

Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhistan: The Unified Higher Education Regulator

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Abstract

National Education Policy 2020 has proposed a revamp of the regulatory structure of the higher education system in India. It opined that the University Grants Commission is overburdened and it performs work of diverse nature. There is a need for specialised bodies for performing distinct functions of regulation, accreditation, funding and academic standard setting. To implement this recommendation of the NEP 2020, the Government of India introduced the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhistan Bill in the Parliament. This bill proposes the setting up of three different bodies for regulation, accreditation and standard setting of higher education. In this paper, various aspects of the Bill are discussed, along with the related recommendations of the NEP 2020. A criticism is also made of the various clauses of the Bill.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, Accreditation Council, Regulatory Council, Standards Setting Council, Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhistan.

1.0: Introduction

National Education Policy 2020 was announced on July 29, 2020 by the Government of India to give a new direction and boost to the education system of the country.

The National Education Policy 2020 noted that the regulatory mechanism of higher education in the country is not effective and efficient; it needs a complete overhaul. Currently, the University Grants Commission is the apex unified body for regulation, funding, accreditation and standards setting for education. The NEP 2020 proposed establishing the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) as the apex body for all aspects of higher education in the country. It was proposed that HECI will have four verticals dealing with four functions: regulation, accreditation, standards setting and funding. The first among the four verticals is proposed to be the National Higher Education Regulator Council (NHERC), serving as the single-

point regulator for the higher education sector, including technical education and teacher education, excluding medical education and legal education. The second vertical of the HECI was proposed to be a meta-accrediting body called the National Accreditation Council (NAC). It was proposed in NEP that accreditation of higher educational Institutions will be under the superintendence of NAC. The third vertical of HECI was proposed as the Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) carrying out financing and funding of higher education in the country. The fourth vertical of HECI was named as the General Education Council (GEC). The GEC was to serve as the standards-setting body for educational programmes.

2.0: Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhasthan Bill

To give effect to the recommendation of the National Education Policy 2020, the Government of India introduced the *Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhasthan Bill 2025* in the Lok Sabha on December 15, 2025. The purpose of the Bill is to enable and empower higher educational institutions to achieve excellence and coordinate and determine standards in institutions of higher education, research, and scientific and technical institutions. The Bill also aims to empower higher education institutions to become self-governing, degree-granting autonomous institutions.

2.1: Applicability of the provisions of the Bill

The jurisdiction of the proposed Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhasthan extends to any matter concerning coordination and determination of standards in higher educational institutions. The provisions of this Bill apply to:

- Institutions of National Importance under the Ministry of Education,
- Universities,
- Colleges affiliated to universities,
- Institutions deemed to be Universities,
- NCTE recognised institutions,
- Institutions regulated under the Architects Act, 1972
- AICTE recognised institutions,
- Institutions of Eminence,
- Institutions offering Distance and Open education.

However, the provisions of this Bill shall not apply to professional programmes of institutions regulated by the Pharmacy Council of India, Bar Council of India, the Veterinary Council of India, the Rehabilitation Council of India, National Medical Commission, National Commission for Indian System of Medicine, National Commission for Homeopathy, National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions, National Nursing and Midwifery Commission and National Dental Commission.

3.0: Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhasthan

A Commission called '*Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhasthan*' will be set up as the apex unified regulator of higher education under this Bill. The Commission shall be a body Corporate having perpetual succession and a common seal with power to acquire, hold and dispose of property and to contract and shall, by the said name, sue or be sued. The Commission will exercise the powers conferred upon it under the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhasthan Bill 2025.

3.1: Composition of Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhasthan

The Commission shall have a Chairperson and not more than twelve members. The members will be of three categories: full-time members and part-time members. Full-time members include the Presidents of the three Councils, the Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Higher Education and a Member Secretary. Part-Time Members include two eminent and distinguished academicians from the State Higher Educational Institutions and the Member-Secretary.

3.2: Functions of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhasthan (Commission)

The Commission, as per the provisions of the Bill, shall perform the following functions:

- It shall provide direction to institutions offering higher education for comprehensive and holistic development.
- It shall promote transformation of existing higher educational institutions into large multidisciplinary institutions.
- It shall promote India as an educational destination among foreign students.
- It shall facilitate integration of Bhartiya knowledge, languages and arts in curricula of higher education.
- It shall provide financial support to three councils.
- It shall coordinate the functioning of three councils
- It shall formulate schemes for improvement of quality of education.

