MODULE-2

ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

CONTENTS

2.1 Introduction

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), as detailed in Module 1, is imparting school education to the disadvantaged, drop-outs, out of school children, etc through the open and distance mode of education. Unlike the formal system, NIOS learners[1] get very few opportunities for interaction with their peer groups and the subject teachers/tutors. While studying at their pace and place, they face various types of problem, both academic and administrative, which need to be addressed in time as per the requirement of learners. They may also face personnel problems that discourage them and lead to their dropping out from the system. In fact the success of the open and distance learning system depends entirely on how learner-friendly it is.

In this Module we have not given any questions under the heading *Check your Progress*. Instead, we have given some questions under the heading *Check your Understanding* and then some more under the heading *Terminal Questions* at the end. We have not provided any answers for these questions, as the purpose of these questions is to motivate you to think about the reformative possibilities. Once such possibilities get outlined, they can be formalised and then implemented.

Objectives of this Module

After going through this Module, you should be able to:

1. explain the need for providing effective Student Support Services (SSS);

2. effectively organize study centre activities at Accredited Institutions to provide   support services to NIOS learners; and

3. enlist the academic, administrative and financial responsibilities of the Headquarters, Regional Centres and AIs in relation to Student Support Services.

2.2 Student Support Services at NIOS

2.2.1   *Need for Student Support Services (SSS)*

In any learner-friendly system of education, including the system of Open Schooling, learner has to be the focus of attention. In open distance learning systems the transaction of teaching and learning, managerial and organizational activities all revolve round the learner, who is expected to be autonomous, independent, motivated and self-directed. However, distance learners who remain isolated for most of the study time often suffer from the feeling of neglect and anxiety while pursuing their studies. This results in their tendency to drop out of the system. This tendency is stronger among the younger distance learners as many of them are school dropouts, many come from socio-economically disadvantaged sections of society etc. The older ones come to studies after long gaps and find it difficult to discipline themselves to study regularly and purposefully. They lack confidence, self-learning skills and have no experience of managing their time. In

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[1] As impressed elsewhere in the Modules prepared for the functionaries of NIOS and also in the literature produced by NIOS, we prefer to use the word *learners* instead of *students* for those who register with NIOS for their studies. In this Module, however, we have used the words *student* and *students* in the first few pages. Subsequently, we have switched over to the words *learner* and *learners*. We have done so, just because the Department (at the Headquarters) concerned with Support Services is called the Department of *Student Support Services*. The distinction between *student* and *learner,* as made in the literature on Open Distance Education/Learning, became more visible and acceptable in early 1990s, presumably after the Department was named at NIOS.

addition to these difficulties, quite often they hardly get any support from their families, as in many cases they are first generation learners. In view of these factors, it becomes necessary to extend timely and proper support to them, so that they achieve the objectives of joining NIOS.

2.2.2 *Three-tier Administrative Model of NIOS*

Keeping in view the importance of and the need for student support services, NIOS functions on a three-tier administrative model that accommodates various aspects of student support services at each of its three tiers. This way the process of student support is decentralized, as a result of which the functioning of NIOS becomes smooth and efficient. Given below is a diagrammatic representation of the said three-tier model of NIOS.

Tier I: Headquarters, New Delhi
(Department of Student Support Services)

Tier II: Regional Centres (11 Centres)

Tier III: Accredited Institutions (i.e. Study Centres) (more than 2000)

2.2.3 *Stages at which Student Support Services are Provided*

The basic objective of student support services is to help learners at the various stages of their journey along the path of their studies through NIOS. The various stages where support services are provided by NIOS are as follows:

i) Pre-admission Support

At this stage the prospective learners are informed about the courses and subjects available at NIOS. In order to disseminate this information and that about NIOS, carefully planned publicity is organized through the print and the electronic media.

ii) Enrolment and Registration

Since NIOS learners are geographically spread throughout the country, even overseas, arrangements for enrolment and registration are made at all the existing AIs.

