UNIT 6 PUBLIC RELATIONS IN EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

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6.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is meant to give you an insight into the functioning and set-up of our educational system as also the various challenges a PR person is likely to face in this field. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the growth and development of education in India in general;
- list the various institutions which are the regulating bodies of our educational system;
- enumerate the tasks and contributions of these institutions in the field of education;
- discuss the pressures on the educational sector and the role of government in promoting the cause of education;
- explain the need for campaign approach in education;
- point out the role and scope of a PR practitioner in bringing out a better understanding between our educational institution and its publics; and
- examine the role of public relations in the promotion of the cause of education.
discuss the present status of PR in education and the outlook for the future.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier units of this block, you have familiarised yourself with the tasks and functions of PR department in the government at central, state and local levels. You have also seen the scope of PR in business and industry both in the public sector as well as in the private sector. The role played by PR in the voluntary organisation has also been examined. We will now turn our attention to what PR can achieve in the educational sector.

The destiny of a nation is shaped in its classrooms—this was aptly pointed out by the Kothari Commission in 1964. This proves that the inputs in education are important to develop our human resources which are the major assets of a nation. This is why education was accorded a high priority by the framers of our constitution making primary education a fundamental right of every child. The government has also taken care to make special provisions for the upliftment of the backward sectors of our society. Some of these constitutional objectives have not yet been achieved for many reasons.

However these provisions have made the educational sector, very much accountable to the society at large. In view of this, the role of Public Relations in relating the constitutional objectives to the hopes and aspirations of the people, through effective action, becomes highly significant. It is in this area that PR needs to justify its role in creating awareness about the various measures being taken by the different government, voluntary and private agencies in the field of education. This does not remain at the awareness level but goes beyond into the policy formulation and implementation.

Therefore, let us look into the role of PR in the educational sector. A quick wide look and an analysis of the situation of education in India should make the picture clearer.

6.2 EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

Education as a sector has been under constant pressure in India and this phenomena is not unique to this country alone. It is a common phenomenon in the developing countries of the world. As a result, education has been and will continue to be under constant restructuring in order to keep pace with the changing need of the society.

Several committees and commissions have over the years studied the problems of education and suggested remedial action. In India, during the last five decades there have been at least two significant steps taken on education reform—the Sergent Plan (1944) and the Education Commission Report (1965). Recently, another detailed review of the education developments and policies was made. It culminated in the Indian Parliament passing the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986. This policy was later reviewed and today we have a revised policy with modifications undertaken in 1992. It is now well recognised that education is an essential input for human resource development. It hardly needs a thesis to establish the crucial role played by human resources in the development of nations.

It is also accepted that education does not exist in a vacuum, since several factors impinge on it. If any educational policy or programme is to be implemented successfully, it should be acceptable to the people. It should answer their needs and aspirations. Institutions should be within the reach of people. There should be political will to support education. There should be people to work for it and above all there should be enough funds for the system to work. In a democratic country like India, it is also necessary that, whatever policies or programmes are sought to be implemented these should conform to the law of the land. It is common knowledge that a judicial view of education has also played a crucial role in the implementation of educational programmes in India.

If one were to look at the progress made by the country in the field of education, one is bound to be struck by its phenomenal growth. Yet one is also bound to be disappointed by the magnitude of tasks yet to be achieved. For instance, when Sir John Sergent in 1944 envisaged the attainment of the goal of free and compulsory basic education in the next 40 years, the proposition was at that time unacceptable to the nationalists. Today, even in 1993 we are nowhere near achieving universal elementary education. It is a fact, however, that in the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution (1950), we had made a solemn resolve to provide free and compulsory education within ten years, for all children up to the
population growth, the value of education not having been appreciated by several parents, due to poverty; problems of special groups like scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, female children; generally unsuitable curriculum; and the lack of basic facilities in schools.

6.2.1 School Education

Today, we have about 5.5 lakh primary schools, 1.4 lakh middle schools and more than 50,000 secondary schools and over 15,000 higher secondary schools in the country. But that is only one part of the story. Though a majority of children get enrolled in Class I to begin with, they start dropping out from the next year onwards, accounting for a sizeable percentage of dropouts, at the end of the primary stage. It is said that India has one of the highest “dropout” rates in the world, particularly in the primary education sector.

6.2.2 Secondary and Higher Secondary Education

As for enrolment of children in the school sector, it is just over one crore at the secondary stage as compared to the eight crore children at the beginning of the primary stage. When one looks at the higher secondary stage the enrolment further dwindles down to 35 lakh children or so in the 15,000 and odd higher secondary schools in the country.

As has been mentioned earlier education up to the age of 14, which broadly corresponds to the middle school stage is free and compulsory to all students. The recent Supreme Court judgment has reinforced this concept by declaring education to be a fundamental right of every child. The next two stages—the secondary and the higher secondary—are optional. Schooling to the secondary stage is called 'general education'. And the term 'secondary education' also connotes that all subjects are compulsory to all students. The basic educational philosophy behind this is that a student who completes general education (and he should be normally 16 years of age by that time) should be in a position to enter life (if he so desires) having had a basic grounding.

