HIGHER EDUCATION OUTREACH:

What it Means and Why it is Important



UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Session 1: Introduction

Part 1: Familiarise the Group with Each Other

15 minutes

Each member in the group writes down two true facts and one fact that is not true about themselves.

Do this quickly to allow time for sharing.

Then in the group, decide for each person, which statements are true or not.

Part 2: Group Discussion

10 minutes

In your groups, discuss the following questions and ask one person to make a note of answers:

1. Have you ever given any advice or help to young people or members of their family about going to college or university? What did they want to know? (Remember what you were sent before the module asking you to think about this).

2. Does your university or college organise any events for young people and their families to learn more about higher education in general, or about your particular institution? If so, what sort of event is organised? Were you involved?

Part 3: Objectives of the Workshop

5 minutes

1. To understand the significance and rationale of Higher Education (HE) outreach and its social benefits for the institution, faculty, students, and the wider community.
2. To discuss the role of faculty members in HE outreach and the challenges that faculty members may encounter in their engagement with HE outreach.
3. To comprehend the core components of effective institution-based HE outreach programmes, focusing on faculty members as ambassadors of HE knowledge outreach.

Session 2: HE Outreach Context and Student Decision-making

Part 1: Higher Education Outreach Context and Decision Making of Students

30 minutes for slides 5-20

- What is HE Outreach and its significance/rationale?
- Understanding students' social, economic, and spatial Higher Education context.
- Factors influencing Higher Education decision making.
- Current status of advice received by students.

Understanding the HE Outreach Context

HE Massification

Higher education in India is currently in the massification stage, which means that many young people from families and communities with no prior history of completing school are now considering applying for higher education.

Social disparity persists

While overall enrolment rates have increased, social disparities in HE access persist, as do variations in course and institution choices.

NEP

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 focuses on expanding higher education (HE) access for socially and economically disadvantaged groups.

NEP

The policy acknowledges that students from socially and economically disadvantaged groups face significant barriers in accessing higher education, including a lack of information about the college-going process and making informed choices.

Rationale of HE Outreach

HE has many functions in society.

The business case

It provides specific training and skills for specific professions and occupations (increases employability). It supports the national development and development of a knowledge economy. **This is often understood as the '*business case*' for expanding HE**

The social justice case

It has the potential to break the cycle of transmission of socio-economic disadvantage from one generation to the next and within a democratic society leads to an opening of the mind and to the creation of active citizens (beyond employability). HEIs are melting pots for students with diverse backgrounds which encourages a different identity—that of enlightened citizens. **This is often understood as the '*social justice case*' for expanding HE.**

The social justice rationale applies to oversubscribed institutions even where there is no obvious institution-based business case.

Rationale of HE Outreach

Continued

- Reservations and scholarships are very important in opening HE to socially and economically disadvantaged groups, but alone do not enable young people from such groups or those experiencing other barriers to make informed choices about HE and to take up the opportunities offered to them.
- Information about HE for many (particularly first-generation entrants) is not based on direct experiences but uses unreliable, inaccurate, and informal sources. This can lead to selection of courses and institutions which may perpetuate gender and caste inequalities.
- HE outreach practices seek to equalise access to HE information and to ensure that decisions about HE are based on reliable, formal/institutional information to support equitable and socially justice access to HE.

Defining Higher Education Outreach

The underlying principles of HE outreach include:

(i) acknowledging the importance of UG education; and

(ii) recognising that a person's background should not act as barrier from knowing about the potential of HE options or how to apply.

- **HE outreach**: a specific set of practices ensuring that prospective students (of HE) (school leaving students applying for HE) are aware of the options that are open to them and the processes they need to follow.
- It provides the knowledge that enables many young people to consider attending HE and enables them to access reliable and accurate information about HE.
- Specifically, it enables those who are the first generation in HE, without existing HE knowledge, to access HE.

Defining Higher Education Outreach

Continued

- HE outreach is part of what is known in international policy and practices as 'widening participation' where prospective students from disadvantaged background are enabled to participate in HE.
- HE outreach requires Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to develop institutional policies and practices to support prospective students (and their families) to consider accessing HE; to make informed choices about HE courses; and to understand enrollment policies and practices.