4.0: Viksit Bharat Shiksha Viniyamak Parishad

The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhasthan will have three verticals in the form of three councils performing the function of regulation, accreditation and standards setting of higher education. The first vertical of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhasthan (Commission) is the Regulatory Council called “*Viksit Bharat Shiksha Viniyamak Parishad*”. It will function as the single unified regulator of higher education in India. The Regulatory Council shall be a corporate body.

4.1: Composition of Viksit Bharat Shiksha Viniyamak Parishad (Regulatory Council)

The Regulatory Council shall consist of a President and fourteen members. The members of the Regulatory Council shall include full-time members and part-time members. Two eminent and distinguished academicians and the Member Secretary shall serve as the full-time members of the Council. One member nominated by the Accreditation Council, one member nominated by the Standards Council, and one nominee of Central Government shall serve as the *ex-officio* members. The part-time members shall include one academician from State Higher Educational Institution, one member representing the Council of Architecture, three members from Institutions of National Importance, one nominee of States/ UTs and two eminent experts.

4.2: Functions of the Regulatory Council

The mandate of the Regulatory Council shall include:

1. Coordination and maintenance of standards and compliance of regulatory provisions in higher educational institutions.

2. Accreditation of all higher educational institutions to be made compulsory.
3. Transforming the higher education sector into autonomous multidisciplinary higher educational institutions.
4. Require full online and offline public self-disclosure of information related to finances, audits, procedures, infrastructure, faculty, courses, results etc.
5. Curb commercialisation of higher education.
6. Corrective measures on dishonest public self-disclosure or any other academic, administrative or financial impropriety.
7. Transparent and efficient student grievance redressal system.
8. Minimum standards for setting up and operation of HEIs.
9. Standards for foreign universities to operate in India,
10. Promote Indian universities to set up campuses in other countries.
11. Monitor that only suitably accredited HEIs offer open and distance education.

5.0: Viksit Bharat Shiksha Gunvatta Parishad (Accreditation Council)

The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhithan Bill proposes the establishment of an Accreditation Council called "*Viksit Bharat Shiksha Gunvatta Parishad*." The Council shall be a body corporate with perpetual succession. The Accreditation Council shall have a President and fourteen members. Two eminent and distinguished academicians and the Member Secretary shall be the full-time members. There will be eight part-time members. The part-time members shall be: two eminent and distinguished academicians from State Higher Educational Institutions, one representative of the Council of Architecture, three eminent and distinguished academicians from the Institutions of National Importance and two eminent experts. There will be three ex officio members: one member nominated by the Regulatory Council, one member nominated by the Standards Council, and one nominee of the Deptt. of Higher Education, Ministry of Education.

5.1: Functions of the Accreditation Council

The Accreditation Council shall function as an accrediting body and shall take such steps to supervise and oversee an independent ecosystem of accreditation. The functions of the Accreditation Council include:

1. To develop an outcome-based Institutional Accreditation Framework.
2. To empanel and de-empanel accrediting institutions.
3. To monitor and review accrediting institutions.
4. Compile and disseminate all accreditation-related information regarding the accreditation of HEIs to the public.
5. To recommend to the Regulatory Council for imposition of penalties for contravention of matters relating to accreditation of HEIs.

6.0: Viksit Bharat Shiksha Manak Parishad (Standards Council)

The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhithan Bill 2025 provides for the establishment of a Standards Council to be known as *Viksit Bharat Shiksha Manak Parishad*. It shall be a body corporate having perpetual succession. The Standards Council shall consist of a President and fourteen Members.

Two eminent and distinguished academicians and the Member Secretary shall be full-time members. Eight members shall be part-time members- one eminent and distinguished academician from a State Higher Educational Institution, one nominee of States and UTs on a rotation basis, one person from the Council of Architecture, three representatives from Institutions of National Importance, and two eminent experts. Besides, one representative of each; Deptt. of Higher Education, the Regulatory Council and the Accreditation Council shall serve as ex-officio members.