Accredited Institutions working as a study centre of NIOS register students as per the category to which they are allotted. The AIs which are allotted to category 'A', can register up to 500 students, the AI allotted to category 'B' can register up to 300 students where as, 'C' category AIs can register up to 150 students in a session. It may be noted that no AI is allowed to admit more students than are fixed for its category, as detailed above.

iii) Advice and Counselling on selecting Subjects

For a distance learner it is very necessary to get proper advice and counselling. Since NIOS provides a range of subjects, students are often not adequately prepared to choose the correct combination of subjects in view of their own goals. Study centres help learners to choose appropriate combinations of subjects, especially in the case of those who plan to go for higher studies. Further, they are also advised about the various Vocational Courses, which may be taken along with the academic subjects for certification or as additional subjects to improve one's employability.

iv) Personal Contact Programmes (PCPs)

Unlike the students in the formal system, distance learners get very limited opportunity for face-to-face interaction with their tutors and peers in classroom situations, which are created during personal contact programmes. These programmes are largely used to supplement learning from the print materials and the electronic media, and include tutorials to answer questions and to remove the doubts of learners, discussion sessions to explain difficult concepts and laboratory work to conduct practicals.

Considering the provision and the practice of open distance institutions, and so also of NIOS, Student Support Services may be classified in a different way (see Table 2.1 below) in order to properly appreciate their utility and the range of application.

Table 2.1 : Support Services

COGNITIVE SUPPORT	AFFECTIVE SUPPORT	SYSTEMIC SUPPORT
❑ Printed learning materials	❑ Peer interaction tutoring	❑ Information systems (admission, examination, result etc.)
❑ Multimedia supplementary materials	❑ Co-curricular activities	❑ Enquiries about the system and the courses/subjects offered
❑ Personal Contact Programmes for face-to-face interaction	❑ National level competitions	❑ Admission and pre-admission advisory services
❑ Tutoring, practical work and problem solving sessions at the designated study centres/AIs	❑ Additional services for learners with special needs, e.g. disability, geographical remoteness, prison inmates, etc.	❑ Information on the credit transfer scheme and accumulation of credits
❑ Guidance and counselling services regarding self study, personal problems, time management, etc.	❑ Provision of materials, which support the development of study skills, time management, programme planning or career development guidance	
❑ Library services for further studies and reference work	❑ Developing appropriate life skills in learners	
❑ Audio-video programmes for supporting the learning material in print ❑ Continuous assessment and preparation through TMAs		

2.3 Field Level Support Services through Accredited Institutions

2.3.1 Accredited Institutions (AIs)

Like any Open and Distance Learning System, NIOS expects its learners to be self-dependent and perform their learning tasks on their own using the package of self-learning materials sent/given to them at the time of their registration. Learning packages alone are not enough for all the distance learners; some need a lot of additional support, while some may need less of it. Overall, the fact is that they need help and support from a variety of sources, not only to be successful in their endeavour to continue learning but also in using the package effectively. With this in view, NIOS provides planned live human support in different ways right from the time a learner joins the system till his/her successful completion of the course.

NIOS aims at providing education at the doorsteps of its learners as per their pace and place of learning convenient to them. To materialize this aim, it becomes an imperative to provide field level support services at places which can be accessed and reached by its learners easily without wasting much of their time and effort—and such places are called *study centre*.

NIOS does not go around building such centres all over the country. Instead, NIOS utilises the existing resources to provide support services to its learners by *accrediting* reputed institutions/schools to be its partners. It has now more than 2500 such partner institutions called *Accredited Institutions (AIs)* all over the country. Usually these AIs are recognised formal schools or other institutions engaged in educational and/or training activities or any other type of social service/activity. They assist NIOS in its various functions and to reach out and to reach all. Accredited institutions join NIOS as partners with the understanding that they would provide support services to NIOS learners utilizing the resources available with them for which NIOS pays them according to mutually agreed terms and conditions.

2.3.2 Eligibility to be an Accredited Institution

NIOS believes in sharing the resources, that are already available in the country, for imparting education and related support services to its learners at the field level. For this purpose the schools which have a sense of commitment and desire to contribute towards developing a learning society are *accredited* to work as the study centre of NIOS. To get accredited by NIOS for the said purpose, they must apply to NIOS and ensure that they satisfy the following criteria laid down by NIOS for the purpose:

a) The school concerned must have sufficient infrastructure and teaching staff and must be affiliated to a recognized State Board of School Education/CBSE/CISCE for Secondary/Senior Secondary level, or

b) If not a school, it could an NGO/Registered Society of national repute, engaged in the education of the children with special needs and in philanthropic activities getting a grant from the Government. Such institutes should have recognition and accreditation with the Rehabilitation Council of India for running training programmes and allied services in their respective areas of disability and objectives of the institution.

