

UGC Guidelines for Merging HEIs in Multidisciplinary Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy 2020, suggests several policy measures for offering multidisciplinary education. Based on these recommendations, the UGC Expert Committee has prepared a document on “Guidelines for Transforming Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) into multidisciplinary institutions.” The strategy proposed in the NEP 2020 to end fragmentation of higher education is to transform HEIs into multidisciplinary universities, colleges and clusters and to convert them into knowledge hubs. The UGC guidelines discuss in detail the objectives and approaches, requirements, general conditions, academic collaborations between the institutions, role of universities and State Governments, etc. The present article has discussed in detail the particulars essential for merging higher educational institutions into multidisciplinary institutions. It is hoped that this article will enlighten all the State Governments and Universities across the country to frame appropriate strategies based on local circumstances to transform HEIs into multidisciplinary institutions.

Keywords : Higher Education Institutions, UGC, NEP

I. INTRODUCTION

The UGC guidelines points out that, India has domain specific stand-alone colleges and universities. Even in multidisciplinary HEIs the disciplinary boundaries are so rigid that the opportunities to learn and explore different disciplines are less explored. Internationally, the culture of establishing and sustaining a multidisciplinary university is increasing fast, thereby maximizing productivity with enhanced focus towards research and development, innovation and incubation. It is therefore, pertinent for Higher Educational

System (HES) to phase out stand-alone, fragmented and domain-specific HEIs to create HEI clusters and multidisciplinary HEIs instead. As per the policy document, such institutions will impart education, with strong values and skill sets. The Higher Education System will further enhance the performance of Indian institutions in terms of teaching, learning and research to newer and greater heights. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), suggests several policy directions for offering multi disciplinary education. These issues are discussed in detail.

II. NEP, 2020 : POLICY INITIATIVES

As pointed out in the UGC guidelines, the way proposed in the NEP 2020 to end fragmentation of higher education is by transforming HEIs into multidisciplinary universities, colleges and clusters and knowledge hubs. The types of HEIs envisaged are:

- a. Multidisciplinary research-intensive universities (RUs)
- b. Multidisciplinary teaching-intensive universities (TUs)
- c. Degree-awarding multi-disciplinary autonomous colleges (smaller than a university)

As per the guidelines, the multidisciplinary TUs and RUs will be universities with 3,000 or more students. Given that by 2035 all affiliated colleges should become degree-awarding multidisciplinary autonomous institutions, it is necessary to develop a road map to transform all affiliated colleges to attain the status, either alone or through collaboration with nearby institutions in the form of clusters or by becoming a constituent part of a university as envisioned in NEP 2020. The affiliated colleges need to achieve the degree-awarding status by becoming large multidisciplinary autonomous colleges or by becoming part of the cluster to become a large multi-disciplinary HEI.

The NEP 2020, recommends that, the overall higher education sector will be an integrated higher education system, including professional and vocational education. The policy also suggests opening departments needed for multidisciplinary subjects, including: Languages, Literature, Music, Philosophy, Indology, Art, Dance, Theatre, Education, Mathematics, Statistics, Pure and Applied Sciences, Sociology, Economics, Sports, Translation and Interpretation.

III. OBJECTIVES AND APPROACHES

The following are the Objectives and Approaches as suggested in the UGC guidelines:

- Transform single-stream institutions into large multidisciplinary universities and autonomous degree-awarding HEIs.
- Strengthen institutional infrastructure necessary for multidisciplinary education and research.
- Academic collaboration between institutions, through HEI clusters, leading to multidisciplinary education and research in different modes.
- Merger of single-stream institutions with other multidisciplinary institutions under the same management or different managements.
- Strengthening of institutions by adding departments in subjects such as: Languages, Literature, Music, Philosophy, Indology, Art, Dance, Theatre, Education, Mathematics, Statistics, Pure and Applied Sciences, Sociology, Economics, Sports, Translation and Interpretation and other subjects as needed for a multidisciplinary institution.

