new professionals and teachers will need to be recruited on a large scale to ensure the educational outcomes promised in the policy. Early Childhood Care Education (3-6 years) will be made compulsory for all children and hence “State Governments will prepare cadres of professionally qualified educators for early childhood education. Anganwadi workers taking the pre-school education component of the ICDS will participate in a 6-month special training. Current and future teachers will be trained in the relevant aspects of ECCE as is urgently required in Grades 1 and 2.”

Social workers and counsellors will help track student attendance and work towards bringing dropouts back into school. Recruitment of teachers for language teaching will be increased nationwide so that even subjects such as science can be taught bilingually. Career management for teachers will be provided through continuing professional development and career tracks for teachers to become administrators and teacher educators.

Bold timelines have been prescribed. For example, by 2030, the four-year integrated B.Ed. will become the minimal degree qualification for school teachers. This degree will be offered only in multi-disciplinary universities and single discipline institutes of education will no longer exist. By 2023, India should have “...only educationally sound teacher preparation programmes in operation”.

The Draft National Education Policy has now been condensed into a 55-page document that has apparently been approved by the Ministry of Human Resource Development and hence no longer has the word ‘draft’ in the title. While the future course of the policy has not been formally announced, a couple of formal steps are awaited: firstly, the approval of the Union Cabinet and then the introduction of a Bill in Parliament that will be likely to create a single regulator for higher education, replacing the University Grants Commission (UGC) and other educational statutory bodies, apart from other items of administrative implementation.

Perhaps career professionals would do well to map some of their future plans and programs in alignment with this far-reaching policy and even to offer advice to schools and universities for the implementation of career studies and services in their institutions.

References

1. *Draft National Education Policy 2019*. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi.
https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/Draft_NEP_2019_EN_Revised.pdf