HE outreach institutional activities include:

- *Opening the doors of HEIs for prospective students and their families to visit the institution and understand more about what HE involves.*
- *Enabling faculty members (FMs) to visit schools to explain HE options and practices in HEIs.*

HE Outreach is NOT Community Outreach

- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) do engage with local communities, through the National Service Scheme (NSS) or other programmes. E.g., sanitation drive, financial literacy, immunisation, nutrition in school, etc. This is *community outreach*.
- 'HE outreach' refers to activities occurring before formal enrolment into HE. This may include taster days which host prospective students at HEIs, and school visits by alumni and/or academics (Harrison & Waller, 2017).
- **While community engagement is strong in Indian HE, the notion of HE outreach as a practice of sharing information and guidance on HE is less common.**
- The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) agenda recognizes a low HE outreach culture and acknowledges significant barriers in accessing HE (Sabharwal et al., 2024).
- Research has shown that Faculty Members (FMs) do not engage in formal institution based HE outreach practices but that these practices tend to be informally enacted. Within the public sector in India, there is currently limited HE outreach activity happening in an official capacity, although there is a proven appetite for this (Stewart et al., 2023).

Young People Miss Out on the Opportunity to Attend HE Due to Many Factors

Factors:

Locational constraints:

Rural-urban divide, geographically difficult terrain (connectivity), isolation (tribal areas). Though these factors may not apply in all states, but there may be varied reasons relating to location, such as rural students having information lag, digital divide, etc.

Material constraints:

The state plays an important role but may lack resources to invest in schooling and HE.

Social and economic constraints:

(i) low parental education;

(ii) marriage age conflict;

(iii) family finances; and

(iv) difficulty in gaining accurate information about HE options (when students from disadvantaged social background are the first generation in their families to apply for HE).

Example: Recent, WAHEI study across 5 states found that overall, nearly 86% of students relied on informal sources with no involvement of faculty in choosing their undergraduate college/university.

Young People Miss Out on the Opportunity to Attend HE Due to Many Factors

Continued

Intersectional disadvantage (e.g. the combined effect of caste, gender, location/rurality) reduces the likelihood of accessing HE.

HE has been historically low among marginalised caste, minority communities, tribal groups due to interwoven material and social constraint

Gender manifests in HE choices—some subjects are considered more suitable for young women, e.g., reflecting caring attributes and lead to jobs flexible for childcare duties

HE outreach can contribute to an equitable and socially just approach to HE.

Current Status of HE Advice Received by Students

Findings

The Widening Access to Higher Education in India (WAHEI) five-state study of 464 faculty members from State Universities and Government Colleges, indicates that nearly 91.4% of FMs guided prospective UG students on their HE-related choices.

The advice and guidance provided by FMs ranged from assisting students in deciding whether to opt for HE, choosing the right college, course or subject, and guiding them through admission process.

These activities largely took place informally and within FMs personal networks rather than embedded in institutional practices, meaning some students are not benefitting from such advice.

Current Status of HE Advice Received by Students

Continued

However, a majority of students in the WAHEI study reported that they had limited interaction with faculty members prior to joining college. The WAHEI five-state study of 2890 students from State Universities and Government Colleges indicates that only 14% of students reported involvement of a faculty member in their HE-related choice, while 86% reported no such involvement. The findings on encouragement to apply for higher education show that most students relied on close family members for motivation.

Research has also identified the rural serving state universities and government colleges in rural and semi-urban areas can play an important role as knowledge hubs.

It is important therefore to strengthen the role of HEIs and their efforts in delivering on an equitable and socially justice agenda of HE in India.

Current Status of HE Advice Received by Students

Continued

WAHEI study revealed:

- A majority of students faced an information gap while making HE choices.
- FMs' involvement in college choice was reported by only 14% of students.
- Most of these FMs were family members or a personal connections.
- Stage of involvement: nearly two-thirds of students received guidance at the point of admissions, while over one-third were supported during the earlier decision-making phase.

Key takeaway

It highlights the need for institutional HE outreach (where all students irrespective of their background, family connection, etc.) can access HE information.

Current Status of HE Advice Received by Students

Continued

Students were asked which issues are of paramount significance for them before enrolling and what they want to be guided on for HE choices. They indicated that they need guidance on:

Access

Whether to opt higher education and other alternatives.

Choices

Selection of course or subject and college/institution.

Admission Information

Admission process and exam preparation.

Campus Experience

Campus safety and security.

They suggested that visits organised by the HE institution to the campus (physical/virtual) are a much needed activity and would attract and support rural students.

