Governance Reforms of Higher Education

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Abstract:

Institutions of higher education in India may be categorised into universities and colleges. These institutions are governed on two criteria, the manner of establishment and the nature of programmes offered by the institution. It appears that higher education institutions are also subject to regulation on these two grounds. The governance of higher education institutions in India is largely the function of the University Grants Commission established under the University Grants Commission Act, 1956. This authority is responsible for formulating regulations on, inter alia other functions, grants, norms and standards for institutions, setting minimum qualifications for teaching and research staff. A further set of statutory authorities such as the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and the Bar Council of India (BCI) are responsible for formulating regulations for the governance of domain-specific higher education institutions. Among other things, the regulations of these authorities broadly specify standards for education, curriculum, qualification of faculty and staff, infrastructural norms, rules for conferment of degrees fees charged by the institutions, minimum levels of infrastructure expected. Broadly speaking, governance of universities in India appears to be on two levels, the University Grants Commission, and domain-based decentralized authorities such as the AICTE, NCTE based on the nature of programmes offered. For colleges, an affiliating university brings in an additional layer of governance and regulation. Therefore, higher education institutions in India are expected to follow all norms and standards for a minimum of two authorities. Individual colleges, on the other hand, are expected to follow rules set forth by three authorities.

Keywords: *Higher education, UGC, NCTE, AICTE*

1. Introduction

The problem of governance in higher education appears to be two-fold. There appears to be a problem of multiple regulatory authorities, and hence a problem of over regulation through multiple sets of regulations that a college or a university must adhere to. The decentralization of authority in higher education appears to have resulted in a situation wherein colleges and universities must wade through a web of regulations and permissions from statutory authorities for conducting courses, conferring degrees, appointing faculty and such day-to-day activities. Therefore, there is a pressing need to ensure coherence in the rules formulated by the statutory authorities, the UGC and individual universities for all programmes to ensure coherence. Governance in higher education must seek to provide more academic freedom to individual universities in shaping programmes and prescribing curricula.

Existing UGC regulations for governing private universities must be amended to ensure that universities have the academic freedom to offer new programmes that are interdisciplinary in nature. The existing regulations do not allow universities to offer new degree programmes that are not on the UGC list. In fact, universities can face penalties for attempting to offer new degrees. These regulations must be amended such that they provide universities with substantial academic freedom to be innovative in the kinds of degrees they offer. Else, we run the risk of restricting interdisciplinary approaches in higher education, and in turn, degree programmes may not offer students a well-rounded course of study. In recent years, higher education in India has experienced an unprecedented expansion

accompanied by diversification of the sector. The unplanned expansion of the sector poses challenges for enhancing and maintaining quality. The issues of governance & regulation in higher education are intertwined. Hence, the existing statutory position needs to be contextualised for any perspective on governance and regulatory issues in the sub-sector.

2. Effective governance of higher education

- An Education Commission comprising of academic experts will be set up, every five years to assist the Ministry of HRD in identifying new knowledge areas/ disciplines/ domains as well as pedagogic, curricular and assessment reforms at the global level, which will help to keep up with the change in global scenario and national aspirations.
- Governing bodies of higher education institutions will be made multi stakeholder, having representations from industry and alumni as well, with clear cut transparent guidelines for the composition and selection of such bodies.
- Efforts will be made to move towards a university system integrating UG, PG & doctoral studies, with faculty concurrently teaching both at UG and PG levels which will help improve synergies between teaching and research. Universities will be multi-disciplinary in nature and not single discipline specific.
- The State will endeavour to implement the recommendations of earlier policies of 1968 and 1986/92 for the creation of an Indian Education Service (IES), which is reiterated herein too. The IES will be an all India service with HRD as the cadre controlling authority. Till the IES comes into existence, an interim step of a one-time special recruitment by UPSC from among the existing academic and administrative positions in the education sector in various states will be made in concurrence with the states.
- Separate education tribunals will be established at the centre and in the states to deal with litigation and address public grievances against government as well as private schools/ institutions. These bodies will be headed by a retired High Court Judge. The tribunals will have the power to follow summary procedures for expeditious disposal of cases.
- The Government recognises and will encourage the positive role played by students' unions in furthering the interests of democracy and strengthening the democratic systems, governance and processes as well as debates, discussions and pluralism of thoughts. However, it has been observed that most of the disruptive activities and disharmony in a campus are led by outsiders and students who remain enrolled for many more years than what is mandated in the course of study they have enrolled in. A study will be conducted to prevent outsiders and those who have ceased to be students from playing an active role in students' politics and disrupting the academic activities as well as to prevent them from staying in hostels and misuse facilities of the institute.
- All HEIs will put in place an effective grievance redressal mechanism and will follow the principles of natural justice– mens rea and audi alterem partem before taking any punitive action against any student, faculty or organization.
- The existing affiliating system will continue but with a maximum limit of 100 on the number of affiliating colleges. Universities having more than 100 affiliated colleges under its ambit will be accordingly restructured.
- Norm-based funding with incentives for activities that promote excellence in public-funded higher education institutions will be introduced. All public-funded institutions will prepare perspective plans with specific milestones and timelines so as to ensure autonomy with financial and administrative accountability.

