CHAPTER III
HIGHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

3.1. Implementation of Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan

3.1.1. Introduction

The Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme launched by the Ministry of Human Resource Development[69] (MHRD) in September 2013, to be operated in the XII and XIII five-year plan periods[70]. The major objective of RUSA was to enable and empower the States to develop sufficient capabilities to plan, implement and monitor initiatives for the higher education sector as a whole. The scheme aimed to improve the quality of State Universities and colleges and enhance their existing capacities so that they emerge as dynamic, demand-driven, quality conscious institutions, responsive to rapid economic and technological developments at the national and international levels.

The scheme was to be implemented in two phases, i.e, RUSA 1.0 during the period 2013-17 and RUSA 2.0 during 2018-22. Government of India (GoI) approved (February 2022) continuation of the scheme till 31 March 2026 for further review. In the State, the Principal Secretary of Higher Education Department acts as the State Project Director (SPD) and the Director of Collegiate Education is the State Project Coordinator of RUSA.

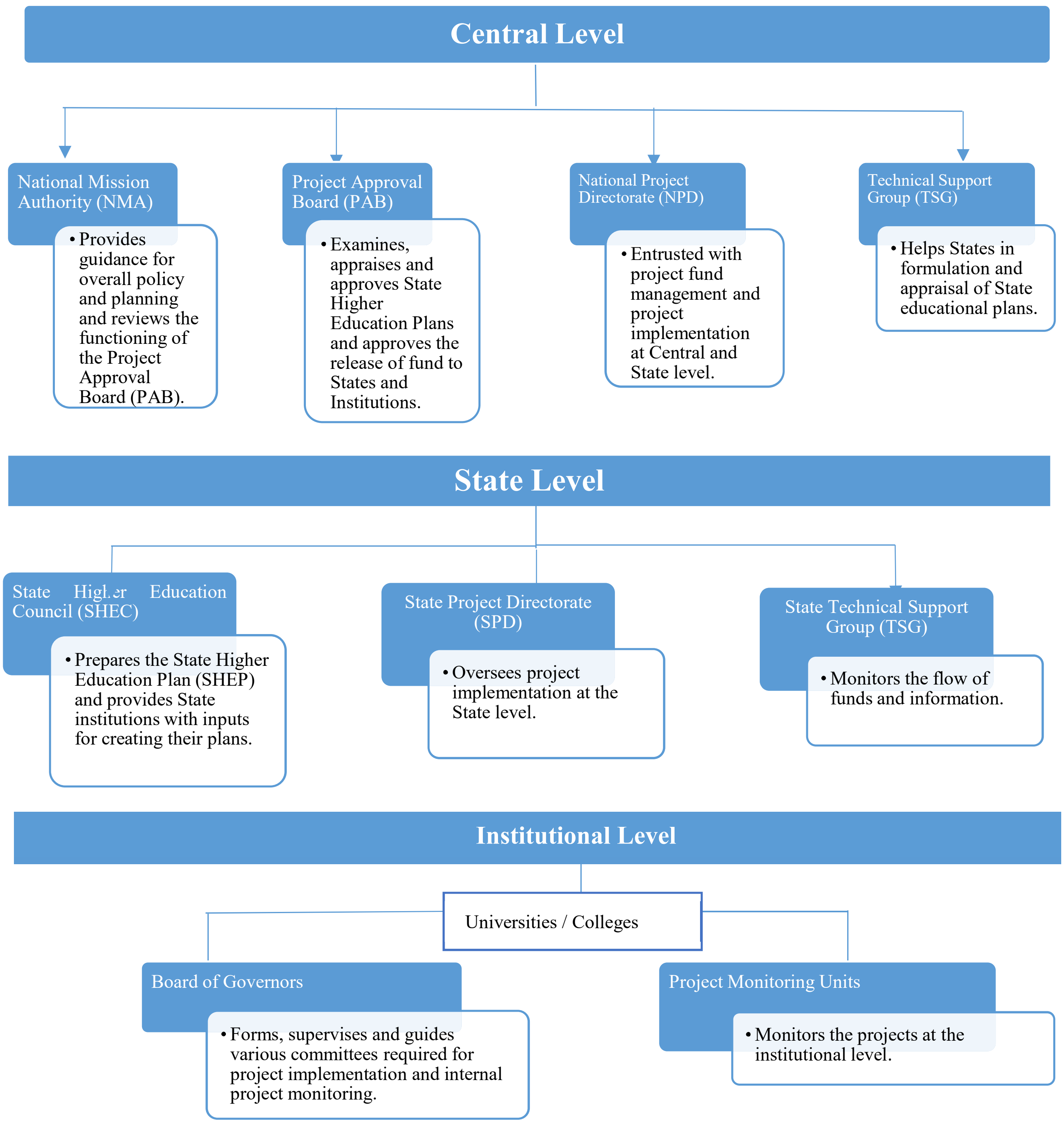
The components of RUSA 1.0 and 2.0 undertaken for implementation in the State are detailed in **Appendix 3.1**.

3.1.1.1. Institutional Hierarchy in RUSA

The participative and inclusive institutional structure envisaged in RUSA guidelines at the Central, State and Institutional level and the roles and powers of the various bodies are shown below in **Chart 3.1**:

[69] Renamed as Ministry of Education by a gazette notification issued in August 2020
[70] XII five year plan covered the period 2012-17 and XIII five year plan pertained to the period 2017-22

Chart 3.1: Institutional Hierarchy in RUSA



3.1.2. Audit Objectives, Scope and Methodology

The Compliance Audit was conducted from May to August 2023 with a view to assess whether;

- the implementation of RUSA scheme was planned properly, effectively and efficiently to improve access, equity and quality in higher education in the State;
- the Scheme was executed efficiently in compliance with the extant instructions and Guidelines;
- adequate initiatives were taken for effective financial management of RUSA funds; and
- monitoring and evaluation of the scheme was effective.

Audit scrutinised records pertaining to the period from 2018-19 to 2022-23 at Higher Education Department, Government of Kerala (GoK), State Project Directorate and in the selected Universities/institutions in four selected districts[71]. All four Universities in the selected districts were taken up for audit. Twenty *per cent* of RUSA funded institutions (12 institutions) and 10 *per cent* of institutions which did not receive funds under RUSA 1.0 and 2.0 (nine institutions) were selected through Simple Random Sampling without Replacement method using IDEA software. The selected institutions are listed in **Appendix 3.2**. An Entry Conference was held with the State Project Coordinator, RUSA on 24 May 2023 wherein the audit objectives, scope and methodology adopted were discussed and agreed upon. On conclusion of audit, an Exit Conference was conducted on 23 April 2024 with the Principal Secretary to Government, Higher Education Department, wherein the audit findings were discussed in detail. Reply of GoK was received (April 2024) and has been suitably incorporated in the paragraphs.

Audit findings

RUSA was an umbrella scheme to be operated in mission mode which would subsume other existing schemes[72] in the sector. In order to realise the intended outcomes, a set of commitments towards reform process have to be made by the States which must be fulfilled during the course of implementation of RUSA. These commitments were non-negotiable and were at two levels, *viz.*, commitment given by the States to the Centre and commitment given by institutions to the State. Unless these commitments were fulfilled, the States and institutions were not to be considered eligible to avail grants under the scheme. Audit examined the extent of compliance to these commitments, and the resultant observations are detailed below:

[71] Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Palakkad and Kannur

[72] Schemes of Model Degree Colleges and Sub-mission on Polytechnics were subsumed under RUSA in addition to schemes under UGC.

3.1.3. Non-conformity between certain clauses in the amended Kerala State Higher Education Act 2007 and RUSA guidelines

As per RUSA guidelines (September 2013), State Government was required to set up an State Higher Education Council (SHEC) by an Act of the State Legislature within two years. The SHEC is the supreme policy body for higher education, to develop comprehensive, long-term and inclusive State Higher Education Plan (SHEP), by aggregating Institutional Development Plans (IDPs) of institutions.

