

**FAQs on NKC recommendations on Higher Education:**

1. On what basis has NKC recommended 1500 universities?

India has about 350 universities. This number is simply not enough with reference to our needs in higher education. Yet, some of our universities are much too large, for ensuring academic standards and providing good governance. We need to create more appropriately scaled universities. 1500 is an approximate figure used to indicate the order of magnitude of the expansion required in the higher education system, if we are to raise our enrolment to levels comparable with most developing countries. This may be achieved not only by creating new universities but also by restructuring the existing undergraduate affiliated college system to create smaller universities which are responsive to change and easier to manage. The number 1500 is a longer-term goal, not something to be aimed at in the short run. In the medium term, 20-30 new national universities have been suggested, beginning in the short run with 4 or 5. These would be in addition to universities that could be formed by breaking up existing large universities into smaller ones or allowing autonomous colleges to expand into universities.

2. In what way would a central or state board of higher education, as proposed by NKC, be an improvement over the affiliated college system?

The proposed Central Board of Undergraduate Education along with State Boards of Undergraduate Education would set curricula and conduct examinations for undergraduate colleges that choose to be affiliated with them. These Boards would thus separate the academic functions from the administrative functions and at the same time provide quality benchmarks. Governance would become much simpler. It is possible that some of the existing undergraduate colleges, particularly those that are at some geographical distance from their parent university, may wish to affiliate themselves to these Boards. New undergraduate colleges are bound to be an integral part of the expansion of opportunities in higher education. Where would these be located? It would be difficult for them to become autonomous colleges without a track record. It may be possible for some to join a cluster of autonomous colleges but this would be more the exception than the rule. It would not be possible for them to affiliate with existing universities which are already overloaded. Hence, they could be affiliated with the Central Board of Undergraduate Education or State Boards of Undergraduate Education.

3. What level of autonomy is envisaged by NKC for autonomous colleges/cluster of colleges?

Colleges with a proven record of academic excellence and efficient administrative functioning can be granted autonomy in terms of academic self-governance. Existing affiliated or constituent colleges should be granted autonomy in phases after due assessment by professional accreditation bodies. A review of performance of these colleges should be institutionalised and they may be granted university status on the fulfilment of stated criteria of academic and administrative performance. The college authorities should be given financial autonomy with regard to internal allocation of

resources. However existing methods of financing should be retained. In operational terms, then, the autonomy would be accorded in setting of curriculum and evaluation of students.

4. Will community colleges impart only vocational education?

No community colleges will not impart only vocational education. Community colleges as envisaged by NKC would provide both vocational education through two-year courses and formal education through three-year courses. This would serve the needs of a particular segment of the student population better. These colleges could focus on promoting job-oriented, work-related, skill-based and life-coping education. These community colleges could provide a unique opportunity to provide holistic education and eligibility for employment to the disadvantaged.

5. Does NKC recommend commercial utilization of land by Universities?

NKC recommends generating revenues through innovative uses of land consistent with the objectives of the Universities. Most public universities are sitting on a large reservoir of untapped resources in the form of land. In effect, with some imagination, many of our universities can be converted into institutions that are similar to land grant universities. Each university should thus have an innovative asset management plan. Such plans should be in consonance with objectives of universities. At the moment, however, universities have no strategy in this sphere. And there is considerable room to think in strategic terms about the use of physical assets in the possession of universities. It should be possible to draw up norms and parameters for universities to use their land as a source of finance.

6. Does NKC encourage setting up *for-profit* educational institutions by private players?

No NKC does not encourage setting up *for-profit* educational institutions by private players. However an anomalous situation has arisen whereby in three professions – engineering, medicine and management- there has been a *de facto* privatization of education so that two-thirds to three-fourths of the seats are in private institutions. But private investment in university education, where more than 70 per cent of our students study, is almost negligible. It is essential to stimulate private investment in higher education as a means of extending educational opportunities. We must recognise that, even with the best will in the world, government financing cannot be enough to support the massive expansion in opportunities for higher education on a scale that is now essential. It might be possible to leverage public funding, especially in the form of land grants, to attract more (not-for-profit) private investment. The present system of allotment of land, where political patronage is implicit, discourages genuine educational entrepreneurs and encourages real estate developers in disguise. In principle, it should be possible to set up new institutions in higher education, not just more IITs and IIMs but also more universities, as public-private partnerships where the government provides the land and the private sector provides the finances. Such public-private partnerships which promote university- industry interface would also strengthen teaching and research.

