

WHY NIOS MUST SUCCEED

For the 105 million children who drop out of school every year, 10 million challenged children excluded from the mainstream education system and 240 million adult illiterates denied access to secondary school and formal vocational education certification, it's vital that the National Institute of Open Schooling (estb. 1989) becomes a household name and national success.

SUMMIYA YASMEEN & SWATI ROY REPORT



NIOS 21st birthday celebrations: festive agenda

LAST MONTH WAS A COMING OF AGE for the Noida/Delhi-based National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). On November 23, this low-profile open school examination board which offers secondary school and vocational education programmes through the flexible open distance learning (ODL) mode to an estimated 1.90 million students country-wide, celebrated its 21st anniversary. A slew of high-profile workshops and lectures attended by 200 delegates from 18 countries around the world were staged at the India Habitat Centre in the national capital between November 21-23. On the festive agenda: an annual

general meeting of the 16-member Commonwealth Open Schooling Association followed by a lecture titled 'Open schooling: education for the 21st century' delivered by Sir John Daniel, president of Commonwealth of Learning, Canada; an international workshop on research in open schooling inaugurated by V. Rajasekharan Pillai, vice chancellor of IGNOU; and a foundation day lecture by Kiran Karnik, former president NASSCOM, on 'Role of media for inclusive education'.

However outside of the NIOS campus and the Union human resource development (HRD) ministry in the national capital, this coming-of-age

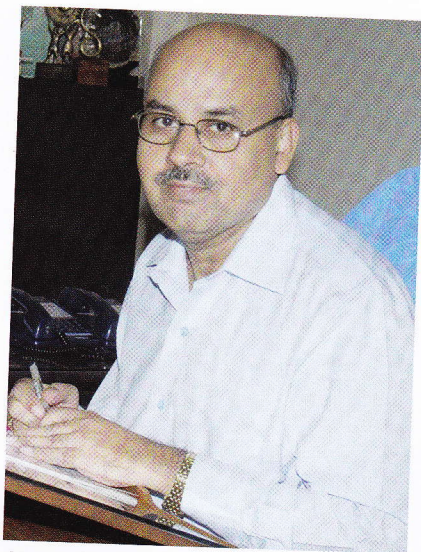
anniversary of the world's largest open school system was ignored by Indian academia and the public, generating minimal media interest. That's primarily because there's little public awareness of the stellar contributions this below-the-radar institute has made to the cause of inclusive education for all.

Over the past 21 years NIOS has tutored and certified 931,290 students aged 14-years-plus as class X school leavers; 641,000 senior secondary (class XII) students and provided 111,220 with vocational education and training. Currently an estimated 1.90 million students are enrolled in its secondary and senior secondary distance learning programmes supported by 2,144 accredited institutions countrywide. Vocational education and training is supplemented by 1,106 study centres and open basic education programmes by 664 accredited agencies. In particular for the 105 million children who drop out of school before class VIII and for those unable to cope with the rigours of the formal K-12 education system for reasons of dyslexia, physical or mental disabilities, NIOS offers a flexible learning alternative through the ODL model.

Moreover NIOS is the only option for the country's 240 million adult illiterates to secure secondary school certification. Of the 371,625 learners enrolled in the open basic education (equivalent to classes III, V and VIII of the formal school system) and secondary school programmes, 88,621 — 24 percent — are in the age group of 21 years and above.

Undoubtedly since its promotion by the Central government in 1989 with the stated objective of "providing education to those who are unable to attend school for a variety of socio-economic reasons and meeting the educational needs of differently abled children for creating an inclusive education system", NIOS has played a critical role in providing a second chance to school dropouts, challenged children and adults to resume, access and continue secondary education. Through a

government resolution of September 14, 1990 published in the Gazette of India on October 20, 1990, NIOS was vested with the authority to register, examine and certify students up to pre-degree level programmes and given an initial grant of Rs.77.87 lakh by the HRD ministry. In 1991 NIOS' class X and XII certification was officially recognised by the Association of Indian Universities for admission into the country's 509 universities and 31,000 colleges.



