

Why UGC must be scrapped

It has not kept pace with higher education's new challenges

The Union ministry of human resource development (MHRD) on Wednesday released a draft Act to replace the University Grants Commission (UGC) with a new regulator for the critical higher education sector. The regulator — Higher Education Commission of

India — will focus on the quality of institutions. The job of financial grant

distribution, earlier with the commission, will now come under the ministry's purview. This decision of transferring financial powers to the MHRD has upset some. On Thursday, the Delhi University Teachers' Association said it will lead to increased direct interference by the State. While the apprehension could be true, presupposing such an action would be incorrect.

The plan to scrap the UGC has been in the works for several years now, necessitated by the fact that India's higher education landscape has changed phenomenally from the time the UGC was set up in 1956. At the time, there were only 20 universities and 500 colleges with 0.21 million students. Today, there are nearly 28 million students in 726 universities and 38,000 colleges. This growth should be enough reason for the overhaul, so that the UGC can respond effectively to the new ground realities and challenges, and also ensure that citizens are skilled enough to respond to the new market requirements. It has also been seen that several states have allowed the setting up of private universities, but many of them don't stick to standards laid down for higher education. The UGC, according to the government, failed to keep an eye on these issues because its entire function is geared towards the disbursement of grants rather than regulation.

Over the years, several panels have also talked about the need for a new regulator. It's good that the new regulator's singular focus will be on quality. It must be staffed with progressive thinkers who are able to chart out a path that is in keeping with our new realities. The body should be strict in terms of regulation of institutions that do not adhere to established standards. The ministry's job is to back with funding the ideas and recommendations of the new body.

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