IV. REQUIREMENTS FOR A MULTIDISCIPLINARY HEIS

As suggested in the UGC guidelines the multidisciplinary education will help students to shape their career options. In order to offer multidisciplinary programmes successfully, HEIs are expected to conduct student-induction programmes to create awareness among students about various learning pathways and career opportunities; to register in the Academic Bank of Credit (ABC); and adopt online courses, in addition to other collaboration with other HEIs, to offer the programmes with a strong interdisciplinary flavour.

- a) *Orientation about new opportunities:* The University Grants Commission (UGC) has initiated Student Induction Programme (SIP) with the purpose to help students acclimatize with the new surroundings, develop bonds with fellow students and teachers, sensitivity towards various issues of social relevance and imbibe values so as to become responsible citizens. With the NEP 2020 bringing in a series of reforms such as multidisciplinary education, multiple entry and exit, Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) etc., students entering the portals of higher education need to be oriented about the available opportunities. Ensuring a well- designed induction programme with adequate exposure to all these reforms will help students to set the pace of their academic journey.
- b) *Credit mobility between institutions:* For credit mobility between partnering institutions, the National e-Governance Division (NeGD) of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has developed the ABC platform under a Digilocker Framework. The ABC provides the facility and functionality for a student to open an academic account and to get eligible HEIs on board. The ABC digitally store the academic credits of the students earned from HEIs registered with the Bank and supply appropriate data for the HEIs to award degrees, diplomas/PG diplomas and certificates as merited by the students, over a period of time. The ABC also ensures opening, closing and validation of Academic Bank Accounts and Credit verification, credit accumulation and credit transfer or redemption for students. HEIs need to register in the ABC to enable credit mobility.
- c) *Online and ODL mode of education:* NEP 2020 has set the ambitious target of achieving 50 per cent GER by 2035. To achieve this target, higher education needs to be imparted in multiple ways. Online learning is one of the ways. Online

education is gaining acceptance and popularity. Hundreds of online courses recognized by UGC including those available in the SWAYAM portal can provide an ideal platform to enable multidisciplinary education.

V. GENERAL CONDITIONS

As per the NEP 2020, the general conditions as laid down in the UGC guidelines are as follows.

- The standards prescribed by the UGC or by the concerned Statutory or Regulatory bodies, such as: All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), National Medical Commission (NMC), Dental Council of India (DCI), National Council for Teachers Education (NCTE), Bar Council of India (BCI) and Indian Nursing Council (INC), etc. in terms of academic and physical infrastructure, qualification of teachers, duration of a programme, intake, eligibility, admission procedures, fees, curriculum and programme implementation, assessment and evaluation, among other conditions are applicable.
- The degrees to be offered as a result of collaboration between institutions must conform to the nomenclature and duration of the degrees as specified in section 22 (3) of the UGC Act, 1956 and shall also conform to the minimum eligibility and other norms and standards to offer such degree programmes. Multidisciplinary degree programmes punctuated with internship, community service and engagement and skill courses need substantial orientation for teachers. Capacity-building for faculty to teach, train and to do research in multidisciplinary academic programmes need adequate focus. Initiatives like Annual Refresher Programme in Teaching (ARPIT) need to be utilized for additional capacity-building.

- Institutional structures have to be expanded to strengthen capacity of faculty to use effective pedagogical approaches and design learning assessment methods and tools.
- The academic requirements and other details of the programme(s) of study to be offered under collaborative arrangements shall be displayed prominently on the collaborating institutions' website before the commencement of programmes.
- An appropriate mechanism has to be put in place to make available counselling services in all HEIs. Each HEI will encourage students through placement assistance and career guidance to help them decide their occupational choices, facilitate processes to identify employment opportunities and set up interactions with potential employers. An efficient mechanism for grievance-handling and or redressal will have to be created or upgraded.
- HEIs shall need appropriate educational infrastructure in terms of books, journals, study materials, audio-visual facilities, e-resources, virtual classrooms and studios and specifically, high bandwidth internet connectivity to deliver courses through various modes such as Open & Distance Learning (ODL), Online education and face to face.

