



UGC

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Agreement between UGC and NT to Facilitate Teaching and Learning



While the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the teaching-learning activities, an agreement has been signed between University Grants Commission and Nepal Telecom to facilitate the teaching-learning and research activities in higher education. University Grants Commission's Chief Administrative Officer Mr. Subash Chandra Dhungel and Nepal Telecom's MD Mr. Dilliram Adhikari signed the agreement in presence of Honorable Minister for Education, Science, and Technology Mr. Giriraj Mani Pokharel and UGC Chairperson Prof. Dr. Bhim Prasad Subedi.

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Approval of UGC Programs and Budgets

The Board Meeting of the University Grants Commission held on 26th August 2020 has made the decision to approve the budget and programs for the fiscal year 2019/20 (2077/78) with the total amount of Rs. 16.4614 billion for the operation and capital development of higher education sector.

Out of this budget NRs 4.4465 billion has been allocated for the capital development. It is 27.01% of the total budget whereas 72.99% is allocated for operation and consumption. Tribhuvan University alone receives NRs. 8.893 billion of the total higher education sector budget. It is 54.02% of the total higher education budget. Community colleges are also receiving significant amount of the grants through UGC.

For the current fiscal year community colleges are receiving NRs. 0.85 billion. Funding to community colleges is based on formula and some of the prerequisites of documentation. UGC is also implementing Higher Education Reform Project since 2015 with the soft loan support of World Bank.

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Agreement between UGC and NT to Facilitate Teaching and Learning

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been signed between UGC and NT for facilitation of the Online Education promotion Offers launched by NT. UGC, an apex body of higher education in Nepal, has recently issued Guidelines for Facilitating Alternative Mode of learning in Higher Education, 2077 to mitigate impact of Covid-19 on regular academic activities of universities and other higher education institutions. Covid-19 has caused unprecedented disturbances in the teaching learning situation of higher education institutions. Uncertainties continue and amidst these uncertainties and difficulties it is the joint responsibility of all stakeholders that the loss incurred to mitigate to the extent possible without compromising the objectives of the curriculum and quality of teaching and learning.

As per the agreement, NT will design the 'Happy Learning Pack' for the online education and UGC will inform to the universities and ask for them to recommend students to subscribe the pack offered by NT as an alternative e-learning platform. Accordingly, NT will coordinate with all the universities and higher education institutions upon signing of this MOU and inform about this activities.

Depending upon the volume of usage NT agree to provide

a suitable video conferencing platform at subsidized rates to 'Happy Learning Pack' data user. For registering there will be following two options:

1. NT will ask the students to fill up a brief data sheet from NT website containing information on Name of the Student, Gender, Citizenship No, Mobile Number, University, Campus, Campus Type (Constituent, Community, Private) Name and student ID Number, Level and Address to subscribe the data package. NT will generate a summary report of the data users from this information and provide UGC upon request. This information regarding the data user will not be provided to a third party without the consensus of the UGC.
2. The universities and other higher education institutions shall provide the list of the students NT mobile number for eligibility in the email address edupack@nt.net.np. Both pre-paid mobile numbers shall be eligible for the packs. The obtained numbers shall be maintained by NT. The students will be notified through SMS about being eligible for the packs. The students by using USSD code 1442 will subscribe the packs.

Funding for Covid-19 Research

University Grants Commission awarded three projects to carry out collaborative research on various aspects of Covid-19. UGC had invited proposals from the Nepali Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to conduct Covid-19 based collaborative researches directly aiming to combat the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the resulting Covid-19 disease under eight thematic areas.

Out of 48 research proposals received, three proposals (each on social science, health science and science & technology clusters) were awarded to Tribhuvan University (TU) based on the competitive basis. Earlier, the Commission had restructured funding mechanism of Higher

Education Reform Project (HERP), a five-year project funded by World Bank, by incorporating an additional disbursement link indicator, DLI 8, in the HERP Implementation Guidelines, 2071 for conducting online classes and carrying out research projects on corona virus in the universities and campuses.