Once accepted as a partner, the Accredited Institution functions as a Study Centre of NIOS. Accordingly, at NIOS the terms Accredited Institution and Study Centre are used interchangeably.

2.3.3   Personnel at Accredited Institutions

An Accredited Institution (AI) is normally authorised to associates the following personnel for NIOS related administrative and academic work to be carried out at the AI concerned:

i)   Principal/Vice-Principal as Coordinator

ii)   Sr. Teacher/ Assistant/Clerk as Assistant Coordinator

iii)   Peon as Helper

iv)   Subject teachers as PCP Tutors

2.3.4   Functions of Accredited Institutions

An Accredited Institution is the most important component of the open schooling system at the field level. It is required to perform the following academic and administrative functions:

(a) Academic Functions

The academic functions of an AI are to:

- facilitate the academic and practical work of NIOS learners registered at the AI (study centre):

- provide guidance and counselling to the learners particularly at the time of admission, during PCPs and for examinations;

- arrange orientation programmes for the learners to apprise them of the unique features of NIOS;

- arrange for the orientation of teachers and other staff engaged in the NIOS activities at the AI concerned;

- prepare a timetable and organise sessions for Personal Contact Programmes as per a set schedule on Saturdays, Sundays and/or holidays.

- facilitate and arrange practical classes for subjects involving practical work by making laboratory facilities available to the learners;

- provide library facilities to the learners for reference work;

- make available the audio-visual aids provided to the AI concerned by NIOS for its learners ;

- ensure that the teachers of the AI concerned undertake continuous and comprehensive evaluation of the Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) and provide constructive feedback to the learners;

- prepare the learners for examinations;

- provide feedback to NIOS regarding the improvements required in the study materials, learner performance and other related academic matters.

- develop life skills among the learners by organising appropriate activities and through PCPs (see Module 5 on 'Life Skills for Open School Learners').

(b) Administrative Functions

The administrative functions of an AI are to:

- publicise the various courses and the related subjects offered by the NIOS;

- sell the NIOS Prospectus to the prospective learners and public in general;

- register learners for NIOS courses/subjects as per the rules/guidelines for admission laid down by NIOS;

- receive the prescribed fee for admission by way of cash/Bank Draft and remit it to the headquarters;

- open a Joint Savings Bank Account in the names of the Coordinator concerned and one more signatory from amongst the senior staff of the Accredited Institution concerned in order to credit all receipts therein, and subsequently at the end of the admission session send the entire amount in the form of just one Bank Draft in favour of Secretary, NIOS;

- maintain complete record of registrants, duplicate copies of the admission forms, etc;

- receive study materials from NIOS and keep a proper record of all the receipts;

- distribute the study material among the learners, without charging them any service charges, ensure that adequate and the right type of material is available at the Study Centre and keep a proper record of the study material issued to the learners;

- inform learners about the important dates and the schedule for the payment of fees, etc. like the last date for the submission of application forms, and registration dates for appearing at the examinations;

- receive the Identity Cards from NIOS and issue them to the learners;

- receive examination fee and remit it to NIOS by means of a single Bank Draft;

- issue receipts to learners for all the payments received from them;

- maintain stock of materials, equipment and other items supplied by NIOS or purchased/acquired by the study centre concerned out of the funds authorised by NIOS;

- issue date sheets, marks-sheets and certificates to the learners and maintain their complete record;

- maintain the attendance record of the teachers and the learners attending PCPs;

- provide a separate Notice Board for NIOS learners, where the timetable, date-sheet and other important information pertaining to NIOS activities is displayed;

- put up a board outside the institution, displaying it as a *study centre* of NIOS with the Code Number of Accreditation for the information of the public; and

- liaise between NIOS and the learners in order to ensure proper functioning of the study centre concerned.

