

## Report on the Focus Group Discussion

The Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Education (CERSSE) of Jain University organised a Focus Group Discussion as a part of its ICSSR Sponsored Research Project on Determining Quality in Higher Education in India: Defining Parameters, Creating Resources and Evolving Models on 12 September, 2013. The discussion was attended by eminent academicians and experts from various institutions across the city.

The proceedings of the day were divided into four thematic sessions.

The first session chaired by Dr. Sandeep Shastri, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Jain University was titled 'Interpreting Quality in Higher Education'. Dr. Shastri outlined the broad areas of discussion namely; the subjectivity in any interpreting of quality, contextualizing quality, dealing with multiplicity of interpretations, and the processes involved in ensuring quality.

Prof. Rajeev Gowda of IIM Bangalore flagged off the discussion on Interpreting Quality by stressing on the need to develop an environment of learning where critical and independent thinking, continuous interaction and academic vibrancy are inculcated. Dr. Usha Devi of ISEC emphasised on the need factor in all the stakeholders and non-negotiable parameters in conceptualisation of quality.

Participants brought out the challenges of developing a singular definition on account of the diversities in higher education in India in terms of funding, historical origin, clientele, expectations and social mindsets that favoured certain courses. The increasing number of entrants to higher education, many of whom are first generation learners provided the context to concept of quality in HEI's. Dr. M J Vinod of Bangalore University, Prof. S K Bhagavan of Jain University and Dr. Joshi of WIPRO were among the contributors to this discussion.

Dr. H S Ashok of Bangalore University summed up the issues of the first session by stressing on the need to conceptualise, contextualise and operationalise the concept of quality.

The second session, "Enhancing the Experience of Quality in Higher Education" was chaired by Dr. Shailaja Shastri, who called upon the delegates to share their experiences on what in their estimation symbolised quality.

Dr Subhasini Muthukrishna and Dr. Cheriyan Alexander of St Joseph's College shared their experience of peer learning, streamlining, extra classroom teaching, synergistic learning, which produced significant improvement in quality.

The delegates agreed with Dr. Vani of the Life Science Department, Jain University that despite the advent of technology the teacher still constituted the cornerstone of quality in higher education. Hence, issues relating to student-teacher ratio, teachers recruitment, training and motivation, and research facilities prominently and figured in the discussion.

The third session looked at the issues relating to assessment quality in HEI's. The session was moderated by Dr. M Manisha. The participants deliberated upon the strengths and weaknesses of the existing attempts at assessing HEIs, including that of NAAC. They agreed that quality

enhancement had to be a continuous and an ongoing process. While assessments helped in creating quality consciousness, they had to be followed up with insights on improving quality.

Dr. Jayaramu of Bangalore University insisted on the need to develop independent quality assessment standards at three distinct levels; curriculum, teaching and evaluation. Dr. Ganesh Hegde of NAAC added that in any assessment of quality, the vision and mission statements provided important parameters for assessing.

The final session was chaired by Dr. Reetika Syal. She briefed the audience about the survey methodology of the project and invited suggestions.

Dr. Bagali of Jain University, made suggestions to include Alumni, Syndicate, Corporate Houses and organisations such as FICCI and NASSCOM, part of the survey. Suggestions for using curriculum content analysis, student path analysis and learning outcome analysis were also made. Participants urged the project coordinators to look at both the supply and demand side of higher education, further disaggregation of data before making any generalisations.

The discussion concluded with Dr. Sandeep Shastri thanking all the participants and seeking their continued support in successful accomplishment of the project.



Focus Group Discussion in progress



Dr. Subhashini making a comment. Dr. P S Jayaramu (extreme left) and Prof. Ganesh Hegde on her left



Dr. Cheriyan participating in the debate. Dr. Ashok to his right and Dr. Shailaja Shastri to his left



Students of Jain University keenly listening to the issues being raised by Dr. M J Vinod



Dr. Sandeep Shastri, Dr. R V Joshi and Dr. S K Bhagwan at the FGD