Awarded research proposals:

1. Evaluating synergies and tradeoffs among health, education and economic sectors in the fight against the COVID-19 in Nepal: Evidence and policy responses (under the Themes of Socio-economic Implications, Health, and Higher Education). [Central

Department of Chemistry, TU]

2. COVID-19: Investigation on Secondary Metabolites from Natural Products through Computational Chemistry and Immunochemistry Approach (Under themes of major biological and medical aspects of a SARS-CoV-2 and innovative and therapeutic values). [Central Department of Economics, TU]
3. An Appraisal on COVID-19 Pandemic and Optimal Containment Measures in Nepal: Socio-economic Implications and Impact on Maternal and Child Health (Under themes of Health) [Institute of Medicine, TU]

UGC Secretary Completes his Tenure

Prof. Dr. Dev Raj Adhikari, Secretary, University Grants Commission, completed his four year tenure on 2nd October 2020. The Government of Nepal had appointed him as the Secretary of UGC on September 2016.

UGC organized farewell program in honor of Secretary on 2nd October. Speaking in the program, Prof. Adhikari shared his good experiences during his tenure in the Commission. He expressed happiness over many achievements and important progress of UGC during his tenure. He paid tribute to the high quality of the staff and also acknowledged the depth of knowledge and understanding of the staff. He also appreciated the dedication and professionalism of the UGC staff. Prof. Adhikari expressed his gratitude to the UGC Chairperson for his support and advice during his tenure. He said



‘my job in the Commission would have been much more difficult if it were not for the support and advice of the Chairperson.’

Dr. Rishikesh Pandey, QAA Director of UGC, highlighted his contribution in higher education especially the implementation of Higher Education Reform Project during his tenure. Dr. Pandey also underlined his personality and organizational

behaviors.

Speaking in the farewell program, UGC Chairperson Prof. Dr. Bhim Parsad Subedi said that his tenure as Secretary was highly successful and expected his expertise and experience for UGC in future. Acknowledging his contribution UGC Chair offered a felicitation letter and token of love to the outgoing Secretary Prof. Adhikari.

Results of Research Support Programs

The University Grants Commission has recently published the final results of PhD Fellowships, Collaborative Research Grants, Faculty Research Grants, Small Research Development and Innovation Grants and Master's Thesis Preparation Support Grants for the fiscal year 2076/77.

The Commission has decided to provide PhD fellowship to 49 students. Likewise, forty four faculties have been awarded with grants for carrying out Small Research Development and Innovation Grants and 201 students have been selected as the recipients of financial support to prepare their master's theses. The Commission also decided to provide the Faculty Research Grants to the 34 university teachers and seven research projects have been awarded for Collaborative Research Grants for fiscal year 2076/77.

Every fiscal year the Commission provides the grants for

different research support programs to promote research, development and innovation through research funding to HEIs, the faculty and students as well as to strengthen research infrastructure of HEIs in the country. The UGC research funds are directed to reinforce opportunities for academic programs and research initiatives on relevant and appropriate fields and disciplines. Supporting the faculty and institutions financially along with required expertise and resources helps colleges and universities maintain research-based higher education. Moreover, these institutions can prepare trained scholars and researchers competent in policy making, knowledge production and dissemination in the greater interest of the nation and the entire world. It can further strengthen the research capacity development, inculcation of investigative and inquisitive academic culture in higher education institutions and increase in research output.

Approval of UGC Programs and Budgets

The Board Meeting of the University Grants Commission held on 26th August 2020 has made the decision to approve the budget and programs for the fiscal year 2019/20 (2077/78) with the total amount of Rs. 16.4614 billion for the operation and capital development of higher education sector.

