

## Executive Summary

# Evaluation Report Top Class Education for SC Students



Submitted to  
**Department of Social Justice & Empowerment,  
Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment,  
Govt. of India**

Submitted by



National Productivity Council

**National Productivity Council  
New Delhi**

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***(Study Team)***

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## Executive Summary

### **1. Background**

In view of the social deprivation of the Scheduled castes of the society, Department of Social Justice & Empowerment has been introducing various types of scholarships schemes in order to support them financially and open avenues for building better future. The role of scholarship is very important not only for educational development but also economic and social developments. In view of the aspirations of the students belonging to this category, Government had introduced scheme on “Top Class Education for SC Students” in order to minimize the financial hardship involved in perusing such courses. This scheme “*Top Class Education for SC Students*” was approved in 2007 and was subsequently revised in January, 2012; June 2016 and in October 2018 to cover more institutions with an increased number of slots. The revised scheme is applicable from the academic session 2018-19. Now 220 institutes including IITs, NITs, IIITs, IIMs, NIFTs, NLUs, AIIMS, hotel management institutes, aviation training institutes and flying training institutes are empanelled with the Scheme. In this context; Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has entrusted an evaluation study to National Productivity council on “*Top Class Education for SC Students*”.

As per ToR, the coverage of sample was proposed to be 532 spread across 25 institutes. However, during the visits to respective institutes, there was lot of variation in the number of slots allotted, proposed sample vis-à-vis number of actual beneficiaries available. On physical visit and verification of the documents made available from respective institutes, the cumulative **number of students as per lists provided by Institutes is 315 out of which 253 (80.31%) have been covered under the study.** Attempt was made to cover all the available students however, as the study period coincided with the semester exams for many institutes, placement for few and then later with COVID-19 pandemic fear many students had left for respective homes. Overall 249 beneficiary students, 50 Institute functionaries have been covered for having discussions/interviews on the scheme.



## 2. Sample Analysis

<b>2.1 Number of Institutes Covered</b>	Govt.: 21	Pvt.: 4	Overall: 25
<b>2.2 Number of Beneficiary Covered</b>	Male: 222	Female: 27	Overall: 249
<b>2.3 Number of Students who got scholarship:</b>	148		
<b>2.4 Source of Information about Scheme</b>			
Institute – 74.2%; Friends- 13.65%; Social Media- 10.04%; Newspaper- 2.0%			
<b>2.5 Score Given by Students with regards to quality of education</b>	8.69 out of 10		

## 3. Observation & Recommendations

### 3.1 Awareness about Scheme

During discussions with the beneficiary students and the nodal officers of the Institutes, it was observed that in general there was lack of proper awareness about various provisions and guidelines under the scheme. It has been observed that there are information gaps not only among the beneficiaries but also at the level of implementing institutions. With limited communication with Ministry officials and poor responses from help lines & grievance readdressal systems, the nodal officers sometimes were clueless for problems raised by students. At beneficiary student level, the awareness level was poor. Although, institutions are taking up publicity & awareness at their level through display on notice boards, notices on websites, Notice Boards of Institutes; **a common guideline can be suggested for following uniformly among all the institutes. It is suggested that Ministry may undertake Annual Meetings/ inviting the nodal officer of all the Notified Institutes covered under the scheme just before start of each session so that there is uniformity in understanding about the scheme and expectations from the Ministry.**

Explicit instructions may be made to all the institutes each year along with the guidelines **Further, it is also suggested that at Ministry level also wider publicity through various forms of Media both print & electronic may be undertaken.**

With regards to number of allotted slots, it was informed that all the Govt. Institutes which participated under the scheme were well aware about the notifications. In most of the institutes, Dean (Students Welfare) was nodal officer for the scheme and they had knowledge as well as understanding about the scheme & guidelines. However, in many instances the applicant of a particular year does not receive the scholarship of the following year, despite the fact that they had received the

scholarship in the previous year. In such cases the institutes advised students to reapply. This was creating confusions w.r.t. the slots and the applications submitted. In case of private institutes which have not been participating under the scheme; they had very little awareness about the scheme.