The next stage viz., the higher secondary stage is again optional and the reference is to classes XI and XII. (It is also popularly called the plus two stage). At this stage the student has an option either to go in for the academic stream leading him to higher education at the University, or go over to the vocational stream of education. The vocational stream, which is a part of the school system, aims at preparing students for middle level vocational occupations. Vocationalisation of higher secondary education was first recommended by the Education Commission in 1966 and this concept was reinforced by NPE 1986. It has now been taken up as a centrally sponsored scheme and the ultimate effort is to divert at least 25 per cent of the student population at the stage to the vocational stream by the end of this century. Currently more than 150 vocational courses are being offered and today the system provides for diverting approximately 9.3 per cent students to the vocational stream.

6.2.3 Higher Education

In direct contrast to the school education sector, the number of universities in the country went up by leaps and bounds since Independence. Currently, there are 194 universities including deemed universities and similar institutions and 7,400 colleges. The student enrolment has touched the four million mark. There are about 57,000 teachers in the universities and over two lakh teachers in the college sector. The common criticism against this trend has been, that, the proliferation of universities in India was unplanned, resulting in dilution of standards. It was to coordinate and to determine standards in higher education, that the University Grants Commission (UGC) was set up in 1956. So phenomenal was the growth of the university sector in India, that until recently, a sizeable chunk of expenditure for education was directed to higher education. Critics argued that this was done at the cost of school education. It is also worth noting here that hardly four to five per cent of students of the relevant age group are enrolled for higher education.

Yet many students aimlessly pursue graduate studies as they have nothing else to do after schooling. This gives rise to social pressures and tensions, since many of the university products pursuing soft-option courses further raise the unemployment market. This is not to undermine the importance of universities in general. There are a number of universities in the country which compare very favourably with some of the best universities in any part of the world. Outstanding scholars of some of these universities have contributed to the development of the country.
Gandhiji on Education: Gandhiji believed that the aim of education was sarvodaya i.e. lead to a situation where there would be a non-exploitative and non-violent society which could ensure the welfare of all. In 'Harijan' of July 31, 1937, he defined this concept of education as:

"By education, I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in the child and man’s body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education not even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby men and woman can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education. I therefore begin the child’s education by teaching it a useful handicraft. I hold that the highest development of the mind and soul is possible under such a system of education."

Gandhiji’s views on women’s education were equally forthright. He believed — “Educate a woman and you educate an individual. Educate a woman and you educate a family!”

The post-Independence era also saw a spectacular growth of technical education, management education and the establishment of agriculture universities, and colleges in other professional areas like medicine, nursing, etc. On the technical side there are 2000 approved engineering colleges at the first degree level and more than 500 polytechnics at the diploma level with annual admission capacities of 40,000 and 80,000 students respectively. The number of technical institutions offering post-graduate courses is 140 with an annual admission capacity of above 10,000 scholars. There are 110 schools of management with an admission capacity of 7,500 students for Master’s degree in Business Administration. By and large their contribution put together has indeed been remarkable, as the scholars have been doing well in the employment market.

Consequently, therefore, there has been a rush for admission to these professional courses, which in turn has given rise to the so-called ‘capitation’ or ‘self-financing’ colleges. The general impression that gathered ground was that the capitation colleges — at least several of them — were giving a go-by to standards. This was because their criterion for admission was not merit, but the paying capacity of the students. Then the inevitable happened. The matter had to be eventually settled by the Supreme Court in February, 1993. The Court ruled that merit alone, and not money, should be the criteria for admissions. That the Court had to intervene to give a ruling of this nature and also had to lay down a scheme of admissions, is a matter, which should interest all public relation practitioners.

Here, it should also be interesting to note, that there has of late been a dramatic change in the policy of the Government in funding the university sector. A virtual freeze has been announced. In direct contrast to this, the government decided to increase the expenditure to the school sector, so that the goal of ‘education for all’ does not remain a distant dream.

6.2.4 Non-formal Education

One of the factors hindering the realisation of the goal of universal education is the lack of facilities in some areas. It was also found that some children were unable to take advantage of facilities where these existed. Therefore, it was felt that education should be provided to them at the place and at the time convenient to such children. This programme also envisaged allowing children to progress at their own pace — thus giving up the rigid structuring — characteristic of the formal system. Thus a non-formal education programme, came to be launched, with a view to achieving the goal of universalisation of elementary education. The focus of the attention of this programme is on the ten educationally backward states viz., Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Yet, the ground realities are quite unenviable. Hardly 50% of the children in the 6-14 age group are enrolled in the primary and upper primary schools. The percentage of children actually completing the first eight years of education is much lower. That is one part of the story. The other part of the story is about the number of children who hardly ‘experience’ their childhood because they enter the work force. How many are they? Different organisations have come out with different estimates; the most alarming estimate is that there are, in India today, about 44 million child workers. Some of them are even forced to take up hazardous jobs. It is to cater to the needs of these children (and those not working but not attending schools either, that the non-formal education programmes have to be tailor-made. Efforts are afoot in this direction, and the government is encouraging voluntary and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to participate in this programme in a big way. In the case of girls, the problem is further compounded because of the discrimination they are subjected.
Thus, the challenge of education is not only to provide these out-of-school children with an interesting and meaningful education programme but also making the education programmes available to them, at a place and time, convenient to them. Thus, education has both social and economic dimensions to it. In order that the children make use of the facilities being provided, it is necessary to arouse and awaken them so that they understand the value and use of education. That would enable them to voluntarily participate in these programmes wholeheartedly and meaningfully.

