

# Driven to EXCEL

HT Horizons spotlights 'universities with potential for excellence' and finds out what the tag entails

They are a league of institutions with extra monetary support to realise their potential. The University Grants Commission has given them the title of Universities with Potential for Excellence (UPE), which means a wind-fall of crores of rupees for them. The UPE funding — over and above their pocket money — allows beneficiaries to upgrade infrastructure, go shopping for equipment and aids, and kick off more research projects, among other activities. While universities spend part of the money on one or a few thrust areas of research, they also use it for their 'holistic' development. Let's find out more about them.

## NEHU, SHILLONG |

[www.nehu.ac.in](http://www.nehu.ac.in)

Set up in 1973 in Shillong, the relatively young North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) bagged the UPE title in the second batch. Granted till March 2012, this is up for review this year.

**Thrust areas under the UPE scheme:** Area studies (including language, cultural and anthropological work in north-east India), bio-sciences, biotechnology and medicinal plants

**The leg-up:** With the ₹5 crore per annum it has been receiving under the scheme since 2006-07, NEHU has equipped classrooms with audio-visual aids, subscribed to 5000 e-journals, bought research equipment, and ensured stable and regular power supply, says AN Rai, vice chancellor. Also, a data-voice network (Wi-Fi connectivity plus the fibre-optic set-up) covers the campus.

## UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD |

[www.uohyd.ernet.in](http://www.uohyd.ernet.in)

The University of Hyderabad added the UPE feather to its cap in 2002 (2002 - 2007). Like certain others, the university is expecting recognition again. "A UGC committee

is likely to visit us soon to consider renewal for the second phase," says V Kannan, VC. The university now hopes to become a "university of excellence".

**Thrust areas:** Interfacial studies and research

**The leg-up:** The UGC gave ₹30 crore for thrust areas and holistic development of the university in UPE phase I.

"The first phase was launched with an accent on the UGC's concerns about the large-scale challenges to research and higher education on account of globalisation, brain drain and a host of others," says Kannan. "The result is, the University of Hyderabad (UoH) is now ranked first (based on Scopus data) among the best universities of India and the role of the UPE programme has been a major catalyst in this process. A rise in peer-reviewed publications; international citations and high visibility of faculty in the academic world have all contributed to the placing of UoH in the first rank," says Kannan. Scopus, an international body, provides an abstracts and citations database of peer-reviewed literature and web sources.

## MKU | [www.mkuniversity.org](http://www.mkuniversity.org)

Madurai Kamaraj University (MKU) got the UPE label for 2007 to 2012. It now aims to become a 'university with excellence', says R Karpaga Kumaravel, who completed his three-year term as MKU VC on April 19.

**Thrust areas:** Nanoscience and nanotechnology

**The leg-up:** The university has received ₹25 crore till March this year. With the funding, it has started many research projects in its focus and other areas, appointed more teachers, and expanded the infrastructure and provided modern facilities to students. "We got a science block built at a cost ₹4.5 crore. It has a science instrumentation centre, students' cyber café, seminar room, and a modern communica-

tion centre," says Kumaravel. It boasts a two-way audio-video conferencing provision and smart classrooms with interactive white boards.

## UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA |

[www.caluniv.ac.in](http://www.caluniv.ac.in)

The University of Calcutta is in the second batch of institutions given the UPE tag.

**Thrust area:** Modern biology

**The leg-up:** "We have developed infrastructure in accordance with UPE guidelines," says Suranjan Das, VC. "We are also developing research programmes. Under the holistic development guideline, a number of research projects in social sciences, humanities and library sciences have been taken up." For access and equity, it set up a Braille section in the central library and built disabled-friendly toilets and ramps.

The funding — ₹30 crore released over five years — has enabled the university to hand out travel grants to teachers as well as MPhil students, says Das. The university now proposes to start projects linking science and social sciences, he adds.

## UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS |

[www.unom.ac.in](http://www.unom.ac.in)

The University of Madras, part of the maiden cohort, got the UPE stamp in 2003-2004.

**Thrust area:** Herbal sciences

**The leg-up:** One-third of the sanctioned ₹30 crore was for the thrust area and two-thirds for holistic development. Under the UPE programme, the university has built about half-a-dozen buildings, including two hostels for women students. It has modernised the libraries in all its four campuses, provided internet connections in each library, and developed four language labs. It also offers coaching for UGC-Council of Scientific and Industrial Research National Eligibility Test.