PRADHAN MANTRI UCHCHATAR SHIKSHA ABHIYAN (PM-USHA), MoE, GoI.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA) is a centrally sponsored scheme of the Department of Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India. The scheme was instituted in 2023 to promote equity, access and inclusion in higher education. The scheme also aims at developing quality teaching and learning processes. The accreditation & non-accredited institutions and improving accreditation & developing ICT-based infrastructure and enhancing employability through multidisciplinary approaches are the instrumental focus areas of the scheme. The philosophical approach of the PM USHA scheme is also rooted in 'सा विद्या या विमुक्तये' (That is Knowledge, which liberates). Indeed, 'विद्या मुक्तकारी है और अनेक प्रकार के बंधनों से युक्तकारी' is evident in the five components of the PM USHA.

To assess the efficacy and effectiveness of the PM-USHA scheme, a set of objectives was designed for the third-party evaluation, keeping in view its sunset as on 31.03.2026. The overarching objectives of the evaluation of PM-USHA are: (i) To examine the equity, access and inclusion of the PM USHA scheme, (ii) To analyze the overall quality of existing state higher educational institutions supported by the scheme, (iii) To analyze the implementation of recommendations of NEP 2020, (iv) To analyze the impact of scheme on quality of education due to interventions such as faculty training, physical infrastructure, other reforms measures such as governance, academic, and examination (and evaluation) reforms, etc (v) To analyze the major outputs of the scheme since its inception vis-a-vis the desired outputs, (vi) To analyze/assess major outcomes of the scheme vis-a-vis desired outcomes with analysis of parameters such as Gross Enrolment Ratio, outcomes, quality, equity aspects etc. (vii) To analyze adequacy and timeliness of fund flow and delivery mechanism, (viii) To analyze the financial and physical achievements under the scheme, (ix) To assess the quality teaching and learning process facilitated through the scheme, (x) To assess the atmosphere in the higher educational institutions to devote themselves to research and innovations, (xi) To study the ICT-based digital infrastructure, particularly to overcome the language barrier in learning outcomes, (xii) To examine the impact of scheme on industry, academic and market linkages, (xiii) To identify key bottlenecks and challenges, if any, faced during the implementation of the scheme, and (xiv) To justify/ recommend about the continuation of the scheme or otherwise.

A descriptive methodology with mixed-method approach in positivist frame of reference was applied to receive feedback on the study objectives. Since the scheme is operational in 31 States and UTs, by using a purposive sampling technique and also in consultation with the Department

of Education, a total of 10 States and 2 UTs were finalised for the study. The focus of the study has been on five components of the scheme, covering a total of 226 institutions, wherein 4 NMDCs were excluded as they were still in the embryonic stage. The sampled states were: (1) Assam, (2) Bihar, (3) Chhattisgarh, (4) Haryana, (5) Jharkhand, (6) Karnataka, (7) Maharashtra, (8) Nagaland, (9) Rajasthan and (10) Uttar Pradesh. The two UTs were: (1) Chandigarh and (2) Jammu and Kashmir. The data collection tools used in the evaluation study were (1) Questionnaire (closed and open-ended), (2) In-depth interaction, (3) Focus Group Discussion and (4) Observation.

The major findings of the study are as under:

1. A total of Rs. 1064.98 crores has been spent on the six components of the scheme during FY 2022-23 to 2025-26. However, the amount also includes the committed liabilities of Rastriya Uchchtar Siksha Abhiyan (RUSA), carried forward in PM-USHA. The financial flow under the scheme is mainly operated through SNA SPARSH (26 States), and there is no parking of funds, as the disbursement is done to the vendors' account based on the eligible uploaded bills. The share between the central Government and State Governments is in the ratio of 90:10 for North-Eastern States, Sikkim, J & K, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and 60:40 for the Other States and UTs with Legislature, the UTs without Legislature are 100% centrally sponsored.
2. A total of 35 MERUs, 73 GSUs, 401 GSCs, 40 NMDCs and GIEIs in 50 districts were proposed to be assisted under the scheme. The MERUs, GSUs, GSCs, NMDCs and GIEIs were to be supported with Rs. 3500 crores (100-unit cost), Rs. 1460 crores (Rs. 20 crores unit cost), Rs. 2005 crores (Rs. 5 crore unit cost), Rs. 600 crores (Rs. 15 crores unit cost) and Rs. 500 crores (Rs. 10 crores unit cost), respectively. Since the scheme began in 2023, most components under the scheme have transitioned to the planning stage, including approvals to the DPRs. The work under the components is still in an initial stage and gaining momentum. Embedded largely with SNA-SPARSH, the state matching grants and selection of vendors to complete the exercises are underway and would reflect results soon.
3. Based on information collected and feedback received from the states, it was found that 'under the MERU component, out of DPR approved 29 MERUs, 82.7% of works (24 MERUs) are in progress. The DPR approved (29 MERUs) represent 82.9% of the work

proposed (35 MERUs). The work executed (24 MERUs) accounts for 68.6% of the proposed universities (35 MERUs) to be covered. 41.7% of works have incurred expenditure. In terms of financial utilisation, 1.3% has been achieved. The work is ongoing, and completion requires additional time.