Jena: alternative learning system

100,000 secondary (classes IX-X) and 50,000 senior secondary (classes XI-XII) schools with an aggregate enrolment of 40 million students (cf. 1.3 million primaries with 210 million students). In fact, 27 percent of India's 626 districts have less than one secondary school for every 1,000 youth aged 14-18 years. According to *Secondary Education in India: Universalising Opportunity*, a report released by the World Bank in October last year, currently only 40 percent of India's children in the age group 14-18 are enrolled in secondary education, and during the decade 2007-2017 the secondary school system will

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According to Jena, the Union government has co-opted NIOS as an important partner for the implementation of its Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA or National Secondary Education Campaign). Initiated in January 2009, RMSA is a Central government sponsored scheme "to universalise access to and improve quality of secondary education".

Contemporary India hosts a mere

need to accommodate an additional 17 million students per year. The report also reveals that India's GER (gross enrolment ratio) of 40 percent is far lower than the secondary school GERs of neighbouring East Asian countries (average 70 percent) and Latin America (82 percent). Even countries such as Vietnam (72 percent) and Bangladesh (52), with lower per capita incomes than India, have higher GERs in secondary education.

Against this backdrop, any government strategy for improving access to secondary education must necessarily strengthen and expand the open schooling system and encourage flexible distance learning to enable lapsed or dropped-out teenagers to re-enter secondary education. "We are fully committed to realisation of the national goal of universalisation of secondary education by 2017. Our target is to cover 15 percent of the child population in the age group 14-18 years through the open distance learning system during the Twelfth Plan period (2012-17). NIOS will be helped by open schools in 14 states to accomplish the goal of RMSA," says Jena.

One of the major infirmities of the formal secondary schooling system dominated by the pan-India CISCE, CBSE and 34 state examination boards is its rigidity and curricular inflexibility, with students given no freedom to choose preferred subjects for study. Add to this the pervasive fear of the make-or-break examination system which takes an estimated annual toll of 4,000 student suicides. In the light of these factors, the unique selling proposition of NIOS, which traces its origin to a flexible secondary certification pilot project initiated by the CBSE in 1979, is the freedom of choice of subjects it offers students who write its secondary (class X) and senior secondary school (class XII) exams. For instance teenagers writing the class X exam are given the option to choose five from 27 subjects (including maths, social science, science, economics, business studies, paint-ing, Indian heritage, psychology, etc) and two languages from 17 (including Hindi, English, Bengali, Marathi, Telugu, Urdu, Sanskrit, Arabic, etc). Students are required to obtain a minimum 33 percent in five subjects with at least one language or at most two languages, to receive the NIOS school leaving certificate. No subjects except any one language are compulsory.

Likewise students writing the class XII exam can select from a menu of 21 subjects, of which they need to clear five to be awarded NIOS' higher secondary school-leaving certificate. Moreover the board's much proclaimed flexibility is supported by provisions that mandate exams to be held twice a

NIOS snapshot profile

THE NOIDA-BASED NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF OPEN SCHOOLING bills itself as the world's largest open/distance education school offering secondary and senior secondary education, vocational education and training, life enrichment and life skills programmes through 2,144 accredited institutions and 1,138 accredited vocational institutes to 1.90 million students in India and four countries worldwide. A snapshot profile:

PROGRAMMES. Secondary school (class X). NIOS offers its 1.90 million students postal and broadcast tuition in 27 subjects (17 of which are languages) in eight languages (Hindi, English, Urdu, Gujarati, Marathi, Telegu, Malayalam, and Oriya).

Senior secondary (class XII). NIOS offers 21 subjects in three languages (Hindi, English and Urdu).