Out of this budget NRs 4.4465 billion has allocated for the capital development. It is 27.01% of the total budget whereas 72.99% is allocated for operation and consumption. Tribhuvan University alone receives NRs. 8.893 billion of the total higher education sector budget. It is 54.02% of the total higher education budget. Community colleges are also receiving significant amount of the grants through UGC.

For the current fiscal year community colleges are receiving NRs. 0.85 billion. Funding to community colleges is based on formula and some of the prerequisites of documentation. UGC is also implementing Higher Education Reform Project since 2015 with the soft loan support of World Bank.

The aim of this project is to support reforms in selected institutions for improving quality, relevance and efficiency of higher education; and to assist underprivileged students for equitable access. The total cost of the project is NRs. 6.5 billion.

The Commission allocates the grants to higher education institutions for operation and academic excellence as it is provisioned by its act (1993). The allocation and disbursement of UGC grants to higher education institutions takes place broadly

under two categories: operation grants and capital development grants. UGC funding to universities are in the form of block grants and formula based grants. Block grants for operation is calculated based on number of teachers and administrative staffs of university whereas formula based grant is calculated on the basis of cost recovery.

In line with the concept of multi-university, the number of universities are increasing. Human resources produced by our universities must be competitive and of international standard. UGC has envisioned to expand the opportunities of technical higher education, to realize the innovative thinking of promoting economy based knowledge and technology and to improve quality, relevance, good governance, accountability and participation in higher education sector. UGC considers that creating opportunities for capable youth to serve in the country is essential and for this restructuring of educational administration so as to combat the current global pandemic is a must. Taking this in to account the Commission has adopted the following annual policies and programs for the FY 2077/78 :

- The modality of grants provided to all higher education institutions will be improved and the pattern of investment through the government will be based on results,
- Efforts towards conducting National Eligibility Test will be

done to improve the quality of higher education,

- In order to make higher education efficient, relevant, employment oriented and enrolment in technical subjects will be increased by launching new educational program. The new programs will be based on higher education mapping and areas of national priority through developing new or through revising the old curriculum,
- Support for patentable innovative research projects and programs of national importance will be extended by emphasizing research and invention which would contribute to achieve national goals of 'Prosperous Nepal and Happy Nepali'. Furthermore, this support is expected to help brand the country a destination of higher education in the international arena,
- Research projects required by the country will be conducted in collaboration with the research centers of the universities,
- Study, teaching and research will be improved by making maximum use of information, technology and communication to cope with the current global pandemic Covid-19, and
- Programs of mutual benefit and social responsibility will be conducted between the university and the industry sector.

UCC Meeting to Review Progress on Alternative Mode of Teaching and Learning

A virtual meeting of the University Coordination Committee (UCC), comprised of University Vice-chancellors, was held on 16th August 2020 in the special presence of Mr. Giriraj Mani Pokhrel, Honorable Minister of Education, Science, and Technology. The meeting was chaired by Prof. Dr. Bhim Prasad Subedi, Chairperson of UGC Nepal. Ten out of eleven university Vice-Chancellors participated in the meeting. The following is a brief description of topics discussed in the meeting:

I. Impacts of Covid-19 on higher education, current situation and the achievements made so far

Covid-19 has directly affected teaching, learning, and research in higher education since the 2nd week of Chaitra 2076. For several weeks, all the teaching, learning, and research activities across higher education institutions have come to a standstill. With the nation-wide lockdown imposed from 24th March, the scheduled annual and semester examinations, despite repeated endeavors, could not be carried out. This was mainly because of several reasons, including the termination of long-distance transportation, transformation of college campuses into quarantine facilities, inability to trace the whereabouts of a large number of students, and lack of mental readiness of students and teachers to prepare for and sit in the examinations.

Similarly, Covid-19 patients are being treated in many medical colleges. Doctors, nurses, and administrative staffs working in the hospitals are also getting infected with the virus. In these circumstances, the treatment of infected patients became a foremost priority than carrying on academic activities.