VI. ACADEMIC COLLABORATIONS

Consolidation of existing HEIs into multidisciplinary degree-granting autonomous colleges through cooperation and collaboration among institutions is outlined in these UGC guidelines. Many industries now look for graduates with sound knowledge of different disciplines. In sync with the market demand, majority of students aspire to acquire multiple skills. Although there are many single-stream institutions in subjects such as Education, Engineering, Management and Law exist in close proximity, rigid disciplinary boundaries and lack of collaboration between

institutions deprive students the opportunities of multidisciplinary learning. As per the guidelines it is essential to capitalize on the proximity of HEIs in offering multidisciplinary programmes. Collaboration and cooperation in offering degree programmes in innovative ways is in the larger interests of aspiring students, parents, industry, government and the nation.

a) Collaboration within the Institutions

As per the UGC guidelines, the institutional collaboration leading to the award of dual-major degrees are as follows:

Eligibility criteria : As suggested in the UGC guidelines, under the collaborative arrangement, single-stream institutions can integrate their programmes with those of nearby multidisciplinary institutions to enhance their programmes. The multidisciplinary HEIs may also seek collaboration in case they are willing to expand further by adding more programmes. Such a new and novel educational architecture will help and strengthen the structure of multidisciplinary education and achieve what has been envisioned in the NEP 2020. As an example, a B.Ed. programme with a B.A leads to the award of dual major degree B.A. B.Ed. (Integrated Teacher Education Programme, ITEP)

Approval process : As per the guidelines, the approval process and degree-awarding will be under the purview of the affiliating universities. The colleges and universities must get the concerned Professional Council(s) to start the degree programmes, either in discipline-specific degree or dual major degree programmes. HEIs should submit proposals to offer a four-year dual-major bachelor's programme to the regulatory body concerned for recognition. Following the selection procedure, the concerned regulatory bodies will recognize institutions to offer the integrated dual major programmes.

Operational requirements : The UGC guidelines outline the operational requirements as: The physical proximity of the institutions should be such that they can share physical and human resources and ensure easier student and faculty mobility. Collaborative dual-major degree programmes, wherever possible and required, should be offered with the idea of bringing flexibility and interdisciplinarity for the students. The collaborative dual-major degree programme should be naturally feasible and should open new career and employment opportunities for the students. The institution will have to enter into a written Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with its partner institution(s) for collaboration. The MoU must include the purposes and related provisions of collaboration, nature and extent of partnership among partnering institutions and the modalities for the functioning of the institutions in offering dual major programmes. The partnership plan for awarding dual major degree and/or collaborative programmes must include planning the expansion in the infrastructure, number of students, departments involved, administration, academic functions and research activities. The student's tuition fee may be charged only for the residential period in the concerned HEIs. The universities will issue the degrees with the transcript or degree indicating the courses the student has taken at the partner institution.

b) Collaboration between the Institutions

As per the UGC guidelines the collaboration between two institutions for the award of dual degree facilitates students enrolled in an HEI to take up the first degree at the host institution and the second degree at the partnering institution. An MoU may be signed between the partnering institutions to offer the dual degree with the approval of the university, the State government and/ or the regulatory bodies, covering all aspects such as the number of seats, modalities of transition from one institution to another and awarding the degree. In accordance to the norms of

regulatory bodies, the Central and/ or State governments, should manage and regulate the joint seat allocation for dual degree programmes. Eligibility to the dual degree programme will be as per the eligibility criteria in terms of qualifying examinations, minimum marks and any other factors as set for the programme by the partnering institutions. Once admitted, the students will be able to complete the first degree at the host institution and the second degree at the partnering institution, without going through the admission process again. Fees will be applicable as per the host institute for the first degree; and for the second degree the fee structure of the partnering institution will be applicable. Partnering institutions will provide hostel facilities, wherever possible, for students while they are pursuing degrees in the particular institution. Students who complete the programme successfully will be awarded the dual degree jointly by the partnering HEIs in the case of universities. In case of collaboration between two colleges of the same university, the affiliating university will award the degree. The students of the dual degree programmes will take up courses as approved by the Academic Council of the HEIs. A certain percentage of seats may be earmarked by the partnering institutions for the dual degree programme. Admission over and above the sanctioned intake is feasible only with the prior approval of the university, the State government and/or the regulatory bodies concerned.

