

NITI Aayog proposals to spur State's SAAC plan

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Vision document stresses on accreditation as a mandatory framework for higher education

The vision document released by the NITI Aayog recommending reforms in the higher education sector has come as a boost for the State government's efforts to operationalise the proposed State Assessment and Accreditation Centre (SAAC).

The 'Strategy for New India @ 75' document, which proposes measures to overcome hurdles in order to achieve full potential in various sectors, has called for adopting accreditation as a mandatory quality assurance framework for higher education and to have multiple accreditation agencies for facilitating the process.

Accreditation coverage

Pointing out that the accreditation coverage in the country has been inadequate, despite recording a two-fold increase in accreditation levels during the last five years, the NITI Aayog has also recommended fast-tracking and enhancing transparency in the accreditation mechanism.

Notably, the recommendations were in consonance with the University Grants Commission (Recognition and Monitoring of Assessment and Accreditation Agencies) Regulations, 2018, issued a few months ago.

The main objective of the regulation was to permit the formation of assessment and accrediting agencies government or semi-government agencies, apart from the existing accreditation institutions, viz., National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA).

It is estimated that around 60% of students in the higher education sector in India were enrolled in private institutions which were mostly unaccredited.

Besides, only less than 20% of the around 40,000 higher education institutions in the country were currently accredited.

In Kerala, only 210 institutions out of the 1000-odd higher education institutions were accredited. A majority of the unaccredited institutions were in the unaided sector, according to Kerala State Higher Education Council member secretary Rajan Varughese.

Besides, NAAC grading has become a determinant for not only Central funding under the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), but has also become a necessity for the State's share of 40%.

Dr. Varughese pointed out that the SAAC will function as a centre within the KSHEC in accordance with the provisions of the KSHEC Act, 2007. Its objective included enhancing the preparedness of the higher education institutions in the State to seek national-level accreditation.

SAAC is being designed in a manner that takes into account a State-specific criteria of evaluation.

"The national-level assessment and accreditation mechanism has never fully appreciated Kerala's equity-based distribution of scarce resources in the social sector. Therefore, efforts were under way to incorporate factors including social inclusiveness of institutions, rural-urban disparities, institutions in backward regions, and the instance of fledgling institutions," Dr. Varughese added.