In Kerala, the Kerala State Higher Education Council (KSHEC) was in existence since 2007, as per provisions of the Kerala Higher Education Act of 2007 (Act). Paragraph 5.2 of RUSA guidelines lays down the term of council members and the manner in which the States with existing councils were to reconstitute the councils. Though GoK joined RUSA on 30 October 2013 by committing to bring reforms in the Higher Education sector in the State and attended the first Project Approval Board (PAB) meeting held by MHRD on 06 November 2013, the State amended the Act in July 2018 only, after a gap of five years. Furthermore, there were provisions in the Act which did not synchronize with clauses outlined in the guidelines of RUSA as detailed below:

According to RUSA guidelines, the Chairman of the Council shall be an eminent academic/public intellectual with proven leadership qualities and one nominee of Government of India shall also be included as a member. The Chairman, who was to hold one non-extendable term of five years was to be selected by a committee consisting of Chief Minister of the State, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the Leader of Opposition, based on the recommendation of shortlisted candidates made by a search-cum-selection committee of eminent academic/public intellectuals with proven record and integrity. Similarly, the Vice Chairman and Member Secretary who were to serve for one non-extendable term of five years were to be selected by a three member search committee consisting of Chairman of the Council and two other members, one nominated by the State Council and the other by the Government.

Audit noticed that the provisions in the amended Act did not synchronize with the above requirements in the guidelines. For instance, disregarding the selection process prescribed by RUSA, the amended Act provided for the State Minister for Higher Education to be the Chairman of the Council and Vice Chairman and Member Secretary to be appointed by the Government.

There were eight variations noticed between provisions in RUSA guidelines and the provisions in the amended Act of 2018 are shown in **Appendix 3.3.**

Government stated (April 2024) that the KSHEC Act was amended in 2018, incorporating majority of the provisions as envisaged in the RUSA guidelines keeping in mind the specific considerations of the State. The amendments are in essence and not in conflict with the RUSA guidelines or detrimental to the broad objectives of RUSA. However, the aforesaid deviations establish that the amendments made to the Act of 2007 in 2018, were not in consonance with the provisions relating to RUSA.

3.1.4. Delay in preparation of State Higher Education Plan and non-conduct of Baseline Survey

As per RUSA guidelines, a Perspective Plan for Higher Education called State Higher Education Plan (SHEP) had to be drawn up by the SHEC for submission to the MHRD, Government of India. SHEP was the guiding document which was to serve as the benchmark against which the performance of a State and its institutions were graded. The SHEP was to have two components, Institutional component and State component. The Institutional component necessitated preparation of Institutional Development Plan (IDP) at institutional level, based on the inputs and discussions with multiple stakeholders within the institution's jurisdiction. The IDPs were to be aggregated at the State level as SHEP. The State component was to address issues related to excellence, spatial and geographical gaps, access, governance, etc. Unserved and under-served areas were to be identified and special provisions made for new institutions in these areas.

Under RUSA 1.0, SHEP was required to be submitted to MHRD by 31 January 2014. The final SHEP was submitted to MHRD by GoK in February 2015, which was considered by PAB in March 2015. Audit observed that out of nine institutions under RUSA 1.0 selected for detailed audit, none had submitted IDPs to SHEC for preparation of SHEP.

The SHEP for RUSA 2.0 was prepared and submitted by SHEC in May 2018. Audit observed that none of the selected institutions under RUSA 2.0 had furnished (May 2018) their IDPs to KSHEC for preparation of SHEP. This indicates that SHEPs for RUSA 1.0 and 2.0 were prepared by KSHEC without aggregating the IDPs. As RUSA envisages a bottom up approach, wherein IDP would depict the resource requirements at institutional level as well as at its sub units for programme implementation in terms of infrastructure, human resources, procurement, scheme execution, etc., non-submission of IDPs would result in SHEP being prepared without factoring in the requirements of the institutions.

Further, Audit observed that prior to the formulation of SHEP, the State had also not undertaken a baseline survey to analyse critical needs in terms of access, equity and excellence in higher education as envisaged in the scheme guidelines. In the absence of a baseline survey, Audit could not draw assurance regarding issues relating to unserved and under-served areas having been identified and special provisions for new institutions made in the SHEP to benefit these areas.

Government stated (April 2024) that SHEP was prepared by KSHEC taking into consideration the resource requirements of every higher educational institution in the State, based on the data collected from those institutions with special consideration given to unserved and under-served areas and special provisions for new institutions made in the SHEP to benefit these areas. The above reply is not factually correct, as the selected institutions had not submitted IDPs to SHEC, in the absence of which the resource requirements of institutions could not be known. Further, the data claimed to have been collected from institutions by SHEC has not been furnished to Audit (June 2024).

3.1.5. Delay in submission of DPRs by institutions

The Project Approval Board (PAB) was to examine, appraise and approve SHEPs submitted by the States, assess the performance of States and institutions and approve release of funds[73]. On receiving approval of PAB, MHRD releases first instalment of 50 *per cent* of the Central share to the State in respect of institutions included under the scheme. Such institutions were required to furnish a Detailed Project Report (DPR) containing details of the works, estimates, etc., to SPD within the dates communicated to the respective institutions by SPD. The funds to the institutions were released by SPD on approval of DPRs.

Audit noticed that out of nine selected institutions under RUSA 1.0, there was delay of 15 months in the submission of DPR by Kannur University. Yet another institution, Government College, Tripunithura, had not finalised the DPR even as on September 2023. Consequently, Central and State share of funds allotted to the State Nodal Account of SPD as Infrastructure Grant could not be utilised by the institution for want of finalisation of DPR.

Under RUSA 2.0, all the institutions were required to upload (May 2018) data in the portal for receiving the RUSA assistance. SPD of RUSA directed (13 June 2018) 95 shortlisted institutions in the State to submit DPRs to SPD on or before 19 June 2018. Audit test checked the records of eight institutions and found that there was delay ranging from 347 days to 4 ½ years in the submission of final DPRs by seven institutions, as shown in **Table 3.1** below:

Table 3.1: Details of delay in submission of DPRs under RUSA 2.0

Sl. No.	Name of institution	Date of submission of final DPR	Delay in days
1.	Sree Sankara Vidyapeetom College, Valayanchirangara	June 2019	347
2.	Government Sanskrit College, Tripunithura	June 2022	713
3.	TM Jacob Memorial Government College, Manimalakkunnu	August 2020	774
4.	NSS Training College, Ottappalam	October 2019	469
5.	Government Arts College, Thiruvananthapuram	June 2019	347
6.	HHMSPBNSS College for Women, Neeramankara	July 2019	377
7.	Cochin University of Science and Technology	March 2023	1716

(Source: Data obtained from institutions)

73 For selection under RUSA 2.0, institutions were required to upload institutional data directly to Challenge Level Funding Portal (Portal) of MHRD and the TSG at the Centre examines and appraises the proposals received from institutions, based on which PAB accords approval for inclusion of institution under the scheme.

The delay in submission of final DPRs by institutions resulted in delayed releasing of fund by SPD to the institutions.

Government stated (April 2024) that in all the seven cases DPR was submitted in time. However, due to non-compliance of RUSA guidelines, discrepancies in the estimates or documents furnished, lack of statutory clearances etc., SPD had advised the institutions to rectify and resubmit the DPR. The reply is not acceptable, as the DPRs had to consider the inherent and potential external risks involved in implementation. Had the DPRs been prepared at the initial stage itself by giving due regard to the above aspects, re-submission and associated delays in completion of projects could have been avoided.

3.1.6. Exclusion of Government Aided institutions from coverage under RUSA 1.0

All State Universities and Colleges (both compliant as well as non-compliant with Section 12B and 2(f) of UGC, Act 1956[74]) across the country were eligible to be covered under RUSA to improve the learning outcomes and employability of graduates and to scale-up research, development and innovations. While Government colleges and universities would be eligible for all the components, Government aided institutions could also be considered eligible for permitted activities[75] based on certain norms and parameters.

