

THE KERALA STATE HIGHER EDUCATION COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE TO
STUDY THE **UGC DRAFT LEARNING
OUTCOME BASED CURRICULA**
(LOCFs)



SEPTEMBER 2025

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**PROCEEDINGS OF THE VICE-CHAIRMAN
THE KERALA STATE HIGHER EDUCATION COUNCIL**

Present: Prof.(Dr.) Rajan Gurukkal

The Kerala State Higher Education Council — Committee to study UGC Draft Learning Outcome – based Curriculum Frameworks (LOCFs) — Sanctioned- Orders issued.

KSHEC-A3/306-19/Committee (LOCFs) / 900-A/2025

Dated, Tvpmm 26.08.2025

Read: Note dated 26.08.2025 received from the Member Secretary, KSHEC

ORDER

The Executive Body of the Kerala State Higher Education Council in its meeting held on 26.08.2025, has resolved to constitute a Committee to study UGC Draft Learning Outcome –based Curriculum Frameworks (LOCFs) with its Chairperson and Members as detailed below:

Members of the Committee

Sl. No	Name	Capacity in the Committee
1	Prof. Prabhat Patnaik Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi	Chairman
2	Prof. Rajan Gurukkal Vice Chairman, KSHEC	Co-Chairman
3	Prof. Romila Thapar, Jawaharlal Nehru University, (JNU), New Delhi	Special Invitee
4	Dr. N.J Rao Professor, Retd, IISC, Bangalore	Member
5	Dr. Vani Kesari Director, Prof N R Madhava Menon Interdisciplinary Centre for Research Ethics & Protocols (ICREP), CUSAT, Kochi	Member
6	Dr. Rajan Varughese Member Secretary, KSHEC	Convenor



Vice Chairman

Copy to:

1. The Principal Secretary to Govt., Higher Education Department with C/L
2. Director of Collegiate Education with C/L
3. Chairman and Members of the Committee
4. Registrars of all Universities with C/L
5. Registrar and FO, KSHEC/ Coordinator
6. Assistants, O/o the VC/MS, KSHEC
7. File/Stock

KSHEC

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE UGC DRAFT LEARNING OUTCOME BASED CURRICULA (LOCFs)

The UGC is enjoined, by the Act of 1956 that established it, to “take in consultation with the Universities and other bodies concerned, all such steps as it may think fit for the promotion and coordination of University education, and for the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examination, and research in universities..”. To the extent that, in pursuit of this objective, its draft on Learning Outcome Based Curricula suggests a standardised structure of credits for universities, it is welcome, provided such a structure is not imposed on universities but is meant for discussion and possible adoption by their relevant decision-making bodies. A uniform structure of credits across universities in the country that facilitates movement of students from one university to another, is a welcome step forward, if voluntarily adopted after due consideration by universities without any violation of their autonomy.

While this part of the UGC draft is useful and constructive for its suggestions, the rest of the draft, concerned with stipulating the detailed course structure, the contents of courses, and even the reading lists for the different courses in various disciplines, is completely unacceptable. It constitutes an unwarranted encroachment into spheres that fall squarely within the jurisdiction of universities: it violates the autonomy of universities; it ignores the various bodies of state governments that are entrusted with guiding and supervising the functioning of state universities that these governments predominantly finance; and it is in blatant contravention of the UGC Act itself. It arrogates to the UGC, and a group of hand-picked experts by it, the power to dictate the contents of the syllabi in every discipline to the entire academic community of the country. This is an encroachment on the academic autonomy of universities, the like of which does not exist in any major country of the world; and it is unprecedented even in our own country. It amounts to treating the academic community of the country as

if it consists of automatons whose sole role is simply to do what a group of UGC “experts” command.

It would be argued of course that the UGC draft is meant only for soliciting opinion and not for imposition. But the central point relates to agency. Whether or not the UGC accepts the opinions it receives, is left to the UGC; hence it is the UGC that has appropriated agency from the academic community located in the universities, in violation both of its own Act and the Acts of the universities themselves. The denial of agency to the academic community that is directly engaged in teaching and research, and reducing this community to mere automatons, is the surest panacea for subverting the quality of higher education in the country. The fact that some members of the academic community in the country do not play the role they are supposed to play, cannot be an argument for instituting the massive centralisation envisaged by the UGC. The existence of delinquents in any sphere necessitates specific measures to deal with delinquency; it does not call for an abrogation of the extant arrangement as a whole. That would amount to throwing out the baby with the bathwater, eliminating the creativity associated with teaching and reducing it to a routine that necessarily becomes a drudgery and hence a second-rate activity. Excellence requires creativity and hence autonomy, even when this creativity characterises a smaller group than desired. Destroying this autonomy and creativity in the name of eliminating delinquency, dooms the entire system to utter mediocrity.

