

Proceedings of the Annual Conference of Vice Chancellors of Agricultural Universities held on April 10, 2020 through Video Conferencing under the Chairmanship of Secretary, DARE and Director General, ICAR.

The Annual Conference of Vice-Chancellors (VCs) of Agricultural Universities (AUs) was held through Video Conferencing on 10 April, 2020 under the Chairmanship of Dr T. Mohapatra, Secretary, DARE and Director General, ICAR. Shri Sanjay Singh, Additional Secretary, DARE & Secretary, ICAR, Deputy Directors General, Vice Chancellors of Deemed and Central Agricultural Universities, Assistant Directors General and Senior Officials of ICAR attended the conference.

At the outset, Dr. T. Mohapatra explained the objectives of the virtual conference during COVID-19 lock-down period. He appreciated the efforts made by the universities in taking necessary steps to continue the academic, research and extension activities during the Corona pandemic crisis. He emphasized on the need to strengthen the required online resources for making the learning process more effective. In view of the COVID-19 and its possible negative impacts, he urged all the Vice-chancellors to prioritize the activities for the year 2020-21. Dr. Mohapatra invited suggestions from the Vice Chancellors for formulation of new programmes/schemes for meeting the current as well as future challenges in agriculture with judicious use of available resources. He acknowledged the support of the Vice-Chancellors in improving the quality of the Agricultural Education in the country. The Director General stressed upon the need to conduct classes regularly and keep active connect with the students in the time of Covid-19 crisis. He advised to make best use of *Turnitin* anti-plagiarism software, made available by MHRD. He highlighted the capacity building of faculties and students under NHAEP, in various Centres of Excellence abroad, and appreciated the fact that undergraduate students have also got excellent exposure.

The Director General stressed upon further need to take the Student READY programme very seriously and urged the Vice Chancellors to look at this component critically for making students future ready and demand responsive. In this regard, a blue print on strengthening of activities of Student READY need to be prepared by the Council. A mention was also made to update the dashboard related information regularly by AUs on their portals so as to have updated information at all times. He further added that the guidelines and recommendations given by Dr.PL Gautam Committee, constituted for the purpose of AICRP review will be implemented during the next five years and will help in making the system more dynamic and vibrant. He also encouraged the Vice Chancellors to address the problems of the farmers through active interfacing with the state governments and other related state agencies.

Mr. Sanjay Singh, Additional Secretary, DARE and Secretary, ICAR appreciated the efforts of Education Division for holding the conference of Vice Chancellors in virtual mode and stressed that such virtual meetings should be held more frequently by taking advantage of the latest technology which shall save the time and other resources. He further added to focus on technology backstopping and human resource development as per the requirement of the nation.

Dr R.C. Agrawal, Deputy Director General (Agril. Education) informed about various advisories given to agricultural universities and the decision to extend the date of submission of Online Application Forms for ICAR's AIEEA from 31 March to 30 April 2020. He also said that the recommendations of BSMA Committees for revision of PG syllabus for the identified disciplines by the respective committees (19) after thorough discussions at different levels has been finalized and shall be circulated in a months' time. He further emphasized the need to interact with students,

to conduct classes, give assignments, presentations etc. Thereafter, he initiated the discussion on agenda items related to guidelines of accreditation, admission of students from Veterinary Science and various options available for online learning.

Agenda 1: Waiving off ICAR accreditation as a requirement for ICAR's AIEEA for students for first batch of ICAR non- accredited private agricultural colleges/AUs

As per existing guidelines, the Higher Agricultural Education Institutes (HAEIs) shall be eligible to apply for the accreditation from the NAEAB if they have a record of at least one batch of students passed out and fulfil the other conditions or are covered by the other provisions, if any. This is putting the first batch of students in disadvantageous position as they are not able to get admission through ICAR's AIEEA (PG). The conference deliberated the issue at length.

- Some Vice Chancellors opined that all students from private colleges should be allowed to apply in AIEEA of ICAR irrespective of their accreditation status including non-accredited first batch students. There was also made a diverse opinion that non accredited first batch students from private colleges should not be allowed to apply for AIEEA, with the apprehension that if the college does not qualify for accreditation then the matter may become complicated as many State Governments have linked employment with ICAR accreditation.
- Issue of insufficient infrastructural and instructional facilities in majority of Private Colleges was also raised, which may deter colleges to qualify for accreditation. Suggestions were also made to initiate process of accreditation in the third year itself to address the issue. The Secretary, ICAR mentioned in his remarks that as per the practices followed accreditation is granted only after first batch is passed out. However, he categorically remarked that the process of accreditation should be complete before the candidates appear in any examination. There was further suggestion to waive accreditation requirement for VCI approved private veterinary colleges.