Audit noticed that, as part of implementation of RUSA 1.0, GoK decided (July 2014) to consider the IDPs of Government Higher Educational Institutions only. Consequently, SHEC proposed six Universities and 63 Government colleges in the SHEP submitted (February 2015) to MHRD under the components Infrastructure Grants to Universities and Infrastructure Grants to Colleges, respectively. Audit noticed that out of the 63 Government colleges, 28 colleges were accredited with various grades of National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the remaining 35 colleges did not possess NAAC accreditation. However, only four universities and 15 colleges having NAAC A or B grades/NBA accreditation were approved (March 2015), for inclusion under RUSA 1.0, by PAB. Further, two universities and 11 colleges were added under RUSA 1.0 in subsequent[76] PABs.

On scrutiny of SHEP submitted in February 2015, Audit observed that there were 166 Government aided colleges which possessed valid NAAC accreditation during 2014-15. However, these colleges were not included in the proposal for the infrastructure grants to colleges based on the Government direction.

Government replied (April 2024) that as per the RUSA 1.0 guidelines, it was not mandatory to provide assistance to Government aided colleges. The above contention is not acceptable as RUSA 1.0 Guidelines explicitly state that

[74] The University Grants Commission (UGC) provides financial assistance to eligible colleges which are included under Section 2(f) and declared fit to receive central assistance (UGC grant) under Section 12 (B) of UGC Act, 1956 as per approved pattern of assistance under various schemes.

[75] Infrastructure and quality improvement

[76] During the period 2017-19

funding will be available to Government aided institutions also, subject to their meeting certain pre-conditions. The decision of GoK to restrict the scope of the scheme to Government institutions prevented the 166 Government aided colleges having NAAC A or B grades from being considered for RUSA 1.0.

3.1.7. Financial Management

3.1.7.1. Funding

The RUSA scheme was implemented with a fund sharing pattern of 60:40 between the Central and State Governments. On approval of State Higher Education Plan (SHEP) submitted by the State, MHRD was to release Central Government funds to the State Government.

The Ministry of Finance directed (March 2021) every State Government to designate a single nodal agency (SNA) for release of funds under Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS). The SNA was to open a single nodal account for each CSS with effect from 01 July 2021. The implementing institutions were required to open zero balance subsidiary accounts for transferring funds as decided by the SNA. Accordingly, GoK designated (July 2021) SPD as the SNA and SPD directed (August 2021) all the institutions funded by RUSA to open zero balance subsidiary accounts. SPD also directed (August 2021) the RUSA funded institutions to close and transfer the balance funds of RUSA in the SB accounts of institutions as on 31 August 2021, to the SNA account.

The State Government transfers the Central funds along with the State share to the SHEC/SPD[77] and from SHEC/SPD to the institutions for implementation. Out of the total release of ₹433.28 crore (Central and State) to 157 institutions/SPD[78] in the State from 2013-14 towards RUSA 1.0 and RUSA 2.0, the utilisation as on 31 March 2023 was ₹310.54 crore (71.67 *per cent*) and ₹122.74 crore was remaining in the single nodal account of SPD. Scheme-wise details of fund flow as on 31 March 2023 under RUSA 1.0 and 2.0 were as shown in **Table 3.2**:

Table 3.2: Scheme-wise details of fund flow under RUSA 1.0 and 2.0

(₹ in crore)

Scheme	Approved	Released	Pending release from GoI/State
RUSA 1.0	199.57	189.03	10.54
RUSA 2.0	366.00	244.25	121.75
Total	**565.57**	**433.28**	**132.29**

(Source: Details furnished by SPD)

Component-wise details are furnished in **Appendix 3.4**. Though RUSA 1.0 was to be implemented during 2013-17[79], all the projects undertaken in test checked institutions under RUSA 1.0 were not completed and were in various stages of execution during the audit period. Funds relating to RUSA 1.0 and RUSA 2.0,

77 From July 2015 onwards, the funds were managed by SPD at State level
78 Preparatory Grant, Management, Monitoring, Evaluation and Research (MMER), Equity Initiatives
79 Thirteen institutions were subsequently brought under RUSA 1.0 during 2017-19.

amounting to ₹10.54 crore and ₹121.75 crore respectively were yet to be released for completing these projects for reasons such as delay in conducting physical inspection, non-commencement of project, etc.

Government stated (April 2024) that a proposal for an amount of ₹112.80 crore[80] was submitted (December 2023) to the Ministry of Education, GoI and the entire project will be completed, and amount utilised expeditiously as and when funds were received.

3.1.7.2. Status of fund release and utilisation

The RUSA scheme was implemented with a fund sharing pattern of 60:40 between the Central and State Governments. Status of year-wise release of funds and utilisation by SPD/Institutions during the audit period 2018-19 to 2022-23 were as shown in **Table 3.3** below:

Table 3.3: Details of release and utilisation of funds in the State

Year	Amount released (*₹ in crore*)	Amount Utilised (*₹ in crore*)	Percentage of utilisation
2018-19	137.25	120.86	88.10
2019-20	24.00	18.44	76.80
2020-21*	0	0	0
2021-22	15.84	12.02	75.90
2022-23	112.34	17.36	15.50

** During 2020-21 there was no allotment from MHRD in the COVID scenario*
(Source: Details furnished by SPD)

Though SPD furnished the consolidated utilisation of funds released against the year of allotment of fund, Audit scrutiny revealed that the actual utilisation of funds was spread over multiple years, as there was delay in transfer of State share of funds to SPD and from SPD to institutions and lags in execution of projects by institutions.

Government stated that though the funds are released in various financial years, RUSA funds are reckoned in a project-wise manner rather than as against each financial year. Hence, the release order in a financial year is inclusive of several instalments of funds to various projects included in each phase of RUSA.

Despite institutions not adhering to conditions specified in the Guidelines of RUSA, funds were released to these institutions, as mentioned in paragraphs 3.1.5 and 3.1.8.4.

Significant deviations from the fund management mechanism laid down in the guidelines of the scheme were observed, as detailed below:

3.1.7.3. Exclusion of KSHEC from fund management

As per RUSA guidelines, at the State level, SHEC was to channelise funds from Centre as well as the State and undertake planning and evaluation activities in addition to monitoring and capacity building functions. SHEC was to open a separate dedicated joint bank account and funds (both Central and State share)

80 Central share ₹67.68 crore

were to be disbursed to the institutions from this account. Accordingly, Higher Education Department of GoK accorded sanction (January 2014) to open joint account of Member Secretary, KSHEC and Additional Secretary, Higher Education Department, GoK for dealing with funds of RUSA. However, GoK, citing delay in transfer of funds due to non-availability of joint signatories, accorded sanction (August 2016) to convert this account to a single account in the designation of Joint Secretary, Higher Education Department, GoK, thereby curtailing the role of KSHEC in fund management.

Government replied (April 2024) that KSHEC was not excluded from fund management and only a demarcation of functions with regard to fund disbursal was attempted. The reply is not acceptable as, being Joint signatories to the releases to the institutions is indicative of a shared accountability between KSHEC, which was the plan formulating authority and SPD, the project implementing authority. Vesting all the fund releasing powers with one party amounted to a dilution of responsibility and authority and a violation of the scheme guidelines.

3.1.7.4. Transfer of funds

Delay in allotment of State share to SPD and release to institutions

As per RUSA 1.0 and 2.0 guidelines, the States were to contribute their share along with Central share to the dedicated RUSA savings account of SHEC within 15 days of receipt of the Central share. The funds received by SHEC were in turn to be transferred to the dedicated RUSA account of institutions within 15 days of receipt of the combined pool of funds from State Government. Non-adherence to the above conditions would necessitate payment of interest at 1.50 *per cent* per annum by GoK to Centre.

Audit observed that the delay in allotment of State share to SPD ranged from 19 to 359 days, which resulted in interest liability to the tune of ₹1.26 crore, as evident from **Table 3.4** below.