2.3.5 Financial Assistance

For certain essential services provided to the learners, NIOS makes a grant to each AI for various activities, such as

i. the token payments for the core staff engaged during the conduct of Personal Contract Programmes (PCPs),

ii. payments for PCP tutors,

iii. contingent expenditure, etc.

Once an institution is accredited, it is obligatory for it to follow the norms and criteria laid down by NIOS for utilising the financial assistance given to the AI concerned. As NIOS and AIs work on the principle of sharing the available resources at the AIs that function as study centres, there is no other financial implication in this regard.

2.3.6 Do's and Don'ts for Accredited Institutions

Though an AI is a very important component of the NIOS for providing field level support services, there are certain limitations that it must take note of and honour in its day today operations. Some of the limitations are listed below:

- The Coordinator as well as the teaching staff of AIs belong to the formal systems of education. Therefore, they may not be well versed with the concept or the philosophy of and the operations pertaining to the open distance schooling system.

- Unlike the students in a formal classroom, who have homogeneous characteristics and more or less similar needs, the NIOS students have diverse characteristics and varied needs. It is, therefore, natural that the teachers used to formal school situations may find it difficult to properly tutor and take care of the heterogeneous learners of NIOS.

- In comparison with the NIOS learners at an AI, the AI concerned is likely to give higher priority to its own day-time students.

In such a scenario, there are certain things/activities that AIs must definitely do and certain others which they should avoid consciously. Here is a list of what they should and should not do:

Table 2.2 : Do's and Don'ts for AIs

Do's	Don'ts
• Provide the necessary academic and administrative support to the learners as per the schedules/norms fixed by NIOS.	• Do not over charge the learners (e.g. by demanding or accepting extra money from them towards service charges or for any other purpose), beyond the amount prescribed for fee by NIOS.
• Distribute the study material supplied by NIOS to the learners in a timely fashion.	• Do not charge additional money for distributing the NIOS study materials among the learners.
• Maintain proper record of financial transactions and stocks issued by NIOS.	• Do not commit financial irregularities relating to NIOS funds, such as spending NIOS funds for purposes other than those laid down by NIOS.
• Provide all the required physical facilities to NIOS learners.	• Do not refuse to provide building and staff facilities for the conduct of NIOS Examinations.
• Exercise adequate supervision of the Examination Centre to check the use of any unfair means, such as mass copying, etc., during examinations at the centre.	
• Fulfil the conditions of partnership as spelt out in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) executed with NIOS.	
• Be courteous to the learners at all times.	

Check your Understanding - 2.2

1. At present, NIOS has a policy of accrediting the existing and appropriately affiliated schools as its study centre. Why should NIOS not go for affiliating schools as CBSE or State Boards of Education do?

2. Interact with the tutors, NIOS learners and other functionaries of AIs associated with the activities of NIOS and find out the areas which need to be strengthened for making support services more effective at the field level.

3. As an officers working at an AI, you must be aware of the problems being faced by NIOS learners at your AI. List at least five such problems that are not listed in the Module.

2.4 Support Services at the Regional Centre Level

2.4.1 Need for Regional Centres

One of the requirements recorded among the Rules and Regulations in *the Memorandum of Association of the National Open School Society* is that NIOS will "Establish Regional Centres for the purpose of supervising the proper functioning of the learner support at study centres". The success of NIOS programmes and policies in a Region depends largely on the pivotal role played by the Regional Centre concerned. NIOS Regional Centres provide a vital and effective link between the study centres on the one hand and NIOS headquarters on the other, and also between the respective State Governments and the NIOS headquarters.

Till 1994-95, NIOS followed a two-tier system comprising the NIOS Headquarters at New Delhi as the first tier and AIs spread all over the country as the second tier. By the mid 1990s, it became obvious that the then existing two-tier system needed to be revamped in order to provide better learner support, counselling and effective attention to their problems through a more decentralised mechanism. As a result, it was decided to transform the two-tier system into a three-tier system by introducing one more tier between the then existing two tiers. This additional tier appeared in the form of Regional Centres, the first of which was established at Kolkata in 1994-95. It was followed by one each at Hyderabad, Guwahati, Pune, Kochi, Chandigarh, Patna, Jaipur, Allahabad, Delhi and Bhopal. Besides, two Sub-regional Centres were established at Dehradun and Bhubneshwar.

