

# UGC Equity Regulations 2026: Caste Discrimination Rules Explained

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## UGC Equity Regulations Latest News

- The University Grants Commission (UGC) recently notified new regulations to address discrimination, including caste-based bias, in higher education institutions.
- The move followed intervention by the Supreme Court of India after petitions filed by the mothers of Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi, who died by suicide in 2016 and 2019 amid allegations of caste-based discrimination.
- These rules are an updated version of the UGC's earlier "equity" regulations issued in 2012.
- However, they have triggered opposition from some quarters, who argue that the provisions could lead to harassment of general category students.

## UGC Notifies New Promotion of Equity Regulations, 2026

- The UGC has notified the University Grants Commission (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026.

- The regulations aim to eradicate discrimination in higher education on grounds such as religion, race, gender, place of birth, caste, or disability.
- The particular focus is on protecting Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, socially and educationally backward classes, economically weaker sections, and persons with disabilities, while promoting equity and inclusion.
- These rules replace the earlier **2012 Promotion of Equity Regulations** and apply to all higher education institutions.
- They establish a **defined structure** and **procedure for filing and addressing complaints** related to discrimination within campuses.

## How Will the New UGC Regulations Be Implemented

- To operationalise the Promotion of Equity Regulations, 2026, the University Grants Commission has mandated a three-tier institutional mechanism in all higher education institutions.

### Equal Opportunity Centre (EOC)

- Every institution must establish an Equal Opportunity Centre to oversee policies for disadvantaged groups.
- The EOC will coordinate with district administration and police and facilitate legal aid when required.
- It will comprise five faculty members, with no category-wise reservation mandated.
- If a college lacks five faculty members, the university-level EOC of its affiliating university will perform these functions.

### Equity Committee

- The EOC will be supported by a 10-member Equity Committee, chaired by the head of the institution.
- Five members must belong to reserved categories—OBCs, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Persons with Disabilities, and women.
- The committee must meet within 24 hours of receiving a complaint and submit its report within 15 days.
- The head of the institution is required to initiate action within seven days of receiving the report.

### Equity Squads and Helpline

- Institutions must constitute **Equity Squads** to maintain vigilance and prevent discrimination on campus.
- These squads are expected to remain mobile and regularly visit vulnerable spots.
- A 24-hour Equity Helpline must be set up to report discrimination.
- Institutions are also required to appoint Equity Ambassadors, tasked with promoting awareness and acting as “torch bearers” of equity.

## How Do the 2026 UGC Regulations Differ from the 2012 Rules

- **Nature of the Regulations**
  - **2012 Regulations:** Largely advisory, stating that punishment should be proportionate to the discrimination or harassment, without clearly defined enforcement mechanisms.

- **2026 Regulations:** Mandatory and enforceable, with clear structures, procedures, and penalties for non-compliance.
- **Enforcement and Penalties**
  - 2012: No provision for action against institutions that failed to comply with the regulations.
  - 2026: The UGC can monitor implementation through a national-level monitoring committee and take punitive action against defaulting institutions, including:
    - Debarring them from UGC schemes
    - Restricting them from offering degree or online programmes
    - Removing eligibility for central grants
- **Institutional Mechanisms**
  - **2012:** Provided for Equal Opportunity Cells but did not specify their composition or detailed procedures for handling discrimination cases. Mandated an Anti-Discrimination Officer, with an appeal to the head of the institution.
  - **2026:** Introduces a detailed, multi-tier mechanism—Equal Opportunity Centres, Equity Committees, and Equity Squads—with clearly defined roles, composition, and time-bound procedures.
- **Complaint Handling and Procedures**
  - **2012:** Lacked clarity on complaint registration, timelines, and disposal mechanisms.
  - **2026:** Lays down elaborate procedures for filing, examining, and resolving complaints, with fixed timelines at each stage.
- **Coverage of Social Groups**
  - **2012:** Focused mainly on **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes**, with no explicit mention of Other Backward Classes (OBCs).
  - **2026:** Explicitly covers **OBCs**, along with SCs, STs, persons with disabilities, women, and other disadvantaged groups, reflecting a broader and more inclusive approach.

## Controversy Over the New UGC Regulation

- Critics argue that the rules could lead to harassment of students from the general category and deepen caste-based divisions within campuses.
- One of the main objections is the **absence of penalties for “false complaints of discrimination”**.
  - Critics claim that without such a provision, the regulations could be misused, while institutions may face punitive action for non-compliance.
- They allege that the regulations are unfair to general category students and that they promote caste-based divisions, particularly within the OBC community, for political purposes.

**Source: IE | FP**

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