

**General Studies-2; Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.**

**Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)**

**1) Introduction**

- The Union government has decided to introduce the Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Bill 2018 that will do away with the UGC Act and will set up Higher Education Commission of India (HECI).
- HECI will be the new, apex regulator for university and higher education in India.
- The focus of HECI will be on improving academic standards and the quality of Higher Education.

**2) Highlights**

- The new body will be more representational.
- Its board will have senior bureaucrats from the ministries of HRD, skills and entrepreneurship, and science and technology, in a way ending the monopoly of HRD ministry in regulating higher education.
- The commission shall consist of a chairperson, vice chairperson and 12 members to be appointed by the central government.

**3) Need for HECI**

- The UGC and its regulatory regime have been criticised by a number of committees and their reports for its restrictive processes.
- Several committees like Yash Pal committee, National Knowledge Commission and the Hari Gautam committee have recommended a single education regulator to rid higher education of red tape and lethargy.
- UGC remained preoccupied with disbursing funds to institutes and was unable to concentrate on mentoring the institutes, focussing on research to be undertaken etc.
- For better administration of the higher education sector.
- For promoting uniform development of quality of education in higher educational institutions.
- To ensure no more interference in the management issues of the educational institutions.

**4) Key thrust areas of the HECI**

- Downsizing over governance of institutions.
- Focus on academic quality with emphasis on improving learning outcomes.
- Evaluation of academic performance by institutions.
- Mentoring of institutions, training of teachers, use of technology and so on.
- HECI will also set standards for opening and closure of institutes.
- Provide greater flexibility and autonomy to institutes.
- Lay standards for appointments to critical leadership positions at the institutional level.

**5) UGC vs HECI**

### UGC vs HECI

**1** The UGC's regulatory power included quality assessment and giving grants. The HECI will just ensure academic quality while MHRD will give grants to institutions

**2** The UGC conducted inspections to assess institutions. The HECI will practically do away with these and shift to a regime of "transparent disclosures" instead

**3** The UGC published lists of bogus institutions once in a while. The HECI will be empowered to shut down sub-standard and bogus institutions. Non-compliance by institutions could also lead to jail terms

#### 6) Criticism

- The structure of the new body is such that it will give political parties more say in decision making regarding education.
- It is an attempt to increase direct government interference in higher education - right from the admission process to the intake of research scholars.
- It is also not clear how shifting the grant-related functions to the ministry will result in less interference.
- The loopholes in the functioning of the UGC should have been addressed by the academicians in the higher education sector and not the government.

#### 7) Way Forward

- The future role of multiple regulatory bodies that currently exist for engineering, medicine and law must be addressed.
- Set academic benchmarks for each stream, with sufficient autonomy to innovate on courses and encourage studies across disciplines.

#### 8) Facts for Prelims

- The University Grants Commission of India is a statutory body set up by the Union government in accordance to the UGC Act 1956 under Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- It is charged with coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of higher education.
- It provides recognition to universities in India, and disburses funds to such recognised universities and colleges.
- Its headquarters is in New Delhi, and six regional

centres in Pune, Bhopal, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Guwahati and Bangalore.