

HECI- What & Why



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

Why in news?

- Union government has planned to replace the UGC with HECI.
- The Centre's bid to replace the UGC with a higher education commission does not inspire confidence.

What do the government intend to do through HECI?

- Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) will be the new, apex regulator for university and higher education in India.
- It has to set benchmarks for academic performance, ensure that institutions adhere to these and act against those that violate standards.
- Draft legislation appears to be part of a stated overarching strategy towards greater autonomy in institutes of higher learning, including the premier Indian Institutes of Technology and Indian Institutes of Management.
- The broad thrust of the Higher Education Commission legislation is to separate governance from funding.
- The proposed commission will focus on academic issues, such as course curricula, faculty standards and outcomes, leaving "monetary matters" to the ministry of human resource development.

Why is HECI already facing criticism?

- The Centre has invited a barrage of criticism after placing in the public domain the HECI (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Bill 2018.
- A fundamental feature of the proposed HECI, as opposed to the UGC, is that it will focus only on enforcement of standards and not disburse grants.
- The latter role will be vested with the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD).

- With reference to proposal that the grant functions will be carried out by the HRD Ministry, the draft Bill merely hints at a regime of direct governmental control, contrary to its promise of autonomy.
- The UGC agreed to the Centre's proposal to have a four-year undergraduate programme, going against its own rules.
- Likewise, State governments of all hues have had no qualms in politicizing key appointments in universities and colleges.
- HECI as an extension of the MHRD may end up legitimizing all of this, while also raising apprehensions of ideological control.

What needs to be done?

- The Centre should modify this proposal to vest the role of disbursing grants in an independent agency.
- The autonomy of universities in framing curricula should not be tampered with.
- Higher education needs both autonomy which has led to the IITs, IISc and IIMs emerging as centres of repute and accountability in the right measure.
- A present system of according 'graded autonomy', depending on independent rankings and assessments, should be continued, without the MHRD superimposing its own views.
- An independent regulator, manned by individuals of probity and academic excellence, could make a difference.
- Reforms in higher education are finally about creating the right ambience of liberalism, academic rigour, universal access and, above all, accountability.