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## **Strategies for promoting and sustaining autonomy in higher education institutions in the context of national education policy 2020**

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### **Abstract**

Government of India approved National Education Policy 2020 (NEP). This is the first policy of 21<sup>st</sup> century on education systems. It has envisioned autonomous higher education colleges and multi-disciplinary universities. The UGC and AICTE have been granting autonomy to existing colleges based on quality education provided by them. Now the NEP 2020 envision all colleges and universities as autonomous institutions. It is a big challenge for universities and colleges to become autonomous which will be based on quality of education, research, services and accreditation. Another challenge is sustaining autonomy of the institution and move to higher ladder of accreditation and autonomy. In this paper strategies for obtaining and sustaining autonomy are stated at central government, state government, institute, faculty members and students level.

**Keywords:** autonomy, sustaining autonomy, national education policy 2020

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### **1. Introduction: Rationale**

National education policy 2020 envisioned coherent ecosystem of higher education. It has proposed three types of higher education institutions in the country viz autonomous colleges, multidisciplinary universities and higher education cluster. In the context of NEP 2020 there are two major challenges for existing colleges; first challenge is to encourage the colleges to implement quality initiatives as envisaged in the policy and satisfy the requirements of accreditation to become autonomous institute. The second challenge is to sustain the autonomy adhering to current norms of the autonomy and striving for excellence.

The existing universities and colleges need to re-engineer their function in the context of NEP 2020 in order to get autonomous status. The accreditation of their programmes will make them enable to get the autonomous status. The proposed statutory body in NEP 2020 may review the performance of the existing autonomous institutes in the light of policy provisions. The articulated strategies will be useful to existing colleges to become autonomous institute, sustain the autonomy of existing autonomous institutes, and move to higher level of autonomy.

### **2. Envision of Autonomous Institution in NEP 2020**

NEP 2020 section 10 states that the main thrust of this policy regarding higher education is to end the fragmentation of higher education by transforming higher education institutions into large multidisciplinary universities, colleges and higher education cluster/knowledge hubs. A university will mean a multidisciplinary institution of higher learning that offers undergraduate and graduate programmes, with high quality teaching, research, and community engagement. An Autonomous degree-granting College (AC) will refer to a large multidisciplinary institution of higher learning that grants undergraduate degrees and is primarily focused on undergraduate teaching though it would not be restricted to that and it need not be restricted to that and it would generally be smaller than a

Typical university.

A stage-wise mechanism for granting graded autonomy to colleges, through a transparent system of graded accreditation, will be established. Colleges will be encouraged, mentored, supported, and incentivized to gradually attain the minimum benchmarks required for each level of accreditation. Over a period of time, it is envisaged that every college would develop into either an Autonomous degree-granting College, or a constituent college of a university - in the latter case, it would be fully a part of the university. With appropriate accreditations, autonomous degree-granting colleges could evolve into research-intensive or teaching-intensive universities, if they so aspire. It must be clearly stated that these three broad types of institutions are not in any natural way a rigid, exclusionary categorization, but are along a continuum. Higher education institutions (HEIs) will have the autonomy and freedom to move gradually from one category to another, based on their plans, actions, and effectiveness.

### **Discussion**

The autonomy is generally granted to the institutions, which have been performing to satisfy the expectation of its stakeholder within legal framework of the country. Before granting the autonomy the potential to achieve quality goals is also assessed. The UGC guidelines for granting the autonomous status is in vogue and expects institutions to raise the level of performance to satisfy the requirements. Accreditation of the institution is also prerequisite for granting the autonomy to the institutions and their programmes. Accreditation is a certification for quality education. The general scenario of higher education institutions in the county is that very few institutions have autonomous status which puts a big question on quality of education being offered currently. Now very high aspirations are stated in NEP 2020 that requires quality by design in new perspective and not by chance.

It is a big issue which is going to come up when plan of action is prepared and implemented at national level. Educational change is a slow process and it has its own limitations. The big question is to be answered who will take initiatives at national level to implement the provisions of the policy?

