

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: A New Dawn

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On July 29, the Union Cabinet adapted the new National Education Policy (NEP) proposing a roadmap of much-needed, sweeping changes in school and higher education. Conceptualised and developed by former Ministry of Human Resource Development - MHRD (now Ministry of Education), NEP 2020 is a true hallmark of the 21st century, aimed at overhauling, and reforming all aspects of education domain including system, regulation and governance. I congratulate the team behind the creation of NEP that has worked tirelessly in creating the aspirational educational goals of India.

Until July 28, draft NEP offered the opportunity to not only assimilate feedback and views from the state, central, and private institutions, partners, and representatives but also allowed participation of common citizens to share their valuable feedback on what India needs to do to stand tall on the global platform in this regard. For that matter, I was also contacted by the Department of Higher Education to provide insights on international component of the new policy. This whole exercise, I believe, was to encourage dialogue and challenge participants' thinking capacities to build a comprehensive framework of an ambitious policy that would change the face of education in India once and for all. Equal opportunity for all, meritocracy, experiential learning, promotion of multilingualism, focus on the development of cognitive skills in the individuals such as critical thinking and problem solving, holistic development in both academic and non-academic spheres are few of the many reforms recommended in the policy. Another notable fact is that the Union Cabinet also approved a plan to increase public spending on education to nearly 6% of gross domestic product (GDP) from the current 4% in an effort to strengthen India's economy following the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. So far so good, I say!

Recommendations in NEP for Higher Education

1. University Grant Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) to be replaced by a single Higher Education Commission of India (HECI).
2. Regulatory System of Higher Education to be distinct for regulation, accreditation, funding and academic standard setting - all under the umbrella of Higher Education Commission of India (HECI).
3. 4 Verticals of HECI to be National Higher Education Regulatory Council (HNERC), National Accreditation Council (NAC), Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) and

General Education Council (GEC) which would further form a National Higher Education Qualification Framework.

4. The professional councils, such as the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR), Veterinary Council of India (VCI), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), Council of Architecture (CoA), National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET) etc., will act as Professional Standard Setting Bodies (PSSBs).
5. Universities to be named not on the basis of ownership but on quality of education.
6. Impetus to multidisciplinary education. Even Indian Institute of technology's (IITs) to move towards a more holistic curriculum with arts and humanities.
7. The undergraduate degree will be of either 3 or 4-year duration, with multiple exit options within this period, with appropriate certifications, e.g., a certificate after completing 1 year in a discipline or field including vocational and professional areas, or a diploma after 2 years of study, or a Bachelor's degree after a 3-year programme. The 4-year multidisciplinary Bachelor's programme, however, shall be the preferred option; Discontinuation of M.Phil programme.
8. Students pursuing 4 year degree programme would have an option of getting a degree with Research if the research process is completed in the area of study as specified.
9. National Research Foundation (NRF) would be set up with a goal to enable 'a culture of research'. NRF would be governed independently by rotating board of governors. Primary task or NRF would be to fund competitive, peer reviewed grant proposals of all types and across all disciplines and also act as a liaison between researchers and relevant branches of government so as to allow breakthroughs.

International Component

The NEP features an important initiative towards internationalization of higher education as it recommends the opening of universities from among the top 100 in the world to set up campuses in India. Also, top 100 institutions of India would be allowed to explore foreign land to open its operations. However, no further details have been provided in the NPE on operational side of these initiatives. I presume, MOE will bring in a new bill encompassing all pertinent details on operations of foreign universities. A similar bill was introduced way back in the year 2013, but wasn't accepted. After many ifs and buts, when this recommendation will be adapted, I feel the doors will open for our Canadian and Indian institutions to create synergies directly, and to do so there is no better time than right now! SICI, with its unique bi-national character and as an extended arm of MHRD, representing Indian and Canadian intellectual interests, will be carefully observing the developments on this corridor and keep its members' updated.

Sum up

In such unusual times where we are witnessing a 180-degree change and an almost complete paradigm shift in the existing education system in India, it is realised that a good funding mechanism is surely at the core of these changes. Any hits and misses will also depend on our willingness and right attitude to accept and move on with the changing times at the earliest. The future of research, learning and higher education will also be impacted greatly by the ongoing digitalization and innovation in the overall education sector. The ground is rich for a productive debate on various elements of the policy. We are still a little far from seeing NEP come into full force as law, however, the seeds to re-create a new reality are now sown with a special thrust on experiential learning and critical thinking. I really hope that the implementation of the NEP is done as envisaged, only then it's true worth will evolve.