

THE BEST CHANCE FOR ARCHITECTURE

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

Recent documents give a sense of how the [National Education Policy](#) (NEP) will play out in professional education. Architecture, in particular, is set for radical shifts. Many architects hold the firm view that professional education should be left to professionals. They argue that practitioners can steer professional education better, as they now do through the Council of Architecture (CoA).

The concerns appear valid, and the demand that NEP limit itself to the humanities, science, and at the most include engineering seems persuasive. However, architects seem to overlook the historical reasons that bring them under NEP and the inadequacy of their current education model. An uninspiring approach, poor training, low employability of graduates and a choking regulatory framework undermine the discipline. NEP is the best chance to set the house right.

Undergraduate education trains students to practice. Hence, law and medicine have their independent bodies looking after education. However, historically, architecture was clubbed with engineering as 'technical education' and brought under the Education Ministry. It came under the purview of the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), set up in 1945. By the time the AICTE got its statutory footing in 1987, the Architects Act was enacted in 1972, and education came under the purview of an independent CoA. However, this did not shift it to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, which would have been more professionally aligned as law and medicine are with their respective nodal ministries. It is now moot to ask if architects can reset history. The question to ask is: how can NEP bring progressive practices to architectural education?

Four key NEP recommendations can change the course. First, NEP seeks a close connection between education and profession, and directs professional bodies such as the CoA to set standards that education will strive to meet. It means that though education commences in campus, it will mature in practice. Second, undergraduate courses should be liberal, allowing students to be trained and to help identify their paths. Third, unlike the current model that trains only a professional apprentice, NEP enables students to take either a practice or a research route. This is bound to pave the way for diverse programmes and support research training. Fourth, autonomy will be granted to institutions, which will save them from stifling regulatory arrangements and the standardised programmes they push.

First, a summary of issues facing architectural education. While design and engineering are four-year undergraduate programmes, architecture is a five-year programme. The justification has been that a long and rigorous course is necessary since institutions train profession-ready students. The assumption that the longer the course, the better the training is spurious. The regulations do not adequately support industry connections. Those who try incur heavy additional expenses. As a result, many colleges have inadequate exposure. Finally, despite architecture practice scaling up and becoming multidisciplinary, education offers less scope for diverse specialisations and does not equip students to solve complex design problems.

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NEP's mission to restructure undergraduate education as a three-year, liberal, broad-based education bodes well for architecture. Shorter programmes can build sufficient capacities to work as apprentices in industry/field-based organisation. When combined with another two years of specialisation and an equal number of years of work experience, the student is better trained

as a professional. Multiple entries and exits to programmes also enhance flexibility. After three years, students with an aptitude for research can take another path. For all these to become a reality, institutions need autonomy. The world over, professional bodies focus on professional standards and let academic institutions decide their creative ways to meet the objectives. NEP promises that.

Architecture institutions pack semesters with many subjects. They far exceed an average of 55 hours work week and deny space for the pursuit of personal development. NEP fixes this issue. It recommends a choice-based 20-credit-per-semester workload, creating better space for students to explore. A challenge in recruiting industry experts to teach is that regulations insufficiently acknowledge them as valid teaching faculty and recommend more full-time academic staff to meet the faculty-student ratio. By allowing 50% of the staff required to be filled by visiting faculty, NEP enables more practitioners to teach. Advantages abound. But to convert them to transformative changes, NEP has to keep to its promise and architects have to embrace changes.

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