Students are required to obtain pass marks (33 percent) in a minimum of five subjects of their choice with at least one language or at most two languages, to qualify for classes X and XII NIOS certification. No subjects except languages are compulsory.

Open Basic Education Programme. This programme is equivalent to elementary education of the formal school system and is available to late learners above 14 years. It is offered at three levels — Level A (equivalent to class I-III), Level B (class IV-V) and Level C (class V-VIII).

Vocational Education Programmes. More than 86 vocational education and training (VET) courses are offered in subjects such as agriculture, business, commerce, and

technology, home science, teacher training, computer and IT related sectors. These diploma/certificate courses are of six months-two years duration.

ELIGIBILITY. Students above 14 years are eligible for admission into the secondary education, open basic education and VET programmes while for entry into the senior secondary courses the minimum age requirement is 15 years. However there is no upper age limit for admission into any NIOS programme.

For VET programmes, admission is open throughout the year, while for secondary and higher secondary programmes it's between July and September. From 2010 the facility of online admission is available on the institute's website.

INSTRUCTION SYSTEM. NIOS' hybrid open distance learning model combines postal tuition print packages, multimedia learning material, personal contact programmes, and practical work

sessions in affiliated study centres augmented by audio-video programmes aired on the Union government-owned Doordarshan and Gyan Darshan television channels.

ASSESSMENT SYSTEM. NIOS conducts exams twice a year, in April-May and October-November in 900 affiliated exam centres across India. Students have five years from the date of registration to complete their programme. After completion of five years, if students have not completed the course, they are eligible for re-admission.

TUITION FEES range between Rs.600-14,000

For further information visit www.nios.ac.in



NIOS campus, Noida

year — in April and October — and students have nine chances to clear the class X/XII exams during a liberal five-year period.

NIOS' secondary and senior secondary exams are written at its 2,144 affiliated study centres across the country — a majority of them mainstream secondary schools affiliated with CBSE, CISCE and/or state examination boards. These affiliates also provide other services to NIOS students including counseling about courses and subjects offered, enrolment with the institute with some also offering supplementary classroom learning aid and advice. NIOS' hybrid open distance learning model combines postal tuition print packages, multimedia learning material, supplementary classroom programmes, and practical work sessions in affiliated study centres augmented by audio-video programmes aired on the Union government-owned Doordarshan

and Gyandarshan television channels.

The Maharashtra state board affiliated Don Bosco High School, Mumbai is one of the 2,144 NIOS affiliated study centres ("accredited institutions") across the country. Currently 76 students are registered with the school for NIOS' secondary (class X) programme. "Students have the option of registering online directly with NIOS or with an accredited institution. In our school we have a dedicated NIOS centre to advise and counsel students on selection of subjects and we have trained six teachers to specially address the needs of NIOS students. Moreover for children with severe learning disabilities we offer a pre-NIOS programme to prepare them for class X certification. We try to offer all support and advice to enable students registered with us to successfully complete their class X NIOS board exam," says Larry Pereira, supervisor of the NIOS

programme at Don Bosco.

Structurally, NIOS' 2,144 study centres/accredited institutions country-wide are monitored by 11 regional centres for effective implementation of the institute's policies and programmes. However NIOS officials concede that the academic and administrative support provided by accredited study centres such as Don Bosco High School to its students is likely to be limited, as the first duty and commitment of accredited institutions is to their full-time students. Therefore in distance learning systems worldwide, the transaction of teaching and learning revolves around the learner, who is expected to be motivated and disciplined.