Considering the remarks and suggestions from the Vice Chancellors, issues pertaining to VCI, Courts, guidelines from State Governments/ Statutory Council's and accreditation guidelines in the matter, DG, ICAR directed to bring agenda in the Accreditation Board for taking necessary decision.

(Action: ADG, EQA&R)

Agenda 2: Disparity in duration of B.V.Sc.&AH-2016 batch (5 years Vs. 5½ Years) depriving 5½ years degree holders to appear in PG entrance exam of 2021-22 to be conducted by ICAR and AUs.

The Veterinary Council of India has modified the B.V.Sc& A.H. curriculum to 5½ years instead of 5 years by extending the internship program of one (1) year in Minimum Standards of Veterinary Education 2016. Hence all the Universities are following the same with effect from Academic year 2016-17 except few universities, who are yet to adopt the same. In this context majority of the Universities have this batch in fourth year of their degree programme and will be completing by December 2021. However, the PG entrance examination of ICAR is generally conducted during June or July of every year and hence the 2016 batch students will have to wait for 6 months before they appear for PG entrance.

Therefore, all the State Veterinary Universities, State Agricultural Universities having Veterinary Colleges and ICAR-DUs admitting B.V.Sc. & A.H. candidates to their Masters

degree programmes are required to shift their academic session from July/August to January/February, w.e.f. the Academic Session 2021-22, in order to enable the candidates passing out in the month of December to seek admission in the AUs.

Further deliberations involving all the stakeholders, including IVRI and NDRI, are required to be held in order to discuss the modalities for admitting candidates through ICAR's PG entrance exam for the Academic Session 2021-22.

(Action: ADG, HRD; COE, Agril Education)

Agenda 3: Signing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with foreign partners

The issue of signing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with foreign partners was discussed. It was informed that approval of Government of India through DARE, which is Nodal Ministry to obtain from the Ministry of External Affairs is required for the State Agricultural Universities signing MOU with foreign partners. It takes a lot of time and many academic opportunities are missed.

- Many VCs were of the view that state agricultural universities should be given freedom to sign MOU with foreign partners /institutes/ universities for academic purpose like admission of students, exchange of students, initiating dual degree programmes, exchange of faculty for teaching purposes.
- A time frame may be fixed for getting approval from DARE (maximum 4 to 6 months), after the lapse of which the university could sign the MOU and the same may be conveyed to DARE for post-facto approval.
- For research and other collaborations, the ICAR should have umbrella MOU with most of the renowned foreign universities and SAUs need not go for individual MOUs with such universities.

It was recommended to look into the issue as per the guidelines of Government of India. Further the matter of signing of MOU may be discussed with Ministry of External Affairs in light of the Office Memorandum dated 17th July 2015 of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) Government of India dealing with academic purposes.

(Action: DDG, Agril. Education; ADG, IR)

Agenda 4: Ph.D. students as Teaching Assistants

The Ph.D. students holding Senior Research Fellowship from ICAR may be allowed to be engaged as Teaching Assistants after completion of their course work. This will facilitate development of better teaching ability amongst such students and building sound human resource pool across all disciplines of agricultural sciences. This shall also help universities addressing the problem of shortage of faculty.

The agenda was welcomed by all agricultural universities. It was recommended that Ph.D. students maybe taken as teaching assistant with a regular teacher. Guidelines for this purpose will be developed by the Council through a committee to be constituted by the Competent Authority.

(Action: ADG, EQA&R; ADG, HRD)

Agenda 5: (submitted by IAUA): Uniform procedure and eligibility for criteria for the post for Vice-Chancellor and University Officers in all Agricultural/Horticultural Universities.

It was mentioned that the Model Act is already revised and would be circulated shortly after the approval by the Competent Authority.

(Action: All VCs)

The honourable Vice Chancellors actively participated in discussion on agenda items as well as on many important issues related to academics, research and extension, and provided their view points. Some general points that emerged out of deliberations were

1. Extensive use of *AarogyaSetu* App developed by the Government of India, by all faculty, other staff and students of the universities as well as concerned farmers and other stakeholders.
2. Use of online tools and resources for teaching to reach all students and faculties, providing technical guidance,
3. Advisory to farmers concerning agricultural operations, exemptions to agriculture and allied sector as notified by the central and state governments, and precautions to be implemented in order to safeguard them against the corona virus.

It was decided to have similar virtual meetings more frequently to discuss the emerging issues from time to time. The meeting ended with vote of thanks to everyone.