Pre-enrolment Activities of Students in the WAHEI Study across 5 States

Pre-Enrolment Activities undertaken by Students	State Universities	Government Colleges
Visited the college/university, i.e., physically stepped to the campus you pursued	22.2	36.4
Visited other college/universities to compare options	12.9	17.0
Discussed options for higher education study with other college/university staff (e.g., administrative staff)	4.0	7.5
Explored various online platforms, such as College Dunia, as well as your current college/university website	10.8	5.3
Referenced the college/university brochures for detailed information	9.5	3.4
Watched informative videos on YouTube related to college/university	13.8	5.1
Used social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) to gather information and insights about college/university	8.7	4.1
Read about college/university in newspapers	7.8	3.1
Listened to radio FM providing information about higher education institutions	0.6	0.8
Visited Common service centres (e.g., Akshaya Kendra/e-Kendras, Saral, etc.,) to inquire about higher education options	0.7	1.7
Consulted with representatives or designated contact persons from various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for advice related to higher education study	1.3	0.9
Visited College Fairs	1.7	4.7
Obtained information from the local administration, such as Gram Panchayat, Nagar Panchayat, Village Administrative Officers, Municipal Councils/Corporations and District Administration	1.2	2.5
None of the above	5.0	7.4

Role of Faculty Members in engaging in HE outreach

- The involvement of FMs in HE outreach may be situated in different stages of students' progression to HE:
  - when in secondary education;
  - while completing final year of secondary education; and
  - when preparing during summer before starting of HE courses.
- FMs are vital sources of subject knowledge and expertise, providing meaningful academic experiences.
- There is a need to 'humanise' FMs, who may otherwise be perceived as unapproachable.
- FMs participation in HE outreach shapes the views and perceptions of HE outreach.

Implications of WAHEI Study and Conclusion

HEIs and FMs are involved in HE outreach but not in an organised manner.

More direct, targeted activities are required at HEI level, which is also part of NEP 2020 expectations.

HE outreach needs to be institutionalised to make HE accessible to all (to do away with inequality of opportunity among school leaving students and to enable them to access quality HE).

Part 2: Group Practical Exercise

30 minutes: 20 to discuss + 10 minutes (2 groups) to share

- In your packs find the documents headed ‘Session 2: Stories and reporting table’ (you will use the same table in the next session as well).
- Each group read the story allocated to them.
- Look at the questions below your story and discuss the answers in your group.
- Allocate one person to write your group’s answers in the reporting table.
- If your group is chosen, share the answers with the whole group (5 minutes).

Part 2: Questions

8 minutes

Drawing again on your pre module ‘bubble’ thoughts about undertaking HE outreach for access activities:

- Why do you do these activities? Would you say that you do these in a personal capacity (informally)—as a moral duty or as a community obligation perhaps?
- What challenges do you face? (e.g. workload and time constraints)
- Does your institution undertake any such activities?
- If yes, is this because your institution wants to increase numbers?
- If no, is this because your institution is oversubscribed? Or is this because we assume that reservation policies are sufficient?

Part 3: Group Practical Exercise

20 minutes: 15 to discuss + 5 minutes (2 groups) to share

- In your packs find the documents headed ’Session 3: Stories continued’ (you will be using the same reporting table).
- Each group return to the same story used in Session 2.
- Look at the questions above your story and discuss the answers in your group.
- Allocate one person to write your group’s answers in the reporting table.
- If your group is chosen, share the answers with the whole group (2.5 minutes).

Part 1: Why *Institutional* HE Outreach

5 minutes for slides 24-32

- FM are *vital sources of knowledge* (already providing support informally in their own time but limited to personal networks) particularly in rural serving state universities/government colleges. But their knowledge is underutilised.
- Moving responsibility for HE outreach to HEIs (an institutional approach):
  - creates HEIs as valuable knowledge hubs;
  - enables FMs to undertake outreach activities as part of their professional responsibilities; and
  - supports an equitable and socially justice approach.

Part 1: What are the Challenges for FMs?

- FMs participating in HE outreach may face several institutional challenges:
  - Academic workloads and distribution of tasks.
  - Allocation of financial resources and the need for capacity building.
  - Lack of identification with local communities: FMs may be employed in HEIs in locations that are often unfamiliar to them and may not have local knowledge or identification with local communities
  - Inequalities in the academic profession: many reserved posts remain unfilled. FMs may be from privileged groups with little connection to the marginalised groups who would be the intended beneficiaries of HE outreach.
  - Currently, neither the training infrastructure nor the Academic Performance Indicator (API) includes reference to HE outreach activities.

Part 1: What Can Be Done? (i)

Outreach activities (undertaken outside the HEI, either physically or virtually).

Inreach activities (undertaken within the HEI, either physically or virtually).

Examples of **outreach**:

- HE outreach activities with schools: visits; developing more sustained links with schools serving underrepresented groups such as potential first generation learners; virtually provided activities.
- HE outreach activities added to a community-based event.
- Mentorship programmes for underrepresented school students involving current students.