Mumbai-based Veer Mulraj, who dropped out of school in class VIII to pursue a passion for music and signed up with the NIOS board to complete class X and XII, confirms the vital importance of disciplined self-study for

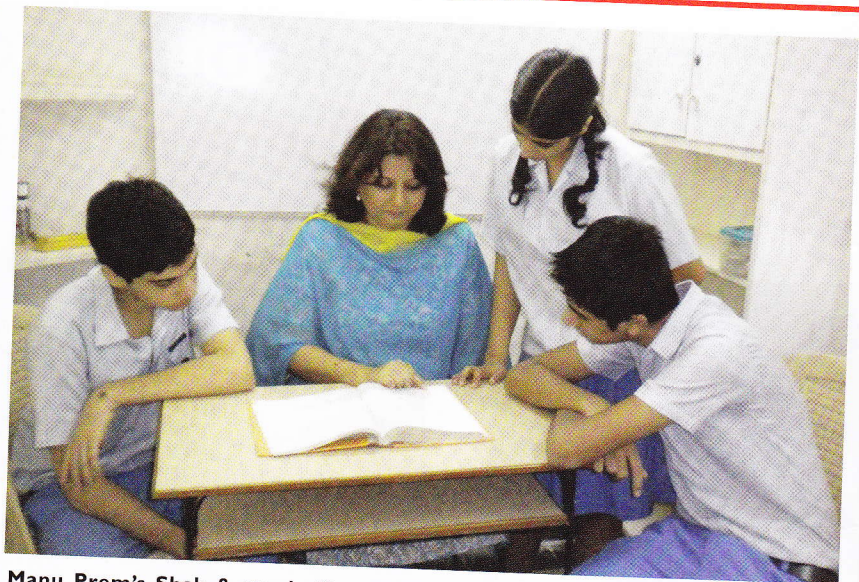
distance learners. "The great advantage of NIOS is that it enables every enrolled student to study at her own pace and choose subjects of her interest. But all students — especially first generation learners — don't have supportive home environments. Therefore NIOS needs to strengthen its study centres and staff them with well-trained counselors and teachers," says Mulraj, currently a first year B.Com student of HR College, Mumbai.

School dropouts such as Mulraj apart, among the prime target groups of the NIOS board are differently abled (aka challenged) children. India hosts an estimated 10 million physically and mentally challenged children with an estimated 80 percent suffering learning disabilities. Given the internal curricular rigidity of national and state boards, NIOS is an attractive alternative study and examinations option for them. Therefore unsurprisingly, an estimated 3,000 special schools countrywide are affiliated with the NIOS board.

COMMENTS DR. MARLENE J. Kamdar, principal of the Saraswathi Kendra Learning Centre for Children (SKLC, estb. 1985), a class I-XII school with an enrolment of 175 children with learning disabilities and a formally accredited study centre for NIOS: "NIOS is a blessing for children with learning and other disabilities. The mainstream exam boards have inflexible syllabuses requiring excellent memorisation skills and are therefore unsuitable for the learning needs of special children. On the other hand the NIOS board offers subject flexibility, a wide menu of subjects, self-paced learning and the semester exams pattern which gives numerous chances for re-writing the class X and XII exams."

Priya Shah, principal of Manu Prem, a special school in Mumbai with an enrolment of 60 children agrees. "NIOS is a boon for challenged children, given its flexibility and wide choice of subjects. For parents of challenged children also, it's a big relief to know that there is a board through which their children can earn secondary certification which in turn opens the doors of higher education institutions," says Shah.

NIOS' certification is also fast gaining popularity within the small but growing community of India's home schooled children. Curiously, the Delhi-based CISCE and CBSE boards don't allow



Manu Prem's Shah & wards: "boon for challenged children"



Prof. Kumar: practical content

home schooled children to write its class X and XII exams as private candidates, leaving them no choice but to write the school leaving exams of NIOS. "Only students enrolled with an affiliated school are permitted to write the CBSE class X and XII exams. Our bye-laws don't allow children who study at home to write our exams," says N.K. Arora, deputy secretary (coordination) of the Delhi-based CBSE, the country's largest pan-India school-leaving examinations board with 10,000-plus affiliated schools.

