

8.11. Finally, the children and adolescents enrolled in schools must not be forgotten in this whole process; after all, the school system is designed for them. Careful attention must be paid to their safety and rights- particularly girl children - and the various difficult issues faced by adolescents, such as substance or drug abuse and forms of discrimination and harassment including violence, with clear, safe, and efficient mechanisms for reporting and for due process on any infractions against children's/adolescents' rights or safety. The development of such mechanisms that are effective, timely, and well-known to all students will be accorded high priority.

Part II. HIGHER EDUCATION

9. Quality Universities and Colleges: A New and Forward-looking Vision for India's Higher Education System

9.1. Higher education plays an extremely important role in promoting human as well as societal well-being and in developing India as envisioned in its Constitution - a democratic, just, socially-conscious, cultured, and humane nation upholding liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice for all. Higher education significantly contributes towards sustainable livelihoods and economic development of the nation. As India moves towards becoming a knowledge economy and society, more and more young Indians are likely to aspire for higher education.

9.1.1. Given the 21st century requirements, quality higher education must aim to develop good, thoughtful, well-rounded, and creative individuals. It must enable an individual to study one or more specialized areas of interest at a deep level, and also develop character, ethical and Constitutional values, intellectual curiosity, scientific temper, creativity, spirit of service, and 21st century capabilities across a range of disciplines including sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, languages, as well as professional, technical, and vocational subjects. A quality higher education must enable personal accomplishment and enlightenment, constructive public engagement, and productive contribution to the society. It must prepare students for more meaningful and satisfying lives and work roles and enable economic independence.

9.1.2. For the purpose of developing holistic individuals, it is essential that an identified set of skills and values will be incorporated at each stage of learning, from pre-school to higher education.

9.1.3. At the societal level, higher education must enable the development of an enlightened, socially conscious, knowledgeable, and skilled nation that can find and implement robust solutions to its own problems. Higher education must form the basis for knowledge creation and innovation thereby contributing to a growing national economy. The purpose of quality higher education is, therefore, more than the creation of greater opportunities for individual employment. It represents the key to more vibrant, socially engaged, cooperative communities and a happier, cohesive, cultured, productive, innovative, progressive, and prosperous nation.

9.2. Some of the major problems currently faced by the higher education system in India include:

- (a) a severely fragmented higher educational ecosystem;
- (b) less emphasis on the development of cognitive skills and learning outcomes;
- (c) a rigid separation of disciplines, with early specialisation and streaming of students into narrow areas of study;
- (d) limited access particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, with few HEIs that teach in local languages
- (e) limited teacher and institutional autonomy;
- (f) inadequate mechanisms for merit-based career management and progression of faculty and institutional leaders;
- (g) lesser emphasis on research at most universities and colleges, and lack of competitive peer-reviewed research funding across disciplines;
- (h) suboptimal governance and leadership of HEIs;
- (i) an ineffective regulatory system; and
- (j) large affiliating universities resulting in low standards of undergraduate education.

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9.3. This policy envisions a complete overhaul and re-energising of the higher education system to overcome these challenges and thereby deliver high-quality higher education, with equity and inclusion. The policy's vision includes the following key changes to the current system:

- (a) moving towards a higher educational system consisting of large, multidisciplinary universities and colleges, with at least one in or near every district, and with more HEIs across India that offer medium of instruction or programmes in local/Indian languages;
- (b) moving towards a more multidisciplinary undergraduate education;
- (c) moving towards faculty and institutional autonomy;
- (d) revamping curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and student support for enhanced student experiences;
- (e) reaffirming the integrity of faculty and institutional leadership positions through merit-appointments and career progression based on teaching, research, and service;
- (f) establishment of a National Research Foundation to fund outstanding peer-reviewed research and to actively seed research in universities and colleges;
- (g) governance of HEIs by high qualified independent boards having academic and administrative autonomy;
- (h) “light but tight” regulation by a single regulator for higher education;
- (i) increased access, equity, and inclusion through a range of measures, including greater opportunities for outstanding public education; scholarships by private/philanthropic universities for disadvantaged and underprivileged students; online education, and Open Distance Learning (ODL); and all infrastructure and learning materials accessible and available to learners with disabilities.

10. Institutional Restructuring and Consolidation

10.1. The main thrust of this policy regarding higher education is to end the fragmentation of higher education by transforming higher education institutions into large multidisciplinary universities, colleges, and HEI clusters/Knowledge Hubs, each of which will aim to have 3,000 or more students. This would help build vibrant communities of scholars and peers, break down harmful silos, enable students to become well-rounded across disciplines including artistic, creative, and analytic subjects as well as sports, develop active research communities across disciplines including cross-disciplinary research, and increase resource efficiency, both material and human, across higher education.