7. What stand does NKC take on entry of foreign universities in India?

NKC believes that top of the rank foreign universities should have an opportunity to come to in India, since the significance of competition from outside India, more qualitative than quantitative, must not be underestimated. However we must formulate appropriate policies for the entry of foreign institutions into India and the promotion of Indian institutions abroad. Such policies must ensure that there is an incentive for good institutions and a disincentive for sub-standard institutions to come to India. The present regime does the opposite: sub-standard players rush in while premier universities stay away as they care more about their autonomy and wish to set benchmarks for themselves. However, a level playing field should be ensured and all rules that apply to domestic institutions should also be applicable to foreign institutions. At the same time, policies must encourage rather than discourage Indian institutions to create campuses abroad not as business opportunities but as competition opportunities in their quest for academic excellence. Of course, expansion abroad should not be at the cost of domestic provision, either at present or in the future.

8. Is IRAHE a super regulator, will its creation lead to greater barriers in the establishment of new institutions?

IRAHE is not envisaged as a super regulator. It is hoped that the setting up of IRAHE would create an additional mechanism to set up new universities. In India, it requires an Act of the Legislature or the Parliament to set up a University. The deemed university route is much too difficult for new institutions. Entry through legislation alone, as at present, is a formidable barrier. The consequence is a steady increase in the average size of existing universities with a steady deterioration in their quality. The absence of competition only compounds problems. Second, as we seek to expand the higher education system, entry norms will be needed for private institutions and public-private partnerships. The institutional framework for this purpose must be put in place here and now. The present regulatory system in higher education is flawed in many respects. The barriers to entry are too high. The system of authorizing entry is cumbersome. And there are extensive rules after entry, as almost every aspect of an institution is regulated from fees to curriculum. The other regulators, say in the sphere of professional education, are often inconsistent in their adherence to principles. The existing regulatory framework constrains the supply of good institutions, excessively regulates existing institutions in the wrong places, and is not conducive to innovation or creativity in higher education. The challenge is therefore to design a regulatory system that increases the supply of good institutions and fosters accountability in those institutions. An independent regulator has to be the cornerstone of such a system.

9. What is the proposed structure of IRAHE?

The IRAHE would be constituted as follows. It would have a Chairperson and six Members. The tenure of the Chairperson would be six years. The tenure of the Members would also be six years. One-third of the Members of the Authority will retire every two years. The Chairperson would be a distinguished academic from any discipline with experience of governance in higher education. The Members would be distinguished academics drawn from the following sets of disciplines: physical sciences, life sciences, social sciences, humanities and professional subjects such as engineering, medicine, law or management. The IRAHE could have some part-time members or standing committees drawn from academia to advise the Authority in each of the aforesaid sets of disciplines. The Chairperson and the Members of the IRAHE would be appointed by the Prime Minister based on the recommendations of a Search Committee.

The IRAHE would have to be established by an Act of Parliament. It would be the only agency that would be authorized to accord degree granting power to higher education institutions. It would also be responsible for monitoring standards and settling disputes. It should also be thought of as the authority for licensing accreditation agencies. The IRAHE must be at an arm's-length from the government and independent of all stakeholders including the concerned Ministries of the Government.

10. Will the setting up of IRAHE entail the dissolution of UGC?

The setting up of IRAHE will not entail the dissolution of UGC. The role of the UGC would be re-defined to focus on the disbursement of grants to, and maintenance of, public institutions in higher education.

11. What will be the role of bodies that perform regulatory functions in different domains such as AICTE, BCI, MCI?

The entry regulatory functions of the AICTE, the MCI and the BCI would be performed by the IRAHE, so that their role would be limited to that of professional associations. These professional associations could conduct nationwide examinations to provide licenses for those wishing to enter the profession.

12. What system does NKC envisage for quality control?

The introduction of an independent regulator in higher education, the reform of existing public universities and the creation of national universities, taken together, would contribute to enhancement of quality in higher education. But this needs to be supported with some pro-active steps that would foster quality in higher education.