6.2.5 Adult Education

Had the country achieved universal elementary education by 1960 as envisaged by the makers of our Constitution, India would not have had occasion to run the National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) earlier, and now the National Literacy Mission. That brings us to another question why adult education at all?

Studies have shown that most literate parents tend to encourage their offspring to go to schools. Conversely, illiteracy (on the part of parents) is one of the reasons for wastage and stagnation at the elementary stage. This is just one aspect of the literacy programme. Equally important perhaps, is the fact that the quality of life of an individual changes with the acquisition of literacy. If one were to examine the various attempts to make India a dynamic society, one would appreciate the efforts directed towards ‘Education for all’.

Check Your Progress 1

Notes: i) Answer the following questions in the space provided below.
ii) Check your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

1) Say whether the following statements are true or false.
   a) Literate parents do not encourage their children to go to school. ( )
   b) The development of its human resources is crucial to any nation’s development. ( )
   c) One’s quality of life cannot be altered by becoming literate. ( )
   d) The criticism against capitation colleges is that the paying capacity of the student and not his merit is the criterion for admission. ( )
   e) The phenomenal growth of population has hindered the achievement of the goal of universal education. ( )

2) Enumerate the factors necessary for successful implementation of education policy.

3) What was the very first step taken by the framers of our constitution towards education?

4) What are the options available to student at plus two stage?
5) What is the chief aim of non-formal education?

Activity 1
Visit a government run primary school in your suburban neighbourhood. Find out the number of students on rolls and the numbers by gender. Is there disparity in the male-female ratio? Are there drop-outs? Find out reasons for drop-outs and what is being done to prevent it?

6.3 OVERVIEW OF IMPORTANT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

A brief description of some of the important apex educational institutions in the country is given below. Some of these have been set up by the Acts of Parliament while many others are autonomous bodies. These institutions, besides the regular universities, are set up by the state and central governments. In addition to what has been mentioned in this section there are various other institutions contributing to the body of knowledge. Particular reference has been made about professional colleges in the relevant sections.

6.3.1 University Grants Commission (UGC)

In the field of higher education, the University Grants Commission (UGC) is an important body which was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1956. The UGC is not a mere grant sanctioning body. A more important aspect of its work is to set standards and ensure imparting of quality education at the higher education stage. The UGC has been continuously taking steps in this direction. It has several programmes to upgrade the quality of University and college teachers. It encourages universities to start new programmes to keep pace with the changing needs of the society under several schemes. The UGC also lays down norms regarding qualifications and experience of teachers at various levels and their pay structure. More recently, it had floated the scheme of autonomous colleges with a view to encouraging innovations and experimentation in colleges. The objective is to allow deserving colleges to frame curricula, courses of studies and their own system of evaluation—the ultimate aim being to provide quality education in these colleges.

6.3.2 Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)

More recently, the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was established by an Act of the Parliament in 1985 in order to augment opportunities for higher education and for democratising education. The IGNOU makes an effort to (i) take education to the doorsteps of student; (ii) provide education to all irrespective of age, region or formal qualifications; (iii) offer need-based vocational and professional academic programmes; (iv) promote and develop distance education in India; and (v) set and maintain standards in distance education in the country as an apex body in the open learning system.

The courses offered by IGNOU should not be mistaken for programmes run by institutes of correspondence courses. The instructional system of IGNOU is unique in that it follows a multi-media approach to education. This comprises:

i) Self-instructional print material,
ii) supporting assignments for feedback from students,

iii) assignment supporting audio and video cassettes, broadcast over AIR and Doordarshan in their educational programmes,

iv) Face to face interaction with academic counsellors at periodic intervals; and

v) practicals at the study centres.

6.3.3 Other ‘Open Universities’

Besides IGNOU, there are four other open universities functioning in the country at Hyderabad, Kota, Nalanda and Nasik. In fact, the first-ever Open University in the country was established in Andhra Pradesh at Hyderabad, named after a great son of India, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

The Open University system in the country has an estimated intake of 2,50,000 students for a variety of courses including courses on management and computer applications.

6.3.4 National Council of Educational, Research and Training (NCERT)

An important apex educational institution in the school sector is the National Council of Educational, Research and Training (NCERT) which was set up in 1961 under the Societies Registration Act (1860). It provides academic support for improving the quality of school education in India and acts as the academic advisor to the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India. NCERT’s expertise is drawn upon for formulating and implementing policies and programmes in the areas of school and teacher education.

The functions of the NCERT broadly relate to (a) research and development, (b) in-service and pre-service training, and (c) extension and dissemination work — all these tuned to achieve the main objective of improving the quality of school education. The NCERT, therefore,

i) develops curriculum, instructional and exemplar materials, methods of teaching, techniques of evaluation, teaching aids, kits and equipments, learning resources, etc;

ii) organises pre-service and in-service training of teachers, teacher educators and other education personnel;

iii) conducts and promotes educational research;

iv) disseminates improved educational techniques and practices and research findings; and

v) acts as a clearing house for ideas and information on all matters relating to school education and teacher education.

