



# National Higher Education Qualifications Framework

**For Prelims:** [National Higher Education Qualifications Framework \(NHEQF\)](#), [National Education Policy \(NEP\) 2020](#), [Academic Bank of Credits](#)

**For Mains:** Initiatives related to Education, Regulation of Higher Education in India

[Source: TH](#)

## Why in News?

[University Grants Commission \(UGC\)](#) has finalised the [National Higher Education Qualifications Framework \(NHEQF\)](#) to standardise qualifications and promote academic mobility.

- However, the implementation of this framework has raised concerns **due to the presence of multiple guidelines, and frameworks**, leading to confusion among stakeholders.

## What is the National Higher Education Qualifications Framework ?

- **Background:**
  - The movement to specify frameworks for higher education qualifications gained momentum across the world in the late 1990s, but India remained without an NHEQF.
  - The idea was deliberated at the **60th meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education in 2012**, which assigned the responsibility to the **UGC**.
- **About:**
  - The UGC has formulated the **NHEQF** with the aim of facilitating transparency and comparability of **higher education qualifications at all levels**. The framework has been issued for all educational institutes to adopt.
    - The NHEQF is based on the [National Education Policy \(NEP\) 2020](#), which envisages a new and forward-looking vision for [India's higher education system](#).
- **Main Features:**
  - The framework categorizes education into eight levels, with the **first four being part of the National School Education Qualification Framework (NSEQF)** and the **latter four pertaining to higher education qualifications (level 4.5 to level 8)**, each with a corresponding level descriptor that specifies the learning outcomes, the volume of learning, and the qualification type and title.
  - The NHEQF provides the guidelines for the **development and implementation of programmes of study**, such as the programme learning outcomes, the course learning outcomes, the curriculum design, the pedagogy, the assessment, and the feedback.
  - The credit framework document of the UGC mandates that **each semester must have a minimum of 20 credits**.
    - This document suggests that **one credit must comprise 15 hours of direct and 30 hours of indirect teaching**. This means that students are required to study

- for a minimum of **900 hours per semester or close to 10 hours a day**.
- Qualification types are broad and discipline-independent, including certificates, diplomas, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and PhDs. The NHEQF also includes qualifications from **technical and vocational education and professional and technical education programs, excluding medical and legal education, all within one framework**.
- It **establishes the quality assurance mechanism such as** the roles and responsibilities of the regulators, the higher education institutions, and the external agencies, as well as the processes and criteria for the approval, monitoring, and evaluation of programmes and qualifications.

## What are the Issues with the NHEQF?

- **Multiplicity of Guidelines:**
  - The UGC has prescribed two separate frameworks - **the NHEQF and the [National Credit Framework](#)**.
  - Higher educational institutions are separately required to implement the **[Academic Bank of Credits](#)** as a mandated modality for recognizing, accepting, and transferring credits across courses and institutions.
  - The presence of **multiple regulations impinges on higher education qualifications**.
- **Ambiguity:**
  - The **NHEQF provides exit requirements**, but it doesn't clearly explain eligibility conditions and pathways through which a student can enter a program at a particular level.
    - The absence of clear eligibility conditions and pathways may lead to confusion among students and institutions.
- **Lack of Consensus:**
  - Disciplines such as **agriculture, law, medicine, and pharmacy may be under the jurisdiction of separate regulators**, but they could have been included in the NHEQF through consensus across various regulatory bodies.
  - The lack of consensus may lead to a fragmented higher education system and impede academic mobility.
- **Degrees Within a Degree:**
  - The framework appears to create a hierarchy, allowing certain students who **hold four-year undergraduate degrees with a minimum CGPA of 7.5** to be eligible for **admission to PhD programmes**.
    - This approach may lead to elitism, as academic performance is often influenced by socioeconomic conditions.
- **Equating Postgraduate Diplomas and Undergraduate Programs:**
  - The NHEQF creates issues by **equating postgraduate diplomas with four-year undergrad programs**, causing confusion, especially for degrees like B.Ed (could be completed in one, two or four years is confusing).
    - This framework's attempt to **standardise qualifications on a scale of 4.5 to 10 complicates categorizing degrees that don't fit neatly**, making it hard to determine their level.
- **Influence of International Models:**
  - The NHEQF draws heavily from the **European Bologna process and Dublin descriptors**.
    - The Bologna Process is a series of agreements between **European countries** to ensure the **quality and comparability of higher education qualifications**.
    - The Dublin descriptors are a system of qualifications frameworks for **evaluating students for bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees**.
  - India's **higher education system is more complex and diverse than the European model**. The NHEQF's development could benefit from broader consultations with Indian states.

## Way Forward

- Merge the NHEQF and the National Credit Framework into a **single comprehensive framework** to reduce confusion and streamline the qualification standards.
- Engage in **wider and more intense consultations with the States** to better reflect the

diversity and complexity of India's higher education system.

- Develop **learning outcomes tailored to the Indian higher education system**, considering **socio-cultural and socio-economic factors**.
- Recognise that learning outcomes should not solely focus on **employability but also on holistic personal and societal development**.
- Review the **eligibility criteria for admission to Ph.D. programs to prevent making the higher education system elitist**.
- Establish a mechanism for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the NHEQF to make necessary adjustments as the higher education landscape evolves.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### **Prelims**

**Q. Which of the following provisions of the Constitution does India have a bearing on Education? (2012)**

1. Directive Principles of State Policy
2. Rural and Urban Local Bodies
3. Fifth Schedule
4. Sixth Schedule
5. Seventh Schedule

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3, 4 and 5 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 5 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

**Ans- (d)**

### **Mains**

**Q1.** National Education Policy 2020 is in conformity with the Sustainable Development Goal-4 (2030). It intends to restructure and reorient the education system in India. Critically examine the statement. **(2020)**

**Q2.** How have digital initiatives in India contributed to the functioning of the education system in the country? Elaborate on your answer. **(2020)**