

UGC to tighten scrutiny of private universities to maintain quality

Amandeep Shukla

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: To ensure that the mushrooming of private universities across the country does not lead to a decline in the standard of education, the Union human resources development (HRD) ministry has initiated a massive exercise in which hundreds of legislations establishing these varsities will be scrutinised to identify if there are deviations from set norms, according to a senior official familiar with the developments. The exercise, which is expected to begin mid-November, is being led by the regulator of the higher education sector, University Grants Commission (UGC), which has already collected at least 300 state acts. A team of legal consultants working with Niti Aayog will study these acts to give a holistic picture, the official added.

UGC is already working on revising parameters for the setting up of universities. "There have been concerns about the standard of education in the hundreds of private universities spread across the country, and also about maintaining quality. There have been reports of varsities with insufficient infrastructure, including some functioning from just a few rooms," said the ministry official who asked not to be named.

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It was felt that a way to address the situation was to have a comprehensive evaluation of the legislations through which these bodies are set up, the official added.

The hundreds of acts under which private universities are set up in different states will be examined in light of the latest parameters that the regulator will soon come up with, said the official. "The idea is to identify any lacunae or gaps that lead to a laxity in the maintenance of educational standards, and ways to address them."

He added that the ministry has taken steps to bring UGC and legal consultants together to address this key aspect following directions from HRD minister Prakash Javadekar.

"The government is in favour of granting more funds and more autonomy to institutions that provide quality education, but ensuring that standards are not diluted is a key premise. Therefore, it is believed this exercise would go a long way in addressing quality concerns," the official said.

Apart from this, UGC is analysing nearly 8,000 cases it finds itself embroiled in, because, officials feel, ambiguities in existing legislations could be the reason behind several of these legal matters. "The study may help in suggesting ways in which the burden on the UGC of such cases may come down in the coming days," said the official quoted above.

Former UGC member Inder Mohan Kapahy said, "Some (private universities in India) are very good and some not as good. At times, even political pressure

may lead to the formation of such a body. A key aspect is: the day an act or ordinance is passed, the body can give degrees. There should be some mechanism to ensure quality checks at the time of inception. In India, operations of a varsity have hardly ever been stopped. So it is important to have quality checks at the time of inception, particularly with regard to new private varsities."