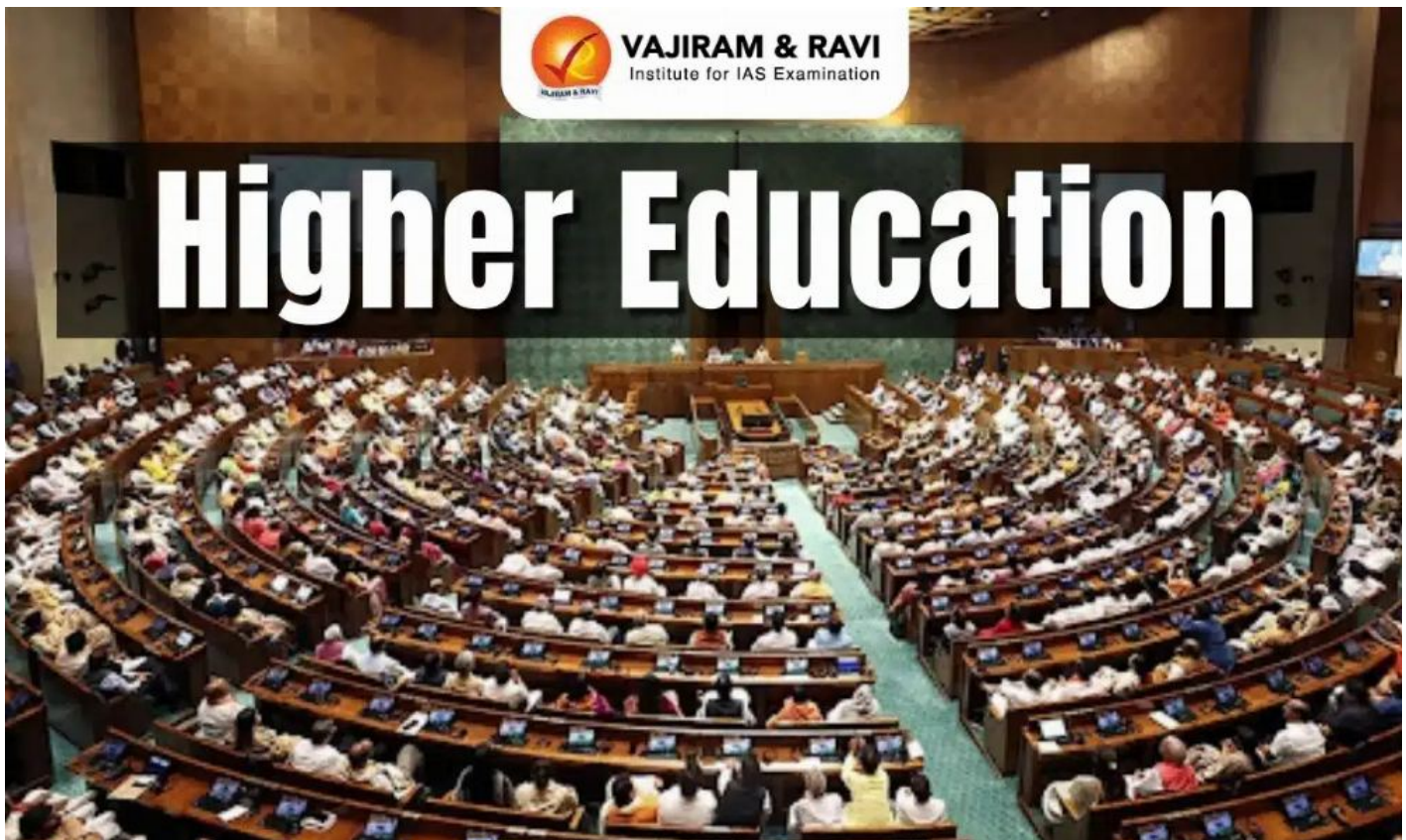


Higher Education Overhaul - Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill 2025

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Higher Education Latest News

- The Union Government has proposed the **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025**, aimed at overhauling India's higher education regulatory system by replacing the UGC, AICTE, and NCTE with a new umbrella commission.
- This Bill was listed in the Winter Session of Parliament.

