

# GOODBYE, UGC!

*A new regulatory body might improve higher education*

**T**he government's resolve to replace the University Grants Commission with the proposed Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) is a radical step forward in its continuing efforts to reform higher education. The idea behind the new apex body is to regulate and enforce quality standards in institutions. The HECI will be armed with powers to penalise noncompliance, which can result in fines, closure or even a jail sentence. It has become increasingly evident that in terms of global rankings, our premier colleges and universities feature nowhere near the top. But with HECI focussing solely on quality – unlike UGC, which was also involved in disbursing monetary funds – one can expect a rise in standards. The UGC had clearly failed to meet the objectives of higher education. Since it came into existence in the form of UGC Act, 1951, there has been a systematic erosion of pedagogical standards. For some years now, meritorious students coming from wealthy families have been travelling to the US and the UK to pursue degrees. This demonstrates that there is little faith in the quality of education on offer in India. Now that monetary grants will be under the control of HRD Ministry, funds will be granted based on the appraisal done by HECI. It is simple: quality will be financially rewarded. The concept of a new regulator has already met with cries of concern. To allay the fears of stakeholders, HRD Ministry has asked all educationists and the general public to give comments and suggestions before 5 pm on July 7 on the draft, which has been released on its website. Such an inclusive approach is likely to cover all the loopholes in the new scheme of things.