### 3. Expectation from Higher Education Institutions

There are many expectations from higher education institutions (HEIs), which are challenging, new and novel for existing institutions. First the institutions will have to raise their level to satisfy these expectations in order get or sustain the autonomous status. The expectation are summarized from systems approach point of view in following paragraphs:

#### 3.1 Inputs

There are many inputs required to produce the outcomes envisaged in the policy. These inputs are flexible curriculum focusing on inter disciplinary and multidisciplinary abilities. Apart from development of soft abilities, professional abilities, technical and vocational abilities, information communication technology abilities, environmental, moral, value and ethical abilities, creative and innovative abilities, critical thinking abilities, and the like. A new model of curriculum design and development will be required to develop these abilities in students of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The faculty members will require rigorous training to implement such curriculum in effective and efficient manner. A totally new infrastructure will be required to support the effective implementation of new curriculum. Laboratories, workshops, production centres, multimedia studio, e library, educational apps, and e learning resources will be required to facilitate learning of students and provide them research opportunities. These inputs will require huge budget to reengineer total infrastructure.

#### 3.2 Processes

Holistic and multidisciplinary education approach of curriculum implementation will require well designed systems and processes of teaching learning, laboratory work, interaction with industry and society, students' project work, internship, guidance, counselling, mentoring, and coaching, entrepreneurship development, research, professional events, competitions, personality development activities, excursions, exhibitions, environmental and social camps, and the like. All these processes need to be designed scientifically, documented and implemented by trained faculty and officers so that full potential of these processes may be harnessed.

At the same time institution governance and management processes such as policy formulation, planning, quality assurance, admission, examination, training and placement, academic audit, performance appraisal and development, autonomy and accountability at various levels, rewards and incentives, career progression, ragging prevention, marketing, networking, consultancy, collaboration need to be designed and implemented.

#### 3.3 Outcomes

At institution level it would be ensured that institution development plan incorporates the vision to become large multidisciplinary university or autonomous college. Autonomy will come through accreditation and accreditation will be

awarded for quality education and research. Therefore higher education institutions need to ensure that they produce quality graduates, interdisciplinary, cross disciplinary and multidisciplinary research studies, significant contribution to industry and society.

### 4. Autonomous Nature of Higher Education Institutions

Through the attainment of suitable accreditations, all HEIs will gradually move towards full autonomy - academic and administrative - in order to enable this vibrant culture. The autonomy of public institutions will be backed by adequate public financial support and stability. Private institutions with a public-spirited commitment to high-quality equitable education will be encouraged. The new regulatory system envisioned by this Policy will foster this overall culture of empowerment and autonomy to innovate, including by gradually phasing out the system of 'affiliated colleges' over a period of fifteen years through a system of graded autonomy, and to be carried out in a challenge mode. 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.

### 5. Strategies for Achieving Autonomous status and sustaining it in the context of NEP 2020

#### 5.1 Strategies at Central Govt. Level

##### 5.1.1 Developing and implementing separate policies and action plan:

Developing and implementing separate policies and action plans for promotion of autonomous institutions across the country as envisioned in NEP 2020. The low hanging fruits are taped first, means the HEIs which are having excellent image so far quality of education is concerned may be give first priority to come forward for this big change of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The selection criterion may be rank in national ranking framework, accreditation by NAAC or NBA or any international accreditation agency. These HEIs may be provided an opportunity to be benchmarked with and mentored by Foreign universities. The concept of benchmarking with best performing university of world may be introduced as early as possible. Different HEIs may be mentored by different world class universities in order to achieve different vision of the HEIs. The concept of benchmarking is based on the principle when it can happen there why not here. Then the little bit higher fruits are grabbed meaning thereby second best performing HEIs are encouraged to achieve quality and excellence adopting/adapting the practices of highest performing institutions. In this manner the HEIs of the country will get transformed on the path of quality, accreditation, autonomy and excellence.

##### 5.1.2 Offering collaborative programmes

Encouraging autonomous institutions for offering collaborative programmes at international level to ensure quality of education at par with global standards. One HEI may be permitted to offer different programmes in collaborative way with different international universities. A framework in this regard may be issued by central government. Collaborative programmes may also be offered with industry, research organizations and educational institutions of the country in order to achieve the goal of interdisciplinary, cross disciplinary and multidisciplinary abilities in the students to meet the challenges of the twenty first

Century.

### 5.1.3 Creating standard terminology

The nomenclature of the programmes and framework for undergraduate and graduate programmes may be issued so all HEIs follow same standard. It will be useful for HEIs in establishing equivalence of the programmes. It will be useful to the students for moving from one university to other with different purposes to develop needed competencies and get the certificate for the same. It will be useful to employers for recruitment and selection process. It will ensure portability across the HEIs.

