Question 15.Has the organization taken any special initiatives to support / encourage women in STEM Workforce such as extra reservation, counselling programmes, training programmes, mentorship sessions etc.

The Institute has implemented a comprehensive and strategic set of initiatives to empower, support, and uplift women in the STEM workforce. These efforts span mentoring, academic support, leadership development, entrepreneurship promotion, and institutional inclusion, all tailored to foster a more equitable and nurturing academic environment.

Mentorship, Counselling, and Academic Support:
BITS Pilani runs regular mentorship and counselling programs specifically for women faculty and researchers. These include academic and pedagogy-focused workshops, scientific conferences, symposia, and Faculty Development Programs (FDPs) featuring national and international experts. A key pillar of this initiative is the **Teaching Learning Centre (TLC)**, led by senior faculty including accomplished women educators. The TLC offers peer mentorship for new faculty members, workshops on global teaching best practices, and continuous pedagogical training. Notably, women faculty such as Prof. Kaushar Vaidya (Physics), Prof. Pushpalata (Humanities), and Prof. Shibani Khanra Jha (Civil Engineering) have held leadership roles in the TLC.

Further, **Academic Counselling Committees (ACC)** are established on each campus, including at least one woman faculty and one female student. Esteemed faculty members such as Prof. Bharti Khungar (Pilani), Prof. Teny Theresa (Goa), Prof. Sudha Radhika (Hyderabad), and Prof. Deepthi Mary (Dubai) play key roles in these committees, offering both academic and emotional support to students.

Leadership Development – WE-FEEL Program:
In January 2024, BITS Pilani introduced **WE-FEEL (Women in Education – Fostering Empowerment through Effective Leadership)**, a 2.5-day residential leadership development program. Curated by Prof. Jayashree Mahesh, it brought together women faculty across campuses for sessions on self-awareness, goal-setting, emotional intelligence, and decision-making. Industry leaders like Ms. Pragnya Seth (Deutsche Bank) and Mr. Pradeep Sethi led sessions. This initiative has significantly enhanced leadership capacity and fostered a strong network of women academics.

Entrepreneurship Support for Women:
The Institute established the **Shobitam Centre for Women Entrepreneurship (SCWE)** across all campuses to nurture women-led ventures. This is complemented by the **Womenpreneurs for Bharat 1.0** initiative, a collaboration between PIEDS-BITS Pilani, NITI Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP), and Aditya Birla Capital Foundation. As of 2025, 34 women-led startups have been successfully incubated through this program, underscoring the impact of these efforts.

Institutional Practices and Equal Opportunity Measures:
While there is no formal reservation policy, the Institute gives preference to equally qualified women candidates during hiring and administrative appointments in the event of a tie. Women faculty are also actively encouraged and nominated for women-specific funding and leadership programs such as SERB-POWER, DST-Women Scientist Schemes, Fulbright-Nehru, and LEAP.

Role Modelling and Public Recognition:
The Institute highlights women leaders by inviting them as Chief Guests at convocations. Notable invitees have included Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, Dr. Sanghamitra Bandopadhyay, and Dr. N. Kalaiselvi—each an exemplar of excellence in STEM.