While NIOS has undoubtedly contributed significantly towards facilitating access to secondary education of children and youth who for a multiplicity of reasons don't study in conventional schools, in the public

perception and within academia as well, NIOS certification is widely accorded less weightage than of CBSE, CISCE and most state examination boards. Although nominally on a par with national and state exam boards and vested with the power to design its own syllabuses, curriculums and award secondary and higher secondary school-leaving certification, NIOS study programmes delivered through postal tuition packages are widely perceived as inferior to teacher-delivered curriculums of CBSE, CISCE and most state examinations in formal bricks-and-mortar schools.

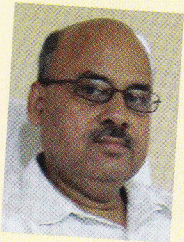
"Certainly NIOS is easier and less stressful and evaluation is less rigorous. While students of CISCE and CBSE affiliated schools study academic subjects in depth, NIOS students study them at the basic level. However it's wrong to regard NIOS students as less qualified because they are of varying aptitudes and capability," says Alice Vaz, principal of the CISCE affiliated Ryan International School, Khargar, a Mumbai suburb.

Sensitive to charges that its curriculum and examinations are less than rigorous, NIOS managers claim to accord great emphasis to continuous curriculum development. "Before finalising the content of every subject, the syllabuses of other examination boards are carefully studied bearing in mind the guidelines and objectives of the National Education Policy 1986. Subsequently high-powered commit-

“Quite successful thus far”

Swati Roy interviewed **DR. SITANSU SHEKHAR JENA**, chairman of NIOS, over the telephone and email. Excerpts:

CONGRATULATIONS ON NIOS' 21ST ANNIVERSARY. WHAT WERE THE OBJECTIVES BEHIND THE PROMOTION OF NIOS AND TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE THEY BEEN ACHIEVED?



The primary objectives behind the promotion of NIOS were to provide education to children unable to attend school for a variety of socio-economic reasons;

to meet the educational needs of differently-abled children, and provide a safety-net to school drop-outs for continuing their education. Since its inception in 1989, NIOS has been working consistently to achieve these objectives by offering need based programmes through the open distance learning mode. We offer a wide spectrum of pre-degree level courses including secondary and senior secondary curriculums, vocational education and training, skills development and life enrichment study programmes. NIOS emerged as a flexible alternative to the rigid formal education system with the mandate to expand access, ensure equity and cost effectiveness in the context of democratising school education.

The journey of the institute has been quite successful thus far. With an enrolment of 1.90 million students, NIOS is the largest open school in the world.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF NIOS OVER

tees comprising experts from the subject area prepare frameworks and modules, after which a specialist sub-committee deliberates on the likely learning outcomes and finalises the subject syllabus. Next, lesson plans are prepared to facilitate self-learning. Review of subject curriculums is an ongoing process and is mandatory every three years. NIOS primarily focuses on content that is practical and life oriented, not theoretical as in the curriculums of other exam boards,” says Prof. Rajesh Kumar, director of

CONVENTIONAL SCHOOLING?

It is free from the rigidity of the conventional system and takes education beyond the classroom. NIOS is a flexible and student-friendly board which places learners at the centre, unlike the conventional system where the teacher dominates the learning process. Students have the flexibility to choose study subjects depending upon their aptitude and interest. For example, a student in the science stream at the Plus Two level can also choose to study music/art/painting, etc. Similarly, a student of the arts stream can choose to study physics. Our exam system is also non stressful with students given nine chances to clear the class X/XII exam over five years. The primary objective of NIOS is to create an inclusive education system and reach education to disadvantaged groups.

THE GENERAL PUBLIC PERCEPTION IS THAT NIOS IS ACADEMICALLY LESS RIGOROUS VIS-À-VIS OTHER EXAM BOARDS SUCH AS CISCE AND CBSE. MOREOVER THERE ARE DOUBTS ABOUT THE QUALITY OF OPEN SCHOOLING PROGRAMMES AS COMPARED TO CERTIFICATION FROM FORMAL SCHOOLS. WHAT'S YOUR COMMENT?