c) Cluster of Colleges

A forward-looking vision of the NEP 2020, suggest that single-stream institutions and multidisciplinary institutions with poor enrollment, due to lack of employment-oriented, innovative multidisciplinary courses and lack of financial resources to maintain and manage the institutions can improve enrolment by becoming members of cluster and by offering multidisciplinary programmes. The clustering of colleges may help in securing good grades in NAAC

accreditation. Transforming all HEIs into large multidisciplinary institutions, the existing colleges operating in the same campus or in close proximity can form a cluster. This will ensure that colleges with poor enrolment and fewer resources can offer multidisciplinary programmes and can have access to better facilities for the benefit of all. The cluster colleges shall aim at making the courses more dynamic through collaboration with other universities, prestigious government institutions and reputed industrial houses and also avail of the courses offered in the online and ODL mode. In the case of private colleges forming a cluster, the trust, or society, or company which runs the college must be charitable and not-for-profit bodies.

As per the UGC guidelines, the cluster colleges will have the following characteristics:

- Students can take up the study programme partly in the parent institution and partly in the partnering institution(s) in the cluster.
- There shall be an Academic Council and Finance Committee for the academic and finance related matters of the cluster colleges.
- The cluster colleges will continue to be affiliated to the university concerned. Admission, examination, result and degree will be awarded as per the rules and regulations of the affiliating university.
- Financial resources will be pooled to ensure that money is utilized for the holistic growth of students.
- All facilities under the colleges, such as housekeeping, security services, library, sports, laboratories, parking, ground and classes will come under the umbrella of a common pool, which will again benefit all students on the campus.
- Facilities in individual colleges can be put to optimum utilization for the overall benefit of students in the cluster. This will also ensure that

the expenditure on separate resources is curtailed and a common pool can benefit all the students.

- Through the clusters, restructured degree programmes with skill courses, internships and community service, among others, will become easier and will increase the students' job-oriented skills.
- The existing colleges will continue to function as per prevailing norms.
- There will be no change in the recruitment, appointment, allowances, service rules and pension schemes of the teaching and non-teaching staff of the colleges.
- The State governments will continue to provide the same funds to government- aided colleges as they had been doing before the cluster formation.

VII. MERGER OF INSTITUTIONS AND ADDING NEW DEPARTMENTS

The UGC guidelines suggested the following procedure for merging and adding of institutions:

Institutions under the same management

Institutions functioning under same managements may merge to put the academic and physical resources to optimal use and to offer multidisciplinary education. The managing trust or society of the institutions should submit an undertaking to the effect that the institutions under its management will merge in accordance to the rules of the State government, affiliating university and/or the regulatory body.

Merger of institutions run by different managements

A private institution desirous of merging with a single stream institution / multidisciplinary institution of another registered society or trust, may apply, with the approval of the affiliating university, to the society or trust of the institution to be merged with and become a part of it as per the procedure of the Societies Registration Act or Trust Act, as the case may be.

Adding new departments

With regard to adding of new departments, the Policy on 'Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education' underlines pulling of courses and resources from a variety of disciplines and providing flexibility to students to choose courses and pathways such that holistic individual development takes place in intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional and moral dimensions and that 21st century skills/competencies (including social and life skills) of critical thinking, problem solving, communication, leadership, team work, mastery of curricula across fields, increase in social and moral awareness and creativity and innovation are fully developed and put to practice. The teaching-learning has to be linked to life, community and the world of work, including the environment across all disciplines/ fields of study, including STEM education.

VIII. CONSTITUENT COLLEGES IN UNIVERSITIES

The NEP 2020, suggests a stage-wise mechanism for granting graded autonomy to colleges, through a transparent system of graded accreditation. Colleges will be encouraged, mentored, supported and incentivized to gradually attain the minimum benchmarks required for each level of accreditation. Over a period of time, it is envisaged that every college will either develop into an autonomous degree-granting college or become a constituent college of a university. In the latter case, it would be a part of the university in its entirety.

The guidelines point out that the colleges willing to become part of a university as a constituent college should submit a proposal to the concerned university giving reasons for joining. The necessary terms and conditions shall be decided mutually by both institutions in accordance with the provisions of the Act and or regulations governing the State University

or Central University, or deemed-to-be university, or private university.