Table 3.4: Details of delay in allotment of state share leading to interest liability

Sl. No.	Central share allotment date	Amount (₹)	State share allotment date to SPD	Amount (₹)	Delay in allotment beyond 15 days	Interest payable at 1.50 *per cent* per annum (₹)
1	31.03.2014	26260000	18.02.2015	14000000	309	333466.03
2	18.06.2015	77187500	06.10.2015	41562500	95	301348.46
3	01.02.2016	30000000	30.03.2016	20000000	43	53013.70
4	15.06.2016	437250000	17.10.2016	291500000	109	1958640.41
5	17.11.2016	27664000	21.03.2017	18442667	109	123919.56
6	28.03.2017	138000000	29.07.2017	92000000	108	612493.15
7	22.02.2018	134830500	30.04.2018	89887000	52	288130.93
8	27.06.2018	595500000	18.01.2019	447000000	190	4649794.52
9	28.08.2018	75000000	18.01.2019		128	394520.55
10	18.12.2018	153000000	11.10.2019	102000000	282	1773123.29

Sl. No.	Central share allotment date	Amount (₹)	State share allotment date to SPD	Amount (₹)	Delay in allotment beyond 15 days	Interest payable at 1.50 *per cent* per annum (₹)
11	11.04.2019	114000000	04.10.2019	76000000	161	754273.97
12	30.09.2019	30000000	08.10.2020	20000000	359	442602.74
13	28.06.2021	81458757	30.10.2021	54305837	109	389712.33
14	29.12.2022	674035000	01.02.2023	449357000	19	526301.30
					Total	**12601340.94**

(Source: Fund release orders of MHRD and State)

Prolonged delay in release of funds is not justifiable, as it in turn leads to delay in release of funds from SPD to institutions.

Verification of records relating to release of first instalment to 16 selected institutions revealed that in 10 institutions the delay ranged from 82 to 682 days as detailed in **Table 3.5** below.

Table 3.5: Details of delay in transfer of funds from SPD to selected institutions

Sl. No.	Institution	Date of receipt of fund in SPD	Date of transfer to institution	Delay in days
1	Human Resource Development Centre (HRDC)	30.03.2016	01.02.2017	293
2	Government College, Tripunithura	08.10.2020	13.01.2021	82
3	Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kalamassery	18.01.2019	14.06.2019	132
4	NSS Training College, Ottapalam	11.10.2019	20.11.2020	391
5	Sree Sankara Vidyapeetom College, Valayanchirangara	18.01.2019	20.11.2020	657
6	PKM College of Education, Madampam, Kannur	11.10.2019	20.11.2020	391
7	HHMSPBNSS College for Women, Neeramankara	18.01.2019	11.12.2020	678
8	Government Arts College, Thiruvananthapuram	18.01.2019	20.11.2020	657
9	TM Jacob Memorial Government College Manimalakkunnu	08.10.2020	23.01.2021	92
10	Government Sanskrit College, Tripunithura	18.01.2019	15.12.2020	682

(Source: Fund release orders of SPD)

In the reply furnished by Government (April 2024), it was stated that delay in allotment of State share occurred in cases which required approval of Finance Department, GoK due to procedural formalities and that no interest was being charged for the delay mentioned. Funds were transferred to the individual institutions only after their DPRs were found to be in compliance with the RUSA guidelines which might have caused some delay.

Government may initiate action to check the delay in transfer of funds, as the delay in allotment of funds to the institutions would impede the timely achievement of targets and completion of projects. Further, the institutions should be directed to submit their Detailed Project Reports and get them approved in time, as pointed out in paragraph 3.1.5.

3.1.7.5. Utilisation of funds

Audit noticed shortfalls in utilisation of funds at State and institutional level as seen in following paragraphs:

Delay in release of funds due to delay in conducting physical inspection

The Guiding Principles of the scheme stipulated that funding was norm based and future grants were released on the basis of level of past achievements and status of utilisation of funds submitted to MHRD. MHRD releases the grants to the State in three instalments in the ratio 50:25:25. MHRD insisted upon utilisation of more than 75 *per cent* of funds received, in order to consider institutions for further release of funds. The final instalment of 25 *per cent* of Central share would be released, only when the State submitted physical inspection report (PIR) conducted by the Technical Support Group (TSG)[81] to PAB.

In accordance with the decision of PAB, ₹565.57 crore was sanctioned during 2013-23 to the State towards implementation of RUSA 1.0 and 2.0. As of March 2023, SPD received ₹433.28 crore (Central and State share) and ₹77.75 crore was yet to be received for want of PIRs to be submitted/ utilisation of funds above 75 *per cent* by the State, as instructed in the policy. Of the sum receivable, ₹ six crore pertained to the implementation of projects in nine institutions under RUSA 1.0 and ₹71.75 crore was related to 120 institutions under RUSA 2.0.

Audit observed that out of these 129 institutions, 78 had utilised more than 75 *per cent* of funds received and were eligible for conduct of physical inspection by TSG, as of July 2023. However, physical inspection was conducted by TSG only in 10 out of these 78 institutions. Further, the remaining 51 institutions were yet to achieve utilisation of funds above 75 *per cent*.

Government replied (April 2024) that by the end of 2023, physical inspections were conducted in 78 institutions, based on which proposals for funds were submitted to GoI on 30 December 2023. However, delay in submission of PIRs/ utilisation of funds above 75 *per cent* resulted in non-receipt of final instalment of State and Central shares to the institutions till date (March 2023).

Expenditure on higher education vis-à-vis GSDP

One of the pre-requisites of RUSA 1.0 was that the State Government must gradually increase the spending on higher education sector to two *per cent* of GSDP[82] during the course of implementation. Under RUSA 2.0, State Governments were to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Department of Higher Education (MHRD), GoI to be eligible for funding.

As GoK had received funds under RUSA 1.0, it was liable to increase its spending on higher education. Further, in the MoU entered into (May 2018) between the State Head of Higher Education Department and RUSA National Mission Director, it was assured that the spending on higher education would be increased to at least two *per cent* of GSDP by March 2020.

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81 The State council (SPD in the State) appoints and decides the composition of TSG.

82 Gross State Domestic Product is a measure in monetary terms, of the sum total volume of all finished goods and services produced during a given period of time, usually a year, within the geographical boundaries of the State

However, Audit observed that the actual spending on higher education during 2018-23 ranged from 0.44 *per cent* to 0.51 *per cent* of the GSDP, as detailed in the **Table 3.6.**

Table 3.6: Total State expenditure on Higher Education during 2018-23

Year	GSDP of the State (*₹ in crore)*	Two *per cent* of GSDP *(₹ in crore)*	Actual expenditure on Higher Education *(₹ in crore)*	Expenditure in Percentage
2018-19	554228.32	11084.57	2691.67	0.48
2019-20	559194.17	11183.89	2462.40	0.44
2020-21	518205.90	10364.12	2433.28	0.46
2021-22	584410.34	11688.21	3017.64	0.51
2022-23	622397.72	12447.96	3088.11	0.49

(Source: Details collected from Economics and Statistics Department, GoK and VLC figures)

GoK thus did not enhance spending on Higher Education sector, as envisaged under the scheme.

Government stated (April 2024) that with the available resources, allocating two *per cent* of GSDP would be a challenging task and that the matter would be brought to the notice of Department of Finance, GoK.

3.1.8. Shortfalls in execution of projects under the scheme

Audit observed deficiencies in release and utilisation of funds by test checked institutions as detailed below:

3.1.8.1. Non- finalising of projects resulting in non-utilisation of funds

Government College, Tripunithura submitted (January 2021) DPR comprising three works[83] to SPD, for obtaining infrastructure grant amounting to ₹ two crore. Of this, ₹ one crore was released (January 2021) for the construction of canteen building in the new campus, where an academic block was being constructed by Kerala Industrial and Technical Consultancy Organisation (KITCO) utilising KIIFB[84] funds. The Director of Collegiate Education (DCE), who was the State Project Coordinator of RUSA, also suggested modifications to the plan and the college submitted the modified plan to SPD in August 2021.