10.2. Moving to large multidisciplinary universities and HEI clusters is thus the highest recommendation of this policy regarding the structure of higher education. The ancient Indian universities Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi, and Vikramshila, which had thousands of students from India and the world studying in vibrant multidisciplinary environments, amply demonstrated the type of great success that large multidisciplinary research and teaching universities could bring. India urgently needs to bring back this great Indian tradition to create well-rounded and innovative individuals, and which is already transforming other countries educationally and economically.

10.3. This vision of higher education will require, in particular, a new conceptual perception/understanding for what constitutes a higher education institution (HEI), i.e., a university or a college. A university will mean a multidisciplinary institution of higher learning that offers undergraduate and graduate programmes, with high quality teaching, research, and community engagement. The definition of university will thus allow a spectrum of institutions that range from those that place equal emphasis on teaching and research i.e., Research-intensive Universities, those that place greater emphasis on teaching but still conduct significant research i.e. Teaching-intensive Universities. Meanwhile, an Autonomous degree-granting College (AC) will refer to a large multidisciplinary institution of higher learning that grants undergraduate degrees and is primarily focused on undergraduate teaching though it would not be restricted to that and it need not be restricted to that and it would generally be smaller than a typical university.

10.4. A stage-wise mechanism for granting graded autonomy to colleges, through a transparent system of graded accreditation, will be established. Colleges will be encouraged, mentored, supported, and incentivized to gradually attain the minimum benchmarks required for each level of

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accreditation. Over a period of time, it is envisaged that every college would develop into either an Autonomous degree-granting College, or a constituent college of a university - in the latter case, it would be fully a part of the university. With appropriate accreditations, Autonomous degree-granting Colleges could evolve into Research-intensive or Teaching-intensive Universities, if they so aspire.

10.5. It must be clearly stated that these three broad types of institutions are not in any natural way a rigid, exclusionary categorization, but are along a continuum. HEIs will have the autonomy and freedom to move gradually from one category to another, based on their plans, actions, and effectiveness. The most salient marker for these categories of institutions will be the focus of their goals and work. The Accreditation System will develop and use appropriately different and relevant norms across this range of HEIs. However, the expectations of high quality of education, and of teaching-learning, across all HEIs will be the same.

10.6. In addition to teaching and research, HEIs will have other crucial responsibilities, which they will discharge through appropriate resourcing, incentives, and structures. These include supporting other HEIs in their development, community engagement and service, contribution to various fields of practice, faculty development for the higher education system, and support to school education.

10.7. By 2040, all higher education institutions (HEIs) shall aim to become multidisciplinary institutions and shall aim to have larger student enrolments preferably in the thousands, for optimal use of infrastructure and resources, and for the creation of vibrant multidisciplinary communities. Since this process will take time, all HEIs will firstly plan to become multidisciplinary by 2030, and then gradually increase student strength to the desired levels.

10.8. More HEIs shall be established and developed in underserved regions to ensure full access, equity, and inclusion. There shall, by 2030, be at least one large multidisciplinary HEI in or near every district. Steps shall be taken towards developing high-quality higher education institutions both public and private that have medium of instruction in local/Indian languages or bilingually. The aim will be to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education including vocational education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035. While a number of new institutions may be developed to attain these goals, a large part of the capacity creation will be achieved by consolidating, substantially expanding, and also improving existing HEIs.

10.9. Growth will be in both public and private institutions, with a strong emphasis on developing a large number of outstanding public institutions. There will be a fair and transparent system for determining increased levels of public funding support for public HEIs. This system will give an equitable opportunity for all public institutions to grow and develop, and will be based on transparent, pre-announced criteria from within the accreditation norms of the Accreditation System. HEIs delivering education of the highest quality as laid down in this Policy will be incentivized in expanding their capacity.

10.10. Institutions will have the option to run Open Distance Learning (ODL) and online programmes, provided they are accredited to do so, in order to enhance their offerings, improve access, increase GER, and provide opportunities for lifelong learning (SDG 4). All ODL programmes and their components leading to any diploma or degree will be of standards and quality equivalent to the highest quality programmes run by the HEIs on their campuses. Top institutions accredited for ODL will be encouraged and supported to develop high-quality online courses. Such quality online courses will be suitably integrated into curricula of HEIs, and blended mode will be preferred.