Part 1: What Can Be Done? (ii)

Examples of **inreach**:

- Physical campus visits: Opening HEI doors for prospective students and families:
  - Open days or fairs tend to be larger-scale, promotional events, offering general information and open to all.
  - Taster days (or sessions) are smaller, invitation based and more targeted often aimed at students who may not yet see themselves as 'university material'. Students and their families come to the institution and discover what it is like; taste a class or a lab demonstration; take part in a sports activity; meet student ambassadors; see the facilities; etc.
- Virtual campus tours and online resources.
- Summer programmes: Extensive sessions during school holidays conducted at the HEI.
- Academic enrichment and preparedness programmes such as pre-degree courses.

Examples of HE Outreach

The following four slides provide some examples of HE outreach activity across different Indian states, but tutors may substitute with examples their own examples.

Maharashtra · Kerala · Assam · Chhattisgarh

Some Examples: Maharashtra

School based ‘taster’ inreach

In one government college, activities like ‘Fun in Chemistry’ and ‘Science Open Day’ are organised and school students in the locality are invited to visit the event. Students see the infrastructure of the HEI and the activities carried out in the science laboratories.

School based outreach

In another government college, faculty members as a group visit higher secondary schools in the nearby rural places and guide students in the institutions about the availability of career opportunities in HE. They inform the school students about admission process, employability, and other facilities.

Some Examples: Kerala

Inreach HE open event

The University of Calicut provides a three-day Open House organised under SHASTRAYAN. The community, nearby schools, and students from affiliating colleges are invited. The whole staff of the University showcases itself in terms of departments, courses offered, labs, infrastructure, and research accomplishments. Students are fully involved as volunteers for the event. Every department is allocated funds.

Some Examples: Assam

School based virtual inreach

A government college has set up a webpage known as TARANG where the faculty members/teachers from nearby rural schools and the Higher Secondary section can seek assistance for training, additional classes, information, etc., on the basis of their subject or for any academic matter. Through TARANG, students of nearly schools obtain permission for free college science lab facilities, library facilities, sports trainings, etc.

Some Examples: Chhattisgarh

Community based HE outreach

A seven-day special camp at schools where FMs accompanied by NSS student volunteers stay at the school and organise multiple programmes including cleanliness drives, plantation drives, health camps, social awareness campaigning and activities meant for school children which includes providing information on HE courses, admission, etc.

Session 4: Institutional HE Outreach Plan

Part 2: Planning an HE Outreach Event

30 minutes + 13 minutes

- The task is to create a checklist of what would be needed to undertake an institutional HE outreach activity.
- Each group has been allocated an activity.
- How would you and your institution plan for this activity (e.g. what approvals would be needed?) Who would be involved (number of teachers, departments, student ambassadors, sources of finance etc?) and how would you carry the activity out (e.g. transport?)
- You are provided with a checklist which gives you some prompts but you can use your own experience and context.
- Identify one member of the group to fill in the checklist on behalf of the group.
- You have 30 minutes to do this.
- Each group will share the key points (identified from the checklist) of their institutional plan (13 minutes for all groups to report).

Session 5: Conclusion

Part 1: Objectives and Key Points (i)

2 minutes for slides 34-35

We hope that after taking part in this module you:

- understand what is meant by HE outreach (and how it is different to community outreach);
- can identify the social, economic, and geographical factors which affect HE outreach;
- understand why HE outreach is important for socially and economically marginalised students and for the equitable and just development of HE;
- understand the role that you as FMs already play in HE outreach activities;
- recognise the challenges you may face in undertaking HE outreach activities;

Part 1: Objective and Key Points (ii)

We hope that after taking part in this module you:

- recognise the importance of developing institutional awareness of HE outreach;
- recognise the importance of developing an institutional readiness (a plan) to undertake HE outreach activities;
- are familiar with some ways of conducting HE outreach activities within an institutional setting (checklist plan) to encourage institutional readiness to undertake outreach programmes; and
- able to identify activities that are already conducted by your HEI that may be facilitating HE outreach, and how such existing practices could be further developed.

Part 2: Quick Quiz

8 minutes

- Please complete the quick quiz provided in your module pack.
- The purpose of this quiz is only to enable the tutor to reflect on what they can learn about conducting such a module.
- You will also receive a copy of the module manual which provides you with some more information about HE outreach.

Contributions

The following have contributed to and supported the preparation of this PowerPoint which accompany the module: Higher Education Outreach*: What it means and why it is important*

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