6.3.5 National Institute of Educational, Planning and Administration (NIEPA)

In the area of planning and administration, there is another apex educational body called National Institute of Educational, Planning and Administration (NIEPA). The NIEPA evolved itself from its parent organisation, the Asian Institute of Educational Planning and Administration. The NIEPA is an autonomous body and its main areas of activities consist of

i) training of educational planners and administrators,

ii) research,

iii) diffusion of innovations, and

iv) consultancy services. Its activities concern all areas of education — both the school sector and the higher education sector.

Similar apex educational bodies have been set up for coordinating activities and setting up standards and institutions that impart education in (a) agriculture and allied sciences, and (b) medical education.
Check Your Progress 2
Notes:
i) Answer the following questions in the space provided below.
ii) Check your answers with the ones supplied at the end of this unit.

1) Fill in the blanks with appropriate answer.
a) UGC was set up in .................................................................
b) IGNOU was set up in .............................................................
c) The first ever Open University in India was up at ................
d) NCERT stands for ..............................................................
e) NIEPA stands for ..............................................................

2) Why is IGNOU’s instructional system considered unique?
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3) Mention some aims of UGC.
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4) State the Chief functions of NCERT.
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6.4 EDUCATION POLICY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Realising the vital necessity of catering to the opinions of different groups, while formulating policies, the Government of India worked on the National Policy on Education (1986) in a novel way—different from any similar educational exercises undertaken hitherto. Earlier, it was the various committees and commissions which went into the problems of education and came out with recommendations. But this one was a case of involving the public directly.

In the year 1985, the Government of India adopted a thoroughly 'public relations-oriented' strategy. A status paper titled Challenge of Education — a policy perspective (1985) was brought out and copies distributed widely to everyone who was interested in offering suggestions. Thus, a nations-wide debate was set in motion. For the public relations practitioners, this is an important landmark to note because the document was taken seriously by several segments of the population: parents, teachers, students, industrialists, professionals, the media and so forth. The government succeeded in setting in motion a two-way communication process through this effort.

The comments and reactions of various groups were collected and analysed carefully to put them all in proper perspective. This was followed by a lively debate in the Parliament. And the culmination of these efforts was the National Policy on Education - 1986.

Perhaps few other sectors have made a conscious effort of this nature of set in motion a communication process of this dimension and magnitude. The feedback received from the public not only helped in formulating a generally acceptable policy on education but has also ensured in taking steps towards improving the system. Some of these steps are:

a) A conscious and concerted effort for providing education to all children upto the age of 14.
b) encouraging non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to participate in this process.

c) re-orienting the content and process of school education (which has given a new look to the curriculum and curricular materials).

d) emphasising on thrust areas in curriculum which have a bearing on values.

e) having a common core curriculum for the entire nation.

f) providing minimum facilities in primary schools.

g) appointing a second teacher in single teacher schools.

h) establishment of open learning system (establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University, National Open School, etc.).

i) upgrading the competencies of school (and college teachers) through continuous inservice programmes, etc.

Check Your Progress 3

Notes: i) Answer the following question in the space provided below.

ii) Compare your answers with the one supplied at the end of this unit.

1) Why is NEP (1986) considered unique by PR practitioners?

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6.5 PUBLIC RELATIONS PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION

We had earlier stressed on the need for making an educational policy and programme acceptable to the people first and foremost. This is because education by its very nature should cater to the needs and aspirations of the people. For achieving this objective, a planned and sustained effort to involve the community and the opinion leaders should precede the formulation of both the policies and programmes.

In order that the programmes are grounded effectively the system should work well. In the ultimate analysis the performance of the education sector would be judged by the way in which the programmes are run. It is generally accepted that public relations is nothing but 'doing good work and talking about it'. Thus for any communication programme good performance is the sine qua non (indispensable condition or qualification).

In the area of education most of the criticism emanates at the stage of public acceptance. The public at large very often tends to be critical of the whole educational process. This criticism generally gets reflected in the debates of the legislatures and parliament and in the media.

Thus, as you see it is both a challenge and an opportunity for the educational institutions and the PR professionals to rise to the occasion. A healthy and inbuilt two-way communication process should help the institutions to continuously respond to public opinion. Given this, one can reasonably expect community participation, which should help in making the system vibrant. What needs to be underlined in this context is that every functionary in the education system from the chief executive down below should be a firm believer in the philosophy of public relations and should act as such.

6.5.1 Campaign Approach—Initial Resistance

This brings us to the concept of the campaign approach. Let us also examine the important PR tool. It took more than four decades for the country to appreciate the need for bringing in the "campaign approach" for education. Indian educationists and educational administrators were blissfully cloistered in their ivory towers. The work 'campaign' was an anathema for them, till almost recently. Community participation was not something which they had ever
Public Relations in Government and Industry

awakening for them. A modest beginning was made in the 1970s, when the National Adult Education Programme was taken up - with the help of media experts to carry the message forward.