Meanwhile, as per Government instructions issued in March 2021[85], ₹ one crore allotted for construction was credited back to the account of the SPD in October 2021. Audit observed that even as the approval of the plan for canteen was pending with SPD, the college submitted (January 2022) a revised plan for constructing class rooms on the third floor of the academic block, for which permission was accorded by SPD in March 2022. However, the implementing

83 Construction Component – ₹ one crore for construction of College Canteen in the upcoming campus, Purchase Component – ₹80 lakh, Campus Beautification and Maintenance Component – Installation of Water Treatment Plant ₹20 lakh

84 Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board

85 In line with revised guidelines of GoI wrt. Centrally Sponsored schemes, SPD instructed (August 2021) the institutions to close the existing bank accounts and transfer funds lying in the accounts to the Single Nodal Account of SPD

agency KITCO was not willing to execute the work due to insufficiency of funds provided. Subsequently, the college sought permission (May 2022) for yet another project, *viz*., construction of a Ladies' hostel, which was also withdrawn (June 2023), stating that the marshy terrain would necessitate extra cost for construction of the hostel building.

Audit noticed that even after three years of approval of original DPR, the college was not able to decide upon the project to be executed and multiple options were being explored. In the absence of effective planning and feasibility studies to identify the actual requirement of the institution, various unviable proposals were mooted and the allotted fund remained unutilised. Besides, the components relating to purchase, beautification of campus and maintenance and installation of water treatment plant were also not undertaken.

Government replied (April 2024) that getting clearances from statutory bodies for construction activities, high cost of construction, etc., delayed the project. It was also informed that SPD accorded (December 2023) administrative sanction for ₹ two crore for a new proposal submitted (October 2023) by the college for construction of classrooms, renovation works and purchase of equipment and that the project would start at the earliest. The reply confirms the audit observation on inability of the college in finalising the project to be executed as the college continues to moot new proposals.

3.1.8.2. Infructuous expenditure out of preparatory grants

Government of Kerala received (February 2014 to March 2017) ₹ eight crore as preparatory grants under RUSA 1.0 to undertake activities for creating and supporting institutional structures such as SHEC, SPD and TSG, for better implementation of RUSA in the State. MHRD directed (January 2016) the States to utilise the preparatory grants and to submit the Utilisation Certificates (UC) by 31 March 2016.

As per GoK's directions (February 2016) to utilise the grants in a timely manner, the SPD invited proposal for implementing Video Conferencing (VC) facility[86] from Kerala State Electronics Development Corporation (KELTRON). KELTRON submitted (February 2016) detailed project proposal to SPD for implementing the facility in 30 selected Government Arts and Science Colleges all over Kerala and Directorate of Collegiate Education, at a cost of ₹1.24 crore. The delivery and installation of VC facility was to be completed within six to seven weeks and the warranty of equipment was fixed as three years. SPD issued (February 2016) work order to KELTRON and KELTRON submitted invoice (March 2016) for ₹1.24 crore. SPD paid the amount in two instalments in March 2016 itself and furnished UC to MHRD in the same month.

KELTRON supplied (March 2017) the hardware and equipment at 31 locations, only after a delay of one year. However, simultaneous video conferencing at all 31 locations did not materialise. Moreover, due to non-availability of dedicated

[86] Included six items such as end point with camera and remote, speaker, channel mixer with mic, display etc.

bandwidth (i.e 40-50 mbps), the Master Control Unit (MCU)[87] could not be installed at the Directorate and had to be relocated (March 2019) to State Data Centre at Thiruvananthapuram after two years.

Audit observed that the Director of Collegiate Education (DCE) had informed (June 2019) SPD about the inability to undertake new programmes due to the issue of VC connectivity and requested KELTRON to make the system functional. However, KELTRON was able to connect 22 locations only. In six locations, the devices were faulty and the remaining three locations had reported Internet Protocol issues. Even in the case of 22 locations claimed to have been connected by KELTRON, DCE pointed out that (September 2022) only one way connectivity could be established.

In December 2022, DCE requested KELTRON to suggest the date for testing 31 VC locations through MCU. However, KELTRON expressed inability to conduct the test due to poor condition of functional equipment and inability to replace damaged equipment from their own fund. Audit noticed that in response to the request made by SPD to re-organise the VC facility already installed, KELTRON informed (July 2023) that all hardware components deployed as part of the project have turned obsolete and out of warranty, due to which no further assistance could be provided. As per the status report furnished (January 2024) by SPD to Audit, in 19 out of 22 locations where the system was installed, at least one component of the system had turned faulty and required replacement.

Thus, KELTRON, despite being entrusted with the responsibility of completing the work within seven weeks for which full payment was received, could not complete the project and achieve integration of all 31 locations at a time, even after seven years. Due to non-integration of all locations, meetings, training programmes and Online Resources Initiatives of Collegiate Education Programmes could not be conducted online as envisaged. The SPD, without ensuring the completion of integration of VC facility at 31 locations, had effected full payment to KELTRON which resulted in infructuous expenditure of ₹1.24 crore. Despite funds released remaining parked with KELTRON, Government furnished UCs to GoI, showing the funds as spent.

Government stated (April 2024) that KELTRON being a PSU under Industries Department, the Department was requested to direct KELTRON to complete the integration of VC facility at the 31 locations without further delay, failing which disciplinary action would be finalised against erring officials.

3.1.8.3. Non-establishment of the New Model Degree College at Wayanad

Under component five of RUSA 2.0, the project for setting up of a New Model Degree College (NMDC) in Wayanad District was approved (July 2018) by PAB. MHRD directed (July 2018) GoK to complete the processes of handing over of land for construction, submission of complete DPR and the tendering

[87] MCU is a video transcoding device that helps in conducting group video conferences between multiple video conferencing systems. It works by mixing media points received from different endpoints of a video conference call in real time.

process on priority basis. GoK accorded (January 2019) permissive sanction to allot 10 acres of land owned by Health and Family Welfare Department in Periya village of Mananthavady Taluk in Wayanad district and the land was handed over (July 2020) to Higher Education Department for constructing the college.

SPD entrusted (April 2019) the task of preparation of DPR of NMDC to Kerala State Information Technology Infrastructure Ltd (KSITIL). On verifying records made available to audit, it was noticed that KSITIL furnished (May 2019) the DPR to SPD without ensuring the suitability of the land. SPD forwarded (May 2019) the DPR to MHRD. In the wake of frequent occurrence of landslides in the vicinity of the site, it was decided[88] (September 2019) to entrust National Institute of Technology (NIT), Calicut to ascertain suitability of the proposed land for construction. NIT reported (October 2019) that the site being steep and characterised by silty clay, was not fit for building works. The above fact was informed by the District Collector to the SPD in November 2019. Audit observed that consultancy fee of ₹14.51 lakh was paid (March 2023) to KSITIL for preparation of DPR.

As KSITIL did not ensure suitability of the land while preparing the DPR, ₹14.51 lakh expended from RUSA fund towards consultancy fee has turned wasteful. Despite funds amounting to ₹ six crore being credited (February 2023) to the SNA, no alternative site was identified and fresh DPR prepared. As a result, the project of construction of NMDC Wayanad is yet to be undertaken (February 2024).

Government replied (April 2024) that an alternative land in possession of Department of Technical Education has been identified and the construction of NMDC was expected to start at the earliest. Government may fix responsibility and initiate action against KSITIL for not ensuring the suitability of selected land, as the land identified was located in an area prone to landslides.

3.1.8.4. Deviation from Detailed Project Report

On submission of Technical sanction accorded by TSG to the works proposed by institutions, SPD issues final authorisation to the institutions to commence the works for which sanction was accorded. As per the general directions issued by SPD while issuing Technical Sanction/final work order to the institutions, works included in the DPR were to be executed in the site proposed as per specifications contained in the DPR. Audit observed that the institutions took up projects which were not included originally in the DPR and not accorded Technical sanction, for execution as seen in the following cases:

- The DPR of Kannur University approved by SPD (October 2017) under RUSA 1.0, included three construction works[89] worth ₹ seven crore

[88] In a joint physical verification of the site conducted by authorities of Panchayat, Revenue Department and RUSA.