Quality is a major issue in the formal and open schooling systems. Barring a few schools located in the metros, most schools suffer on this count in the formal system as well. Since open schooling is heavily dependent on the formal education system for help and support, it also suffers. NIOS is an autonomous organisation and hence is not guided by CBSE norms as far as access to education and curriculum development is concerned.

academics at NIOS, Noida.

Nevertheless although NIOS certification is officially on a par with CBSE, CISCE and state exam boards, its inclusive education mandate to admit all children who apply including challenged children, reduces its system-wide average scores. This prompts most colleges and universities to prefer school-leavers of CISCE, CSBE and state exam boards for admission.

According to Lubiana Motiwala, a dyslexic student who cleared her NIOS class X board exam with 73 percent,

HOW EFFECTIVELY HAS NIOS INCORPORATED NEW AGE MEDIA INCLUDING INTERNET, RADIO, TELEVISION AND SATELLITE TO DELIVER ITS PROGRAMMES?

Apart from using learner-friendly print study materials, NIOS uses a host of non-print learning materials including audio and video inputs broadcast over Gyan Darshan, a government-run television channel. NIOS has also successfully completed its Ni-On project, which enables online admission, student counseling and provides on-demand examination facility. We have also finalised plans to digitise our print study materials, introduce an e-learning platform and a dedicated 24/7 channel in collaboration with the Union HRD ministry.

WHAT ARE NIOS' FUTURE PLANS?

We are in the process of revisiting NIOS instructional material as per guidelines of the National Curriculum Framework 2005. We've also launched several initiatives to intensify the use of ICT to strengthen the learning process, rather than merely utilising it for governance purposes.

But we still have a lot to do. So far our attempts have been somewhat sporadic in nature. There is a need to assess the varied educational needs of NIOS' diverse target groups, link education with vocational training for empowerment, evolve workable public private partnerships for vocational education, and integrate open with the formal schooling system. NIOS is committed to taking education to unreached segments of the population, particularly first generation learners, physically challenged children and those from socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

most of Mumbai's top-ranked colleges brazenly refuse to admit NIOS certified school-leavers. “I had applied for admission into the arts stream of some of Mumbai's top colleges and though my average percentage was more than the cut-off of 71, my name didn't appear in the admission lists. When I confronted the management of K.C. College, I was told point blank that the college doesn't admit NIOS students on the ground that they are insufficiently equipped to cope with the difficulty level of subjects at the college level.

Fortunately I was admitted by the top-ranked St. Xavier's College, which is one of the few colleges in the city which doesn't discriminate against NIOS certified students," says Motiwala.

But 22 years on, attitudes of college managements are changing. Comments Fr. Albert Muthumalai, secretary of St. Joseph's College, Tiruchi and former principal of Loyola College, Chennai — both Jesuit-run institutions as is St. Xavier's College, Mumbai: "We certainly don't discriminate against NIOS students. While I was principal of Loyola College, we admitted several NIOS school leavers and most of them were talented with some excelling academically. Although some of them had difficulty with English language communication, we rectified this lacuna by conducting special English classes for them."

ANOTHER FOCUS AREA OF THE NIOS management is adult education programmes. Its Open Basic Education (OBE) programmes (equivalent to classes III, V and VIII of the formal school system) for the 14+ years age group are offered by 664 accredited agencies across the country. Last year it certified 30,547 students, bringing the total number of students certified under the programme to 169,632 thus far. Moreover the institute's equivalency and vocational education programmes are integrated into the Sakshar Bharat Mission (National Literacy Mission). NIOS proposes to cover 70 million learners under this scheme by 2012 by setting up Adult Education Centres in village panchayats countrywide.