However, it was only with the launching of the National Literacy Mission about five years ago that the need was felt for initiating a major sustained public campaign through the use of mass media for achieving the goal. The importance of eliciting public co-operation, including that of all political parties and gearing up the administrative machinery to achieve a task of this magnitude was gradually realised.

In a similar manner, if one is serious about achieving the target of universal elementary education, it is only this campaign approach that would work. There are pressures from various quarters on this issue, including the recent judgement of the Supreme Court of India (February, 1993) which has ruled that primary education up to the age of 14 years is a “fundamental right”. This ruling, as also the provisions of the law restraining the use of child labour, are good auguries. Coupled with this, if the campaign approach works it could exert pressure on the society to bring all children up to the age of 14 within the ambit of education when that happens, it would be for the good of the society.

It may be of interest to you, to know that there are other extraneous factors, which will force children of this age group to enter schools. To cite one instance, importers of India carpets (in other countries) have reportedly declined to patronise those industrial units which use children for weaving carpets. The point to be noted here is that there are several factors of this nature, which impinge on the educational sector.

6.5.2 Public Relations Professionals in Education Field

It is generally agreed that the policy formulations and plans that follow are invariably unexceptionable. But the problems in the area of education arise because of the way in which the programmes are implemented. This has a direct bearing on the work of the PR practitioners in the field.

Then, ‘education’ in itself has inherent limiting factors (lack of finance, regulations, controls etc) - and this puts a limit on the use of all PR tools as far as the practitioners are concerned. For them the press and to some extent the electronic media are the chief means of communication, the scope for use of other media like house journal exhibition, film or video, for the purpose being very limited. But more than the inherent limitation of the subject itself, is the general apathy on the part of institutions towards PR itself.

6.5.3 Institutionalised Public Relations

By and large, institutionalised public relations effort is a comparatively recent phenomenon in the area of education. If public relations made inroads into the country about five decades ago, the education sector has started engaging full-time PR professionals hardly two decades ago. The story of PR professionals struggling to establish themselves in the industrial and other sectors at that point of time is well-known and has been the topic of constant discussion in the professional bodies ever since.

People at the helm of affairs in the national and the state educational institutions or universities—barring a few exceptions—are yet to fully comprehend the potential of a planned and sustained effort establishing and maintaining a mutual communication process with their publics. Like the chief executives of industrial establishments of yesteryears, those in the education sector need some orientation on this. If educational institutions are to function as vibrant organisations they have to become PR-oriented. This lack of appreciation on the part of the leaders of the educational field, results in their images getting distorted. It is at that stage that they began to sit up and indulge in “fire-fighting”, which can not really help. Several industrial and commercial establishments, including those in the public sector have gone through this stage already, and as such the public relations departments in those sectors are at a more advantageous positions today. PR departments in most of the organised sector in the educational discipline need to inculcate this professional approach to PR.

Another problem is the lack of funds (coupled with facilities that normally go with any PR set-up) that makes the best of PR professionals in the educational world settle for just a modest bite of their staple diet the press. This situation is the direct consequence of a lack of understanding on the part of the chiefs in the education sector—who generally are willing to spend to come a cropper. This matter of the two exceptions in the educational field has led to
the overall distorted image of education as being in "disarray", "in a shambles" and "confused".

In this context, it will be interesting to compare how the defence sector is faring in terms of both the quantity and quality or exposure in the press. Defence has been cited as a point of comparison for it is very often pointed out that the education budget is next only to that of defence. Now, it is not a secret that the defence sector is able to muster forth a much better quality of press coverage for various reasons; it is carried out in a much more disciplined way with a lot of inputs. Defence has done very well on all aspects of PR work, which is the direct result of the facilities that PR professionals in the defence sector can command.

Again, if we were to look at the extent and quality of coverage for the sports sector or the economic sector, we are bound to be greatly impressed. Education per se also touches the life of almost all the citizens of the country but it does not have that kind of coverage in the press. Some amount of heart-searching is needed to find out the reasons. Has anything been done to constantly keep the press posted with information, take them to places where the action is, give them enough of background material invite them and allow them to participate in programmes? Is there anything on the education front like ‘Economic Editors’ Forum—existing in the economic sector? Have we taken enough interest in them, so that they take an interest in us? Have we allowed the few earnest PR professionals working in education with enough of freedom and wherewithal?

It is only recently that some newspapers have started devoting weekly columns for 'education' and felt the need for exclusive education correspondents. 'Education Page' of The Hindu and 'Campus Notes' of Indian Express are particularly note worthy. It is also a recent development that the education sector has started talking in terms of "campaigns", "need for educating the public", information dissemination, "community participation", "advocacy", etc. Yet the picture today has not progressed much beyond the fringe.

Check Your Progress 4

Notes:  
   i) Read the following and complete the statement by selecting the right answers from among the choices supplied.

   ii) Check your answers with the ones supplied at the end of this unit.