[89] Seminar Complex at Kannur Campus – ₹5.90 crore, University Scientific Instrumentation Centre at Swami Anandatheertha Campus, Payyanur – ₹ one crore, Construction of open well at Staff Quarters, Dharmasala – ₹0.10 crore.

under the infrastructure component. During verification of records of these works, it was noticed that two works, *viz.*, construction of a car shed roof with rest room for drivers costing ₹55.04 lakh and construction of Compound Wall in Nileswaram Campus for ₹44.80 lakh which were not included in the DPR, were undertaken by the University utilising RUSA fund.

- Maintenance of Ladies' Hostel at an estimated amount of ₹19.25 lakh was one of the works included in the DPR of Sree Sankara Vidyapeetom College, Valayanchirangara under RUSA 2.0. The technical sanction for the work was accorded by the TSG in February 2020. As per the agreement executed (February 2020) between the College and Habitat Technology Group (Habitat), the work was to be completed by February 2021. The work was not taken up based on the instructions of College in the wake of COVID in 2020. Subsequently, the Board of Governors of the College decided (July 2021) to undertake maintenance work of Ladies' Hostel with funds provided by the Management of the institution, and to utilize the allotted RUSA funds for renovating History Museum by constructing the first floor to the existing building. Audit observed that the work of History museum was also entrusted to Habitat without executing any fresh agreement. During the joint site inspection conducted by Audit with the college authorities in April 2023, it was observed that though the first floor was constructed, electrical and plumbing works were not executed.

The Government replied (April 2024) that the deviation in respect of two works *viz.*, car shed and compound wall as well as the work-related to history museum did not have approval from SPD, and the cases were being examined in consultation with the Finance Department. The deviations in projects undertaken, which did not have approval from SPD are a procedural violation and are to be viewed seriously.

3.1.8.5. Failure in completing construction works

Seminar Complex

Kannur University proposed (July 2017) construction of ground floor of building for Seminar Complex at Thavakkara Campus of Kannur University for ₹5.90 crore under RUSA 1.0. The work was entrusted to the contractor, Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society (ULCCS). As per the agreement (March 2018) executed between the University and ULCCS, ULCCS was to be paid ₹4.70 crore and the work was to be completed within 15 months, by June 2019.

The Syndicate initially decided to grant (March 2018) mobilisation advance of 20 *per cent* amounting to ₹93.96 lakh to ULCCS but resolved (August 2018) to grant excess funds (additional 30 *per cent)* to the agency, thereby enhancing the total amount of advance granted to ₹2.34 crore.

Figure 3.1: Photographs of construction site of Seminar Complex at Thavakkara campus, Kannur University taken by Audit party on 12 July 2023

Audit noticed that the University handed over the site to ULCCS in July 2018 only, after felling and clearing off the trees in the site. In July 2019, ULCCS wrote to the Registrar of the University that delayed clarifications and approval of drawings of pile cap, column rods and grid beam have greatly hampered the progress of work. Citing the above, ULCCS requested an extension of period of one year to complete the work, which was also granted by the Syndicate. While the work was in progress, ULCCS submitted (November 2020) a revised estimate for ₹6.04 crore, which was approved (February 2021) by the Board of Governors (BoG) of RUSA. Though the agreement was executed in March 2018, ULCCS requested multiple extensions of time[90] for completion of work to the University, citing reasons such as delay in handing over of site, difficulties experienced in pile boring beyond a certain strata, and non-availability of men and material due to COVID restrictions and lock down. The requests for time extension were accepted and a supplementary agreement executed (April 2022) for extra items in the revised estimate.

Joint verification of the site with University authorities (July 2023) revealed that the ground floor of the building has not been completed and electrical and plumbing works were yet to be undertaken. By then, an expenditure of ₹5.13 crore had been incurred on the work.

Thus, the Syndicate of the University, disregarding the guidelines of the scheme, extended undue favour to the contractor by sanctioning excess mobilisation advance as well as granting unjustified extension of one year. Despite executing supplementary agreement in April 2022 with extra items, the contractor has not completed the work even after a lapse of nearly five years from June 2019. After incurring an expenditure of ₹5.13 crore from RUSA

[90] First extension – 01 July 2019 to 30 July 2020, Second extension – upto June 2021, Third extension – upto October 2021

funds, the intended benefit of Seminar Complex to the University is yet to be achieved.

Scientific Instrumentation Centre

Kannur University proposed (July 2017) construction of a Scientific Instrumentation Centre (Centre) for ₹ one crore and purchase of instruments worth ₹3.07 crore under the components of construction and purchase of RUSA 1.0 respectively. The facility and equipment were to help the faculty, research scholars and students to carry out globally competitive Research and Development in basic and applied sciences. The sophisticated instrumentation facility aimed at strengthening technological infrastructure to carry out advanced research in various science disciplines under one roof and make their services available to academic schools and departments. University accorded (August 2018) Technical Sanction to the estimate for ₹1.90 crore of which ₹ one crore was sourced from RUSA funds and balance ₹0.90 crore from State Plan fund. The work was entrusted to ULCCS, an accredited agency.

As per the agreement executed by the University (September 2018) with ULCCS, the construction of the centre including electrification and plumbing works[91] were to be completed within nine months from the date of agreement, which was extended[92] subsequently through multiple orders till June 2021. The University stated that the completion of work got extended due to non-release of money from Plan fund and delay in obtaining approval from Public Works Department, GoK for electrical and plumbing works.

The University revised (August 2022-May 2023) the estimate to ₹3.30 crore (₹2.30 crore from Plan fund) by including three additional rooms, car porch and staircase in the cellar and allied electrical and plumbing works. Audit conducted (July 2023) a joint inspection of the site along with the authorities of the University and observed that the building alone was completed and works relating to flooring, electrification, plumbing, etc., were yet to be undertaken.

Figure 3.2: Photograph of building for Scientific Instrumentation centre at Payyanur campus, Kannur University, taken by Audit party on 13 July 2023

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[91] Costing ₹1.52 crore

[92] First extension from 02 June 2019 to 11 April 2020, second extension upto 30 November 2020 and third extension upto 30 June 2021

Thus, though the University undertook construction of the building based on an approved design, it opted to revise the plan with additional features, necessitating extra expenses. Consequently, the Centre was not made functional even after five years and the four instruments[93] purchased for ₹2.20 crore for installation in the centre had to be kept at the disposal of the Heads of the Departments in various campuses of the University. Thus, the objective of enabling technological infrastructure to carry out advanced research in various science disciplines under one roof to benefit academic schools and departments, remains to be realised.

Government replied (April 2024) that for the financial year 2024-25, the University has proposed to allocate ₹201.60 lakh from the State plan fund as a matching grant for the completion of both the works. It was also informed that corrective measures will be taken to complete the projects at the earliest.

However, due to delay in completion of the projects, the students of the University were deprived of the benefits of the Seminar Complex and Scientific Instrumentation Centre.

Audit further observed that Kannur University had violated GoK instructions (July 2014 and June 2018) whereby the advance payment to an accredited agency undertaking the work directly, should be restricted to 20 *per cent* of the estimated cost of works in the agreement executed between the institution and accredited agency. Kannur University entrusted the new construction works undertaken under RUSA 1.0 to the contractor, ULCCS. In August 2018, ULCCS requested to release 50 *per cent* of the contract price as mobilisation advance towards all works for which agreement was executed by them with Kannur University, citing increase in price of materials, reduction of credit period by vendors post implementation of GST and need for bulk purchase of materials for the work. Accordingly, the Syndicate of the University resolved (August 2018) to grant 50 *per cent* of the contract price of works as mobilisation advance for all construction works undertaken by ULCCS. Thus, Kannur University paid ₹5.61 crore as advance payment to ULCCS for various works under RUSA, in violation of extant orders, as shown in **Appendix 3.5**.

