



Higher Education Commission of India Faces Resentment from Academia

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The Centre's decision to scrap the University Grants Commission and replace it with a Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), is witnessing growing resentment within the academic community. HECI is likely to be without the grant-giving powers that the UGC possesses.

Concerns

- The representatives from academia have their expressed resentment over the lack of debate on the issue.
- The move is being seen as an attempt to bring the universities under the strict and direct financial control of the MHRD. This shift in financial control to the Ministry can be used for the regimentation of knowledge.
- The composition of search and selection committees consisting of the Cabinet Secretary along with Higher Education Secretary and three co-opted academicians provides total governmental control over the appointment of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson.
- The twelve members of this body are largely drawn from the Secretaries of the Departments, Chairpersons of other regulatory bodies of education and Chairpersons of accreditation bodies.
- The ex-officio members and bureaucrats have a dominant presence, which is expected to tighten the noose over the academic freedom of the universities.
- The proposed draft has reduced the teachers' representation which again is being seen as a matter of concern. While UGC has 4 teacher members out of total 10 members, the HECI has only 2 teacher members out of total 12 members.

Draft Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Bill, 2018

- The Bill proposes to replace the UGC Act, 1956, and rechristen the UGC as the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI).
- The regulator will focus on setting, maintaining and improving academic standards in universities.
- The Bill if passed by the Parliament, will separate the academic and funding aspects of the sector.
- The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development will take over the grant-giving functions.
- HECI will be empowered to penalise or even shut down sub-standard institutions without affecting students' interests. If the management of the institution does not comply with the penalties, they can land in jail for up to three years.
- HECI shall comprise a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson, and 12 members to be appointed by the Centre, including educationists and a member of the industry. The Chairperson's retirement age is 70, will hold office for five years.