### 5.1.4 Establishing effective regulatory system (governance and management)

Establishing governance and management structure at national level by which autonomous institutions will be free from political and administrative control. One way is to set benchmarks for the most of the common inputs, process and outcomes which are frequently practiced in universities. The conflicting expectations of different bodies of regulatory systems should be removed. The envisioned structure in NEP 2020 should now replace the regulatory role of current statutory bodies. The proposed structure should come out with professional and governance function which must encourage innovation, experimentation, risk taking, quality assurance, use of scientific tools and techniques, application of information communication technology, systematic documentation, encouragement of healthy and motivating environment, removal of punitive practices, accountability, autonomy, and healthy competition.

### 5.1.5 Providing financial assistance

Providing financial assistance to well performing HEIs in the country for creating facilities to implement provisions of NEP 2020 and under taking quality improvement projects in different areas of the functioning of the HEIs. The financial assistance should be provided for project-based interventions and not for piece meal approach.

### 5.1.6 Establishing national level benchmarks

Establishing national level benchmarks for performance of autonomous institutions in various areas (academic, financial, management, administration, research, consultancy, co-curricular activities, infrastructure, and use of ICT) of functioning of the institutions. The bench marks may be established for all three types of HEIs envisioned in the NEP 2020. The benchmarks should be established in quantitative and qualitative form.

### 5.1.7 Fostering healthy competition among HEIs

Establishing prizes and rewards to foster healthy competition (for quality education, educational innovations, research, consultancy and services) among autonomous institutions at national level. The professional societies should be strengthened to encourage professional activities in HEIs, set professional norms, and further professional standards. The professional society should promote national and state level competitions in order to enhance the quality of the higher education at state and national level.

### 5.1.8 Publishing best practices

Publish the best practices of autonomous institutions at national

Level for wider circulation and adaption. The best practices may be published on various areas of functioning of the institutions in the form of case study, success story, models and processes, and the like.

### 5.1.9 Implementing an international exchange programme

implementing an international exchange programme for faculty and students on areas of mutual interest under legal provisions. Legal provisions may be made by statutory bodies and communicated to the institutions for effective implementation in the context of higher education.

### 5.1.10 recognizing industrial experience

The statutory bodies should make provision for recognizing industrial experience for the purpose of recruitment and selection, deployment and redeployment as expert and consultant. Encouraging autonomous institutions for recognizing industrial experiences as a qualifier to contribute in academic activities.

## 5.2 Strategies at State Govt. level

### 5.2.1 Developing and implementing policies

Developing and implementing policies for transforming government institutions into autonomous institutions as envisaged in NEP 2020. The state government should regulate the autonomous institutions differently in accordance to NEP 2020. It should create encouraging environment for institutions to select faculty members of international standards. It should ensure to implement no transfer policy in government autonomous colleges.

### 5.2.2 Permitting the institutions to select faculty and staff members

Permitting the institutions to select faculty and staff members (permanent, temporary and on projects) within the framework of the government rules. The national testing agency should conduct test for different positions and declare the list of eligible candidates, which may be used for recruitment and selection purpose by any HEI. This will ensure selection of right person for right position.

### 5.2.3 Creating a consortium of autonomous institutions

Consortium of autonomous institutions at state level will provide forum to share the experiences related to effective use of autonomy, to promote quality of education as a whole, to share resources and expertise and to collaborate on areas of mutual benefits.

## 5.3 Strategies at Institute level

### 5.3.1 Establishing transparent governance and management system:

Establish transparent governance and management system for the institute following the provisions of multi-disciplinary universities and autonomous colleges as envisaged in NEP 2020. These provisions will be further detailed out by national level by regulatory authorities. Create teams' structure both for governance and management of the institution in order to foster creativity, innovativeness, multidisciplinary and cross disciplinary culture in the institute. Teams' structure will be useful in removing bottleneck of sustaining autonomy. Encourage legal, ethical, professional, fair and transparent practices in the institute. Encourage participative methods in

curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities of the institute with intensive involvement of students. The structural autonomy may be granted to the governing body of the institute to develop policies make strategic decisions, set bench marks of excellence and the like. The substantive autonomy should be accompanied with accountability. It should be used for enhancing the educational excellence.

### **5.3.2 Encouraging proactive and vision achievement planning**

Encourage to prepare strategic, perspective, annual and academic plan at institute level, department level. Encourage faculty members to set challenging goals every year to bring improvement in all areas of performance within the scope of the institute and department development plans (IDPs).

### **5.3.3 Establishing a autonomy cell**

Establish an autonomy cell at institute level to facilitate planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluating the impact of the autonomy. This cell should take care of facilitating and guiding the effective implementation of autonomy at all levels in the institute. It is said that getting autonomy is easier than sustaining it in right way for a longer time. The autonomy cell should ensure that autonomy is being used for accepting the challenge, undertaking experimentations for innovations, improving systems and processes, preventing problems through use of scientific educational tools and techniques, improving efficiency of educational processes through use of information communication technology, artificial intelligence, block chain technology, blended learning, promoting evidence based decisions, adopting/adapting best practices and adding value to products and services.