Likewise the NIOS management is aware of the need to upskill school dropouts and in-school children. Therefore vocational education and training (VET) is also a focus area for the institute. NIOS currently offers 86 VET courses through 1,106 accredited study centres. Since 2000, 78,645 learners have been certified and currently 61,811 learners are enrolled in its various VET programmes which are delivered through the hybrid distance learning model combining postal tuition packages with practical training in affiliated centres.

"Delivery of industry oriented and contemporary vocational education and training is a top priority with NIOS. We are looking at signing up partnerships



Muthumalai: changing attitudes



Arya: technology fix

with industry to jointly introduce industry relevant VET programmes. Students above 15 years of age with primary school qualifications are eligible to enrol in NIOS' VET programmes. Our objective is to provide skills-based education which will qualify them for employment. We've also just set up a placement division and have finalised plans to make all our content available online," says Koushalya Barik, assistant director, vocational education at NIOS. Yet if there is a perception that NIOS school-leavers are not academically on a par with students writing CISCE,

printed course material. While more than 95 percent of IGNOU's content is available digitally and over 1,600 video-based lessons are accessible on YouTube in addition to its e-Gyangosh website, an internet repository of all its learning resources, NIOS content is not yet accessible digitally.

However according to NIOS spokesman, this lacuna is being urgently addressed. "We have just successfully completed our Ni-On project to facilitate online admission of students, and have begun the process of adapting our academic and vocational programmes to the e-learning platform. Introduction of a fully-fledged e-learning platform, two-way interaction through video conferencing, webcasting our video programmes on our website, and a 24x7 television channel is also on the cards," says Dr. R.K. Arya, deputy director (media) at NIOS headquarters in Noida.

Given that only 34.62 percent of the 196,882 students who wrote NIOS' class X, and 35.99 percent of 199,682 class XII students were awarded certification last year (cf. CBSE class X: 89.28 percent and class XII: 79.87 percent), it's obvious that instruction through traditional postal study materials and the occasional personal contact programmes is insufficient to improve learning outcomes. Therefore there's urgent need for NIOS to embrace new ICTs and internet technologies facilitating video-based lectures webcast on the internet and/or beamed through satellite; two-way video conferencing; and

Unlike the Delhi-based IGNOU — its counterpart in the higher education space and the world's largest open university — NIOS has been slow to embrace new ICTs to supplement its printed course material

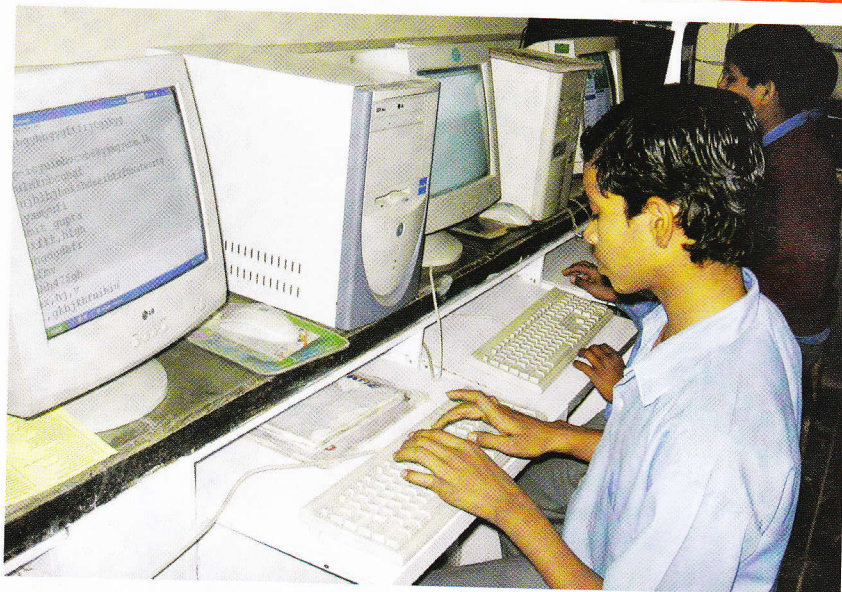
CBSE and other board exams, it's perhaps because the institute's management has been tardy in utilising new information communication technologies which have revolutionised K-12 education. Unlike the Delhi-based IGNOU — its counterpart in the higher education space which since its promotion has morphed into the world's largest distance education university with an enrolment of 2.89 million students — NIOS has been slow to embrace new ICTs to supplement its

interactive multi-media CD-ROMs. Greater convergence of the ODL and conventional schooling systems is also required to improve student learning outcomes and pass percentages.