- There should be stringent information disclosure norms for all educational institutions such as their financial situation, physical assets, admissions criteria, faculty positions, academic curricula, as also their source and level of accreditation.

- Evaluation of courses and teachers by students as well as peer evaluation of teachers by teachers should be encouraged.
- There must be a focus on upgrading infrastructure, improving the training of teachers and continuous assessment of syllabi and examination systems.
- It is particularly important to enhance the ICT infrastructure. Websites and web-based services would improve transparency and accountability. A portal on higher education and research would increase interaction and accessibility. A knowledge network would connect all universities and colleges for online open resources.
- It may be necessary to rethink the issue of salary differentials within and between universities along with other means of attracting and retaining talented faculty members. Such salary differentials between and within universities could be effective without being large.
- It is necessary to formulate appropriate policies for the entry of foreign institutions into India and the promotion of Indian institutions abroad, while ensuring a level playing field for foreign and domestic institutions within the country.
- The system of higher education must recognize that there is bound to be diversity and pluralism in any system of higher education, and avoid a uniform one-size-fits-all approach. This sense of pluralism must recognise, rather than ignore or shy away from, such diversity and differentiation.

13. Will implementation of NKC recommendations on fees lead to an exorbitant increase in the cost of higher education making it inaccessible to large sections of society?

No NKC proposes a gradual rationalization of fees over a period of time which will not result in an exorbitant increase, but rather will ensure that those who can afford to pay, do so while education is subsidized for those who cannot pay. On an average, fees constitute less than 10 per cent of total expenditure in our universities. And, in most universities, fees have remained unchanged for decades. In theory, universities have the freedom to decide on fees. In practice, however, universities have not exercised this freedom in part because of some genuine concerns about access but in larger part because of the rhetoric and populism in the political process. The problem has been compounded by the UGC method of providing grants-in-aid to bridge the difference between income and expenditure. Consequently, there is no incentive for universities or colleges to raise income through higher fees as that sum would be deducted from their UGC (or State government) grants. The low fees in public universities, without any means test, have meant unquantifiable benefits for unintended beneficiaries. But private players and foreign institutions have not been restrained in charging fees that the market can bear. The time has come to rethink, as we have no choice but to rationalize fees. It is for universities to decide the level of fees but, as a norm, fees should meet at least 20 per cent of the total expenditure in universities. In addition, fees need to be adjusted every two years through price indexation. Such small, continuous, adjustments would be absorbed and accepted far more easily than large, discrete changes after a period of time. This rationalization of fees should be subject to two conditions: first, needy students should be provided with a fee waiver plus scholarships to meet their costs; second, universities

should not be penalized by the UGC for the resources raised from higher fees through matching deductions from their grants-in-aid.

14. Does NKC oppose caste based reservations?

NKC believes that reservations are essential but they are a part, and one form of, affirmative action. Disparities in educational attainments are related to caste and social groups, but are also strongly related to other indicators such as income, gender, region and place of residence. Access to quality higher education is further limited for students from certain types of schools. Therefore deprivation of educational opportunities is a multi-dimensional problem and attention needs to be paid to different salient levels of deprivation faced by students. A meaningful and comprehensive framework would account for the multidimensionality of differences that still persist. Such a deprivation index could provide weighted scores to students and the cumulative score could be used to supplement a student's school examination score. After adding the score from the deprivation index, all students could compete for admissions.

The indicators need to be easily identifiable and verifiable for the system to work effectively. They should cover the different types of disadvantages that a student could face at the school level, and while applying for admissions to higher education. This system serves the dual purpose of considering various disadvantages and ensuring that a reserved category student who has otherwise enjoyed other benefits does not get great preference at the time of admissions.

15. What stand does NKC take on accreditation?

NKC believes there should be multiple accreditation agencies so that instead of vesting one institution created by the state with monopoly power, the IRAHE may be empowered to license a number of accreditation agencies, public and private, to do the ratings. In doing so, the regulator would set standards for them. This will need to be accompanied by stringent information disclosure norms for all educational institutions, including the source and level of their accreditation. The rapid growth in higher education, particularly in the private sector, has created a strong need for empowering students and parents with reliable information from a credible accreditation process. This system can be supplemented with the creation of self-regulatory bodies in the higher education system and the freedom to seek recognition from global accreditation systems.