

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.

National Education Policy 2020

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