10.11. Single-stream HEIs will be phased out over time, and all will move towards becoming vibrant multidisciplinary institutions or parts of vibrant multidisciplinary HEI clusters, in order to enable and encourage high-quality multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary teaching and research across fields. Single-stream HEIs will, in particular, add departments across different fields that would strengthen the single stream that they currently serve. Through the attainment of suitable accreditations, all HEIs will gradually move towards full autonomy - academic and administrative - in order to enable this vibrant culture. The autonomy of public institutions will be backed by adequate public financial

support and stability. Private institutions with a public-spirited commitment to high-quality equitable education will be encouraged.

10.12. The new regulatory system envisioned by this Policy will foster this overall culture of empowerment and autonomy to innovate, including by gradually phasing out the system of ‘affiliated colleges’ over a period of fifteen years through a system of graded autonomy, and to be carried out in a challenge mode. Each existing affiliating university will be responsible for mentoring its affiliated colleges so that they can develop their capabilities and achieve minimum benchmarks in academic and curricular matters; teaching and assessment; governance reforms; financial robustness; and administrative efficiency. All colleges currently affiliated to a university shall attain the required benchmarks over time to secure the prescribed accreditation benchmarks and eventually become autonomous degree-granting colleges. This will be achieved through a concerted national effort including suitable mentoring and governmental support for the same.

10.13. The overall higher education sector will aim to be an integrated higher education system, including professional and vocational education. This Policy and its approach will be equally applicable to all HEIs across all current streams, which would eventually merge into one coherent ecosystem of higher education.

10.14. University, worldwide, means a multidisciplinary institution of higher learning that offers undergraduate, graduate, and Ph.D programmes, and engages in high-quality teaching and research. The present complex nomenclature of HEIs in the country such as ‘deemed to be university’, ‘affiliating university’, ‘affiliating technical university’, ‘unitary university’ shall be replaced simply by ‘university’ on fulfilling the criteria as per norms.

11. Towards a More Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education

11.1. India has a long tradition of holistic and multidisciplinary learning, from universities such as Takshashila and Nalanda, to the extensive literatures of India combining subjects across fields. Ancient Indian literary works such as Banabhatta’s *Kadambari* described a good education as knowledge of the 64 Kalaas or arts; and among these 64 ‘arts’ were not only subjects, such as singing and painting, but also ‘scientific’ fields, such as chemistry and mathematics, ‘vocational’ fields such as carpentry and clothes-making, ‘professional’ fields, such as medicine and engineering, as well as ‘soft skills’ such as communication, discussion, and debate. The very idea that all branches of creative human endeavour, including mathematics, science, vocational subjects, professional subjects, and soft skills should be considered ‘arts’, has distinctly Indian origins. This notion of a ‘knowledge of many arts’ or what in modern times is often called the ‘liberal arts’ (i.e., a liberal notion of the arts) must be brought back to Indian education, as it is exactly the kind of education that will be required for the 21st century.

11.2. Assessments of educational approaches in undergraduate education that integrate the humanities and arts with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) have consistently showed positive learning outcomes, including increased creativity and innovation, critical thinking and higher-order thinking capacities, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, communication skills, more in-depth learning and mastery of curricula across fields, increases in social and moral awareness, etc., besides general engagement and enjoyment of learning. Research is also improved and enhanced through a holistic and multidisciplinary education approach.

11.3. A holistic and multidisciplinary education would aim to develop all capacities of human beings -intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, and moral in an integrated manner. Such an education will help develop well-rounded individuals that possess critical 21st century capacities in fields across the arts, humanities, languages, sciences, social sciences, and professional, technical, and vocational fields; an ethic of social engagement; soft skills, such as communication, discussion and debate; and rigorous specialization in a chosen field or fields. Such a holistic education shall be, in the long term, the approach of all undergraduate programmes, including those in professional, technical, and vocational disciplines.

11.4. A holistic and multidisciplinary education, as described so beautifully in India's past, is indeed what is needed for the education of India to lead the country into the 21st century and the fourth industrial revolution. Even engineering institutions, such as IITs, will move towards more holistic and multidisciplinary education with more arts and humanities. Students of arts and humanities will aim to learn more science and all will make an effort to incorporate more vocational subjects and soft skills.

11.5. Imaginative and flexible curricular structures will enable creative combinations of disciplines for study, and would offer multiple entry and exit points, thus, removing currently prevalent rigid boundaries and creating new possibilities for life-long learning. Graduate-level, master's and doctoral education in large multidisciplinary universities, while providing rigorous research-based specialization, would also provide opportunities for multidisciplinary work, including in academia, government, and industry.