2.4.2 Functions of Regional Centres (RCs)

The Regional Centres are required to perform four types of activities primarily. They are:

* Academic

* Administrative

* Promotional

* Planning and Monitoring

A brief description of each of these functions is given below:

(a) Academic Functions

    i.   Developing need based instructional materials and training packages especially in regional languages;.

    ii.   Developing and disseminating audio and video programmes in Regional languages;

    iii.   Organizing short-term training programmes for open school functionaries;

    iv.   Conducting follow up studies of NIOS pass outs and compiling success stories;

    v.   Arranging lectures, exhibitions and other academic programmes for the benefit of NIOS learners;

    vi.   Holding periodic meetings of Coordinators, Examination Centre Superintendents and Academic Facilitators to look into the issues that need to be resolved; and

vii. Conducting research in the process and products of the open schooling system and collecting feedback on the functioning of AIs/RCs/NIOS.

(b)   Administrative Functions

i. *Admission related activities,* such as the sale of NIOS Prospectus, fee realization, entry of admission data, checking admission data, issue check lists to AIs, issue of identity cards, checking and verification of Transfer of Credits (TOC) cases and forwarding the same to HQs, change of subjects and taking additional subjects;

ii. Keeping the learners' admission and examination records safe for five years;

iii. *Examination related activities,* such as fee realization, fixation of examination centres, issuing Hall Tickets to learners, receipt of answer books, secrecy work for evaluation, spot evaluation of answer books, sending awards to HQs, re-evaluation of answer books, etc.

iv. Appointing nodal officers, observers and inspection teams;

v. ensuring proper conduct of NIOS Examinations, consolidating observers reports, taking follow up action and verifying the examination related bills;

vi. Maintaining Secretary's and Regional Directors' Accounts;

vii. Attending to matters relating to public relations and learner grievances;

viii. Ensuring that TMAs are attempted by learners and evaluated by tutors at the AIs;

ix. Forwarding TMA awards and bills to the Department of Student Support Services as per the set schedule and maintaining the related records at RCs; and.

x. Carrying out the mandatory checking of the 5% sample TMAs received from AIs.

(c)   Promotional Functions

i. Identifying reputed schools/institutions to work as study centres;

ii. *Accreditation related work,* such as inspection of schools/institutions for accreditation, interaction with study centres, matters related to de-accreditation of study centres, etc;

iii. Issuing advertisements regarding admissions, examinations and publicising NIOS programmes;

iv. Liaising with the related State Governments to encourage them to start State Open Schools;

v. Identifying the educational needs specific to the open schooling system in the region concerned through the State Coordination Committees;

vi. Promoting the Open Schooling system in the related States and providing consultancy/assistance to those States for setting up/up-scaling State Open Schools (SOSs); and

vii. Organizing advocacy programmes to promote open distance learning system as a viable and effective system of education and training.

(d)   Planning And Monitoring Functions

i.   Preparing the Perspective Plan and Annual Plans of the Regional Centre concerned;

ii.   Implementing and monitoring the NIOS programmes in the accredited institutions including Personal Contract Programmes (PCPs) and the handling of Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA);

iii. Identifying Academic Facilitators for appointment and allotting AIs to them when they are appointed;

iv.   Attending to matters relating to academic facilitation as effected by Academic Facilitators at various study centres;

v.   Coordinating and clearing house functions;

vi.   Maintaining databases of admissions, AIs, Resource Persons for monitoring and academic facilitation at the RC level;

vii. Analysing the reports of the Academic Facilitators and preparing consolidated quarterly reports for immediate and long-term actions and forwarding such reports to the HQs; and

viii. Ensuring smooth functioning of AIs/AVIs/OBE centres.