Government replied that Kannur University has violated the guidelines of Government on undertaking public works issued by the Finance Department and released excess mobilisation advances to the contractors without obtaining prior approval of Government. It was also stated that appropriate action would be taken against the University in consultation with Finance Department.

Auditorium at SSUS Kalady

As per the approved DPR, the Vice-Chancellor of Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit (SSUS), Kalady sanctioned (March 2017) the construction of an auditorium in the University campus and entrusted the Engineering Department of the University to prepare a detailed estimate. Subsequently, the SSUS, Kalady handed over (February 2018) this work to a

[93] Micro Raman Spectrometer, Spectro Fluorometer, X-ray Diffraction Instrument, Solar Simulator

consultant, Kerala State Nirmiti Kendra (KESNIK), which prepared a detailed estimate for ₹ four crore. The University released (February 2018) ₹ three crore as mobilisation advance to KESNIK, which was 55 *per cent* in excess of the permissible 20 *per cent* of the total cost. KESNIK tendered the work and awarded it to another agency[94], with September 2019 as time of completion. KESNIK also prepared an additional detailed estimate of ₹3.75 crore for electrification, air conditioning, acoustics, false ceiling, compound wall, firefighting system, etc., from the plan fund of the institution, which was sanctioned (November 2020) by SSUS, Kalady. The total payment made by SSUS, Kalady till 19 March 2022 was ₹3.35 crore, which was utilised from RUSA fund amounting to ₹ four crore. Audit conducted joint inspection (April 2023) of the site and found that the construction of auditorium was not completed and works related to flooring, electrification and plumbing were yet to be undertaken. Further, no work was being currently undertaken at the site. Thus, the construction was left incomplete even after a lapse of five years from the release of fund.

Figure 3.3: Photograph of Auditorium at SSUS, Kalady taken by Audit party on 27 April 2023

Government accepted the audit findings and stated (April 2024) that SSUS, Kalady has violated the guidelines of Government on undertaking public works issued by the Finance Department and released excess mobilisation advances to the contractor without obtaining prior approval of Government. It was also stated that appropriate action would be taken against the University in consultation with Finance Department and that the delay in the construction of auditorium will be reviewed and corrective measures will be taken to complete the project at the earliest.

3.1.8.6. Infrastructure Facilities for Differently abled Persons

RUSA aimed at ensuring that issues of access, equity and quality are addressed in an equitable manner. By addressing equity issues such as converting existing buildings into fully disabled friendly and barrier free environments by providing ramps/lifts for easy access to classrooms, tactile path, display boards and sign posts, special facilities / equipment for the disabled, etc., significant impact was

94 M/s. K. A. Johnson

expected in the enrolment of students from deprived and marginalised sections. Further, the Manuals for institutional accreditation of Universities and Colleges under NAAC also prescribed the availability of disabled friendly physical facilities in an institution as a requisite for grading purpose.

Audit observed low priority being assigned to installation of disabled friendly features in institutions while selecting components under RUSA. Out of the 16 test checked institutions, only four institutions had included proposals for providing disabled friendly facilities like special toilets, elevators, ramps, etc., for ₹239 lakh.

Though existing institutions could have utilised RUSA funds to erect disabled friendly structures, Audit observed (August 2023) that out of 358 buildings in selected institutions, functional ramp was available in 151 buildings (42.18 *per cent*) only. Further, out of 244 multi-storied buildings, wheelchair access to upper floors was available in 30 buildings (12.30 *per cent*) only, the details of which are given in **Appendix 3.6**.

Government replied (April 2024) that every effort will be made to incorporate disabled friendly features in institutions in future. Efforts to utilize the second and third instalments of the component equity initiatives for providing facilities/ making purchases that help disabled students at various institutions were also underway.

3.1.9. Monitoring

3.1.9.1. Non-constitution of Board of Governors and Project Monitoring Unit in selected institutions

As per RUSA 1.0 Guidelines, the Board of Governors (BoG) was to monitor the progress of institutional projects on a regular basis and provide guidance for improving the performance of the institutions in project implementation. The BoG could be a 10-15 member body comprising eminent individuals from the institution itself, State government, society, industry as well as the academia. It was the responsibility of BoG to take all policy decisions with regard to smooth, cost effective and timely implementation of the institutional projects, ensure overall faculty development, ensure compliance with the agreed procedures for procurement of goods, works and services, financial management, etc.

RUSA guidelines further envisage that each institution will have to form a Project Monitoring Unit (PMU) with appropriate representation from academic officials of the institution, faculty, senior administrative officers, technical and non-technical support staff and students. The PMU was responsible for monitoring of the project at the institutional level and was assigned with roles including procurement of goods, works and services, financial management, performance audit, implementation of faculty/staff development and periodical updation of Management Information System.

Audit observed that one test checked institution, Government College, Tripunithura had not constituted BoG or PMU (May 2023). Audit also observed that seven out of the 16 selected institutions did not convene any meetings of the BoG and/or PMU meetings in the years specified, as detailed in **Table 3.7**, which was reflective of the low priority assigned to timely review and decision making with regard to implementation of institutional projects.

Table 3.7: Details of convening BoG and PMU meetings

Name of Institution	Years in which no meetings were held	
	BoG	PMU
SSUS Kalady	2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23	Meetings held
Government Arts College, Thiruvananthapuram	Meetings held	2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2022-23
Rajagiri College, Kalamassery	2018-19, 2022-23	2018-19, 2022-23
Sree Sankara Vidyapeetom College, Valayanchirangara	Meetings held	2018-19
Government Sanskrit College, Tripunithura	2018-19, 2019-20, 2021-22 and 2022-23	2018-19
SNGS Pattambi	2020-21	2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23
Government Brennen College, Thalassery	2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2022-23	Meetings held

(Source: Data obtained from institutions)

Government informed (April 2024) that Government College, Tripunithura has constituted both BoG and PMU in November 2023. It was assured that regular monitoring and evaluation of BoG and PMU of each institution would be undertaken by RUSA SPD.

3.1.9.2. Shortfall in geo-tagging of works and non-functioning of Management Information System

Ministry of Human Resource Development had provided (November 2015) ISRO's location-based application 'Bhuvan RUSA' to the States to monitor the progress in activities undertaken by funded institutions. The funded institutions were required to geo-tag the works/purchases by uploading physical and financial information in the application. Audit analysis of the Geographic Information System in the RUSA website in January 2024 revealed that only 19 out of the 157 funded institutions had geo-tagged their information on the status of project implementation. Reasons for not geo-tagging works/purchases were not furnished to audit. The above instances point to the fact that the prospects of web-based monitoring system have not been harnessed effectively in the State.

RUSA aimed to implement a new web-based Management Information System (MIS) for monitoring the progress of project implementation in funded institutions and to collect IDPs and historical data of all universities and colleges in the State. For the purpose, MHRD launched (October 2018) National Higher Education Resource Center (NHERC)-MIS portal for collecting the details of institutions and the portal link was communicated (April 2019) to the institutions. Audit observed that the portal was not functional and MIS was not operationalised as envisaged.

Government replied (April 2024) that action will be taken to monitor and ensure that all RUSA beneficiaries are geo-tagged.

3.1.9.3. Shortfall in regular teaching staff

One of the pre-requisites for funding under RUSA 1.0 was that of filling up of faculty vacancies. The RUSA 1.0 guidelines stipulated that the States having more than 15 *per cent* faculty positions remaining vacant by the end of the first year of RUSA, may lose the entitlement for any further grants. The Guidelines of RUSA 2.0 envisaged that colleges and universities with faculty position above 85 *per cent* filled in regular mode and student teacher ratio above 10:1-20:1 were to be given top priority for selection under infrastructure grants. GoK entered (May 2018) into an MoU with MHRD and agreed on filling up faculty vacancies and ensuring that there is no ban on recruitment and that the faculty positions in Universities would not be less than 85 *per cent* of sanctioned faculty strength. However, Audit noticed deviations from the above in filling up of vacancies by test checked institutions as elaborated below:

- Audit observed that in 15 selected institutions (including Universities), the sanctioned faculty strength was 1776 as on 31 March 2023, against which the actual faculty position was 1249 (70 *per cent*), leaving 527 vacant faculty positions as shown in **Table 3.8**. The details of sanctioned strength and faculty positions in individual institutions are given in **Appendix 3.7**.