11.6. Large multidisciplinary universities and colleges will facilitate the move towards high-quality holistic and multidisciplinary education. Flexibility in curriculum and novel and engaging course options will be on offer to students, in addition to rigorous specialization in a subject or subjects. This will be encouraged by increased faculty and institutional autonomy in setting curricula. Pedagogy will have an increased emphasis on communication, discussion, debate, research, and opportunities for cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary thinking.

11.7. Departments in Languages, Literature, Music, Philosophy, Indology, Art, Dance, Theatre, Education, Mathematics, Statistics, Pure and Applied Sciences, Sociology, Economics, Sports, Translation and Interpretation, and other such subjects needed for a multidisciplinary, stimulating Indian education and environment will be established and strengthened at all HEIs. Credits will be given in all Bachelor's Degree programmes for these subjects if they are done from such departments or through ODL mode when they are not offered in-class at the HEI.

11.8. Towards the attainment of such a holistic and multidisciplinary education, the flexible and innovative curricula of all HEIs shall include credit-based courses and projects in the areas of community engagement and service, environmental education, and value-based education. Environment education will include areas such as climate change, pollution, waste management, sanitation, conservation of biological diversity, management of biological resources and biodiversity, forest and wildlife conservation, and sustainable development and living. Value-based education will include the development of humanistic, ethical, Constitutional, and universal human values of truth (*satya*), righteous conduct (*dharma*), peace (*shanti*), love (*prem*), nonviolence (*ahimsa*), scientific temper, citizenship values, and also life-skills; lessons in *seva*/service and participation in community service programmes will be considered an integral part of a holistic education. As the world is becoming increasingly interconnected, Global Citizenship Education (GCED), a response to contemporary global challenges, will be provided to empower learners to become aware of and understand global issues and to become active promoters of more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure, and sustainable societies. Finally, as part of a holistic education, students at all HEIs will be provided with opportunities for internships with local industry, businesses, artists, crafts persons, etc., as well as research internships with faculty and researchers at their own or other HEIs/research institutions, so that students may actively engage with the practical side of their learning and, as a by-product, further improve their employability.

11.9. The structure and lengths of degree programmes shall be adjusted accordingly. The undergraduate degree will be of either 3 or 4-year duration, with multiple exit options within this period, with appropriate certifications, e.g., a certificate after completing 1 year in a discipline or field including vocational and professional areas, or a diploma after 2 years of study, or a Bachelor's degree after a 3-year programme. The 4-year multidisciplinary Bachelor's programme, however, shall be the preferred option since it allows the opportunity to experience the full range of holistic and multidisciplinary education in addition to a focus on the chosen major and minors as per the choices of the student. An Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) shall be established which would digitally store the academic credits earned from various recognized HEIs so that the degrees from an HEI can be awarded taking into account credits earned. The 4-year programme may also lead to a degree 'with

Research' if the student completes a rigorous research project in their major area(s) of study as specified by the HEI.

11.10. HEIs will have the flexibility to offer different designs of Master's programmes: (a) there may be a 2-year programme with the second year devoted entirely to research for those who have completed the 3-year Bachelor's programme; (b) for students completing a 4-year Bachelor's programme with Research, there could be a 1-year Master's programme; and (c) there may be an integrated 5-year Bachelor's/Master's programme. Undertaking a Ph.D. shall require either a Master's degree or a 4-year Bachelor's degree with Research. The M.Phil. programme shall be discontinued.

11.11. Model public universities for holistic and multidisciplinary education, at par with IITs, IIMs, etc., called MERUs (Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities) will be set up and will aim to attain the highest global standards in quality education. They will also help set the highest standards for multidisciplinary education across India.

11.12. HEIs will focus on research and innovation by setting up start-up incubation centres; technology development centres; centres in frontier areas of research; greater industry-academic linkages; and interdisciplinary research including humanities and social sciences research. Given the scenario of epidemics and pandemics, it is critical that HEIs take the lead to undertake research in areas of infectious diseases, epidemiology, virology, diagnostics, instrumentation, vaccinology and other relevant areas. HEIs will develop specific hand holding mechanisms and competitions for promoting innovation among student communities. The NRF will function to help enable and support such a vibrant research and innovation culture across HEIs, research labs, and other research organizations.

12. Optimal Learning Environments and Support for Students

12.1. Effective learning requires a comprehensive approach that involves appropriate curriculum, engaging pedagogy, continuous formative assessment, and adequate student support. The curriculum must be interesting and relevant, and updated regularly to align with the latest knowledge requirements and to meet specified learning outcomes. High-quality pedagogy is then necessary to successfully impart the curricular material to students; pedagogical practices determine the learning experiences that are provided to students, thus directly influencing learning outcomes. The assessment methods must be scientific, designed to continuously improve learning and test the application of knowledge. Last but not least, the development of capacities that promote student wellness such as fitness, good health, psycho-social well-being, and sound ethical grounding are also critical for high-quality learning.