6.1: Functions of the Standards Council

The Standards Council is on the lines of the General Education Council as recommended by National Education Policy 2020. The General Education Council, as suggested by NEP 2020 was to serve as a professional standards-setting body. The existing professional bodies were cooperative and assist the GEC. The Standards Council is similar to the GEC and it shall perform the following functions:

- It shall frame learning outcomes for educational programmes of higher education. These learning outcomes will be known as the 'Graduate Attributes'.
- It shall standardise the nomenclature of 'certificate', 'diploma', and 'degree' being offered by higher educational institutions.
- It shall determine the norms for the transfer of credit and their equivalence.
- It shall also boost the quality of academic instructions.
- It shall lay down standards for setting up and operation of HEIs.
- It shall promote Indianisation of education, Bhartiya Knowledge, arts and languages.

7.0: Concerns

Academicians, Politicians and other stakeholders have raised serious concerns over the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhistan Bill 2025. The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhistan shall replace the University Grants Commission, All India Council for Technical Education and National Council for Teacher Education. Some of the major concerns are:

7.1: Centralisation of Power

The proposed regulatory structure of higher education promotes centralisation of power and tight control over higher educational institutions. The AICTE, NCTE and Council of Architecture will be things of the past. The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhistan is being given almost unlimited power over higher educational institutions. The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhistan shall cover general education, technical education, teacher education and education related to Architecture. It may be difficult for Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhistan to monitor the diverse types of education sectors.

7.2: Erosion of Federalism

The Constitution of India has a clear and well-demarcated division of power between the Union and States. Any infringement in the powers of States creates deep dissatisfaction and tussle between the States and the Union. States have expressed serious concerns and dissatisfaction over concentration of power in the hands of the Central Government. The Union Government has major say in the appointment of experts and officers in the proposed Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhistan and three

Councils. The representation of States in the Commission and the Councils is not adequate. The States feel that they are underrepresented and the Union has the upper hand in the decision-making.

7.3: Issues related to Autonomy

The Bill promises to promote autonomy and help every college to attain autonomy in a graded manner and eventually become an autonomous degree granting college. Though this point seems to be good and sound to promoting autonomy, it will lead to compromises in the quality of education. Many self-financed private degree Colleges are of very low quality and these colleges resort to unfair means and malpractices in admission, teaching and examination. In the present system of affiliation of colleges to universities, the latter exercise at least some control over the colleges. Giving a free hand to the colleges in admission and examination may lead to commercialisation of education.

7.4: Control Over Premier Institutions

Institutions of National Importance and Institutes of Eminence are covered under the proposed regulation. These premier institutions need considerable autonomy for flourishing and unnecessary bureaucratic control over these institutions will compromise their quality. The Institutions of National Importance are our great valuable assets. There should not be interference in their functioning.

7.5: Generalisation of Higher Education

Teacher Education, Technical Education, Management Education and education related to architecture are specialised fields of study. The proposed regulation will club the specialised fields with general education. The nature of Technical Education and Teacher Education is very specialised; it should not have been clubbed with general education. If there is any failure or shortcomings in the functioning of AICTE or NCTE, it should be reformed instead of closing these professional bodies.

7.6: Funding

Though the National Education Policy 2020 talks about setting up the Higher Education Grants Council, no agency has been proposed in the VBSA Act regarding funding of higher education institutions. It seems that the Government wants to get rid of financial responsibility. Funding of the education sector is the prime responsibility of the Government, but, surprisingly, VBSA Act does not have any provision related to financing of higher educational institutions. Experts and critics are very suspicious about this point.

7.7: Issue Related to Accreditation

The proposed Accreditation Council will act as a meta-accrediting body and it will empanel accrediting bodies to assess and accredit higher educational institutions. It will require vigilance over accrediting agencies to curb malpractices.

8.0: Conclusion

As the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhithan Bill, 2025 is under scrutiny and consideration of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, its exact form is yet to be decided. However, the Bill did not include the provision of NEP 2020 regarding setting up an agency for funding of higher educational institutions. It is very disheartening that the Higher Education Grants Council as proposed by NEP 2020 is

missing. Over-centralisation of the regulatory mechanism of higher education is also of serious concern. Representation of States is not adequate, and this will impact implementation of the provisions of the Bill once it is passed and becomes an Act. The willing support of States is very crucial for implementing any regulation.

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