



HEDP Delegation Visit to Lovely Professional University, Amity University, Sharda University, and Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan



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Report on official visit to India

Background:

Considering one of the crucial objectives of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan, the ministry of higher education intends to continue focusing on quality improvement with emphasis on enhanced academic capacity for the Ministry and higher education institutions including faculty development for those who lack master's and PhDs, continue to upgrade the curriculum to bring it up to international standards and to meet employer needs, improve laboratories and other teaching facilities.

The intention of the official tour to India was mainly to visit Lovely Professional University (the largest private university in India which is already a strategic partner of HEDP and the Ministry of Higher Education and in the meantime visit Sharda University and to build new ties with Amity University, which is considered one of the best universities in India while having its campuses in almost all of the states of India as well as in foreign countries such as Singapore, United Kingdom, UAE and Mauritius.

India is a neighboring country to Afghanistan, where some HEDP scholarship awardees, especially a higher portion of the female candidates, prefer to study because it is both culturally similar to Afghanistan and closer to travel for their family commitment. Those awardees who consider taking their families to the country where they study, India is always the best option due to the fact that they practice leniency while issuing visa for Afghan citizens

Day 1: LPU Visit

LPU claims to be the first paperless and the biggest private university throughout India that encompasses 600 acres of land. This university was founded in 2001 with the vision of Transforming Education, Transforming India, LPU is part of 50+ years old Lovely Group LPUs motto is Think Big and Global Development.

The university offers a wide range of programs in undergraduate, postgraduate and doctorate qualifications. It also facilitates its wide range of faculties with top-notch professors to make sure they deliver quality education to its both local and international students.

LPU supports a diverse culture of students from over one hundred (100) countries while holding annual cultural week where students can exhibit their culture, and perform a cultural dance to assure there is more acceptance of the various existing societies from around the world.

The university has an admirable relationship with the officials of the government of Afghanistan, such as his Excellency the former president of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai visited LPU in 2012 and was welcomed by his Excellency the president of India of the aforementioned time. The president of Afghanistan was offered honorary P.h.D. (honoris causa).

Moreover, his Excellency the former Minister of Higher Education Ms. Farida Momand, Deputy Minister for academics Mr. Baabory and other high-grade policy level officials have officially been invited by LPU.

During the first day of visit our delegation visited the International Division at Lovely Professional University to meet Mr. Aman Mittal who is the chief of the department, Nitesh Mahajan who is the deputy chief of the department and our focal point at the university Mr. Ashish Gupta in order to share our presentation on behalf of the HEDP and the Ministry of Higher Education.

The presentation included a detailed thematic overview of the tasks and achievements of HEDP team with the support of the Ministry of Higher Education and the World Bank so far.

The day was concluded with the following day's plan, which was to visit LPU to observe the quality of LPU labs.



Day 2: Lab Visits

On our second day at LPU, we spent most of our time with the superintendent and technical staff for the labs. As a result, the following labs were observed,

Engineering: the engineering labs were well-furnished with the latest tech; a group of students had come up with the concept of a race-car and went on to implement it. It was very well received by a host of sponsors after it received an award at a local racing tournament. It goes on to reflect on the quality of labs at the students' disposal.

Agriculture: the team observed classes as well as the labs available to students; a small number of students were informally interviewed to understand if there are equipment that are not currently available for their use. All of the students asked, expressed their satisfaction with the quality of labs.



Pharmacy & Animal House: The pharmacy labs were well equipped and some students were observed performing experiments on certain guinea pigs. Overall, the course-work concerned tools and equipment were vastly available in the labs.

Computer Labs: The computer labs were equipped with the latest computers and a plethora of software support was available. Other relevant equipment like projectors, book printers, etc. were also available to the students.

The team was pleased with the overall quality of labs following the detailed assessment and proposed to Mr. Aman Mittal the idea of technical training for the technicians of Public Universities in Afghanistan. The suggestion was warmly welcomed by LPU; following which the team proposed that LPU share a formal technical and financial proposal in line with the assessment made by ELCS.

