
The Viksit Bharat Siksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025

Introduction

The role of higher education has always been critical in determining the economic, social, and intellectual prowess of nations across the world. In India, though, the regulatory environment for higher educational institutions has sometimes fallen short when it comes to keeping up with the dynamics of growth that characterize this sector. India has one of the biggest higher education institutions in the world, but concerns have always been raised about quality, relevance, research, and job readiness. The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, therefore, assumes special importance as a reform measure at this point in time.

The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in December 2025 and is in line with the vision set forth in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 reforms. The Bill can be seen as an effort to move beyond simply restructuring the regulatory agencies to completely transform how higher education in the country is governed rather than being a simple update in legislation that can be passed routinely.

The Context: Why Reform Was Inevitable

The regulation of higher education in India has been marked by institutional fragmentation for several decades. The University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) operated in a parallel manner, with their own sets of rules, approvals, and compliance procedures. While these four had distinct objectives, they came to be marked by duplication of effort and procedural delays for institutions.

Institutions of higher learning found themselves contending with various compliance activities just to roll out new programs. This impacted innovation and pulled resources away from teaching and research. The NEP 2020 recognized the gaps in the existing architecture and urged simplification and a principle-driven framework. The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill is enacted to respond to this challenge.

What the Bill Proposes

The Bill provides for the establishment of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) as the top regulatory authority for higher education, except for legal and medical education, which will continue to be regulated through separate statutory regimes. The Bill will repeal the law governing the UGC, AICTE, and NCTE. Here, there will be a change from a fragmented regulatory regime to an integrated one.

The VBSA is contemplated more as a strategic steer for the sector rather than a micromanaging controller. Its charter mandates laying down long-term directions for higher education and

research, facilitating the transition to large, multidisciplinary institutions, and quality enhancement across the system. More importantly, the Bill has kept regulation and funding separate, in the sense that the new body shall not have financial powers over institutions, in contrast to the earlier UGC-centric regime.

A Three-Council Architecture: Clarity of Roles

Contrary to many acts where all functions collide into one authority, it is proposed that three independent but integrated councils be formed under the umbrella of the VBSA.

"The Regulatory Council plays the role of the common regulator, ensuring that the institutions meet minimal norms in a manner that does not obstruct procedural intervention to a certain degree. In this regard, the Regulatory Council adopted the "light but tight" regulatory approach, which entails minimal intervention with strong implementation where the norms are breached."

The Accreditation Council is responsible for managing the accreditation process, with a focus on achieving objectivity, transparency, and technological management. With so much reliance on public disclosure of institutional data, the intention is to shift the focus from inspection to evidence assessment.

The responsibility of the Standards Council is to set the academic standards of the programmes, degrees, and institutions. It does not prescribe a curriculum, but the minimum standards to ensure quality and at the same time maintain diversity and freedom.

With these two aspects, the division of duties is supposed to remove any conflicts of interest, increase credibility, and make overall quality assurance more reliable.

Governance, Appointments, and Federal Balance

The composition of the VBSA and its councils thus seeks a balance in expertise, administrative experience, and federal representation. The governing body is stocked with bright academics and experts, combined with the representation of the central government and nominees from rotating state governments in key councils.

The appointments are channeled through search and selection committees, with the President of India making the final appointment. Though the centralized appointment system has been criticized for giving too much power to the Union, it has been argued that such a system ensures that there is consistency in standards across the country, which is enshrined in the Union List.

The very referral of the Bill to a Joint Parliamentary Committee testifies to the federal sensitivities involved and the imperative need to have state concerns meaningfully taken care of before its enactment.

Enforcement Without Excess

One thing that is worthy of note in the Bill is the enforcement tool employed. The amounts fined for breaches go from relatively moderate amounts to high amounts in the case of the setting up of illegal universities. Other than fines, the matter can be taken up by the Regulatory Council, recommending changes regarding autonomy or awarding of degrees.

Although the above provisions seem strict, they have been drafted with the motive of dissuading malpractice and protecting students from substandard or fraudulent colleges. However, it is seen that the Bill lays strong stress on the aspects of due process and appeal. This reinforces the point that regulation needs to be tough but fair.

Why the Bill Matters

The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill is not merely about administrative restructuring. It addresses various structural weaknesses that have long hamstrung Indian higher education. It simplifies regulation and enhances autonomy, clearing space for innovation, interdisciplinarity, and international collaboration. By improving accreditation and public disclosure, it fosters transparency and informed student choice.

In an institution struggling with low Gross Enrolment Ratio, lack of faculty, poor research budgets, and poor globalization ranks, change in governance is not an immediate solution but an axiom for change to happen. The Bill provides for institutions to prioritize that which matters most to institutions: learning, research, and students.

Concerns

Though the Bill is meant to be reform-oriented, controversy has erupted over the proposed legislation. Misgivings have been expressed regarding centralization, the appellate jurisdiction of the central government, and the possible peripheral handling of states in a particular domain that is supposed to be on the Concurrent List.

These are not insignificant concerns, and the process of parliamentary scrutiny offers some opportunity to revise the legislation. However, the ultimate effectiveness of the Bill will depend not so much on what is included in the text, as on its implementation—especially the capacity of institutions, regulators, and governments to take up a culture of trust-based governance.

Conclusion

The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, marks a paradigm shift in how India can regulate its higher education sector as a nation. The Bill has moved away from a regulatory mindset that encourages institutions to merely comply, for example, with regulatory requirements in higher education, towards building an enabling regulatory environment that can enable institutions while ensuring that quality is maintained for public purposes. The Bill has a great potential to become a bedrock for India's journey towards building a world-class higher education system that mirrors a "Viksit Bharat".

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