“**NIOS MUST ENSURE THAT ITS COURSE** material and lessons are rigorous and written by proven subject experts capable of explaining concepts clearly since students have to self-study. NIOS accredited study centres must also be upgraded and properly staffed to offer supplementary classroom instruction and academic help to distance learners registered with them. Since NIOS caters mostly to secondary students in their teenage years and from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, some hand-holding, supplementary instruction and monitoring is required. Formal schools signing up as NIOS study centres should play a larger role,” advises S.C. Jha, professor of political science at Delhi University.

Addressing the 19th general body meeting of NIOS on February 15, Union HRD minister Kapil Sibal acknowledged that a more effective system is required to improve the learning outcomes of distance secondary and higher secondary learners. “Considering the fast pace at which the country is moving forward, NIOS should be regarded not as a poor alternative but as an effective empowering alternative by producing high quality delivery materials which need to be continuously evaluated by an outside agency. It should also evolve a policy through incentives to attract regular schools to embrace the open school concept to increase its credibility and improve its national acceptance. NIOS has to actively reach out to the 15 million learners who are out of school,” said Sibal speaking on the occasion.

Sibal’s advice to NIOS to initiate an image makeover exercise to improve the acceptability and credibility of its certification is overdue. Twenty one years on, this high potential open learning institution dominated by government bureaucrats and academics has done little to publicise itself or boost public acceptability of its programmes. For instance in 2009-10, a pathetic Rs.1 crore was spent on marketing, promoting and building the NIOS brand. Moreover as is the case with most government-controlled institutions, there’s a perennial shortage of funds. Its income from students’ fees



NIOS students at accredited institution: unexceptionable objectives



VET students: empowering alternative

aggregated only Rs.86 crore (in fiscal 2009-10) against its annual expenditure of Rs.100 crore, and hence it’s critically dependent on the Rs.15 crore annual grant it receives from the Union government. And given its government lineage there’s hardly any scope for financial and administrative autonomy.

Certainly the aims and objectives of NIOS are unexceptionable and this low-profile institute/examination board is well-positioned to provide millions of children who drop out of the formal school system an opportunity to resume secondary and higher secondary education. With the institute having crossed the 21 years threshold and come of age, the mood on the 5.5 acre NIOS campus in Noida is of cautious optimism. “We are conscious of the need to reassess the educational needs of our diversified target groups, link

education with vocational training, integrate open schooling with the conventional learning system and promote NIOS chapters in all states of the country. Therefore future plans include revision of the NIOS curriculum, integration of ICT and online technologies to improve learning outcomes and introducing industry relevant VET and adult education programmes. Moreover we intend to become actively involved with the government’s secondary education for all goal by 2017 initiative, and in implementing the Right to Education Act by providing academic and professional qualifications to teachers. NIOS is poised for a great leap forward in the next decade and we intend to make this transformation happen sooner than later,” says S. Jena, chairman of NIOS.

For the 105 million children who drop out of school every year, 10 million challenged children excluded from the mainstream education system and 240 million adult illiterates denied access to secondary school and formal vocational education certification, it’s vital that NIOS is strengthened and expanded to help them resume and complete secondary education. If India has to achieve its long cherished goal of quality education for all, NIOS has to become a household name and national success.

With **Autar Nehru** (Delhi) & **Hemalatha Raghupathi** (Chennai)