IX. MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH IN HEI CLUSTERS

The NEP 2020 policy conceptualizes that, over the past decades there has been an increased growth in Multidisciplinary Research in Higher Education. The high level of diversity, such as different disciplinary experts and the rapid sharing of information and resources involved in Multidisciplinary Research enables the synthesis of new knowledge, increased production of original, creative work, innovations and patents. Multidisciplinary Research, therefore, plays a crucial role in finding solutions to the challenges currently facing society.

a) Capacity Building

As per the guidelines the four-year undergraduate programme with the research component and different designs of the Master's programme, are likely to increase research activities, which calls for enhancing the research capacity in HEIs. Students and faculty should be encouraged to do research in areas that are locally, regionally and nationally relevant. To encourage high quality research in multidisciplinary areas in HEIs a research ecosystem is needed where ample opportunity on how to design research proposals, write research articles, publish and patent findings, are available for young scholars and faculty. These opportunities are likely to be high in HEI clusters with the availability of faculty with different disciplinary backgrounds, collective resources and a greater number of students engaging in research.

b) Collaboration

The NEP 2020, aims for holistic education to develop well-rounded individuals. The four-year undergraduate programme has been proposed for

students to experience a holistic education, with the fourth year of the programme focusing on the research component. Faculty with backgrounds of different disciplines will provide the perfect opportunity in guiding students pursuing UG (honours with research) and Master's programmes. As per the guidelines the Multidisciplinary projects can provide students with the valuable training required to assume multidisciplinary roles.

The faculty from different institutions of a cluster can be encouraged to design multidisciplinary projects in areas of National priority and supervise students interested in multidisciplinary research as per the UGC guidelines. The institutions should work out the modalities of collaboration between them in enabling faculty members to supervise UG and PG students in research.

X. ROLE OF UNIVERSITY AND GOVERNMENT

With regard to the role of the parent university, the guidelines suggest to identify potentials of colleges and to encourage them by providing timely approval to their proposals and help to nominate representatives in various committees for the proper functioning of cluster colleges and enable collaboration between institutions.

Given the size of our Higher Education System and the variety of HEIs with many single-stream institutions, it may not be viable to introduce multidisciplinary education in all HEIs simultaneously. Therefore, for all HEIs to plan to become multidisciplinary institutions, a hub and spoke model where a certain number of HEIs will be identified as the hub institutions and transform them into multidisciplinary institutions. These 'hub' HEIs can, in turn, develop a specified number of 'spoke' institutions. It emphasizes that, over some time, they will have a rapid multiplier effect so that by 2030 there will be at least one large multidisciplinary HEI in or near every district.

The UGC guidelines advocate that the institutions entering into academic collaboration shall address matters relating to the *grievances of students* and *legal matters relating to the collaboration*. The Commission could, either *suo moto* or based on any complaint from any quarter may initiate an inquiry, including physical inspection, of the collaborative arrangements. After giving the opportunity of representation and hearing to the collaborating institutions and after being convinced that the collaborating institution(s) is/are not functioning according to the guidelines, the Commission may rescind the approval for collaboration. However, the students who have already enrolled for such courses or programmes will be permitted to continue till they acquire the requisite qualification.

XI. CONCLUSION

A considerable number of HEIs in the country are either single stream institutions or multidisciplinary institutions with rigid disciplinary boundaries. It is a challenging task to transform all these HEIs into multidisciplinary institutions as suggested in the NEP 2020. As envisioned in the NEP 2020 the purpose of HEIs is to develop dynamic communities of graduates which will break down isolation between the disciplines and enable graduates to become all-round individuals. In order to enable the conversion of HEIs into multidisciplinary institutions, the committee constituted by the UGC has suggested many ways, such as, collaboration, merging and clustering between institutions to attain the characteristics of a multidisciplinary institution. This article introduces the planners, administrators and curriculum framers regarding the strategies of converting HEIs into multidisciplinary institutions. It is hoped that these guidelines will help all the State Governments across the country as well as Universities to frame appropriate rules and regulations to transform HEIs into multidisciplinary institutions.

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