Approximately, 250,000 students out of about 350,000 enrolled at Tribhuvan University, nation's largest university, have been traced and remain in touch with the university administration; whereas, smaller universities (in terms of student enrollment) are able to establish contact with almost all the students. As per the Guidelines on Alternative System of Learning in Higher Education Guidelines, 2077, issued by University Grants Commission, the universities have identified and categorized students into various groups and facilitated accordingly:

- Students who have computers and have an access to online (classes),
- Students with computing equipment and who have an access to offline (classes), radio and television,
- Students without equipment such as computers, tablets, and smart phones, and
- Students without an access to the Internet.

Despite sincere efforts, Tribhuvan University, with almost 80% share of students in the country, has been unable to trace the whereabouts of its approximately 90,000 students till then while corresponding number of students in other universities was small.

Having provided training to their teachers and administrative staff, all universities, except Pokhara have been conducting online classes of few subjects in Bachelor's, Master's, and M. Phil. level. After the resumption of online classes, however, some students have also been opposing alternative learning system citing unavailability of internet connection, electricity, and resources as well as

some other reasons.

II. Implementation and effectiveness of Alternative Learning Guidelines in higher education 2077

In view of the health and security concerns created by the Covid-19 pandemic, the government of Nepal has imposed a nation-wide lockdown to contain the spread of virus. This led to a total closure of teaching, learning, and research activities in universities and affiliated higher education institutions. In such an adverse situation, some universities and higher education institutions took the initiative of offering online classes by the end of Chaitra, 2076. The absence of a systematic guidelines and procedures to regulate online classes was realized and Guidelines for Facilitating the Alternative Mode of Learning 2077, was issued by the UGC. It was reported that this guideline, has become very effective and useful. Universities have adopted the procedures and norms that are clearly mentioned in the Guidelines. They have also developed further directives in the spirit of the Guidelines to address their specific needs and standards. In fact, all the universities and their affiliated institutions have effectively implemented the Guidelines.

III. Activities / programs

implemented under UGC grants

Although the impacts of Covid-19 have been felt among universities since the first week of Chaitra 2076, UGC received the programs and budget to ameliorate the effects of Covid-19 at the end of Ashad. In between some universities, had already started running online classes by mobilizing their own internal resources, even before receiving the

UGC grants related to Covid-19. According to Vice-Chancellors, the new programs and budget granted to minimize the impacts of Covid-19 has made it easier for universities to implement alternative learning measures effectively. Universities have utilized UGC grants in the following ways:

- 1) Internet capacity has been upgraded.
- 2) Students and teachers were provided with official university email accounts.
- 3) Teachers and students have received technical training in running/taking online classes.
- 4) Examinations have been conducted in programs with fewer students.

IV. Completion of current academic session

Among various measures prescribed in the UGC Guidelines 2077, attention has been focused on not letting the academic year go to waste. For this, the students, who are studying in the current semester or academic year and whose final examinations have been postponed due to Covid-19, will be able to take classes of next semester

or year via online. The postponed examinations will be conducted at an appropriate time in future.

V. Action plan for next six months

It is quite uncertain as to how long the Covid-19 condition will continue. In case the circumstances do not return to normal in near future, the need for developing a more effective alternative learning system has been realized. For this, the concept of a common integrated data center will have to be implemented in coordination and collaboration of all the higher education institutions. To establish such a data center, however, will require a large amount investment. For this, sources to cover the budget need to be identified. It has also been realized that such a data center should be housed at the UGC. The meeting of Coordination Committee of Vice-Chancellors discussed the following actions that the universities need to take in the coming six months:

- 1) To prepare and publish a 6-month academic calendar within 7 days, in order to avoid the loss of entire semester and academic year,

- 2) To conduct online examinations in possible subjects,
- 3) To revise the curriculum of higher education so as to align them with research and service opportunities,
- 4) To adopt and implement various necessary measures to run classes and conduct examinations,
- 5) To formulate strategies to develop professional capability of students pursuing higher education in the Faculty of Education, and
- 6) To move forward by making teaching, learning, and research as the foundation of the curriculum.