### **3.2 Selection of students**

As per the guidelines; those SC students who have secured admission in the notified institutions according to the norms prescribed by the respective institutions are eligible for the scholarship under the scheme to the extent of the number of scholarships allocated to the institutes concerned. **All the institutes covered under the study have confirmed for following the said procedures.** . The female participation in the scheme has been poor however it is not related to the scheme per se but due to in general poor enrolment of female students. No prejudice was reported by the students or the institutes. The process of application is by and large transparent and only apprehensions are there once the applications are submitted to the Ministry. All the institutes confirmed of strict adherence to the guidelines prescribed by the Ministry in processing the applications received for scholarship.

Further under the guidelines, it has also been clarified that in case, the institute finds that the number of eligible candidates in the 1st year are less than the number of scholarships allotted to it, the balance scholarships may be offered to students studying in 2nd, 3rd and 4th year, etc. on the basis of inter-se merit of previous year's results giving priority to those with higher number of Years left to complete their respective course i.e. 1st Year student is to get priority over the 2nd year students and so on. However, under these criteria, only few institutes confirmed for allotment of seats either due to less awareness or lack of pro-activeness in filling the seats. It has been observed that there are seats lying vacant for want of applications. **It is suggested that Ministry may instruct institutes to ensure filling of all the seats so that the available benefits are fully utilized.**

Further, it is suggested that apart from merit of the students; **the economic capabilities of students family may also considered as additional criteria while selecting students for award of scholarships.** It is suggested that the apart

from merit, **weightages may also be given to the annual family income** in deciding upon the final selected list of students.

### **3.3 Submission of Application**

The current process of enrolment into the scholarship program requires the students to apply online along with all necessary documents which is first verified at the institute level and then forwarded to the Ministry for their approval. However, it may be noted that before the Ministry level approval, the institute is required to send all the hard copies of the application and the documents of the students to the Ministry, failing which the application may be rejected. This creates undue delay and makes the process lengthy. It is suggested that efforts might be made to make the process fully online. Submission of hard copy of document need to be waved off as it will expedite the process of selection of scholarship.

### **3.4 Decision time for scholarship**

**The time gap between the submission of application and receipt of scholarship is too high.** In some cases, students have not received their scholarship even after completion of course. This forces the students to go for education loan to meet the course related expenses. This however defeats the entire objective of offering the scholarship as the students who are from economically weaker background have to take the burden of paying interest to the banks. Further, as per the guidelines, only one application can be forwarded and due to delay in processing; the other remaining scholarship options gets closed as all other scholarship deadlines also gets missed by the time decision is taken. It has been informed by some of the students that due to **delay in decisions, they have not been able to avail any scholarship.** All nodal officers informed that they follow timelines provided in SoP. Only in one instance for NIT, Shillong it was informed that they had missed the deadline due to oversight. However, they had taken permission from the Ministry and sent the applications at a later date.

It is suggested that **shrinking of timeline of having the final decision and its adherence** would be highly beneficial for the students. While the scheme has a detailed guideline, it is felt that Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) specifying timelines for different activities related to scholarship. In the above mentioned scenario the whole process needs to be studied carefully to find ways to reduce the

time for approval of application. Alternatively, the possibilities of issuing a sanction letter to the institute against the approved scholarship cases may be explored. This letter may be availed by the students to seek extension waiver of the term fees or extension of time for remitting the term fees.

Further, with regards to verification of fee of the student before forwarding the application on NSP; it was informed that every year the students face difficulties during the renewal of scholarship in the subsequent year. As such many students who had already registered in the first year reapply in the subsequent year as sometimes the renewal process is not successful. Further, some institutes had allowed more number of applications that allotted slots as they were not sure how many applications would be acceptable to Ministry. The intention of institutes was to not miss on the allotted number of slots provided to them.

