

Reforms in the Higher Education Sector

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- Government has ushered in multiple reforms in the higher education sector.
- While these are positives, a comprehensive overhaul of UGC and other regulatory structures is long overdue.

\n

\n\n

What are the political developments in the Ed-sector?

\n\n

\n

- PM Modi's vision to create 20 institutions of eminence and Union HRD ministries push for reforms have set the stage for overhauling the landscape.
- The HRD Ministry first saw the passage of the Indian Institutes of Management (IIM) Bill, 2017, which will extend greater autonomy to the IIMs.
- This was followed by reforms in the rules for granting autonomy and changes to the University Grants Commission's (UGC) mandate.
- Also, "Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan" (RUSA) was continued in order to improve the quality of higher educational institutions in the state.
- In this backdrop, it would now be appropriate to usher in major institutional reforms to overhaul the regulatory framework in the sector.
- Such an Act will further reforms adopted until now, and pave the way for the emergence of high-quality higher educational institutions.

\n

\n\n

What structures could possibly replace the current UGC?

\n\n

\n

- **Broad View** - Currently, there are 3 regulatory agencies in the higher education sector under the Union HRD ministry - UGC, AICTE and CoA.

\n

- A new Act should hence consider establishing a 'Higher Education Regulatory Commission' (HERA) to subsume all the 3 regulators.

\n

- States do play an important role in higher education and an advisory council consisting of representatives of all states needs to be established by the union.

\n

- In addition, leading educationists from diverse fields should also be roped in as members to the advisory council that advises HERC on all matters.

\n

- **Autonomy** - UGC has regulations under which it divides universities into three categories (I, II and III), with varying levels of autonomy.

\n

- The proposed act could consider merging Category I and Category II universities into one group - with autonomy to write their own curriculum.

\n

- In addition, they could also be granted the authority to oversee the curriculums of their respective affiliated colleges (not part of Category I).

\n

- For some independent courses that those non-autonomous colleges wish to start, HERC could be empowered to vet them with an appropriate expert body.

\n

- Also, HERC should be empowered to formulate guidelines for establishing institutions, reviewing compliance and call for closures if needed.

\n

\n\n

\n

- **Substructures** - If these suggestions are adopted, UGC will be relieved of the multiple regulatory responsibilities that will get divested to the HERC.

\n

- The two other major tasks of disbursement of funds and accreditation could then be vested with separate finance and accreditation boards respectively.

\n

- Both these boards should have full autonomy in discharging their functions once the broad policy is formulated at the level of the HERC.

\n

- **Accreditation** - HERC in cooperation with accreditation board should have

the responsibility to draw up standards and a grading system for institutions.

\n

- Multiple accreditation boards need to be established under HERC guidelines and mapping institutions with the boards should be random.

\n

- Direct financial dealing of institutions with accreditation boards also needs to be eliminated to ensure robust inspections and certifications.

\n

- **Financial Aspects** - HERC in cooperation with the finance board should develop guidelines for funding institutions.

\n

- HERC should also formulate policies for tuition fees and teacher salaries and explicitly provisions to raise funds should also be framed.

\n

- The HERC should have a secretariat to support its activities and also maintain a separate grievance remedy office.

\n

- **Foreign Institutions** - The proposed act should also provide for a clear path for the entry of foreign institutions into the Indian landscape.

\n

- As India has a large young population, foreign institutions will have an incentive to enter the country - which will in turn benefit our Ed-landscape.

\n

\n\n

\n

- **Research Integration** - There is a divide between teaching and research institutions and it is neither benefitting students nor benefitting researchers.

\n

- Hence, the act must also chart a path to integrate teaching and research to enable state-of-the-art labs to actively engage university scholars.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n\n

\n\n

\n



SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering