

Redefining Higher Education

AICTE has been a bone of contention for long. There are many divergent views on it. Recently Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FICCI) has put forward recommendations on Regulatory Framework on Technical Education in which it recommends dissolution of AICTE. Khalid Perwez asks Dr Amit Mitra, Secretary General, FICCI what the real issue is and why FICCI thinks dissolution would help the cause of technical and higher education in India.



Q. 1. According to FICCI, AICTE has severely fallen short of addressing issues which concern technical education in India today. What issues has AICTE been unable to address?

A. FICCI analysis shows that the enabling Act of AICTE has got converted to a regulating Act, which constrains the supply of good institutions, excessively regulates existing institutions in the wrong places and is not conducive to innovation or creativity in technical education. Ambiguity in Government's policy for regulating the private higher education institutions, leads to delays in permission and other operational difficulties, which deters genuine higher education providers from entering the sector.

Further, AICTE has been unable to manage multiple functions to the satisfaction of constituents, and has become virtually synonymous with granting approvals or licenses to new applicants. The important role of quality assurance of existing institutions through issuing guidelines has taken a back seat.

As the organizational structure and functioning of AICTE is in sync with public institutions, which are budgetarily supported by the State and/or Central Government, there is negligible representation in the council from the self-financing private universities/higher education institutions and the industry. Hence, the Council is unable to address the issues that are specific to self-financing private technical education providers and the changing needs of the industry.

Q. 2. Why does FICCI want dissolution of AICTE? What are the recommendations made by FICCI on regulatory framework for technical education?

A. For the Indian Technical Education to excel and compete globally, it is imperative that the higher education sector should be opened up with an enabling environment for all kinds of higher and technical institutions to flourish and to do so a single regulatory

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authority, independent of Government, as recommended by the National Knowledge Commission (NKC), Government of India should be set up with its role limited to regulating public and private, aided and unaided, institutions at the initial stages with minimum prescriptions and flexible norms at start to evolve into rigor with institutional evolution. Institutions with credible reputation over a period of 5 years should be given "autonomous" status.

FICCI recommends an overhaul of "regulation", its articulation and embodiment through a flexible framework and replacing it with a quality benchmarking system that is comparable with the international standards as mentioned below:

- Government focus should be to prepare for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence in higher educational institutions, ensuring access & equity and promoting and facilitating student achievements through student loans, scholarships, etc.
- Government should facilitate self-financing institutions to set up institutions without any entry barriers where the market forces work, as has been in the case of Indian School of Business (ISB) Hyderabad or Great Lake Institute of Management, Chennai.
- However, the government must make it mandatory for all higher and technical institutions to disclose their ranking for knowledge of all on the website and all promotional literature to help students make an informed choice. This will ensure growth of quality institutions and the fly by night operators.
- Autonomy to all institutions should be granted to decide on setting up of new campus, new programmes, number of programmes, number of students, fees, faculty recruitment, etc., based on requirements of the industry, market forces and financial considerations of the institutions by making it responsible for delivery of quality education. The regulatory authority should be responsible for
- Allocation of funds for research, scholarships, etc., based on performance of both public and private sector institutions, thus instilling healthy inter-sector competition between the institutions.
- Non-performing institutions should be given a period of 5 years to come up to the minimum prescribed level or face closure.
- Budgetary allocation to the institutions should be performance-based instead of traditional incremental budgeting.
- The quality assurance mechanism should be delinked from the regulatory

authority and made independent. Accreditation process should have direct consequences like relaxation in approval processes for setting up new campuses, starting new programmes, direct empanelment in various government schemes, etc., for attracting genuine technical and higher education providers to invest in the process.

Q. 3. There is a general perception that accreditation from AICTE is confirmation of some minimum standard in education. What alternative benchmarking mechanism does FICCI propose?

A. FICCI proposes two alternative benchmarking mechanisms below drawing from the best practices of UK and USA and integrating it with our own mechanisms that are acceptable to the stakeholders:

Accreditation Mechanism Adapting the US Model:

- There should be no governmental body to supervise higher education institutions or accrediting bodies.
- Accreditation should be governed by commonly developed and accepted "standards of good practice", and not by law.
- Provision for umbrella body/bodies to review accreditation bodies/councils for respective sectors. NAAC could be one such body after being delinked from UGC. Use of professional bodies like the Academies of Science, Engineering, Management, etc. could be considered. Provision for universities and industry to set up a non-governmental body for the purpose should be made. The umbrella body/bodies would
- define standards for the approval of accreditation councils/associations, and recognize accrediting associations that meet the criteria.
- would not "accredit" or "recognize" institutions, but should be made responsible for recommending to the Government for the disbursement of funds to the institutions based on inputs of accrediting councils/associations.
- be funded by the Central and State Governments in case of NAAC and subscription from education providers-public and private in case of non-governmental body.
- Fully autonomous, sector-specific accreditation councils/association should be established with adequate representation from all stakeholders and funded by the universities and industry. Existing professional bodies could be empowered to take up this role.
- Each accreditation council/association should evolve its own comparable norms and standards and define strategies to complete the process within a stipulated



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ed time frame. These norms should be available on the web. Overlapping situation should be assessed by joint mechanism.

- Each accrediting council/association may have representatives from leading Indian and foreign universities to carry out the accreditation process within the prescribed norms. The process would involve:

- Self-Assessment according to the standards of the accrediting organization

- Peer review of the self-assessment by a team consisting of practicing educators and administrators at other higher education institutions

- Site visit based on self-assessment

- Review of the team's recommendations and follow up

- Accreditation organization's decision

- Ongoing review based on the accrediting organization's timeline for accreditation review

- Accreditation would be granted for a specific period of time, and must be renewed, usually every 5 -10 years as specified by the accrediting council

- Accreditation reviews to be carried out by review teams comprising instructors and administrators from accredited institutions

- "Program", "Professional", or "Specialized" accreditation should be available for specific programs of study within the institutions. An institution that is "accredited" might offer several "accredited programs".

Accreditation Mechanism Adapting the UK Model:

- Independent Quality Assurance Agency funded by the Central and State Governments and subscription from education providers public and private to be set up for review of standards and quality and provide reference points that would help to define clear and explicit standards. NAAC could be empowered for such purpose after being delinked from UGC.

- Each university and college of higher education would be responsible for ensuring that appropriate standards are being achieved and quality education is being offered through institutional audit process.

- Quality Assurance Mechanism would be based on "institutional" review along with "subject" review and "research" review.

- The review team would consist of qualified professionals from the sector. They should be members of a professional body in their area and should be active academicians with teaching and research experience for at least 5 years. A panel of such professionals could be periodically published on the agencies websites'.

- Focus would be on having systems, which check effectiveness of structures and overall enhancement.

- Evaluation of academic Infrastructure could be done on the following elements as done in the UK:

- Set of Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) would promote a clear understanding of the achievements and attributes represented by the main qualification titles, such as bachelor's degree with honours, or master's degree.

- Subject benchmark statements would set out expectations about the standards of degrees in a range of subject areas

- Programme specifications would be the sets of information that each institution would provide about its programmes

- The Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher and technical education would be a guideline on good practice for universities and colleges, relating to the management of academic standards and quality.

- Assessment would be based on grading system, which would make it flexible and responsive to change, and which in turn would build confidence amongst the institutions.

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Q. 4. What monitoring mechanism for quality assurance will the new system have?

A. FICCI proposes self-regulation mechanism to be integrated in the system through setting up of an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) within an institution making it mandatory for all education providers to do it. It should comprise of senior academicians and management of the institution working together as a steering group. Also initiatives like FICCI-Higher Education Network (FICCI-HEN) set up by the leading Higher Education Providers should be supported by the Government to promote self-regulation in the sector as prescribed through the Code of Conduct and Disclosure Norms formalized and adapted by the members themselves.

Q. 5. What impact will it have on management education/management schools in India?

A. The proposed model of quality assurance by FICCI will in no way have a differential impact on different institutions. The positive outcomes of this model will be more or less of the same intensity and magnitude. However, since the management and other technical institutions are relatively more market-driven, the impact of the proposed model of quality assurance may be more perceptible.