

Government to go slow on proposal to replace UGC with a new body

PAUSE The bill to set up a Higher Education Commission of India as an alternative to the UGC is unlikely to be presented in the parliament this year, say government officials

Prashant K Nanda
prashant.n@htlive.com

NEW DELHI: Under criticism from academics and political parties, the Union government has decided to go slow on the proposal to replace higher education regulator University Grants Commission (UGC) with a new body.

The bill to set up a Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) as an alternative to the UGC is unlikely to be presented in Parliament any time this year, at least two government officials said, adding more consultation will be held to iron out concerns and clear confusion.

"The ministry has carried out consultations on the subject and has received a lot of feedback, but there seems to be a perception against the move. We need to communicate and explain the intention well. It may be better to hold a wider consultation before moving forward," said one of the two officials cited above, both of whom spoke under condition of anonymity.

The official said academics in particular were not convinced on how this new body will be different from the UGC and "why a new body is required when the present system can be improved".

The second of the two officials said there was a consultation meeting with different stakeholders at the National Institute

of Educational Planning and Infrastructure, a body under the human resource development (HRD) ministry a few weeks ago, and academics were quite open on their opposition to the bill.

Authorities cited above said there are three key points of confusion—first, some view this as beginning of a move towards privatization of state-run higher education; second, the plan to take away grant-making power from the regulator will weaken its value, and third, the HRD ministry may actually become a super regulator instead of the proposed body.

On 6 August, the HRD ministry told Parliament in reply to a question that the UGC is doing a good job over the years in bringing reforms in the sector.

"UGC, with its mandate of promoting and coordinating university education, has been taking lead in the recent past towards introducing reforms in the field of higher education. With a clear aim of determining and maintaining standards of teaching, examination and research in universities, UGC has come up with various initiatives to promote the same," the ministry informed the Lok Sabha.

An HRD ministry spokesperson said there is no official information on when the bill will be placed in Parliament.

The All India Federation of



Academics were not convinced on how this new body will be different from the UGC, said govt officials.

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University and College Teachers' Organisations said in an e-mail that they have publicly opposed the move to replace the UGC with HECI.

"UGC as the apex body of higher education in India steadfastly carried out its duty

towards ensuring standard, affordable education to majority of Indians. Generations of young scholars benefitted professionally and academically from the various schemes of UGC. Notwithstanding the aberrations and loopholes that

the institution suffered from, UGC gave Indian higher education the much needed secular, broad based and respectable outlook...", the teachers' body said in an email.

The move also met with criticism from political parties. The

Communist Party of India (Marxist) recently wrote to the prime minister, saying the move "will have a major adverse impact on higher education in the country in general and public funded higher education in particular".