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Government of India
Ministry of Human Resource Development
Department of Higher Education
Distance Learning Division

Public Notice

In pursuance to the announcement of 100 days Agenda of HRD Ministry by Hon'ble Human Resource Development Minister, New Policy on Distance Learning in Higher Education Sector was drafted.

2. The above said **New Policy on Distance Learning in Higher Education Sector** has been uploaded on the website of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Higher Education) for information of general public and the stakeholders and seeking comments from them.

3. The comments/views in this regard may kindly be sent through email or post to Dr. D.K. Paliwal, Deputy Educational Adviser (DL), Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, Room No.325-C, Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi. (email id: dkpaliwal@nic.in).

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Assistant Educational Adviser(T)

Place: New Delhi

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NEW POLICY ON DISTANCE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

BACKGROUND

In terms of Entry 66 of List 1 of the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India, Parliament is competent to make laws for the coordination and determination of standards in institutions for higher education for research, and scientific and technical institutions. Parliament has enacted laws for discharging this responsibility through : the University Grants Commission (UGC) for general Higher Education, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) for Technical Education ; and other Statutory bodies for other disciplines. As regards higher education, through the distance mode, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) Act, 1985 was enacted with the following two prime objectives, among others:

- (a) to provide opportunities for higher education to a large segment of population, especially disadvantaged groups living in remote and rural areas, adults, housewives and working people; and
- (b) to encourage Open University and Distance Education Systems in the educational pattern of the country and to coordinate and determine the standards in such systems.

2. The history of distance learning or education through distance mode in India, goes way back when the universities started offering education through distance mode in the name of Correspondence Courses through their Directorate/School of Correspondence Education. In those days, the courses in humanities and/or in commerce were offered through correspondence and taken by those, who, owing to various reasons, including limited

number of seats in regular courses, employability, problems of access to the institutions of higher learning etc., could not get themselves enrolled in the conventional 'face-to-face' mode 'in-class' programmes.

3. In the recent past, the demand for higher education has increased enormously throughout the country because of awareness about the significance of higher education, whereas the system of higher education could not accommodate this ever increasing demand.

4. Under the circumstances, a number of institutions including deemed universities, private universities, public (Government) universities and even other institutions, which are not empowered to award degrees, have started cashing on the situation by offering distance education programmes in a large number of disciplines, ranging from humanities to engineering and management etc., and at different levels (certificate to under-graduate and post-graduate degrees). There is always a danger that some of these institutions may become 'degree mills' offering sub-standard/poor quality education, consequently eroding the credibility of degrees and other qualifications awarded through the distance mode. This calls for a far higher degree of coordination among the concerned statutory authorities, primarily, UGC, AICTE and IGNOU and its authority – the Distance Education Council (DEC).

5. Government of India had clarified its position in respect of recognition of degrees, earned through the distance mode, for employment under it vide Gazette Notification No. 44 dated 1.3.1995.

6. Despite the risks referred to in para 4 above, the significance of distance education in providing quality education and training cannot be ignored. Distance Mode of education has an important role for :

- (i) providing opportunity of learning to those, who do not have direct access to face to face teaching, working persons, house-wives etc.
- (ii) providing opportunity to working professionals to update their knowledge, enabling them to switchover to new disciplines and professions and enhancing their qualifications for career advancement.
- (iii) exploiting the potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the teaching and learning process; and
- (iv) achieving the target of 15% of GER by the end of 11th Plan and 20% by the end of 12th five year Plan.

7. In order to discharge the Constitutional responsibility of determination and maintenance of the standards in Higher Education, by ensuring coordination among various statutory regulatory authorities as also to ensure the promotion of open and distance education system in the country to meet the aspirations of all cross-sections of people for higher education, the following policy in respect of distance learning is laid down:-

(a) In order to ensure proper coordination in regulation of standards of higher education in different disciplines through various modes [i.e. face to face and distance] as also to ensure credibility of degrees/diploma and certificates awarded by Indian Universities and other Education Institutes, an apex body, namely, National Commission for Higher Education and Research shall be established in line with the recommendations of Prof. Yash Pal Committee/National Knowledge Commission. A Standing Committee on Open and Distance

Education of the said Commission, shall undertake the job of coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of education through the distance mode. Pending establishment of this body:

- (i) Only those programmes, which do not involve extensive practical course work, shall be permissible through the distance mode.
- (ii) Universities / institutions shall frame ordinances / regulations / rules, as the case may be, spelling out the outline of the programmes to be offered through the distance mode indicating the number of required credits, list of courses with assigned credits, reading references in addition to self learning material, hours of study, contact classes at study centres, assignments, examination and evaluation process, grading etc.
- (iii) DEC of IGNOU shall only assess the competence of university/institute in respect of conducting distance education programmes by a team of experts, whose report shall be placed before the Council of DEC for consideration.
- (iv) The approval shall be given only after consideration by Council of DEC and not by Chairperson, DEC. For the purpose, minimum number of mandatory meetings of DEC may be prescribed.
- (v) AICTE would be directed under section 20 (1) of AICTE Act 1987 to ensure accreditation of the programmes in Computer Sciences, Information Technology and Management purposed to be offered by an institute/university through the distance mode, by National Board of Accreditation (NBA).
- (vi) UGC and AICTE would be directed under section 20 (1) of their respective Acts to frame detailed regulations prescribing standards for various

programmes/courses, under their mandate, offered through the distance mode.

