

Flexible learning is important to choose one's academic pathway leading to the award of certificate, diploma, and degree. There are occasions when learners have to give up their education mid-way for various reasons. The records of the clearance of credits for such incomplete academic programmes remain unaccounted. Some contingency approaches are followed in a few Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by allowing the learner to settle for a lower level of certification. Such rigid boundaries need to be removed to ensure zero-year-loss to students in the event of exiting in between. It will reduce the drop-out rate, thus improving Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), which is one of the major objectives of the National Education Policy, (NEP), 2020. Flexible learning also facilitates lifelong learning. These objectives can be achieved on the principle of a multiple entry and exit system along with the opportunity of learning from anywhere, anytime. Highlighting the importance of flexible learning, NEP, 2020 states that imaginative and flexible curricular structures will enable creative combinations of disciplines for study and would offer multiple entry and exit points and thus, remove the currently prevalent rigid boundaries. These would create new possibilities for students to choose and learn the subject(s) of their choice, while changing the HEI as per their preference, convenience, or necessity. In order to pave the way for seamless student mobility, the NEP, 2020 envisages adjustments in the structure and lengths of degree programmes and an Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) to ensure seamless student mobility between or within degree-granting HEIs through a formal system of credit recognition, credit accumulation, credit transfers, and credit redemption to promote distributed and flexible teaching-learning. The ABC is an academic service mechanism as a digital/virtual/online entity established and managed by Ministry of Education (MoE)/UGC to facilitate students to become its academic account holders. To take this forward, NEP, 2020 promotes rigorous research-based specialization and opportunities for multidisciplinary work, including academia, government and interdisciplinary thinking at the graduate, Master's and doctoral level education in large multidisciplinary universities. It also points out that, "Higher education qualifications leading to a degree/diploma/certificate shall be described by the National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) in terms of such learning outcomes." The undergraduate degree should be of either a three- or four-year duration, with multiple entry and exit options within this period, with appropriate certifications. For example, a certificate after completing one year in a discipline or field including vocational and professional areas; a diploma after two years of study; or a Bachelor's degree after a three-year programme. The four- Guidelines for Multiple Entry and Exit in Academic Programmes offered in Higher Education Institutions | 7 year multidisciplinary Bachelor's programme, however, is the preferred option since it allows the opportunity to experience the full range of holistic and multidisciplinary education in addition to a focus on major and minor subjects as per the student's preference. The four-year programme may also lead to a degree with Research, if the student completes a rigorous research project in the major area(s) of study as specified by the HEI. For the Master's programmes, the HEI will have the flexibility to offer different designs: a) A two-year programme with the second year devoted entirely to research for those who have completed the three-year Bachelor's programme; b) A one-year Master's programme for students who are completing a four-year Bachelor's programme with Research; and c) An integrated five-year Bachelor's/Master's programme with an option to exit at the end of the third year with a Bachelor's degree, with an entry to a Master's programme in another HEI.