Centre may scrap UGC, proposes new regulator

There is no plan to merge all higher education regulators, as was proposed through a planned agency called HEERA, which was supposed to be put in place as a super regulator.

The present proposal, said Secretary (Higher Education) R. Subrahmanyam, is to replace the UGC. Once this is done after the HECI Bill is passed by Parliament, the technical education regulator AICTE and the teachers' education regulator NCTE will also be reformed on similar lines.

The new regime separates the academic and funding aspects of higher education. While HECI will be in charge of ensuring academic quality in universities and colleges, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) – or another mechanism that will be put in place later – will be responsible for funding universities and colleges.

Closing down

Another key feature of the draft legislation is that "the Regulator will have powers to enforce compliance to the academic quality standards and will have the power to order closure of sub-standard and bogus institutions", said an MHRD release.

Moreover, non-compliance could result in fines or even a jail sentence.

Till now, the UGC had no such powers. All it could do was to release a list of bogus institutions and not recognise their degrees.

Norms to be developed

"HECI is tasked with the mandate of improving academic standards with specific focus on learning outcomes, evaluation of academic performance by institutions, mentoring of institutions, training of teachers, promote use of educational technology, etc.," said the release.

"It will develop norms for setting standards for opening and closure of institutions, provide for greater flexibility and autonomy to institutions, lay standards for appointments to critical leadership positions at the institutional level irrespective of university started under any law (including State list)," it said.

A senior official of the MHRD said UGC staff would be retrained to adapt to the HECI regime, which would be fully digital and do away with file work.

The HECI will have a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and 12 other members, including ex officio members, eminent academics and a doyen of industry.

END