

## Government to scrap UGC and AICTE

The government plans to scrap the top two regulators of higher education in line with the recommendations of the National Knowledge Commission (NKC), the advisory body to the Prime Minister that has repeatedly called for the abolition of the regulatory regime in the education sector.

A senior official of the ministry of human resource development said on condition of anonymity that the government will soon scrap the University Grants Commission, or UGC, and the All India Council for Technical Education, or AICTE. The two regulators, which oversee the functioning of universities and engineering and business schools in India, have often received flak for restrictive policies and sometimes opaque functioning. The ministry, headed by Kapil Sibal, will instead create an independent National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), which will take over the academic, accreditation and financial functions of the regulators. The move is based on the recommendations of a panel set up by the government to review the functioning of the UGC, established in 1956, and the AICTE, which came into existence in 1987.

The panel, headed by physicist and educationist Yash Pal, was set up to study NKC recommendations on the two regulators. The committee also recommends a self-regulatory regime for universities, including the Indian Institutes of Technology and Indian Institutes of Management.

“Abolition of the regulators would mean restoration of the decision-making powers to the universities. So far, the universities have had to wait for permission from the UGC or the AICTE for even small matters, which could just be introducing an academic course,” Apoorva Anand, member of the committee and a professor at Delhi University, said. The creation of a single regulator would also do away with the multiplicity of regulatory bodies in the higher education system in India. Besides the UGC and the AICTE, the Medical Council of India and the Dental Council of India, both regulators under the ministry of health and family welfare, oversee the functioning of medical and dental colleges. The Yash Pal panel has called for their abolition too.

In a draft report last year, trade body Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci) had said the existing regulatory framework constrains the supply of good institutions, excessively regulates existing institutions in the wrong places, and is not conducive to innovation or creativity in higher and technical education.

“Regulators are meant to facilitate growth and innovation rather than regulate. UGC has been using its power to grant funds as a tool of regulation... Both the regulators have too many retired bureaucrats as officials, which have only been facilitating government interference into the functioning of educational institutions,” said C.S. Venkat Ratnam,

member of the Ficci education committee and director of New Delhi-based International Management Institute.

The ministry official said the government is moving towards total implementation of the Yash Pal report, which also suggests scrapping of the deemed university status for state and private institutions. The status of deemed universities has allowed them to operate free of government control in admissions, fees and coursework. Sibal, after taking charge, ordered a review of at least 125 institutions that have been granted the status.

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