

Cover Story



Vishav

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STUDY ABROAD, IN INDIA

Coming soon: Indian campuses
of foreign universities



In the summer of 2020, when the whole nation was busy fighting the deadly COVID pandemic, the Union Cabinet approved the New Education Policy (NEP), a landmark initiative that is expected to overhaul the country's education system.

Among other major provisions aimed at providing equitable and inclusive education to all and promote a learner-centric approach, the NEP also seeks to allow foreign universities to set up campuses in India. Two-and-a-half years later, the government has come up with norms to implement this move. The University Grants Commission (UGC), in January, announced draft norms for allowing foreign universities and educational institutions to set up campuses in India.

As per the draft rules, foreign universities can not only set up their campuses in India, but can also decide their own admission process, as well as their fee structure. The UGC sought feedback from all stakeholders, giving them a month-and-a-half's time to respond. At the time of writing this article, the extended deadline for submitting comments, suggestions, and feedback was February 20.

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The NEP 2020 had envisaged that international institutions would collaborate with Indian institutions, and their entry would be regulated through a transparent and robust regulatory mechanism.

The draft rules issued by the UGC are aimed at achieving that purpose through setting up adequate safeguards and a monitoring mechanism. Based on the feedback given by the stakeholders, it is expected that the rules will be further strengthened in the final guidelines.

UGC Draft Rules: What do they say?

According to UGC guidelines, only those foreign universities are eligible to set up campuses in India which have a global ranking among the top-500 institutions, either overall, or by subject. This will ensure that the institutions intending to enter India are among the most reputed in their home country.

Moreover, in order to meet quality standards, the foreign universities and institutions will be

allowed to offer only full-time programmes in physical mode, and will be barred from running online, or distance learning programmes.

More importantly, the degrees granted to students on the Indian campus have to be at par with those granted by the universities in their home country.

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their Indian campuses is at par with their main campus in their native country. UGC will devise a mechanism to ensure that such institutions do not offer courses which “jeopardize the national interest” of India.

The UGC guidelines also mandate that the foreign higher educational institutions make the prospectus available on their website at least 60 days before the commencement of admissions, including the fee structure, refund policy, number of seats in a programme, eligibility qualifications, and the admission process. All processes, including fee structure and admission criteria, have to be transparent.

While these institutions will be free to recruit faculty and staff from India, as well as abroad, as per their recruitment norms, they will need to ensure that the qualifications of the faculty are at par with the main campus of the country of origin.





A step in the right direction

Foreign universities setting up campuses in India will get an initial approval for a period of ten years, and they will have to ensure that the quality of education imparted in their Indian campuses is at par with their campus in their native country.

The idea of allowing foreign universities to set up campuses in India has its advantages and disadvantages. However, with the right implementation and carefully-designed safeguards, this could revolutionize the Indian education system, not only when it comes to higher education, but also school education. After all, the synergies between different parts of the education system are well-documented.

The biggest advantage of allowing foreign universities in India is that Indian students will get

access to world-class education. Foreign universities are expected to bring in cutting-edge research and teaching methods, which could benefit Indian students. Their entry will also foster increased competition in the Indian education sector, which can drive improvement in the quality of education provided by domestic institutions as well.

For students, it is a win-win situation. The entry of foreign universities will increase the number of opportunities and choice of colleges that they have for higher education. With education from foreign universities available in





India, the overall cost for such education will drop significantly and they will not have to travel abroad and sustain themselves for years in high-cost economies. Now, even those who could not earlier afford foreign education can benefit if they satisfy the admission criteria.

The presence of foreign universities will also provide young people with exposure to different cultures, languages,

and perspectives, which could broaden their horizons and increase their inter-cultural competence. Increased research opportunities for young people could foster innovation and contribute to the development of new technologies and industries.

It will be convenient for those protective parents who are reluctant to send their children overseas, especially after

the pandemic. Having more opportunities is also likely to attract superior talent to the teaching field.

Moreover, the presence of foreign educational institutions will boost the Indian economy through creation of job opportunities, attract foreign investment, and contribute to the development of the local economy.

Since the draft UGC



regulations require foreign institutions to establish campuses in India with adequate physical infrastructure, there will be a significant inflow of foreign investment into the country. The ecosystem that will develop around a foreign university campus will bring direct benefits to the local community surrounding the campus.

It is estimated that around 400,000 students move abroad every year

for higher education, which leads to the outflow of thousands of crores of rupees. With quality universities from across the world coming to India, it will help decrease this outflow significantly. Availing foreign education in India will also reduce the loss of human capital from India, as many students who go abroad to study tend to find a job there only and settle down in that country, thus causing brain-drain.



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Likely challenges

Since the UGC has given freedom to foreign universities to decide their own fee structure, it is quite possible that they might be more expensive than domestic institutions, which could limit access to education in these institutions to many students from low-income backgrounds.

To overcome these challenges, the UGC could, over time, regulate the fees charged by foreign universities to ensure that education remains affordable and accessible to students from all socio-economic backgrounds. It could also look at establishing robust quality assurance mechanisms so that the education provided by foreign universities meets certain standards. This can include accreditation, monitoring and evaluation of academic programmes, and regular audits. While foreign institutions should be allowed to design their own curriculum, UGC could look at requiring foreign universities to include local content to ensure that students are exposed to the rich cultural heritage of India.





Lessons from other countries

There are several countries which have already allowed foreign universities to set up campuses, and India can learn from their experiences. While the UAE has been a pioneer in attracting foreign universities to set up campuses in the country, Malaysia and Singapore have also been successful in attracting a number of foreign universities to

set up campuses in their respective countries. China figures among the three largest host markets for International Branch Campuses, apart from UAE and Malaysia. Singapore has set up the Office for Regulation of Private Education to regulate the entry and operations of foreign educational institutions. Malaysia has taken several steps to ensure that the education provided by these institutions meets local standards.

Similarly, some of the

lessons from Singapore include the setting up a strong regulatory framework, ensuring that foreign universities are financially sustainable, and providing a supportive business environment. India can also learn from China's experience with foreign universities and develop a comprehensive framework to attract high-quality foreign universities, while ensuring that the education offered meets Indian standards and aligns with India's

education goals. China has encouraged foreign universities to collaborate with local universities to promote academic exchange and research cooperation. India could encourage similar collaboration between foreign and local universities to enhance the quality of education and research

in the country.

Since the NEP was introduced in 2020, India has drawn attention as a prime location for establishing campuses and receiving investments in the higher education market. The new UGC draft guidelines take this vision a step further to ensure that

India becomes a global study destination that provides affordable, quality education, not only to Indian students, but also students from other countries. ■