3. Governance reforms for quality

Quality assurance in higher education is today the top priority of the policy agenda. Post- secondary education needs to prepare graduates with new skills, a broad knowledge base and a wide range of competencies to enter a more complex and interdependent world. Quality is a multi-dimensional concept and several mechanisms for quality assurance and management at individual and institutional level are needed. Systems of accountability and accreditation with a robust regulatory mechanism are

essential to the process of sustaining and improving quality. Coordination and determination of standards in institutions for higher education and research and scientific and technical institutions is a constitutional obligation of the central government. It is necessary to involve all stakeholders to institutionalize internal processes in favour of quality as an island of excellence cannot serve the massive requirement of higher education. Quality has to be the concern of all institutions and excellence will flow from good quality institutions and appropriate governance structures. Higher education in India has experienced an unprecedented expansion accompanied by diversification of the sector. The unplanned expansion of the sector poses challenges for enhancing and maintaining quality. The country has established external quality assurance agencies in the 1990s to assure external quality. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was set up by the UGC in 1994 to accredit universities and institutions of general higher education and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) was established by the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) in 1994 to accredit programmes and institutions. NAAC accredits institutions and certifies for educational quality of the institution based on seven criteria. There is a dire need to undertake reforms in the entire higher education sector beginning with regulatory structures and going down to the institution level.

4. Possible approaches of reform agenda

- Create independent quality assurance frameworks to address the quality deficit in the higher educational institutions. Setting up of an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) is one such mechanism to ensure quality within the institutional framework and linking it with the standards set by the quality assurance agencies..
- A governance structure where in appointment of VC & Professors are through transparent and competitive process
- Restructuring the existing regulatory bodies and relooks at their multiplicity in a rationalized manner.
- Autonomy matching with accountability: Need to re-align the regulatory functioning in such a way as to promote autonomy of institutions. This approach envisages that we embrace a paradigm shift from to Facilitation rather than regulation; Single point clearances for grants and clearances; encourage global quality institutions. Autonomy of institutions would also be achieved by conferring degree granting powers to colleges and conferring autonomous status on colleges. In order to ensure horizontal and vertical mobility of students, we need to ensure that uniformity is achieved in terms of syllabi and curricula through a framework; Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) is adopted by all institutions.
- Need to revisit the issue of multiplicity of entrance and eligibility examinations and explore the possibility of a single national test. Can we have a National Testing Service for this purpose, which could be developed through consultations and debate?
- Permitting foreign education providers in India for proper regulation and internationalization of education by enhanced collaborations.
- Norm based funding of higher education rather than subjective demand based inspection governed funding. UGC is the main vehicle of routing funds to central and state Universities and colleges for funding. Adopting a norm based funding approach could be considered for improving efficiency in grant disbursals.
- State universities and their affiliated colleges that account for more than 90 percent of the enrolment suffer from severe fund constraints and poor governance leading to poor quality.
- Autonomy for Central Educational Institutions
- Prevention and prohibition of unfair practices so as to ensure that only merit plays a role in admissions.
- Capitation fees and misleading advertisements to be punished severely.

5. Conclusion

Academic reforms in India are being introduced with a goal of increasing quality standards in tandem with initiatives designed to broaden access. Current reform initiatives are focused at the state level, where over 90 percent of the nation's approximately 30 million higher-education students are enrolled. With increased funding of traditionally underfunded state universities and colleges, the government aims to implement a raft of reforms that include, among other things: greater institutional autonomy, a new credit accumulation and transfer system, new assessment protocols, student-focused syllabi, and regular revisions to curriculum. These changes are aimed at leveraging India's huge demographic advantage by producing graduates that are significantly better prepared to meet the needs of India's rapidly growing economy than is the case today. Implementation of the reforms is currently underway. In concert with plans to broaden access to tertiary study opportunities, the 12th Five-Year Plan also discusses the need for a deepening of academic reforms, with institutions being asked to shift their instructional emphasis from an "input-centric and credential-focused" approach to a more "learner-centric" approach. This is to be achieved through: regular revisions to curricula, the implementation of a choice-based credit system, the introduction of continuous and comprehensive student evaluations, a cumulative grade point system, and new marking and grading schemes. Learner-centric curriculum reforms include the introduction of credit requirements for non-major elective courses and the creation of syllabi and programs based on learning outcomes relevant to the labor market. Details of 12th Plan reform initiatives in the higher education space are outlined in the Ministry of Human Resource Development's 2013 *Rashtriya Uchchattar Shiksha Abhiyan* (RUSA) policy document. The RUSA initiatives build on plans first circulated in 2009 under the UGC's Action Plan for Academic and Administrative Reforms, and have an implementation window through to the end of the 13th planning period (2017-2022).

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