Quite apart from the fact that the syllabi presented in the UGC draft are an intrusion into a domain outside of the UGC’s jurisdiction, they also lack any thought-out vision, any broad weltanschauung, or philosophical understanding of our times, that the UGC itself believes should underlie the education of an Indian student, as distinct from an agenda. A philosophical understanding or a weltanschauung is not an agenda; it too is not meant to be imposed upon universities, but it constitutes a comprehensive vision of the universities’ role, a meta-narrative about what should animate universities. This vision must be rooted in our own historical experience.

For a country that was under the rule of a metropolitan power for nearly two centuries, embracing “modernity” must obviously be an overriding goal; indeed it is essential for our freedom. But “modernity” must not be confused with European “modernity”, which from the very beginning had been imbued with, and contaminated by, an imperialist drive. Education in India must therefore cultivate among the students an “alternative modernity”, one free of this contamination; or, put differently, it must seek to instil in students an egalitarian modernity, precisely of the sort that constitutes the basis of our Constitution. Since the essence of modernity consists in the application of reason, the objective of education in the country must be to ensure, in the words of Tagore, that “the clear stream of reason does not lose its way in the dreary desert sands of dead habit”. But since the domain of reason in European modernity was circumscribed by imperialism, education in India must produce a full flowering of reason, uncircumscribed by any bigotry arising from racial, ethnic or religious differences. This, to repeat, is essential for the survival of a free India, which requires both an awareness of the phenomenon of imperialism that ruled us for so long, as well as a respect for all races, ethnic groups and religions. A conclusion that follows from this is that the syllabi in Indian universities, at the very least in the social sciences and the humanities, cannot be clones of those in Western universities, for in the West one would scarcely find any recognition or mention of the damaging impact of imperialism on societies like ours. Having syllabi that essentially mimic those in the West, and relying exclusively on text-books that are followed in Western universities, even renowned Western universities, would lead therefore to an insulation of Indian students from Indian realities; and that would be ultimately inimical to our freedom.

The UGC draft fails in both these respects. Its proclaimed syllabi constitute a hotch-potch, an admixture of material from standard text-books used at present in British and American universities, of writings that underplay the exploitative role of imperialism in the history of our society, and of a Hindu-exclusivist perception of the Indian knowledge system. Instead of formulating syllabi informed by a perspective of egalitarian modernity, the UGC draft merely replicates in essence what is currently

taught in British and American universities, adding a dash of Hindutva-inspired smugness and self-satisfaction under the guise of the Indian knowledge system. Thus, both requirements of what the university syllabi should be in free India, namely, inculcating in students an awareness of the lingering impact of imperialism on our history and our minds, and inculcating in them a recognition of the multifarious contributions made to the Indian society by diverse ethnic, caste and religious groups that inhabit it, are missing from the UGC syllabi.

Why there should be so much emphasis on Indian knowledge system is not at all clear. By “Indian knowledge system” the UGC syllabi mean the contributions to various disciplines in ancient India. It is not clear why contributions only during the ancient epoch should be singled out. Besides, it is not clear why such contributions should be compulsorily studied by every student, when they are not very helpful in acquiring mastery over the discipline in contemporary times. How does it help a student of economics, who is trying to understand the macroeconomics of the Indian economy in its contemporary setting, to read Kautilya’s Arthshastra? To be sure, Indian contributions in various disciplines need to be researched and studied, but only as specialist activities; why should they be made compulsory for every student? The only possible reason for cramming such matter into the syllabus is to provide a boost to the ego of the Indian students, which in turn presupposes that Indian students need such an ego-boost. This implicitly attributes to them an inferiority complex which they presumably need to overcome; but they certainly have no such affliction, especially in view of the contemporary contributions that Indian academics are making in diverse spheres all over the world. What is more, forcing such material down the throats of students is more likely to make them averse to Indian contributions than to take pride in them. Altogether therefore this idea of shoving “Indian knowledge system” into large chunks of the syllabi is an utterly jejune idea.

It becomes even more objectionable when Indian contributions are made synonymous with Hindu contributions. The Buddhist and Islamic contributions for

instance are not included in the syllabi, nor are the interactions between Arab scholars and Indian ones that led to the diffusion of Indian ideas across the world. To ignore all this, to make “India” synonymous with “Hindu” is utterly unacceptable and repugnant; making a study of such contributions compulsory is wholly unwarranted.

Let us now turn to the syllabi in some individual disciplines, starting with economics. Because inter alia of the impact of colonialism on economies like ours, which Western scholars tend to underplay if not ignore outright, economics has always been an intensely ideological discipline. It is important for students to be aware of this fact, and for this purpose to be made aware of alternative perspectives. But the reading list gives predominantly only one side, the colonial side of the story. For instance, there is no reference anywhere to the work of Amiya Kumar Bagchi the most outstanding of modern Indian economists writing on colonial exploitation, whose work is internationally celebrated. There is reference to a discussion of the work of Utsa Patnaik but that reference is an erroneous one, perhaps just thrown in to avoid accusations of bias. On the other hand there are plenty of references to the work of Tirthankar Roy, whose writings are in the tradition of a school of historiography that is oblivious of the impact of colonial exploitation. Likewise, there are no references to the work of a host of scholars like Irfan Habib, Bipan Chandra (who gets just one stray reference), Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Nirmal Kumar Chandra, Sunanda Sen, Tapan Raychaudhury and others. The economics syllabus simply glosses over the phenomenon of colonial exploitation.