4. Based on interaction with university representatives, State higher education councils and information garnered from the Department of Higher Education, it was found that 'under the Grants to Strengthen Universities (GSU)' component of the scheme, out of the proposed 73 Universities, 87.7% of the DPRs (64) have been approved. Of the approved DPRs, 76.6% of GSUs have completed tendering (49 GSUs). Of the 49 tendered GSUs, 95.9% of the work has been allotted to 47 GSUs. Of the 47 allotted works, 59.6% have commenced execution in 28 works. In terms of financial utilisation, 2.38% of the proposed fund, i.e. Rs. 1,460 crores, has been utilised, amounting to Rs. 34.31 crores. It is worthwhile to mention that Universities processing tenders to award the work gets delayed due to compliance and lack of human resources to do timely follow-ups. However, the PAB shows effectiveness in functioning, keeping in view the percentage of DPRs approved.
5. Based on information gathered from the State Directorate and Department of Education, Government of India, it was found that 'under the Grants to Strengthen Colleges (GSCs)' component, out of the 401 proposed colleges, DPRs for 96.5% of colleges (387) have been approved. Of the DPR-approved GSCs, 86.6% of colleges (335) have completed tendering. Of the total colleges that completed tendering, 94.3% (316 colleges) have allocated works. Of the total works allotted, 55.4% of colleges (175 colleges) have incurred expenditure. The financial utilisation stands at 6.2%, with Rs. 123.71 crores spent till date. Based on focus group discussions with college heads, it was brought out that institutions were attempting to utilise the approvals in line with the state government's laid down norms for work execution. Since the financial management system is innovatively new, the colleges are attuned to process component-specific matters to scale up their works and book expenditures thereto.
6. It was reported from the field visit and consequent scheme guidelines that 'under the New Model Degree Colleges (NMDC)' component, out of the proposed 40 units, 8 units have been approved, representing 20%. The four New Model Degree Colleges to be

established in Noklak, Shamator, Tseminyu, and Niuland districts of Nagaland are still in the initial stages. Based on interactions with the executive engineers, it was revealed that tendering for contractors is yet to be completed. The work is expected to be completed within a year and half. Challenges related to the monsoon and the identification of suitable contractors were the impeding reasons. The initiative to establish NMDCs in the state of Nagaland was acknowledged by stakeholders as a strong affirmative action by the central government.

7. The study posits that under the Gender Inclusion and Equity Initiative (GIEI), a total of 98 districts were approved against 50 districts proposed earlier. The increase in the number of projects under GIEI component was due to conversion of the amount available for the 32 slots of NMDCs into GIEI. Out of the approved DPRs (72 GIEIs), tendering has been completed by 52.8% of the institutions (38 GIEIs). Of the institutions that completed tendering, 76.3% (29 GIEIs) have allotted works to approved vendors. Of the institutions with allotted works, 65.5% (19 GIEIs) are experiencing work progress. However, against the proposed amount of Rs. 500 crores, the utilisation as on date stands at 5.9%. It was found that GIEI works have commenced and process-based execution has been prioritised. The implemented GIEI works have not only redesigned the image of institutions but also provided a message to the districts that institutions are gender-sensitive now.
8. PM-USHA scheme has specifically supported state governments in promoting gender inclusion and equity, along with upgrading skills for better employability through Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The study reveals that female beneficiaries have achieved the most substantial transformation, with 16.99% experiencing considerable upward mobility through the scheme’s interventions.
9. Based on data points collected from 10 States and 2 UTs, it has been found that the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and women have experienced upward mobility due to the scheme. The positive inclusion of the social categories has ensured that ‘no one is left behind’.
10. The research output catalysed by the scheme is evident in the increased number of patents granted. Before the implementation of the PM USHA Scheme, a total of 879 patents were granted, whereas after the implementation of the scheme, a total of 1167 patents were

awarded. The number of patents has experienced an increase of 32.8% due to the implementation of the scheme. However, externalities to this score may also be attributed to other implicit drivers. The deletion of the UGC care list, Scopus publication difficulties vis-à-vis qualitative academic works, and all these elements together would have contributed to crystallising the academic credibility. The ecosystem of higher education has also been hearing the voice for a long time to scale up the quality of research.

11. The study reveals the placement score of the students before and after the implementation of the PM USHA scheme. It has been found that the maximum placement has been reported in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, followed by Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Nagaland, Bihar and Haryana. The placement score is 3% across the sampled states. It shows that the improvement in infrastructure, teaching classes, and technological upgradation of lecture theatres have just begun, as a result of the scheme's outreach.
12. Based on information collected from 12 States/UTs, one-third of responses are for accepting the importance of infrastructure, etc., created due to the scheme. Approximately 20% favour this idea. The scheme has started gaining grounds, and as a result, faculty training, physical infrastructure, other reforms pertaining to governance, academic and examination reforms have moved on. Based on focus group discussions with stakeholders, it was revealed that physical infrastructure has received considerable improvement.

As such, the PM-USHA scheme has brought about many breakthroughs in the ecosystem of higher education by including quality component into it. Keeping in view the evaluation of the scheme with regard to 100% of its demand, 20.4% increase in enrolment in post PM USHA and implicit multiplier effect, the scheme is one-of-its-kind.