

UGC push for autonomy for better quality of education

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NEW DELHI: The University Grants Commission (UGC), the regulator of the higher education sector, has pushed ahead with the strategy of providing autonomous status to the country's better performing colleges, in an attempt to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the country's higher education institutions.

Thus far this year, it has given the autonomous status to 37 colleges, taking the total number to 672 colleges across 106 universities. To be sure, this has been UGC's long-time strategy: between 2007-08 and 2017-18, the number of autonomous colleges rose from 281 across 55 universities to 635 across 105.

According to data from UGC, the south Indian states account for a lion's share of colleges with autonomy status. Tamil Nadu with 183 colleges leads the pack, followed by Andhra Pradesh (97), Karnataka (70) and Telangana (59).

Large states such as Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, with 11 and 5 autonomous colleges, lag behind. Interestingly, experts point out that Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan lag the southern states in various educational indicators, perhaps suggesting a link between the presence of autonomous institutions and

SOUTH INDIAN STATES ACCOUNT FOR A LION'S SHARE OF COLLEGES WITH AUTONOMY STATUS, AS PER DATA

this. Government officials are confident that with new guidelines for autonomous colleges issued earlier this year, more colleges from all geographical areas will now be applying for this status.

An autonomous college can review existing courses, programmes and restructure, redesign and prescribe its own courses or programmes of study and syllabi.

These colleges can formulate new courses with the UGC-specified nomenclature and even evolve methods of assessment of students' performance and conduct of examinations.

However, even for these colleges, the degree is awarded by the University with the name of the college on the degree certificate.

"Nearly, 40 colleges in districts across the country were granted autonomous status in the current year by the commission. We are also planning to make the process of applying for autonomous status online and comparatively simpler. It is felt that autonomy can provide a

much needed boost to academic standards," UGC secretary Rajnish Jain said.

Several top performing colleges have been given the autonomous college status in the course of this year, including Pune's Ferguson College, Chennai's Loyola College, LN Welingkar Institute of Management Development and Research, Mumbai and PSG College of Technology in Coimbatore, a government official said on condition of anonymity.

"Even in the last commission meeting on December 10, at least eight new colleges, including SGGSKhalsa college in Patiala, were approved for the autonomous status," this person added.

"The idea of academic autonomy to higher education systems is a good idea. But the full benefits of academic autonomy can be reaped only if the colleges have financial support to effectively implement innovations and new academic structures. In the absence of such a support only minor tinkering with the routine academic structures are possible," said former UGC member Inder Mohan Kapahy.

India started giving colleges such status in the eighties, Kapahy pointed out. Three decades on, an in-depth review may be called for to see if these colleges have fulfilled the original promise of helping the cause of academic excellence, he added.