Thus, curriculum, pedagogy, continuous assessment, and student support are the cornerstones for quality learning. Along with providing suitable resources and infrastructure, such as quality libraries, classrooms, labs, technology, sports/recreation areas, student discussion spaces, and dining areas, a number of initiatives will be required to ensure that learning environments are engaging and supportive, and enable all students to succeed.

12.2. First, in order to promote creativity, institutions and faculty will have the autonomy to innovate on matters of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment within a broad framework of higher education qualifications that ensures consistency across institutions and programmes and across the ODL, online, and traditional 'in-class' modes. Accordingly, curriculum and pedagogy will be designed by institutions and motivated faculty to ensure a stimulating and engaging learning experience for all students, and continuous formative assessment will be used to further the goals of each programme. All assessment systems shall also be decided by the HEI, including those that lead to final certification. The Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) will be revised for instilling innovation and flexibility. HEIs shall move to a criterion-based grading system that assesses student achievement based on the learning goals for each programme, making the system fairer and outcomes more comparable. HEIs shall also move away from high-stakes examinations towards more continuous and comprehensive evaluation.

12.3. Second, each institution will integrate its academic plans ranging from curricular improvement to quality of classroom transaction - into its larger Institutional Development Plan (IDP). Each institution will be committed to the holistic development of students and create strong internal systems for supporting diverse student cohorts in academic and social domains both inside and outside formal academic interactions in the classroom. For example, all HEIs will have mechanisms and opportunities for funding of topic-centred clubs and activities organized by students with the help of faculty and other experts as needed, such as clubs and events dedicated to science, mathematics, poetry, language, literature, debate, music, sports, etc. Over time, such activities could be incorporated into the curriculum once appropriate faculty expertise and campus student demand is developed. Faculty will have the capacity and training to be able to approach students not just as teachers, but also as mentors and guides.

12.4. Third, students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds require encouragement and support to make a successful transition to higher education. Universities and colleges will thus be required to set up high-quality support centres and will be given adequate funds and academic resources to carry this out effectively. There will also be professional academic and career counselling available to all students, as well as counsellors to ensure physical, psychological and emotional well-being.

12.5. Fourth, ODL and online education provide a natural path to increase access to quality higher education. In order to leverage its potential completely, ODL will be renewed through concerted, evidence-based efforts towards expansion while ensuring adherence to clearly articulated standards of quality. ODL programmes will aim to be equivalent to the highest quality in-class programmes available. Norms, standards, and guidelines for systemic development, regulation, and accreditation of ODL will be prepared, and a framework for quality of ODL that will be recommendatory for all HEIs will be developed.

12.6. Finally, all programmes, courses, curricula, and pedagogy across subjects, including those in-class, online, and in ODL modes as well as student support will aim to achieve global standards of quality.

Internationalization

12.7. The various initiatives mentioned above will also help in having larger numbers of international students studying in India, and provide greater mobility to students in India who may wish to visit, study at, transfer credits to, or carry out research at institutions abroad, and vice versa. Courses and programmes in subjects, such as Indology, Indian languages, AYUSH systems of medicine, yoga, arts, music, history, culture, and modern India, internationally relevant curricula in the sciences, social sciences, and beyond, meaningful opportunities for social engagement, quality residential facilities and on-campus support, etc. will be fostered to attain this goal of global quality standards, attract greater numbers of international students, and achieve the goal of 'internationalization at home'.

12.8. India will be promoted as a global study destination providing premium education at affordable costs thereby helping to restore its role as a Vishwa Guru. An International Students Office at each HEI hosting foreign students will be set up to coordinate all matters relating to welcoming and supporting students arriving from abroad. Research/teaching collaborations and faculty/student exchanges with high-quality foreign institutions will be facilitated, and relevant mutually beneficial MOUs with foreign countries will be signed. High performing Indian universities will be encouraged to set up campuses in other countries, and similarly, selected universities e.g., those from among the top 100 universities in the world will be facilitated to operate in India. A legislative framework facilitating such entry will be put in place, and such universities will be given special dispensation regarding regulatory, governance, and content norms on par with other autonomous institutions of India. Furthermore, research collaboration and student exchanges between Indian institutions and global institutions will be promoted through special efforts. Credits acquired in foreign universities will be permitted, where appropriate as per the requirements of each HEI, to be counted for the award of a degree.