Table 3.8: Details of sanctioned posts and faculty position of 15 selected institutions during the period 2018-19 to 2022-23

Year	Total Sanctioned Teaching Post	Actual Teaching Faculty (excluding Contract/ Guest Faculty)	Difference/ Vacant Position
2018-19	1727	1160*	568
2019-20	1737	1179	558
2020-21	1738	1255	483
2021-22	1739	1253	486
2022-23	1776	1249	527

** In one college, there was one faculty in excess of the sanctioned strength*
(Source: Data obtained from selected institutions)

Audit took note of the fact that as the requisite benchmark of 85 *per cent* of faculty strength was not maintained by SSUS Kalady, the project submitted by the institution under RUSA 2.0 was discarded (July 2018) by MHRD. In 2018-19, against the sanctioned strength of 220, 46 faculty positions remained vacant in the institution.

- Out of the 15 selected institutions, eight institutions, which had proposed works under construction, renovation and purchase, did not maintain the student teacher ratio as stipulated in the guidelines (**Appendix 3.8**).

- As per the UGC Regulation on Minimum Qualifications for appointment of Teachers and other Academic staff in Universities and colleges and measures for the maintenance of standards in Higher Education 2010, teachers should be appointed on contract basis, only when it is absolutely necessary and when the student teacher ratio does not satisfy the laid down norms. In any case, the number of appointments was not to exceed 10 *per cent* of the total faculty position of the College / University.

Contrary to the above, it was observed that during the audit period 2018-19 to 2022-23, the number of Guest / Contract Faculty appointed in the 15 selected institutions ranged from 42 to 47 *per cent*, as against the 10 *per cent* criteria specified in UGC norms, as detailed in **Table 3.9.**

Table 3.9: Details of Guest/Contract staff appointed in selected institutions

Period	Sanctioned Regular Teaching Posts	Actual Regular Teaching Posts	UGC Criteria (10 *per cent* of total posts)	Guest / Contract Faculty appointed	Percentage of Guest/ Contract faculty
2018-19	1727	1160	173	760	44
2019-20	1737	1179	174	789	45
2020-21	1738	1255	174	746	42
2021-22	1739	1253	174	807	46
2022-23	1776	1249	178	838	47

(Source: Replies collected from 15 selected institutions under RUSA 1.0 and 2.0)

Government assured in reply (April 2024) that institutions which have a student teacher ratio exceeding 15 *per cent* and guest faculty exceeding 10 *per cent* will be reminded to undertake corrective measures to adhere to the RUSA/UGC guidelines.

3.1.9.4. Non-compliance to pre-requisites of RUSA scheme

As per the pre-requisites of RUSA 1.0, it was the responsibility of the States to carry out Accreditation reforms. States were to ensure that all the institutions adopt accreditation of NAAC and National Board of Accreditation (NBA)[95] as mandatory quality assurance framework. This was a pre-condition for sanction of funds under RUSA. Further, targets of RUSA 2.0 required all the State institutions to be NAAC accredited[96] by the end of March 2020. MHRD directed (January 2016) the States to create a State level Quality Assurance Cell (SLQAC) for facilitating timely mandatory NAAC accreditation to Higher Education institutions under RUSA 1.0. SLQAC was to take up various awareness as well as preparatory activities reaching out to the geographically scattered Higher Education institutions across the State, so as to achieve national and international standards.

Though GoK created (March 2016) SLQAC and utilised ₹1.42 crore of RUSA fund towards its establishment expenditure (March 2023), Audit observed that out of the 266 Government/Aided Arts and Science institutions[97], 81 did not have NAAC accreditation of any grade at the beginning of the audit period in 2018-19. The status after five years in 2022-23 indicated that the number of unaccredited institutions increased to 114 as detailed in **Table 3.10**.

95 Accreditation agency for Technical Educational institutions

96 Accreditation given by NAAC is usually valid for a period of five years. However, institutions which have secured highest grade consecutively in previous two cycles of accreditation and continue to do so in the 3rd cycle will be eligible for extension of validity from five to seven years.

97 Government and Aided Arts and Science colleges

Table 3.10: Status of NAAC accreditation of Arts and Science Colleges in the State during 2018-23

Year	Total number of Higher Education institutions	Number of institutions without accreditation
2018-19	266	81
2019-20	266	88
2020-21	266	94
2021-22	267	103
2022-23	267	114

(Source: Data furnished by the Directorate of Collegiate Education)

The decreasing trend in obtaining accreditation raises concerns regarding the extent of handholding of institutions by SLQAC towards attaining the pre-requisites of RUSA.

Government stated (April 2024) that as per the NAAC website (August 2023), a total of 234 institutions in the State were accredited. In addition, it was stated that several factors posed limitation to accreditation process like frequent changes in the criteria of assessment by NAAC, shutting down of Higher Education Institutions during COVID 19 lockdown and floods in 2018 and 2019.

The above contention is not tenable as the targets of RUSA 2.0 required all the State institutions to be NAAC accredited by the end of March 2020 and Audit observed that 58 number of colleges did not possess NAAC accreditation of any grade throughout the period 2018-23.

3.1.10. Conclusion

GoK received funding for implementation of RUSA from March 2014. Total grants of ₹433.28 crore were received till March 2023, out of which the Government managed to spend only ₹310.54 crore, leaving an unspent balance of ₹122.74 crore. Despite institutions not adhering to conditions specified in the Guidelines of RUSA, funds were released to these institutions, which defeated the very purpose of the scheme. Though RUSA 1.0 was to be implemented during 2013-17, several projects undertaken in test checked institutions under RUSA 1.0 were not completed by 2017 and were in various stages of execution during the audit period. Funds relating to RUSA 1.0 and RUSA 2.0, amounting to ₹10.54 crore and ₹121.75 crore respectively were yet to be released for completing these projects for reasons such as delay in conducting physical inspection, non-commencement of project etc.

Audit scrutiny revealed several shortcomings, delays and deviations from adherence to provisions in the Guidelines on implementation of the scheme. The State excluded KSHEC from the roles of strategy and planning, monitoring and evaluation, etc. Even though SHEPs were endorsed by KSHEC, the activities in connection with their preparation were not performed by the Council. SHEPs were not prepared by aggregating the IDPs. Baseline survey was not conducted for the preparation of DPRs by institutions. There was undue delay on the part of SPD, in releasing funds to institutions, which contributed to delay in implementation of components undertaken as per the DPR.

Government spending on higher education for the period 2018-23 ranged between 0.44 and 0.51 *per cent* of GSDP against the agreed two *per cent* as per the MoU with Government of India. Infrastructure projects remained incomplete due to deviation from approved DPR and consequent lack of funds for their completion. Out of 16 test checked institutions, only four institutions had included proposals for providing disabled friendly facilities like special toilets, elevators, ramps, etc.

Monitoring of the scheme at institutional as well as State level was inadequate. In the absence of annual perspective plan, the institutions were not having any timeline for progress to be achieved in the implementation. Geo-tagging of projects was not undertaken by the institutions as required under RUSA Guidelines.

3.1.11. Recommendations

Government may ensure that:

- All works undertaken are geo-tagged for effective implementation of web-based monitoring system.
- The spending on higher education is increased to two *per cent* of the GSDP as per the Memorandum of Understanding with Government of India.
- Recruitment of staff for faculty positions is carried out as per the norms for smooth functioning of the Institutes.
- Projects under RUSA should be completed in a time bound manner to achieve the targeted benefits and the option of taking action against officials responsible for severely delayed cases is explored.