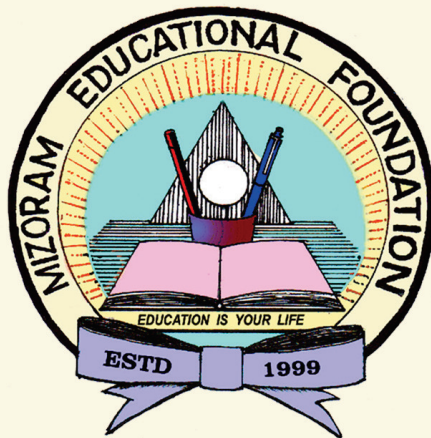


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From the Desk of the Chief Editor

How difficult/easy it would be for affiliated colleges to become autonomous colleges

NEP 2020 envisions that every college would develop into either an autonomous degree-granting college, or a constituent college of a university. Overall culture of empowerment and autonomy to innovate will be fostered by gradually phasing out the system of 'affiliated colleges' over a period of 15 years through a system of graded autonomy. All colleges currently affiliated to a university shall attain the required benchmarks over time to secure the prescribed accreditation benchmarks and eventually become autonomous degree-granting colleges. Thus, over a period of fifteen years, there will be only 2 types of colleges: autonomous degree-granting colleges and constituent colleges of universities.

There are 45,473 colleges registered in AISHE portal and the number of affiliated colleges under different types of universities is 44,185 (AISHE Final Report 2021-2022) which constitutes the large majority. On the other hand, the number of approved autonomous colleges is only 979 which are under 122 universities spread in 25 states as on 12.06.2023 (UGC website).

The big task lying ahead of the country's higher education is to upgrade all these affiliated colleges to large multidisciplinary autonomous degree granting colleges or at least to constituent colleges. According to the UGC (Conferment of Autonomous Status upon Colleges and Measures for Maintenance of Standards in Autonomous Colleges) Regulations, 2018; getting the status of autonomy was not easy for colleges and large majority of affiliated colleges in the country did not even think of applying for the status. To fulfill the mandate of NEP 2020 on this matter, the UGC has brought out the UGC (Conferment of Autonomous Status upon Colleges and Measures for Maintenance of Standards in Autonomous Colleges) Regulations, 2023 notified in the Gazette of India on 3rd April, 2023 in supersession of the Regulations, 2018.

The Regulations, 2023 provide for a simplified and transparent mechanism for conferment of Autonomous Status to Colleges. While the simple eligibility criteria like the requirements of being under Section 2(f) of the UGC Act and having at least 10 years of existence remain the same, the difficult criteria relating to NAAC or NBA accreditation have been made easier. While the Regulations 2018 mandate colleges to have accreditation by either NAAC with minimum 'A' Grade or by NBA for at least three programme(s) with a minimum score of 675 individually or a corresponding accreditation grade/score from a UGC empanelled accreditation agency, the Regulations 2023 do not insist on these. Simply getting accreditation from the concerned accreditation agency is enough to become eligible for autonomous status.

Further, the Regulations 2023 provide for exemption of a college from the requirements of having at least 10 years of existence and accreditation by concerned accreditation agency, if it offers programmes in any of the following focus areas:

- 1) unique discipline(s), e.g., special education, Indian knowledge system, yoga, defence studies
- 2) addressing the strategic needs of the country
- 3) engaged in the preservation of Indian cultural heritage
- 4) preservation of the environment
- 5) dedicated to Skill Development, Sports, languages
- 6) any other discipline(s)/ field(s) so determined by the UGC.

Thus, looking into the new Regulations 2023, it appears that becoming autonomous college will not be difficult for an affiliated or a constituent college. This is the outcome of the UGC's continued efforts to implement the recommendations of NEP 2020 with regard to transformation of colleges (affiliated and constituent) into autonomous colleges. However, in the process of the transformation, the UGC Guidelines for Transforming Higher Education Institutions into Multidisciplinary Institutions, 2022 need to be consulted and implemented. A College fulfilling the eligibility, intending to become autonomous, may submit the application on the UGC portal anytime during the year.

Lalmmasai Chuaungo
Chief Editor