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The Big Picture: Higher Education Quality Mandate

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In line with the **University Grants Commission (UGC)** developed **Higher Education Quality Improvement Programme Mandate**, the Ministry of Human Resource Development recently launched new guidelines for **values and ethics in higher education**.

The Ministry launched 5 documents covering 5 verticals of the **Quality Mandate** viz.- Evaluation reforms, eco-friendly and sustainable university campuses, human values & professional ethics, faculty induction programme, and academic research integrity.

Concept of Quality Mandate

- India being a signatory to **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDG), has launched various programmes to effectively implement them.

SDG-4 deals with **quality in higher education**. In this backdrop, the UGC in May 2018, launched the quality mandate for higher education.

- The mandate aims to improve the quality of higher educational institutions and to **evolve** the higher education system equipping the country's next-generation with vital skills, knowledge and ethics in order to lead a rewarding life.

- **Mandate's 5 verticals:**

- **Evaluation Reforms:** It aims to make student assessment more meaningful, effective and linked to learning outcomes. It acknowledges the fact that student evaluation plays a crucial role in improving the quality of Higher Education in the country and tries to address the related issue.

Under this, the report titled '**Evaluation Reforms in Higher Educational Institutions in India**' has also been published.

- **SATAT**- It is a framework for **Eco-Friendly and Sustainable Campus development** in higher educational institutions that encourages universities to adopt reflective policies and practices. It aims to enhance the environmental quality of the campus by **adopting green and sustainable methods**.
- **MulyaPravah**- These are the guidelines for inculcation of **Human values and Professionals Ethics** in higher educational institutions. It recognizes and focuses on the need for discussing and streamlining the process in educational institutions that can help in infusing the culture of human values and ethics.

The issued guidelines also ask students to **observe modesty** in their overall appearance and behaviour, **maintain good health** and refrain from any kind of intoxicants, and **maintain harmony** among students belonging to different socio-economic status, community, caste, religion or region.

- **Guru-Dakshta**– It is a one-month **Faculty Induction Programme (FIP)** which aims to **sensitise and motivate** the newly recruited faculty to adopt learner-centered approaches, Information and communications technology (ICT) integrated learning, and new pedagogic approaches to teaching/learning in higher education. It is a mandatory programme for the newly appointed teachers.

UGC aims to pursue "**Recruit, Retain and Role model**" in this approach. As teachers play a vital role in any educational system, recruiting and retaining knowledgeable teachers is crucial. There is a need to project such teachers as role models for students and for this purpose, FIP is essential.

- **CARE- Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics:** This programme emphasizes the importance of promoting **high-quality research**, maintaining **integrity** and **creation** of new **knowledge** by faculty members so as to continuously **monitor and identify quality journals** across disciplines.
 - An **empowered committee** has been constituted under this programme that comprises of representatives from all the regulatory authorities such as Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), etc.
 - It identifies good journals in which the research articles by the teachers can be published.
 - For this purpose, UGC has identified **Pune** University as the **nodal** university and **4 regional universities** from- Tezpur (Assam), MSU (Baroda), University of Hyderabad, JNU (Delhi).
 - Also in this regard, **CARE website and Reference List of quality journals** can prove to be beneficial in creating more awareness and promoting academic quality, integrity and ethical publishing (reducing predatory journals).

There is a need to identify the purpose of research (which is professional, ethical and of good quality). This list identifies the scientific journals in which more meaningful, good quality and ethical research can be published.

- **Other Programmes**

- **Deeksharambh**- It is a 6 days **Student Induction Programme** aimed to help new students feel comfortable and get accustomed to the new environment by inculcating in them the ethos and culture of the institution. Till date, around 500 institutes have successfully inducted this programme.
- **Paramarsh**- It is a scheme to mentor National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) accreditation aspirant institutions for promoting quality assurance in **higher education**. It will also facilitate the sharing of knowledge, information and opportunities for research collaboration and faculty development in mentee Institutions.

By 2022, the government has set the target of accrediting all higher education institutes by the NAAC. Institutes with high Overall Grade Performance Report (OGP) will mentor the other institutions (that have not been accredited or have low OGP score) so that their overall performance could be improved.

- **Scheme for Trans-Disciplinary Research for India's Developing Economy (STRIDE)**- It is a scheme to **promote multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary** research. It has 3 components:
 - First- for **research capacity building in diverse disciplines**,
 - Second- for **enhancing problem solving skills** with the help of social innovation and undertaking research in all the programmes/fields,
 - Third- for funding high impact research projects **in the identified thrust areas in humanities and human sciences** thereby providing support to research projects that are socially relevant, locally need-based, nationally important and globally significant. **'Banaras Hindu University' is helping in identification and evaluation of such projects.**

Evaluation Reforms

There is a need for **continuous evaluation** in order to come out of **rote system of learning** (reproducing the material learnt by heart without any analysis or meaningful/true learning). To achieve this, the mandate focuses on:

- **Outcome-oriented framework:** Learning and outcomes of the course and programme must be known to the student prior to getting enrolled in a particular course.

- **Evaluation:** The student is then to be evaluated for the acquired competencies on a continuous basis through **internal assessment** (throughout the semester rather than only at the end of the semester).
 - **Prof. MM Salunkhe Committee** also recommended for the internal assessment of students. In this, along with the acquired knowledge from the curriculum, student's scientific reasoning, communication & cognitive skills, and other similar qualities like, team spirit, leadership ability, etc. will also be evaluated.
 - This helps in identifying the **behavioural outcome** (including **cognition**-knowledge part, **conation**-action part, & **affection**- sensitivity, responsibility and ethics part) of the student as well.
 - For ***hassle-free and effective conducting of exams***, Controller of Examination along with the Dean Academics of various institutes have been trained.
- **Use of Technology:** To bring in **transparency** in the system, ICT plays a vital role.

Challenges

- Not only rules that we have to implement matter but the self-discipline and quality we are striving hard to achieve also hold significant position.
 - **Self-discipline and peer-pressure** are important in achieving the SDG-4 along with improving the effective implementation of the framed policies.
- Continuous internal assessment during research is good but that leaves students completely at the **discretion of the concerned professor**, which is prone to be misused.

Way Forward

- **Codification of rules along with their effective implementation** is the key to achieve the desired outcomes.
 - For instance, to prevent publishing in predatory journals **top-down approach of professional ethics** (starting with Vice-Chancellors, by keeping a track of their publications in predatory journals) can be implemented. Also, strict punishments and lack of reward will inhibit such moves.

- There is a need to **constantly evaluate past policies** on higher education institutions. Creating a database within the country for all the colleges including IITs, NITs and their contribution to society must be accounted.
 - **Involvement of student groups or Alumni** while framing these policies is important, as they can provide significant input to the area of research, the way it should be conducted and the corresponding required infrastructure.
 - Also the premier institutes must focus on becoming self sufficient so that the government funds can be used to help other institutes.
- There is a need to promote **practical research** with direct involvement of industries along with acknowledgment of the dissertation work of Master's students.
- The government needs to ensure that higher education's role in innovation and human capital is not ignored. The **Draft National Education Policy (DNEP)-2019**, which proposed ambitious reforms is a welcome step, but such reforms must lead to legislations that can fund research-based universities.
 - DNEP aims to double education spending to 6% of GDP and close the research-teaching divide in higher education.