1) Primary education
   a) is not the fundamental right of children in India
   b) is a fundamental right of every Indian child

2) Every functionary in the educational system
   a) cannot play the PR role in his day-to-day functioning
   b) can play the PR role in such a way

3) Educational area in India
   a) has no scope for PR
   b) is already PR oriented
   c) has scope for PR but not fully PR oriented as yet

4) The press in India
   a) devoted a lot of attention to education
   b) does not pay attention to education
   c) has started devoting columns for education now-a-days

5) An educational institution
   a) must respond to public opinion
   b) cannot afford to respond to public opinion
6) In the field of education
   a) a campaign approach can help in certain matters.
   b) there is no scope for campaigns.
   c) only campaigns can tackle all problems.

6.6 PRESENT STATUS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN EDUCATIONAL SECTOR

The status of PR in educational institutions partly emanates from the individual perceptions of what public relations is. Certain mis-conceptions (which run contrary to the standard definitions of public relations being nothing but a two-way communication process) put a strain on the professionals entering such institutions. This situation is not because of the deliberate attempts of any of the chief executives—rather it is because of a general lack of orientation in modern management techniques needed for the running of educational institutions. This lack of modern management techniques is in fact affecting the very functioning of several bodies; most of them still cling on to the colonial method of administration even after nearly four decades and eight five-year plans. With the 21st century round the corner and the economy promising to open up at a very fast pace, it is high time that the management structures of all the educational institutions of the country were geared towards adopting the management systems which would deliver the goods.

An illustration would suffice to drive home the point. In February 1993, an autonomous body of the Government of India in one of the major cities of the country, while advertising for the post of an Administration Officer, had set forth some interesting responsibilities for the person. He was to "shoulder the integrated responsibility involving establishment/legal matters and public relations pertaining to the laboratory".

Says the advertisement: The 'Public Relations' functions include air/rail reservations for the laboratory personnel on official tour, arrangements for foreign travels, conferences, liaison with press, media and government agencies, etc. "Doesn't this example illustrate the poor status of PR in the educational sector?"

6.7 AREAS NEEDING PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFORTS

Education cannot be viewed in isolation as it affects a lot of other spheres and in turn is influenced by several others. Therefore, education in its broadest sense, involves a lot more publics than academicians alone.

The apathy towards PR in education springs from an inadequate perception of what good communication can accomplish towards establishing a smooth relationship among the various publics e.g. parents, teaching faculty, non-teaching staff, local authorities like sports institutions, transport service, post office, book publishers, business houses, doctors etc.

The student community has a lot of grievances against authorities. These include objection to study of compulsory languages, outdated syllabus, and lack of employment opportunities or career guidance, teachers apathy, irregularities committed by an administrative staff etc. On the other hand there are complaints galore against students—student indiscipline, politics in campus, ragging of freshers, mass copying, drug abuse etc—to say a few.

Only a proper PR campaign can help to involve the concerned public in solving the chronic maladies that afflict our campuses e.g. Good links with industry and business can help providing career counselling and placement service. The curriculum in turn can be framed for deserving candidates. Similarly medical professionals could be involved for awareness campaigns against AIDS, drug abuse etc. Sports institutions could help spot and nurture young talents. Thus PR could help to make education an enriching experience for all round growth and development of an individual.
Tools and Media

Some of the commonly used communication channels for PR activity in educational sector are PTA meetings, speeches, Senate/Syndicate/meetings/telephone queries/visitors/ Conducted—VIP visits, exhibitions, workshops, seminars, posters, brochures, charts audio-visual and newsletters, souveniers, press releases, advertisements, bulletin boards, campaigns etc.

6.8 OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

In the earlier parts of this Unit a reference was made to the need for adopting a campaign approach to achieve universalisation of elementary education (UEE) which is a priority area of national concern. The different strategies adopted by the government have also been enumerated. The campaign approach in which PR professionals can contribute would entail use of several media and tools like meetings, films, radio and TV broadcasts newsletters articles and features in newspapers exhibitions etc. If public relations efforts are to bring about a change in the attitude of parents and the public toward education, the campaign should be at least as vigorous and sustained as perhaps the family planning campaign or the AIDS campaign. For instance, States like Haryana, in their campaign, had made use of radio, to motivate parents to send their children, especially girls, to schools. When on the subject of campaign, it is relevant to mention that the adult education programme has hired quite a few communication professionals to assist in their efforts. Campaigns of any nature are bound to succeed only when professionals are involved right from the policy formulation stage—they need to participate in the process right from the “board room” stage—to use the corporate jargon.

There are several thrust areas like early childhood education, special education (integrating the handicapped children in normal schools) which call for a campaign approach. All those working in these areas understand and realise it. What one would now expect is to see PR in action and going beyond the expression of intent in committee reports.

Activity 2

Watch and study some posters, public service advertisements and short films released by National Literacy Mission through print, radio and television. Imagine you are put in charge of producing a short film for promoting the cause of female education in rural areas. Prepare a storyboard for a 2 minute film.

6.9 CASE STUDIES

An attempt is being made to present two case studies which should help students to draw their own conclusions on how an educational institution had attempted to promote mutual understanding between an organisation which works for a cause, and the public with whom it deals. The idea behind describing these two case studies is to point out how important it is to disseminate information to the right people at the right time, projection of correct image, elimination of all sources of misunderstanding, overcoming misconception and prejudices and earning goodwill. Perhaps it can be claimed that ‘openness’ in communication has been the hallmark in both these cases.