The debates within economics of course are not confined to the question of colonialism alone. There are alternative traditions, the differences between which stem from different perceptions about capitalism. Textbooks followed in British and American universities, apart from ignoring the whole phenomenon of imperialism, do not do justice to heterodox traditions. And yet those are the very textbooks that student are supposed to follow. For instance there are several places where the text book by Dornbusch and Fisher is recommended (whose ideological orientation can be gleaned

from the fact that the latter of the two was once the Managing Director of the IMF), but never a mention of the heterodox textbook by Amit Bhaduri, titled *Macroeconomics: the Dynamics of Commodity Production*. In the same vein while Friederich Von Hayek and Milton Friedman, arch defenders of unbridled capitalism are recommended in several places, there is never a mention of even the accessible writings of Joan Robinson (*Economic Philosophy*), Nicholas Kaldor or Michal Kalecki (except one stray reference). Students who follow this syllabus will emerge not as thinkers critically reflecting on what they are taught, which after all is the purpose of higher education, but as automatons who have imbibed, like capsules, a set of ideas propagated by a group of orthodox economists about the functioning of capitalism. They would certainly lack the capability to provide any insights for tackling economic problems in a society like ours. The UGC draft in short will only turn the academic world, consisting of both students and teachers, into a world of automatons devoid of originality, creativity and critical thinking. The overall characteristic of the syllabus it proposes is conformism to the imperialist narrative but garnished with a dash of Hindutva.

Romila Thapar remarks: “The approach, as many have commented, is that of governmental interference in the jurisdiction of universities. The syllabus and what is to be taught and how in each discipline is the concern of the individual university and is not to be dictated to by the government. These are concerns in which a specialised and advanced knowledge is required - something that obviously administrators and politicians do not have. The universities have to be entrusted with deciding on what is to be taught and researched. Equally Reading Lists are the concern of specialists in the subjects and not those that run the government. The syllabus at university level cannot be interfered with or created by non-specialists. Non-specialists because they are not up-to-date with, nor fully cognisant of a subject do not know what is the knowledge that has to be taught. This move should be objected to in principle unless those drawing up the syllabus are properly trained in the subject. A poorly conceived of syllabus will be badly taught and this is a sure way of bringing down the quality of education. It is

reduced to the Question-Answer text books and teaching by rote without giving the students an understanding of how to ask questions pertinent to what they are being taught.

On the question of modernity and defining it - which is of ultimate importance - I think that it could perhaps be better understood if divided into two phases. The first phase is that which develops in the intellectual history of Europe from the 17th century onwards in debates on rational thought by philosophers and others and is linked to the Reformation as well. This needs to be examined and understood as it was to lead to issues concerning secularism. The second phase is further advanced by both the Industrial Revolution and its necessary counterpart of colonialism. This needs to be examined in the context of a colonial situation as it has a bearing on the economy and the structural changes in society tied to this experience, as well as some intellectual assumptions e.g., the theory that in India there was an absence of a state, so for all time it was a society ruled by despots - the theory of Oriental Despotism.

I would also question the general references in various situations to something which educational bodies of the current times refer to as "the Indian Knowledge System". None of them have defined what they mean by this, nor has there any analytical writing about it. nor a discussion of where Indian proto-science - to take an example - succeeded and where it failed. Nor has it been co-related with historical change and evolution. So the Kautilya Arthashastra is quoted virtually in any chronological context extending over ancient India, from 500 BC to AD 1000. So what is going to be taught in this subject ? It will again be anything and everything that anyone in authority wishes to see taught. It has also been quite correctly said that however one defines it, it cannot be treated as a solely Hindu contribution. Even if some of the texts were composed in Sanskrit, there was during the first and early second millennia AD, when most of them were written, a considerable exchange of ideas on subjects that we call proto-science across India, west Asia, central Asia and China. These ideas cannot be given a geographical boundary or a religious origin."

Conclusion

In light of the academic obsolescence, internal contradictions, and the uncritical imposition of ideologically driven content under the guise of Indian Knowledge Systems, the UGC's new Curriculum Framework and Learning Outcomes fail to respect the standards of intellectual rigour, disciplinary integrity, and academic autonomy that the Universities in the State are legally mandated. This report has not sought to amend or repair the proposed framework because the issues are structural, not incidental. What is required is not a patchwork of corrections but a fundamental rethinking of the very premises on which this framework is built. Until such a rethinking occurs, we reject this UGC Draft Learning Outcome Based Curricula (LOCFs) in its present form as incompatible with the pursuit of critical, pluralistic, and globally relevant education.



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