Reform of India's Higher Education Regulatory Framework

- India's higher education sector has long operated with multiple regulatory bodies, often resulting in overlapping mandates, fragmented standards, and inconsistent approval mechanisms.
- To address these structural challenges and align with the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** vision, the government has introduced the **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, 2025**.

- The Bill aims to improve academic quality, streamline regulation, and modernise governance in universities and higher educational institutions across India.
- It marks one of the most significant policy interventions in the higher education domain in recent years.

Core Objectives of the VBSA Bill

- The Bill states that its primary purpose is to enable and empower universities to achieve excellence in teaching, learning, research, and innovation. This is to be achieved through:
 - Better coordination between regulatory bodies
 - Clear determination of academic and institutional standards
 - A unified governance mechanism for higher education
- The Statement of Objects and Reasons emphasises the NEP 2020 principle of a “light but tight” regulatory structure, ensuring reduced bureaucratic complexity while maintaining strong accountability.

Structure of the VBSA Commission

- At the centre of the proposed reforms is the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan (VBSA), a 12-member umbrella commission that functions as the apex authority.
- It will oversee three specialised councils:
 - **Viksit Bharat Viniyaman Parishad (Regulatory Council)**
 - Responsible for maintaining regulatory standards
 - Coordinates governance norms in universities and colleges
 - **Viksit Bharat Guvatta Parishad (Accreditation Council)**
 - Supervises accreditation processes
 - Builds an independent ecosystem for institutional and program accreditation
 - **Viksit Bharat Manak Parishad (Standards Council)**
 - Establishes academic standards
 - Ensures harmonisation of policies and quality benchmarks
- Each council can have up to 14 members. The VBSA will include members from the Education Ministry, State higher education institutions, and eminent experts.

Institutions Covered Under the Bill

- The proposed law applies to:
 - All Central and State universities
 - Colleges and Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)
 - Institutions of national importance
 - Institutions of eminence
 - Technical and teacher education institutions
- However, professional programmes such as Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing, Law, Pharmacology, and Veterinary Sciences are exempted and will continue under their respective regulators.
- The Council of Architecture will remain the professional standards-setting body for architecture but will not have regulatory powers.

Key Changes Proposed Under the Bill

- **Replacing Existing Bodies**

- The VBSA Bill seeks to subsume the UGC, AICTE, and NCTE, integrating their regulatory, accreditation, and standardisation functions under one framework.

- **Separation of Funding from Regulation**

- A major shift is the removal of grant-disbursal powers from the UGC. Funding functions will now be performed through mechanisms devised by the Ministry of Education.
- This separation aligns with NEP-2020's recommendation to delink academic regulation from financial control.

- **Enabling Foreign Universities and Global Outreach**

- The Regulatory Council will:
 - Set standards for foreign universities to operate in India
 - Facilitate high-performing Indian universities to set up offshore campuses
 - Prevent the commercialisation of higher education

- **Strengthening Accreditation**

- The Accreditation Council must develop an outcome-based framework, encouraging institutions to improve learning outputs rather than merely compliance inputs.

Criticism and Concerns

- Earlier attempts to reform the higher education framework, such as the **2018 Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Bill**, faced strong criticism for placing excessive central control and weakening the role of States. Similar concerns have resurfaced.
- Key criticisms include:
 - The possibility of the Centre having disproportionate influence in appointments
 - Removal of grant-disbursal powers from an autonomous body
 - Risk of over-centralisation in standard-setting functions
- However, unlike the HECI Bill, the VBSA Bill includes State representation in all three councils, partly addressing federal concerns.

Graded Penalties and Enforcement Mechanisms

- The VBSA will have significant punitive powers, including:
 - Fines beginning at Rs. 10 lakh and going up to Rs. 75 lakh
 - Possible closure of institutions for repeated non-compliance
 - Power to suspend an institution's authority to grant degrees or diplomas
 - Institutions operating without accreditation may face fines of Rs. 2 crore or more
- These provisions aim to improve accountability and discourage substandard educational practices.

Implications for India's Higher Education System

- If implemented, the VBSA Bill could:

- Streamline regulatory processes
- Ensure uniform academic standards nationwide
- Enhance India's global competitiveness in higher education
- Promote transparency in accreditation and governance
- Reduce fragmentation among regulators
- However, concerns about autonomy, funding clarity, and centralisation will require careful implementation and stakeholder dialogue.

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