

New body to replace UGC proposed

Centre places draft Bill for a Higher Education Commission of India in public domain

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Setting the ball rolling for major reforms in higher education, the Centre has placed in the public domain a draft Bill for a Higher Education Commission of India - aimed at replacing the University Grants Commission - for eliciting suggestions from educationists.

The draft Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Act, 2018, takes away funding powers from the proposed regulator and gives it powers to ensure academic quality and even close down bogus institutions.

Stakeholders in the high-

er education sector can mail their suggestions at reformofugc@gmail.com by 5 pm on July 7, 2018.

There is no plan to merge all higher education regulators, as was proposed through a planned agency called HEERA, which was supposed to be put in place as a super regulator.

The present proposal, said secretary (higher education) R. Subrahmanyam, is to replace the UGC. Once this is done after the HECI Bill is passed by Parliament, the technical education regulator AICTE and the teachers' education regulator NCTE will also be reformed on similar lines.

The new regime sepa-

rates the academic and funding aspects of higher education.

While HECI will be in charge of ensuring academic quality in universities and colleges, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) - or another mechanism that will be put in place later - will be responsible for funding universities and colleges.

Closing down

Another key feature of the draft legislation is that "the Regulator will have powers to enforce compliance to the academic quality standards and will have the power to order closure of sub-standard and bogus institu-

tions", said an MHRD release.

Moreover, non-compliance could result in fines or even a jail sentence.

Till now, the UGC had no such powers. All it could do was to release a list of bogus institutions and not recognise their degrees.

"HECI is tasked with the mandate of improving academic standards with specific focus on learning outcomes, evaluation of academic performance by institutions, mentoring of institutions, training of teachers, promote use of educational technology, etc.," said the release.

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"It will develop norms for setting standards for opening and closure of institutions, provide for greater flexibility and autonomy to institutions, lay standards for appointments to critical leadership positions at the

institutional level irrespective of university started under any law (including state list)," it said.

A senior official of the MHRD said that UGC staff would be retrained to adapt to the HECI regime.