

State yet to warm up to NPTEL

Good quality education material in engineering has been generated under the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning, which can be easily accessed through the project's recently launched portal. Sadly, engineering colleges in Kerala do not seem to be either aware or keen to use it, Abdul Latheef Naha finds out.

The quality of education being imparted in the country's engineering institutions has always been a matter of concern. The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development has evolved a scheme involving all the seven Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc.), Bangalore, aimed at enhancing learning of basic science and engineering concepts by using multimedia and web technology.

The scheme

The quality-boosting scheme named National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) is about to enter its second phase. Yet, engineering institutions in Kerala have generally not been able to make use of the academic expertise offered freely by the IITs of Mumbai, Delhi, Guwahati, Kanpur, Kharagpur, Madras and Roorkee, and IISc., Bangalore. And recently the programme portal has made it possible to access the content with relative ease. Sadly, most of our engineering colleges are not even aware of NPTEL. The IITs-IISc. collaborative venture is meant to deliver video and web-based educational content of high quality for 240 courses at the undergraduate level in the disciplines of core sciences and engineering, civil engineering, computer science and engineering, electrical engineering, electronics and communication engineering and mechanical engineering.

The content

The content conforming to AICTE syllabus is being made freely available for over two million engineering students in the country. Video lectures will be made available through broadcast channels and DVDs. NPTEL - where 320 faculty members of international repute from eight top-notch institutions work together to help more than two million engineering students and their teachers in the five core branches of engineering - also marks the country's entry into the global arena of ICT (information and communication technology) enabled education in science and technology.

Access on the Net

Material for over 200 courses is already available on Internet. Anyone can log on to <http://nptel.iitm.ac.in> and access the course contents prepared by the IIT-IISc. professors of international repute. Although the website asks for a login before entry, access is found to be much easier than creating a web-based e-mail account. Just provide a login name and some basic details, you can access the course content given in subject-wise modules. "This is excellent stuff," said one of the faculty members at M.E.S. College of Engineering, Kuttippuram, seeking anonymity as he was not aware of NPTEL and had to be prodded to check the content for *The Hindu-Educationplus*.

Thousands of hits

Ever since MHRD Minister Arjun Singh declared the NPTEL content open for use on September 3, the portal has had thousands of hits. The number of hits is expected to cross three lakhs in a few days. But more than half of the hits have been from the industry, and not from the academia. "This is because the lessons are of great use for those in the industry," says K.R. Srivathsan, director of the Indian Institute of Information Technology and Management, Kerala (IIITMK), Thiruvananthapuram. Prof. Srivathsan has been closely associated with the NPTEL programme, previously as a faculty member of IIT Kanpur and currently as a member of the national programme committee and the programme implementation committee that steer the scheme funded by the MHRD. More than Rs.20 crore has already been spent for the project. Prof. Srivathsan says that the current system of technical education under the affiliation regime is heavily examination-oriented and not learning-oriented. "Therefore, quality has always been a victim," he says. He says technical education is far removed from the real world. "Society should start demanding quality, not just marks and percentage," he says. Prof. Srivathsan has been instrumental in launching the Kerala Education Grid as a project to build e-learning systems, deploying the content in the colleges and orienting the teachers. Intense training of teachers and further content development in large number of courses is expected as part of the second phase of NPTEL. A series of workshops is on the cards as part of popularising the project as well as changing the mindset of education managers. Prof. Srivathsan will lead a workshop to be held as part of this in Thiruvananthapuram in December.