VI. Other issues raised during the discussion

Sanskrit university had a special situation. With the termination of *Uttarmadhyama* (post-middle school) level, the mainstay of student enrollment, in Sanskrit University, has been gone. Thus, it was requested that UGC and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology come up with a special decision regarding the situation for the future operation and sustenance of the university.

Endorsement of IQAC Directives

As a long-term strategy to develop quality culture and establishing a minimum standard in quality education system in the universities and HEIs operating in Nepal, UGC has endorsed Directive for the formation and operation of Internal Quality Assurance Committee (IQAC) in universities and HEIs. The Directive has set IQAC as a central mechanism of quality management. The University-level IQAC are led by the Vice-Chancellors while the Campus Chief or the Head of the Institution leads the IQAC in HEIs.

The directive points out the major responsibilities of IQACs as :

- Assure the quality - educational/ academic, research and administrative in reference to the criteria, benchmarks and indicators set by UGC/HEQAAC, and adopt best practices of Academia abroad,
- Implement the provision of regular (annual) internal academic audit and periodic external academic audit,
- Review the LoI and SSR of the institutions internally and recommend, as appropriate, to the HEQAAC for further process of accreditation,
- Facilitate and supervise the affiliated HEIs to go through QAA progress
- Monitor the annual progress of the affiliated HEIs and document the changes over time. Also encourage them to conduct academic audits - internal (regularly), and university as well as external (periodically) and
- Conduct an internal peer review of the institutions.
- The directives has also listed other several provisions and defined the responsibilities of university –level and HEI-level IQACs.

Consultation on New Project 'NEHEP'

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has implemented Higher Education Project (1993- 1999); Second Higher Education Project (2007-2014) and Higher Education Reform Project (2015-2020) under the financial support of the World Bank (WB). The latest project, i.e. HERP is nearing completion by December 2020. As a result, UGC is developing new project to nurture quality in higher education in Nepal.

'Stakeholder Consultations' for developing new project have been carried out from November 13, 2019. Earlier consultations have conceptualized the Higher Education Reform Program and in the course of developing the detail program, deep dive consultations have been organized through participation of a wide range of stakeholders of the

country. As a part of Higher Education Reform Program, new project has been conceived as Nurturing Excellence in Higher Education Program (NEHEP). With the approval of the project conception from the Government of Nepal and the World Bank, the second stage of consultation has been organized in August 7- 17, 2020. During this consultation, the project concept was discussed with higher level policy authorities and major areas of interventions have been identified. The consultation was organized with the objectives of identifying overall project framework and project components, key performance indicators (KPIs), results areas, disbursement linked indicators (DLIs) and digital development; making implementation arrangement,

including fiduciary and safeguard management, education management information system (EMIS) and monitoring and evaluation. The financing instrument and project preparation schedule have also been discussed and agreed upon.

The main objectives of the proposed project are: Strengthen market relevance and quality of higher education; boost collaborative research and innovation; and enhance equitable access for underprivileged groups. Considering the effect of Covid-19 in the higher education of the country, the project intends to emphasize strengthening the connectivity for digital higher education in Nepal. Measurable KPIs towards the development of project document would be in line with the following KPIs.

Outcome Areas and Tentative KPIs

SN	Outcome Areas	Indicators	Remarks
1	Strengthening market relevance (Improved employability and skills of graduates)	Number of students enrolled in the market relevant programs Number of autonomous programs introduced	The consultation discussed about the indicators' definition, ways of collecting the baseline and annual targets, methods and frequency of collection/ reporting, and responsible agency. It was agreed that these discussions will be continued during the deep dive consultation in the next 3 months as agreed in the key action plan and will be included in the next draft Project document.
2	Strengthening quality (Improved teaching, learning, and quality management)	Number of HEIs with their academic leaders/ teachers involved in curriculum development and examination	
3	Improved digital development and implementation (to strengthen quality and enhance equitable access)	Number of students in online programs	
4	Boosting collaborative research and innovation	Number of publications from awarded collaborative research Number of patents applied from the awarded research	
5	Enhanced equitable access and retention for underprivileged	Share of higher education students from bottom quintiles increased	