2.4.3 NIOS-RC-AI Relationship

The NIOS Headquarters, Regional Centres and the Accredited Institutions are the integrated components of the chain of support services designed for NIOS learners. Different departments of NIOS plan various programmes, make policies, and design standard operating procedures. Regional Centres with the help of Accredited Institutions implement these programmes at the field level for reaching the un-reached. As per the guidelines, the RCs identify reputed schools/institutions to work as study centres. The Headquarters grants accreditation to the deserving schools/institutions for them to impart field level support services to NIOS learners on behalf of NIOS. The Regional Centres provide various types of support, instructions, and guidance to the AIs from time to time and also supervise their functioning.
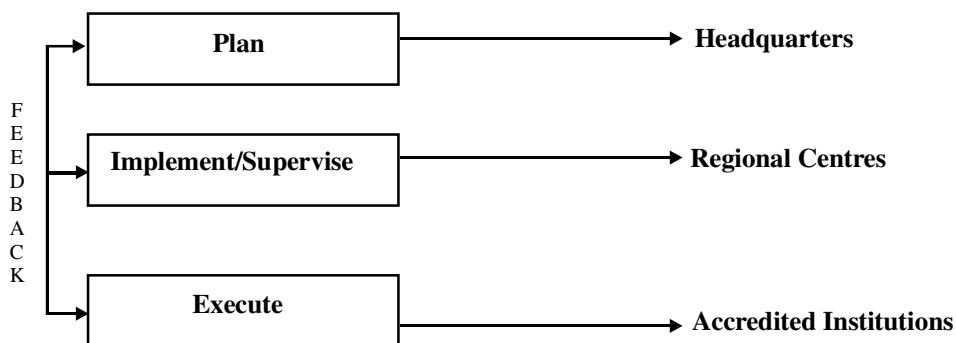
All the three tiers of the NIOS open schooling system are equally important and with mutual interaction and cooperation their relationship becomes stronger and their common goal achievable.

Check your Understanding -2.3

1.   What should be the role of AIs in the process of planning the NIOS programmes and in preparing policies for the implementation of such programmes?

2.   NIOS with the help of its Regional Centres and AIs implements learner support for its programmes. List the academic problems faced by the NIOS learners and suggest viable solutions.

2.5 Monitoring of Support Services and Academic Facilitation

2.5.1 Need for Monitoring and Academic Facilitation

Open school learners encounter various types of problem, such as the lack of information about courses/subjects on offer, admission time and procedure, place where to contact the authorities concerned, examination procedure, etc., because of which certain targeted groups of learners are deprived of the opportunity of learning. Distance learners require not only professional guidance in their studies, but also live human support to deal with their problems.

The teachers/tutors who provide academic support through Personal Contact Programmes (PCPs) to solve the difficulties of NIOS learners are drawn from the formal system of education. Normally, they transact the NIOS curriculum in PCPs the way they practice teaching in the formal system. To overcome this difficulty, these teachers/tutors need to be oriented to appreciate the philosophy of open learning and trained in managing and helping distance learners, so that they effectively support them to pursue their studies.

Further, in order to ensure proper implementation of NIOS policies and programmes and thus assure the quality and effectiveness of support services, it is necessary to monitor the functioning of the AIs regularly. To achieve this objective, NIOS has created a cadre of Academic Facilitators for each Regional Centre, who are charged with the following responsibilities:

•   to support the teachers/tutors and the learners at AIs in achieving their respective objectives;

•   to respond to learners' needs and grievances and to extend help in resolving their problems;

•   to build a systematic channel of communication among the NIOS, Regional Centre concerned and the related AIs; and

•   to provide feedback to the Regional Office concerned and the NIOS Headquarters about the actual practices at AIs and the problems faced by the learners there with the sole purpose of bringing about improvements in NIOS operations to serve the learners better.

2.5.2 Academic Facilitators (AFs) and their Functions

As seen by NIOS, Academic Facilitation is a process that provides sustained improvements in the functioning of Regional Centres (RCs) and AIs and also in the levels of interaction among the Headquarters at New Delhi, RCs and AIs. Such facilitation is carried out by the personnel known as Academic Facilitators, who have rich experience and suitable expertise in academic activities and educational administration, which they use in the field as they keep moving between the RC concerned and the related AIs. Each Academic

Facilitator is assigned the responsibility of facilitating and monitoring the working of a few AIs overseen by the RC he/she is associated with. With the help of the Academic Facilitators, guidance and support is extended not only to the AIs but also to the learners registered at the AIs. Undoubtedly, the Academic Facilitators function as an important link between NIOS, AIs and the learners and thus their activities help in promoting greater interaction between the providers and the beneficiaries.