6.9.1 NCERT’s Open House: Case Study - 1

For two successive years now, the NCERT has organised ‘open house’ programmes, each of one week’s duration. Before organising these events, the organisation carefully analysed the public reaction to all the programmes it has undertaken over the years and tried to assess what gaps in communication needed to be filled. The ‘Open House’ exercise was also aimed at eliciting feedback from public besides providing them information.

The elements of the open house programme were (a) corporate exhibition, (b) corporate film, (c) display of materials produced (d) continuous screening of educational video programmes developed by the organisation, (e) allowing visitors to see the facilities available in the institution and how the institution works and (f) organisation of public interest lectures.
followed by question-answer sessions. The faculty was available during the week for consultation.

The open house programmes were organised in all the constituent units of NCERT located in Delhi, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Ajmer and Mysore.

A general invitation was extended to all the interested groups to participate in the programmes which were organised during its anniversary celebrations. For this, prominent advertisements were issued in almost all the newspapers; the topics and discussion were those that concerned the opinion groups most. A careful planning effort was behind all these exercises. This was borne out by the results as the response was overwhelming with thousands of participants taking advantage of the opportunity. The two programmes arranged during the years 1991 and 1992 helped the various groups to see for themselves what was happening in the NCERT. The public also had many of their questions answered and doubts cleared. Thus several misconceptions were removed. It also helped the faculty and the personnel of NCERT to understand the expectations of various groups from the organisation itself. This proved to be a guidance to the organisation in shaping some of its future programmes to answer these needs. It would also be interesting to record that there was an initial criticism on both sides about the open house programme. But, this slowly gave way and as each day passed, it was discernible that the programme was worth the effort.

6.9.2 School Children — the beasts of burden: Case Study-2

The second case study pertains to a typical urban phenomenon of burdening nursery school children with books and ‘schooling’ rather than adopting the play-way method. A general impression that had gained ground was (and it was not without basis) that the NCERT which attempts to upgrade the quality of school education, was tacitly approving of such a programme. In many urban areas, nursery schools are opened either as a part of the existing schools or as separate entities. It is also found that many enterprising housewives in cities open nursery schools in their drawing rooms using some toy and play material. These so-called nursery schools collect children, teach them the three R’s, give them homework and also prepare them for admission tests to be taken at a later stage for admission to class I.

Child development experts all over the world agree that all these practices are not educationally sound. But, there is monetary profit in running nursery schools. As far as admission tests to class I are concerned, schools have their own difficulties and therefore resort to unhealthy and unethical practices—it being a question of supply and demand.

NCERT has been running its own nursery school which perhaps can be called a ‘model’ school—as a part of its extension programme. That school is also used for conducting research in the area of early childhood education.

Backed by this ground experience and also the research evidence, NCERT experts were in a position to spell out how an ideal nursery school should be run and the types of programmes that should go in such a nursery school.

Research findings have shown that children who go through the ‘wrong’ type of nursery schools tend to develop several problems in later life. They usually develop a distaste for learning later. Pediatricians also agree that the existing pattern of nursery schools is not congenial for the healthy physical growth of children either.

In order to set things right, it was felt that the opinion leaders should be tackled first. To begin with, the principals of leading public schools of Delhi were called for a conference. This was four years ago. The effort was to convince them that as principals of prominent public schools they should take upon themselves to offer the correct type of nursery school programmes in their own institutions. A video film, which had been prepared by that time was shown to them on how children thrived in good nursery schools. They were given both the pictures the children would gain when exposed to nursery schooling of the correct variety, and what the children would lose in terms of both emotional and physical development if not allowed to enjoy their childhood. Some research data was also made available to them. Representatives of the associations of pediatricians were also called in, to present the medical data of the harmful effects of exposing children to activities which are not congenial to their growth.

This initial effort was followed by extensive media coverage which had a spin-off effect. Slowly, public awareness was rekindled. There was improvement. Each year more and more schools began adopting the correct approach to nursery education and also giving up entrance
tests at the class I stage.

Since education was recognised to be the birth right of every child, some schools preferred not to discriminate and agreed to admit students by drawing lots—and not subjecting them to admission tests, which had no educational validity anyway. The lottery system implied that all children have equal potential and of course, right to education.

NCERT experts then set their targets on different cities for a similar campaign. All this was carefully planned to rope in principals, media men, doctors and convince them not to ‘torture’ children. In this campaign, which has so far covered several major cities of the country, the effort has been made to use many PR tools: the mass communication media, the opinion leaders, the video and of course the print material.

As a result of this sustained campaign, there is a perceptible rise in the awareness level of parents and educators, and this should usher in the right type of nursery education in the country, before long. There is a growing recognition that admission tests are unsound educationally and should be scrapped at the class I stage also. State authorities have also started sitting up. They are now talking in terms of issuing ‘licences’ to nursery schools. This implies that nursery schools would be employing trained nursery school teachers, imparting the right type of nursery education by not subjecting children to the learning of the three R’s at that stage, but adopting the ‘playway method’ which is what nursery schools should be doing.

Check Your Progress 5
Notes: i) Answer the following questions in the space provided below.

ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

1) What was the PR tool used in the first Case Study?

2) Who were the target publics involved in the campaign described in Case Study - 2?