Based on the background presented above, the UGC Nepal has formed two committees - Project Governing Board (PGB), with the mandate of policy guideline and endorsing the designed project for further action from the UGC and Government of Nepal; the Project Executive Committee (PEC) got the mandate of consulting with stakeholders, analyzing the current situation of Higher Education in Nepal,

assess the outcomes and limitations of the projects that has been implemented, particularly of the HERP, and developing a draft of Project Document and forward it to the governing board for further action. In the course of project development, the Project Executive Committee has been working intensively and till the date, deep dive consultation activities have been conducted in participation of several stakeholders.

UGC Signs MOU with NTV for TV Program

University Grants Commission and Nepal Television signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on October 31 to work together on production and broadcast of Television program on higher education.

Mr. Subas Chandra Dhungel, Chief Administrative Officer of UGC and Mr. Govinda Rokka, Managing Director of NTV signed the agreement at UGC in presence of UGC Chairperson Prof. Dr. Bhim Prasad Subedi.

As per the understanding, NTV will produce the television program focusing on the activities of UGC and issues of higher education. Nepal Television will broadcast the fortnightly TV program on Saturday at



6:30.

On the occasion, Chairperson of UGC Prof. Dr. Bhim Prasad Subedi expressed his happiness for starting television program to promote higher education and hoped to deliver the information related to the UGC activities and higher education issues to the concerned stakeholders. He further added that the UGC as an apex body has the key responsibility for

the quality improvement of higher education in the country and TV program will be the important tool for informing the people about the activities of UGC towards quality improvement.

Managing Director of NTV Govinda Rokka praised the UGC's role for the development of higher education and thanked the UGC for its interest to broadcast the program on NTV.

Endorsement of Covid-19 Protocol in Assessment for Accreditation

As a response to the severe effects of COVID-19 pandemic in QAA Process, the HEQAAC Nepal has developed and endorsed an alternative measures of conducting online assessment on June 22, 2020. By this, soft copies of related SSR and associated supporting documents are received online and distributed to peer reviewers for review and assessment, instead of direct face to face meetings. Although it would be a challenging task to maintain the credibility of the QAA, for the time, this is the only option available. Therefore, the Council endorsed the Protocol with following key provisions:

- Establishing official website/digital platform for peer assessment.
- Limiting the number of participants from HEI to 15 during online interaction

with stakeholders, and in case of in-person face-to-face meeting, standard COVID-19 security protocols must be followed.

- Preparing video for virtual site visit and live-streaming of the elements that the PRT desires to observation from distant, by institution.
- Conducting most of the discussions/interactions with stakeholders in online platform.
- In case of requirement for the field visit to inspect the HEIs - such as physical facilities and learning resources, a one day visit can be arranged through land-travel using Office Vehicle and sticking to the COVID-19 Security Protocol (CSP).
- Using of digital signature for verification, approval.

Publication of Annual Program Guideline, 2077

University Grants Commission has recently published the Annual Program Guideline, 2077 for implementing its regular programs during the fiscal year 2077-78. The Board Meeting of the Commission held on 26th August 2020 had approved to pass the guideline for the implementation.

The Annual Program Guideline describes the intended work programs of the Commission for the quality development of the higher education. It explains the context and priorities of UGC program areas, and describes funding modality, application procedures and required documents.

This guideline is comprehensive and includes the details of the programs to be implemented in the current fiscal year such as development and regular grants for universities and campuses, scholarships and thesis support for the students, financial support for the capacity building of the university and campus staff, research support programs for faculties and HEIs institutions, quality assurance and accreditation for HEIs and other different quality improvement programs.