The important functions of the Academic Facilitators (AFs) are as follows:

- To monitor the admission process with a view to ensure that there is no discrimination and other irregularities like overcharging fees etc ;

- To ensure that learners are adequately counselled to make the right choice of subjects;

- To check that AIs receive the complete set of study materials in time and that they are distributed to the learners in a timely fashion;

- To observe the conduct of PCPs at AIs, interact with learners and teachers/tutors and impress upon them the relevance of interactive learning strategies and the importance of self-study;

- To find out whether the requisite number of assignments are given to the learners and whether the responses are assessed properly and then returned to learners in good time for them to benefit from the comments written by the tutors;

- To check whether the audio and video materials supplied by NIOS are being used during PCPs purposefully;

- To provide feedback to NIOS on the training needs of the teachers/tutors, Coordinators and the other personnel involved in NIOS activities at AIs;

- To review the records maintained by the AIs regarding NIOS learners, teachers/tutors etc and advise the Coordinator about their proper maintenance;

- To interact with the learners and provide them help in solving their problems pertaining to TMAs, PCPs, tutorials, examinations, etc;

- To understand the problems and difficulties, if any, of AIs, provide them locally relevant help and send the related feedback to the Regional Center concerned and NIOS Headquarters in order to sustain effective functioning of AIs;

- To provide up to date information about admissions, examinations date sheets, etc to the learners and AIs;

- To take feedback from a sample of learners and parents to obtain a realistic picture of the implementation and working of NIOS programmes at AIs; and

- To continuously liaise with NIOS to be up-to-date with regard to the latest amendments in the rules and regulations for admissions, PCPs, TMAs, examinations, certificates, etc.

Thus, the Academic Facilitators constitute an important link between NIOS and AIs. This link is not only necessary but also crucial for making the process of teaching-learning effective and the functioning of AIs

smooth right from the time of admissions to that of examinations ensuring quality in the services provided to the NIOS learners.

AFs' schedule of visit to AIs

Academic Facilitators are required to visit the allotted AIs in consultation with the Regional Centre concerned according to the following scheme:

    i.   twice during the Admission Time (once in middle of the session/period and once at its end);

    ii.   three times during Personal Contact Programmes allowing intervals of 10-12 PCP sessions kin between; and

    iii.   twice during Examinations (once in Oct-Nov and once in March-April).

The total number of visits in an academic year may not exceed *seven*.

Each Academic Facilitator, after he/she completes a visit, is required to send a detailed facilitation/monitoring feedback report along with the corresponding Honorarium Bill to the Regional Centre concerned for further necessary action. The said bill is cleared by the Regional Director concerned.

2.6 Let us Sum Up

Besides appreciating the importance of students support services in the open and distance learning system and the need for it, you have also learnt that NIOS is providing three-tier support services to its learners. The three-tier support system includes the Headquarters Level, the Regional Centre Level and the Field Level comprising a network of Accredited Institutions. The said support services are provided from the pre-admission stage to the post-examination stage. Regional Centres supervise and monitor the functioning of AIs for the effective implementation of NIOS policies and programmes. Experienced educationists, as Academic Facilitators, facilitate improvements in the functioning of Regional Centres and collectively they also function as an important link between NIOS and AIs to strengthen interaction between them and thus make the functioning of AIs smooth, effective and efficient.

2.7 Terminal Questions

1. Offer suggestions for improving the student support services provided by NIOS at different stages.

2. At present, NIOS is following a three-tier model of student support services as discussed in this module. Could you suggest a better and more effective model of student support services that can work in the Indian context?

3. What steps may be taken by NIOS to strengthen the NIOS-AI relationship for the effective and quality implementation of NIOS programmes at AIs?

4. In the present age of Information and Communication Technology, how can we make use of ICT for faster and effective support services to the NIOS learners?

5. List the shortcomings of the present monitoring mechanism, as used by NIOS, and give your suggestions for improving it.

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