### **3.5 Delay or Non receipt of benefits**

It has been noted that there is delay in receipt of scholarships. Further, **disbursement of scholarship is irregular and delayed beyond academic years.** There were instances wherein the students haven't received the scholarship benefits viz. laptops even in final semester although they have been enrolled under the scheme in very first year. The institute attributed the delay to late/non-release of funds by the Ministry/State Government during the year. Thus, absence of timelines for both receipt and processing of applications resulted in delay in disbursement of scholarships to the eligible beneficiaries. **Undue delay in disbursal of benefits to eligible beneficiaries causes financial hardship to the genuine needy students.** In all the cases, the students were applying for loans in anticipation of the loans to get sanctioned and disbursed. The scheme guidelines did not prescribe any timelines for processing, sanction and disbursal of scholarship. **Ministry may consider issuing timelines and fix accountability for processing, sanction and disbursal of scholarship.**

With regards to **purchase of Laptops** , the institutions notified under the scheme have been adopting following measure:

- A student purchases laptop and present bill/invoice/voucher for reimbursement

- Institute purchases laptops directly and submits for reimbursement with Ministry

It is suggested that Ministry may relax the norm for adopting any of the processes but may instruct the institute that the laptops should be made available at the earliest. It has been observed in some of the institutes that even though the scholarship was sanctioned in first year for engineering students, they are still waiting for laptop during their last year. This defeats the whole purpose of having provision of laptop which was supposed to be used during the course. It is suggested that Ministry may issue strict guidelines for ensuring availability of laptops and accessories during the first year itself.

### **3.6 Resolving Issues related to National Scholarship Portal**

The transition to the online system from manual system of application for scholarship has not been smooth. The students who were sanctioned scholarship before online system have not been able to renew scholarship due to lack of proper communication & guidance. Some of the students raised concern that NSP portal does not allow the students to make any changes or upload any documents after they submit their application. The same problem is also being faced by the Nodal Officer after an error is being detected or found that the information is incomplete. The correction cannot be made even if it is within the purview of the Nodal Officer.

**There is serious need for addressing the portal related issues which can be resolved having stakeholder's workshops with objective to then tweaking the portal to accommodate the requirements. It is important that the portal which should be acting as facilitation for reliving the manual processing shouldn't itself start creating huddles.**

It is suggested that Ministry may take this on **priority, as with improvement of portal functioning, many of the concerns raised by the institutes and beneficiaries would automatically get resolved.** The best practices for efficient functioning of the scheme can be adopted from other similar operational portal like portal of Ministry of Tribal Affairs of Government or private institutions.

### **3.7 Renewal of Scholarships through portal**

Majority of students conveyed that the filing of online applications had some glitches. Especially, in case of renewal student's login was denied resulting in creation of fresh application which was again in conflict to the prescribed guidelines. As per student's feedback, there are issues in renewing scholarship in second year using the same application ID and most of them end up applying as fresh or withdraw from the scheme. There was lot of confusion among the students during this period due to which many could not renew scholarships. All the institutes were also aware about the same but were clueless in absence on any explicit directive from the Department. NPC team feels that there **needs to be smooth communication channel between Ministry and the institute's nodal officer so that confusions/queries can be addressed timely so that no one suffers.**

### **3.8 Grievance Redressal Mechanism**

#### **a) Institute Level**

All the institutes had informed that they had put grievance redressal system in place by either allocating the responsibility to nodal officer/other related staff however they were not much helpful in resolving Ministry level issues. All the grievances received at the Institutes were forwarded to Ministry for necessary action and they had seldom got reply. Further, the grievances addressed by the nodal officer at the institute level, nothing was found to be recorded. Strengthening of grievance redressal cell at each institute is required done and proper instructions to be sent them by Ministries.

#### **b) Ministry Level**

As per feedback of the beneficiaries, the responses with regards to helplines and grievance redressal were poor. In case of Helplines, the waiting time for connecting call was as long as 30 minutes. Further, it was also slow paced and helpline were inadequate to address the concerns of the institutes and the beneficiary students. It is suggested that Ministry may consider strengthening the present grievance redressal /helpline systems so as to resolves the queries of the students then there itself.

### **3.9 Helpline Number**

As per feedback of the beneficiary students, Telephone helpline Number mentioned on the portal is not functioning properly and a lot of calls were being put on hold. It is suggested that, as The Telephone Helpline is the first and preferred communication channel, it needs to be adequately strengthened. It is suggested more nodes are been added along with increasing the working hours. Establishing an active helpline having a dedicated team to act on the student grievances may be explored. Further, training/orientation of helpline staff is also necessary in order to facilitate the process.

### **3.10 Coverage of other Professional courses**

Presently the allocation of number of scholarships has been capped for various institutes. However, due weightages can be given to the total number of admission seats available with the institute. This will enable coverage of more number of students. Rather than capping at number of seats, Ministry may consider capping percentage of total strength of students in respective institutes. Further, all the professional courses having good placement track may be considered for sanctioning of the scholarships.