Day 3: Sharda University Visit

On the third day of the visit to India, the team visited Sharda University in Uttar Pradesh. This visit was made based on the recommendation from H.E Minister. The universities offer courses in different disciplines at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

During the visit, the university leadership well received the delegation from MoHE, Afghanistan and gave a tour of the campus and facilities at the university which included a library, students unions, sports facilities, labs, and health clinics. Following the tour, we had a brief meeting with the chancellor of the university, during which the objectives of Afghanistan's Higher Education Development Program was discussed, and the Sharda University leadership showed interest in providing cooperation and support in future. During the campus and facilities tour, we also visited the International Students' Division, where Afghan students' representation was note-worthy. We met several Afghan students there, and also a HEDP sponsored graduate students.

In general, the visit to Sharda University was fair given the discussion and campus tour. However, compared to other Indian higher education institutions, the university facilities fell below par.

Day 4: Amity University Visit

On day four of the visit, the delegation visited Amity University, one of India's largest private universities. Almost 75 percent of the academic staff's minimum qualification at Amity is Ph.D. This university has several campuses, the campus we visited is located in Delhi and offers both undergraduate and graduate level courses. The university welcomes students from different nationalities and countries and thus has a diverse community of local and international students.

Amity University has the potential to become one of the very cooperative partners with the Ministry of Higher Education and HEDP more specifically. It offers high standard services in almost each of the components and DLIs that we have to achieve such as the application of OBE and SCL and E-learning, research, ICT centers, technical labs and distance learning studios where they offered online classes for distance learning students.

During discussions and visits to different departments at Amity, the delegations found that Amity is offering courses in a variety of disciplines with better education standards. The delegations had a presentation to the university leadership to explain higher education development program's objectives and plans. Likewise, the leadership of the Amity University had prepared a very much useful presentation explaining the programs and services available at the Amity. After the

presentation sessions, there were a couple of meetings with Vice Chancellors and other individuals in the leadership. The vice chancellor and other leadership members were very much optimistic about future cooperation with MoHE and offered a lot of support in terms of scholarships and discounts in fees for students coming through MoHE. At the end of the visit, a campus tour was arranged to introduce campuses, universities facilities such as libraries, labs, and clinics. We also had a brief discussion on Scholarships and Research events which are explained below:



Scholarship:

The management and the vice chancellor showed eagerness in supporting our team by offering us to if officially requested by the Ministry of Higher Education, accept our scholarship candidates while only demanding the candidate's annual fees same as the local Indian Nationals which can be an enormous advantage in the scholarship component in HEDP.

Research:

The vice chancellor general of the Amity groups of the universities agreed to initiate our research component in an international research conference which will be organized by Amity within next two weeks and guided his team to invite professors from other Amity campuses around the world

who has completed their research on different articles in Afghanistan. These articles included titles such as the overcoming security concerns in Afghanistan, pollution, agriculture, and the rise of the economy, water management in Afghanistan and agreed to invite a delegation on behalf of MoHE.

The day ended with the plan to visit the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Embassy in New Delhi.

Day 5: The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Embassy in New Delhi Visit

On day 5, we were received at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan H.E. Abdali. Mr. Noor Ahmad Darwish presented brief details of the HEDP and discussed in details its engagement in India. Challenges relevant to the Embassy and the role embassy can play to minimize/avoid certain problems faced conversed as well.

Outcomes:

The outcomes of the visit include,

- The team examined the scholars sponsored by HEDP in the classrooms and identified the challenges through dialogue with direct beneficiaries. This will result in minimizing the problems faced by the future batches of students, while also promptly addressing the problems being faced by current batches.
- The team negotiated 2 Masters Scholarships for the capacity building of HEDP staff.
- The team negotiated a 10% tuition waiver for the future batches of students, exceeding 20, to study in LPU.
- The team identified LPU as a potential technical training partner for the technicians in Public Universities across Afghanistan.

Conclusion:

Following the complaints received from students studying in LPU, the team visited the students personally and addressed most of the critical issues with LPU's management. LPU's leadership welcomed the visit and assessment by HEDP and were in agreement of striving to avoid similar problems with the future batches. The HEDP funded scholars were also pleased with the team's visit. The team also negotiated 2 Master's scholarships for HEDP staff to enhance their capacity and a 10% tuition waiver for the future batches.

The team's visit was very productive in terms of minimizing problems faced by scholars and financially, availing lesser fees. It is recommended that visits be made to other universities where a large number of complaints are being received in order to address the current problems and collectively develop mechanisms to avoid similar problems in the future.