- (vii) No university/institute, except the universities established by or under an Act of Parliament/State Legislature before 1985, shall offer any programme through the distance mode, henceforth, without approval from DEC and accreditation by NBA. However, the universities/institutions already offering programmes in Humanities, Commerce/Business/Social Sciences/Computer Sciences and Information Technology and Management, may be allowed to continue, subject to the condition to obtain fresh approval from DEC and accreditation from NBA within one year, failing which they shall have to discontinue the programme and the entire onus with respect to the academic career and financial losses of the students enrolled with them, shall be on such institutions/universities.
- (viii) In light of observation of Apex Court, ex-post-facto approval granted by any authority for distance education shall not be honoured and granted henceforth. However, the universities established by or under an Act of Parliament or State Legislature before the year 1985 and offering distance education programmes in the streams of Humanities/Commerce/Social Sciences before the year 1991 shall be excluded from this policy.
- (ix) The students who have been awarded degrees through distance mode by the universities without taking prior approval of DEC and other statutory bodies, shall be given one chance, provided they fulfil the requirement of minimum standards as prescribed by the UGC, AICTE or any other relevant Statutory Authority through Regulation, to appear in examinations in such papers as decided by the university designated to conduct the examination. If these students qualify in this examination, the university concerned shall issue a

certificate. The degree along with the said qualifying certificate may be recognised for the purpose of employment/promotion under Central Government.

- (x) A clarification shall be issued with reference to Gazette Notification No. 44 dated 1.3.1995 that it shall not be applicable on to the degrees/diplomas awarded by the universities established by or under an Act of Parliament or State Legislature before 1985, in the streams of Humanities/Commerce and Social Sciences.
- (xi) The policy initiatives spelt out in succeeding paragraphs shall be equally applicable to institutions offering distance education/intending to offer distance education.

(b) All universities and institutions offering programmes through the distance mode shall need to have prior recognition/approval for offering such programmes and accreditation from designated competent authority, mandatorily in respect of the programmes offered by them. The violators of this shall be liable for appropriate penalty as prescribed by law. The universities/institutions offering education through distance mode and found involved in cheating of students/people by giving wrong/false information or wilfully suppressing the information shall also be dealt with strictly under the penal provisions of law.

(c) The universities / institutes shall have their own study centres for face to face counselling and removal of difficulties as also to seek other academic and administrative assistance. Franchising of distance education by any university, institutions whether public or private shall not be allowed.

(d) The universities /institutions shall only offer such programmes through distance mode which are on offer on their campuses through conventional mode. In case of open universities, they shall necessarily have the required departments and faculties prior to offering relevant programmes through distance mode.

(e) It would be mandatory for all universities and education institutions offering distance education to use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in delivery of their programmes, management of the student and university affairs through a web portal or any other such platform. The said platform shall invariably, display in public domain, the information about the statutory and other approvals along with other necessary information about the programmes on offer through distance mode, their accreditation and students enrolled, year-wise, etc. This may be linked to a national database, as and when created, to facilitate the stakeholders to take a view on the recognition of the degrees for the purpose of academic pursuit or employment with/under them.

(f) All universities/education institutions shall make optimal use of e-learning contents for delivery/offering their programmes through distance mode. They shall also be encouraged/required to adopt e-surveillance technology for conduct of clean, fair and transparent examinations.

(g) The focus of distance education shall be to provide opportunity of education to people at educationally disadvantaged situations such as living in remote and rural areas, adults with no or limited access to education of their choice etc.

(h) In order to promote flexible and need based learning, choice-based credit system shall be promoted and all ODE institutions shall be encouraged to adopt this system and evolve a

mechanism for acceptance and transfer of credits of the courses successfully completed by students in face-to-face or distance mode. For the purpose, establishment of a credit bank may be considered. Similarly, conventional universities, offering face to face mode programmes shall be encouraged to accept the credits earned by the students through distance mode. A switch over from annual to semester system shall be essential.

(i) Convergence of the face-to-face mode teaching departments of conventional universities with their distance education directorates/correspondence course wings as also with open universities/institutions offering distance education, shall be impressed upon to bridge the gap in distance and conventional face-to-face mode of education.

(j) Reputed Foreign education providers well established, recognized and accredited by competent authority in their country and willing to offer their education programmes in India shall be allowed, subject to the fulfilment of the legal requirement of the country.

(k) A National Information and Communication Technology infrastructure for networking of ODE institutions shall be created under National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology.

(l) Efforts would be made to create favourable environment for research in Open and Distance Education (ODE) system by setting up infrastructure like e-libraries, digital data-base, online journals, holding regular workshops, seminars etc.

(m) Training and orientation programmes for educators and administrators in ODE system with focus on use of ICT and self-learning practice, shall be encouraged.

(n) ODE institutions shall be encouraged to take care the educational needs of learners with disabilities and senior citizens.

(o) An official notification clarifying the issue of recognition of academic qualification, earned through distance mode, for the purpose of employment, shall be issued.

(p) A mechanism shall be set up for evaluation of degrees of foreign universities for the purpose of academic pursuit as well as for employment under the Central Government. This may include the assessment of the credentials of the university concerned as also to test the competence of the degree holder, if needed.