### **5.3.4 Empowering heads and faculty members**

Empowerment of heads and faculty members will lead to fast experimentations for improving the quality of education, risk taking, working in uncertainties, quick decision-making, problem prevention, effective problem solving, developing the capacity of individuals and the like. Empowering personnel at all levels enable them to perform their roles creatively, effectively and efficiently that will result in self-satisfaction. Empowerment of faculty members will result in implementing outcome-based education, inter disciplinary, cross disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research studies and effective services to students and stakeholders. The heads of the institutions should develop capability to exercise decision making power. It is called professional autonomy. The professional autonomy is developed by individuals over the years.

### **5.3.5 Educating stakeholders**

Educate stakeholders on challenges of autonomy and changing external environment (social, political, administrative, cultural, and industrial). Communicate vision, mission and strategic plan to them for seeking help, guidance, cooperation, resources and funds. Seek the participation of stakeholders to build the institutional image and foster owning of the institute goals.

### **5.3.6 Preventing illegal and unethical practices**

Prevent illegal and unethical practices at individual, group and institute level in order to enhance credibility of the institute among stakeholders. Publish all government rules, regulations,

policies, professional norms and ethics, legal provisions on the website of the institute and create awareness among the employees. Institute rewards for adhering to rules and professional norms. Similarly declare punishment for violating any rule or professional ethics. Organize oath taking ceremony and motivational talk on rules and professional standards. Introduce social monitoring system for preventing illegal and unethical practices which will create social pressure on people who are having such intentions. Encourage abiding to rules, regulations and ethical practices of profession in order to build up image of the institution.

### **5.3.7 Establishing a culture of using budget**

Budget is allocated in government as well as self-financed institutions for various purposes. This budgeting process should be integrated with the institute development plans and should be utilized to get the academic, research, development and service advantages out of it.

### **5.3.8 Developing a documentation cell**

Institute conducts various events and activities as per strategic, perspective, annual plan and academic calendar. All these plans, events and activities conducted should be documented for various purposes. The academic audit, performance appraisal reports, energy audit report and such other reports should be appropriately prepared and preventive and corrective actions should be recorded and publicized.

### **5.3.9 Generating funds**

The institute should come out with strategies to generate funds for development, research and services. The funds may be generated through undertaking consultancy projects from industry, government, public sector and society. A wide range of opportunities are available with institutions to obtain consultancy projects and complete them involving faculty members, experts and students. These types of projects generate revenue for the institute. The consultancy projects bring many indirect benefits such as strong relationship for mutual benefit, access to world of work situation, and real time learning. These projects are useful in image building of the institute. The other options such as renting institutional resources, production center, continuing education programmes and organizing joint events are also available to the institute for generating funds.

### **5.3.10 Strengthening training, retraining, self-development and mentoring of faculty and staff members**

Strengthen training, retraining, self-development and mentoring of the faculty and staff members in the institute to cope up with ever changing challenges as envisaged in NEP 2020. This strengthening will expand their capacity and capability to meet the challenges with confidence. They will get encouragement for taking initiatives, accepting risk and doing academic experimentation.

### **5.3.11 Establishing grievance management mechanism**

Establish grievance management mechanism at institute level in order to resolve grievances, complaints and conflict of employees and students. Create provision of making an appeal for those who are not satisfied with the decision of the team. Make sure that role related conflicts are prevented deploying right person for the right

Role.

### 5.3.12 Marketing products and services

Design and implement aggressive marketing strategies to promote academic image of the institute, influence high scoring students to take admission, attract employers to offer jobs, impress industry to take services of the institute, attract ambitious faculty members and raise resources for quantitative and qualitative expansion of the institute.

### 5.3.13 Conducting research studies

Conduct research studies in domain specific areas, cross discipline areas and multi discipline areas, which are focused on significant issues of industry, society, economy and ecology. These types of research studies should be effectively and efficiently implemented involving students and stakeholders. These research studies solve live problems of the industry and society. The findings of these studies should be adaptable in generic way. These research studies should serve purposes such as image building, credibility of the institute, learning of the students, and creating solutions to problems of world of work. The other type of researches are educational researches such as need analysis, tracer study, impact study, action research, content analysis and the like. These educational researches will be useful in improving the quality of systems and processes of the institute. These types of studies will build capability within the institute to move on higher ladder of quality, accreditation and autonomy.