Activity 3
Analyse the contents of IGNOU Newsletter, at least 3 issues, available at your study centre. Evaluate its information content.

6.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have had a wide glimpse of the functioning of our educational system in order to assess how PR efforts could benefit the field.

We began by examining the importance of education for an individual society and ultimately to the nation; the development of nations being related to its human resource development.
This is why government has accorded a high priority to education and is making massive investments on education. Despite the investments and efforts, the goals are proving difficult to attain due to population growth and other reasons. This has raised a pertinent question—how to make the educational institutions accountable?

We have had a brief description of three important stages of education—primary, secondary and higher in the country. Number of schools which had increased dropout rates are now decreasing, yet there are 25% more illiterates than we had years ago. This contradictory situation truly describes our education scene.

We have seen the newer and radical thrust to education provided by the frontline apex bodies like UGC, IGNOU, NCERT, NIEPA through their innovative approach. We have also seen the effort that goes into the framing of an educational policy and the impediments in the way of its implementation.

Despite the proliferation of educational institutions and diversification into many professional fields, including computers and satellites, there has been a great deal of criticism of the educational standards in India. Performance is not commensurate with the amount of financial and physical investments made in the field of education. The education scenario is not rosy. It poses a lot of challenges to the PR person in the form of various maladies with campus unrest that afflict our universities. PR approvals has to be professional and the managerial attitude towards PR in education must also change to improve matters.

For many problems, chronic in nature, a campaign approach is needed in an effort to reach the target publics at a minimum cost with highest benefit. This planning and approach has been dealt with, in detail in the two important case studies for illustrations. These case studies give us an idea as to how various PR tools, techniques and media could be used successfully to tackle even the toughest tasks and challenges in the educational field.

6.11 SUGGESTED READING


6.12 GLOSSARY

**Teaching**: It is that part of process of education through which one individual directly helps another to learn.

**Schooling**: It is that part of the education process in which educational contact is provided to individuals to learn in a particular place.

**Career education**: Programme designed to prepare students into the world of work.

**PTA meeting**: A regularly scheduled meeting between teachers and parents for the purpose of discussing a student's programme.

**Curriculum**: Organised course of study undertaken by a student in any educational institution.

**Discipline**: Control of pupil behaviour.
Campus: Grounds of college, school, or university which are self-contained.

Primary education: education provided by an elementary school

Secondary education: education in secondary schools after primary education

Higher education: education at a higher academic level after attaining secondary education.

Private colleges: Refers to colleges financed by private funds.

Adult education: Adult education programmes are meant to educate illiterate adults in their regional languages so that they can read and write to be able to carry on their social functions.

Literacy: It is a relative term and a basic ingredient of formal education. It is a learning that helps to acquire skill in written medium and also promotes such knowledge that helps to solve the day to day problems and improve the standards of living.

Dropouts: these who terminate education before completing high school.

Career counsellor: a person who advises student on choice of career.

Admission criteria: Refers to rules framed for selection of students.

Absenteeism: Failure of students to attend classes regularly.

Educational technology: Use of hardware and technology like film, slides, audio-visual aids for teaching purposes.

Educational Planning: Making plans according to educational needs of the future.

Education: According to UNESCO, education is the organised and sustained instruction designed to communicate a combination of knowledge, skill and understanding, valuable for all activities of life.

6.13 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: MODEL ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1) a) False b) True c) False d) True e) True

2) Policies should be acceptable to people and conform to the law of the land and have political backing. Institutions, should have sufficient manpower, be accessible to the beneficiaries.

3) Under the Directive Principles of State Policy of India Education (1950) "a firm resolve to provide free and compulsory education to all children till the age of 14."

4) One can either go to the academic stream for higher education or to the Vocational Stream for vocational occupation.

5) The chief aim of non-formal education is to bring education for children to their doorstep and at a time convenient to them.

Check Your Progress 2

1) a) 1956, b) 1985, c) Hyderabad, d) National Council of Educational, Research and Training, e) National Institute of Educational, Planning and Administration.

2) It provides a multimedia approach to education. Self instructional printed study material, supplemented by audio and video cassettes broadcast over AIR and Doordarshan, face to face interaction with academic counsellors and feedback from written assignments—put together make it a unique educational system.
3) Set standards for quality education, encourages starting of new programmes to keep pace with the changing needs, lays down norms for teachers at various levels, encourages innovation and research.

4) Developing curriculum, instructional material, teaching aids, evaluation techniques etc; Organising training of educational personnel; promoting educational research; disseminating improved educational techniques, acting as a clearing house for all ideas pertaining to education.

Check Your Progress 3

1) This policy is unique in its origin as it was not based on the usual recommendation made by committees. It was based on the feedback and suggestion received from the public, in response to the widely distributed 'status paper on education'. The nationwide debate, and the discussions in Parliament helped evolving a generally acceptable policy.

Check Your Progress 4

1  (b)  2  (b)  3  (c)  4  (c)  5  (a)  6  (a)

Check Your Progress 5

1) Open House - exhibition, screening of film, lectures, question-answer sessions, touring of premises.

2) Opinion leaders, principals of leading school, parents, paediatricians, media persons.