Accelerated and Extended Degree Programmes

Why in News?

Recently, University Grants Commission(UGC) has released guidelines for accelerated degree programme and extended degree programme for undergraduate students.

What are extended and accelerated programme?

- **Accelerated and extended degree programme** – It will allow students to complete their degrees either earlier or later than the standard duration.
- **Accelerated degree program** - ADP allows students to complete a three-year or four-year degree in reduced time by earning additional credits per semester.
- **Extended degree programme** - EDP enables an extended timeline with fewer credits per semester.
- **Aim** - To create a globally competitive educational framework that allows students greater autonomy and flexibility in charting out their academic trajectory.
- **Equal status** - They will be treated at par with standard duration degrees and students earn the same total credits as in the standard-duration programme.
- **Eligibility -** Higher education institutions will establish committees to evaluate students' eligibility for these programmes.
- **Awarding degree -** HEIs may issue degrees for students on completion of the programme in the opted duration (shortened or extended duration) and need not wait to complete the standard duration for the award of the formal degree.

What are the advantages of it?

- **Early employment** – It will facilitate those who are keen to join the workforce quickly or who wish to gain early professional experience.
- **Cost effective** – It enables students to save money on tuition fees and costs during the college education period.
- **Broader learning** – It will allow students the leeway to explore a broader range of subject, undertake internships, and learn in new skills.
- **Balanced education** – It helps in balancing academic pursuits with personal and professional commitments.
- **Multidisciplinary approach** - This approach could produce graduates who are not only proficient in their chosen fields, but are also equipped with more soft skills, creative skills, and ideas for innovation.
- **Greater Mobility** - By aligning the structure of undergraduate education with international standards, the reforms aim to create greater mobility for Indian students, both within India and abroad.
- **Flexibility** - The flexible credit system introduced under these reforms will allow students to progress at their own pace and specific needs, interests, and future career

goals.

- **More opportunity** - Extended degree option in engineering could provide students with more opportunities for specialisation, research, and practical experience
- **Vikshit Bharat** - These reforms could lay the foundation for a more dynamic higher education system, and would help India realise the dream of Viksit Bharat by 2047.

What are the disadvantages with the program?

- **Impact on quality** - The accelerated format affects the depth and rigour of the education provided to students.
- **Compromise educational outcomes** - If students are taught the same curriculum within a shorter period of time, they may have a superficial understanding of key concepts.
- **Slowness** - Students who opt for the extended degree programme may lack academic urgency.
- **Decline in degree value** - Some may take longer than necessary to complete their studies, which would diminish the value of the degree.
- **Specialization** - Engineering programmes are traditionally structured to provide students with a specialised education that prepares them for specific career paths.
- **Oversimplification of technical learning** - Engineering degrees require an in-depth study of subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, and advanced engineering principles.
- **Affect technical competencies** - Compressing the technical content could reduce the time available for practical projects, lab work, tutorial sessions, and project work and internships.
- **Affects professional skills** - Any pressure to finish their studies quickly may hinder their ability to master problem-solving techniques.
- **Financial burden** - Extended degree option in engineering will be more of a financial burden for students and could discourage those who already face economic constraints.

What are the challenges in implementing it?

- **Difficulty in adaptation** - Adapting to the new structure, especially in engineering programmes which demand a deep understanding of both theory and practice is difficult.
- **Restructuring challenges** – It requires substantial restructuring of curricula, teaching methods, and approval from competent bodies of universities and administrative systems.
- **Transition challenges** - The introduction of accelerated and extended degrees necessitates robust systems for tracking student progress, evaluation, managing credit transfers.
- **Resource constraints** – The new approach requires more material and human resources which is difficulut for universities that already face resource constraints.
- **Digitalization** - Shift towards greater digitalisation in education, which is likely to accompany these reforms, could deepen the digital divide.
- **Equity implications** - Students from underprivileged backgrounds may struggle to

navigate the new system without adequate guidance and support.
- **Teachers' capacity development** - Teachers will need to undergo professional development to adjust to the demands of flexible, interdisciplinary curricula.

What lies ahead?

- Develop sophisticated administrative frameworks to manage the implementation complexities.
- Address the challenges with strategic planning, adequate investment, timely recruitment of faculty and staff, and a commitment to inclusivity.

Reference

The Hindu | More flexibility, but also greater challenges