### 5.3.14 Collaborating and networking

Institutes have to achieve creative and innovative vision with limited resources. Therefore it becomes necessary to tap the strengths of stakeholders and cover up the weaknesses of the institute. Similarly use the strengths of the institute to cover up the weaknesses of the stakeholders. This strategy will result in win-win situation for the institute and its stakeholders. It will also create greater scope to grab the opportunities combining the strengths of the institute and its stakeholders. It will be helpful in dealing with the trivial threats.

## 5.4 Strategies at faculty members' level

### 5.4.1 Academics

Create and encourage development oriented and positive environment for academic activities in the institute. Use learner centric teaching learning methods in order to implement provisions of the outcome based education. Develop habit of enhancing, renewing and adapting the quality of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular practices. Use information, communication technology and learning management systems to improve the curriculum implementation and assessment of learning. Encourage students to develop abilities in vogue in world of work situation. Professionally guide, coach, mentor and counsel students for placement, entrepreneurship, higher education and the career. Develop lifelong learning abilities in students. Use transparent processes in assessment and evaluation of performance of the students.

### 5.4.2 Research

Undertake fundamental research studies in the area of technology in collaboration with the industry to solve complex problems of world of work and thereby building image of the institution in the

industry. Involve students in industrial and research projects to give feel of world of work situation.

### 5.4.3 Consultancy

Generate funds through consultancy, projects, research, and publications in order to meet the expenditure of the institute for innovation and change. Use this fund for self-development and experimentation.

### 5.4.4 Collaboration

Collaborate with industries, research organizations, professional bodies and stakeholders to improve professional practices in the institute and generate resources. Collaborate with faculty members of other disciplines to organize interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary events.

### 5.4.5 Professional ethics

Observe professional ethics and professional practices in the institute in order to create excellent image. Maintain transparency while performing roles and discharging duties assigned by the institute. Create social pressure on others to observe ethical norms.

## 5.5 Strategies at student level

### 5.5.1 Develop abilities

Develop abilities such as self-learning, peer learning, collaborative learning, experiential learning, learning to learn attitude and cooperative learning among students. Develop entrepreneurship abilities using various motivational, interaction, awareness and training activities. Develop students to go for exploiting self-employment opportunities through students project work, survey, and case analysis. Develop learning to learn, thinking to think, and lifelong learning skills. Use formal and informal modes of learning.

### 5.5.2 Developing life skills

Develop life skills such as communication, professional, leadership, management, time management, risk taking, accepting the challenge, self-evaluation and universal human values involving them in various presentations, co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

### 5.5.3 Creating opportunities for earning while learning

Create opportunities for earning during study through apprenticeship, working on live projects, production and development activities.

### 5.5.4 Harnessing full potential

Explore, channelize and harness full potential of students through guidance, counselling, coaching and mentoring. The potential may be in the area of creativity, logic, communication, interpersonal relationship, leadership, and dealing with uncertain situations. The potential may be related to culture, music, sports, arts, environment and the like.

### 5.5.5 Creating simulated situations

Create simulated situations for job interview, teaching learning, real life examples, emotions and work pressure. Managing emotions, dealing with crisis, managing stress and the like. These types of situations may be created through demonstration, role

Play, multiple role play and simulators.

## 6. Conclusion

The NEP 2020 has envisioned a radical change in higher education system of the country, which is based on principles of quality education leading to accreditation in turn getting autonomy, which will result in excellence. Higher education institutions in the country need to gear up for this radical change in totality. The autonomous status is based on quality education and quality education may better be achieved through autonomy so institutions need to break this deadlock. Another challenge is that sustaining the autonomy for longer time through consistent high performance in education, research and service and continually improving it. The third challenge is breaking the existing practices and habits of faculty members and designing and implementing new practices and habits in tune to the requirement of the policy. The fourth challenge is generating adequate funds to support the radical change on sustained basis. The fifth challenge is creating favourable culture for academics, research, service and extension. The sixth challenge is developing and using educational models for innovation and change in the areas of education and research in Indian context. The seventh challenge is designing strategic human resource management practices aligned to radical change. The eighth challenge is developing educational leaders and faculty members to transform the change overcoming the resistance to change. The ninth challenge is consolidation and integration of existing universities and colleges in the context of NEP 2020. The tenth challenge is removing all types of obsolescence from the institutions. The eleventh challenge is strongly curbing the prevailing illegal practices in the institutions.

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