### **3.11 Communication Gap**

Many times the institute is not aware about the payments being made to the students. Direct to Beneficiary Transfer (DBT) scheme of GOI is a good initiative but the information of fund transfer should also be intimated to institute. As the institute is directly communicating with Ministry for taking the scholarships hence for all the communication pertaining to scholarship; institute may be kept in loop.

### **3.12 Non-participation of Private Institutions**

Among the sample suggested for the study, four Private institutions were covered under the study. However; three institutes namely BITS Pilani, CMC Vellore & SDM College of Medical Science & hospital, Dharwad have indicated that they have no beneficiaries in last 5 years. As per the guidelines, these institutes have been notified and allotted seats. The institutes claim that they have not received any application under this scheme from students. These institutes have their own scholarships schemes based on merit/need based and same is being awarded to

eligible students. During the course of study, it was felt that these institutes do not have much awareness about the scheme. They seemed to be totally unaware that they have been notified under the scheme and they also need to propagate the scheme. It is suggested that if this scheme is to be implemented in private institutions, they need to be separately sensitised.

### 3.13 Diversion of Students to State Scholarship Schemes

During discussion with the institutes and beneficiary students, it was revealed that many the of students have opted for State Scholarships schemes as they also had similar provision of assistance and **their processing was faster than the Central assisted scheme. Due to poor feedback from some of the senior students, some students didn't opt for this scheme.**

## 4. General Suggestions

- **Active Point of Contact from Ministry:** Emails/queries sent to scd1.msje@gmail.com are not responsive. An active point of contact is required to quickly resolve issues.
- **Pre Approved Scholarship:** Since the process of approval of scholarship takes quite a bit of time, a way of completing the administrative formalities may be thought of before the admission process starts at the institutes. An authorization letter may be issued to the successful candidates which may be used by the students to seek waiver of term fees.
- **Increase in living expenses:** In most of the institutes, the cost of living expenses along with hostel and mess charges are far higher than the scholarship amount which is approximately ₹26,000 /- per year while the actual expenses can be as high as ₹1,27,000 /- per year. In this scenario, Boarding and Lodging charges provided by Ministry per year are not sufficient to meet the hostel fees at our institute. It is recommended that the ministry might look into increasing this scholarship amount. Further, an bi-annual assessment can be made with regards to expenditure being incurred and accordingly the living expenses can be capped.
- Timely communication to the institutions regarding scheme guidelines, and sanction orders through emails.



- Allocation of dedicated manpower for being contact person for all the institutes would be very helpful.
- Letter related to call for fresh scholarship proposal is most of the time received late from the concerned department. This allows less time to the student to fill in the details and submission of forms.

## 5. Conclusion

Needless to mention, the scheme on “Top Class Education for SC Students” has been meeting its objectives to a large extent. It has reached the deprived section of the society and reduced the financial burden of poor parents; enabled a large proportion of beneficiaries to stay through their course; improved their performance levels; and more significantly raised their aspirations for bringing change in their society. It can be safely said that this scheme has been contributing towards empowerment of the Scheduled Castes through education and greater future prospects.

The success of a scholarship schemes does not merely lie in constitution but also in its effective administrative implementation. As per the key stakeholders, there has been good improvement in disbursement compared to previous batches there was in general a good response from the students on the scholarship program.

At the same time, the feedback received from various stakeholders can be referred for strengthening the scheme further for making it more accessible, transparent and effective. To conclude the major areas which need immediate attention are as following:

1. Timelines and fix accountability for processing, sanction and disbursal of scholarship so as to avoid undue delay.
2. Project Division detailed study for system and procedure improvement (Restructuring exercise)
3. Portal to be improved to made it work precisely.
4. Students Helpline
5. Restructuring of Grievance Redressal Cell
6. Issue of Guidelines for uniform execution of publicity activities at Institute level
7. Annual Meetings/ inviting the nodal officer of all the Top Class Institutes covered under the scheme just before each session so that all the provisions under the scheme are uniformly understood.
8. Ministry level wider publicity through various forms of Media both print & electronic may be undertaken.

