HECI Bill 2025

Mains: *GS II – Governance*

Why in News?

In the winter session of Parliament, beginning December 1, 2025, the Union Government plans to introduce the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Bill, 2025.

What is HEIC bill, 2025?

- **HEIC bill** – Higher Education Commission of India bill, is a flagship reform to create a single overarching higher education regulator, replacing the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the sectoral councils, excluding medical and legal education.
- **Objective** – The HECI is expected to be a robust framework, designed to ensure quality, accountability, and institutional autonomy in higher education and translate the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's vision into clear norms on curriculum reforms, better academic delivery, and promote research culture.

How the 2018 draft bill received mixed public reaction?

- **The 2018 draft HECI Bill** – Efforts to create a unified regulator in higher education began with the 2018 draft Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) bill, which was placed in the public domain for stakeholder feedback.
- **Suggestions** – It is reported to have garnered over 7,500 suggestions from parliamentarians, State governments, academics, students, teacher unions, and industry associations.
- While the draft bill was applauded for recognising the need to separate regulation from funding, several viewpoints emerged from various stakeholders.
- **Concerns raised** – Several stakeholders, particularly from the States, raised concerns over a potentially "Central government-heavy

composition" of HECI.
    - They argued that the limited representation from the States could undermine the concurrent status of education and fail to account for regional diversity.
    - They said the bill also adversely affect the public institutions in rural areas, which often operate with limited infrastructure and faculty.
- **Teacher unions and student groups** – They pointed out the absence of guaranteed representation for faculty and students on the HECI and its advisory bodies.
- It was also felt that the draft bill continued a 'command-and-control' regulatory philosophy, replacing the UGC could disproportionately affect smaller and rural institutions.
- The draft bill also did not adequately articulate how the existing specialist regulators, such as AICTE and NCTE, would be integrated into a coherent architecture.
- The academic associations and civil society organisations were reported to have argued that the draft did not sufficiently safeguard institutional autonomy and collegial governance.
- In response to this feedback from the public consultations, the 2018 draft was not tabled in the Parliament, and the government signalled that the proposed bill would be re-worked in light of NEP 2020.

How the NEP 2020 envisaged HECI architecture?

- **NEP 2020** – It emphasises transparency, public self-disclosure by institutions, minimisation of human interface through technology, and the avoidance of conflicts of interest between these four functions.
- It also underscores institutional autonomy, graded on accreditation outcomes, and encourages multi-disciplinary universities with strong internal quality assurance systems.
- **4 verticals** – The HECI, proposed by NEP 2020, envisages four independent verticals:
    - National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC),
    - National Accreditation Council (NAC),
    - General Education Council (GEC)
    - Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) to address the functions of compliance, quality assurance, setting up academic standards and funding, respectively.
- The proposed HECI bill, therefore, has to move beyond the narrow academic-standards focus of the 2018 draft and codify the four-pillar

architecture.
- It has adequate checks and balances, including a robust role for the States and the academic peers, in the governance processes.

- **Global developments since 2018** – The COVID-19 pandemic triggered the largest disruption in the history of education, forcing institutions to shift to online and blended modes of delivery rapidly.
- The online learning delivery model created opportunities for working professionals to learn without leaving their current jobs.
- Due to the unprecedented acceleration in the deployment of technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) in industry, skills emerged as a higher priority over knowledge for employment, leading to a dramatic rise in micro-credential skill development courses and stackable learning pathways, to supplement classroom learning.
- **Dr. Radhakrishnan Committee report** – It proposed transformative reforms to strengthen assessment, accreditation and ranking of higher education institutions, to expand coverage of accreditation, and to align existing bodies such as NAAC, NBA and NIRF, with the proposed NAC, under HECI.
- It also recommended a One Nation One Data (ONOD) IT architecture to capture data needed from the institutions for governance, ratings and ranking and maintain the integrity of the same to enable transparent, technology-empowered evaluation and ranking.

What are the expectations of different stakeholders?

- **State government** – The State governments expect commensurate representation within HECI's governance structures, clear articulation of the division of regulatory responsibilities, and protection of their constitutional roles in higher education.
- **Higher educational institution** – The Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) hope for predictable, time-bound approvals; simplified, fully online compliance processes; rationalised inspection and reporting burdens; and a credible pathway to graded autonomy, based on transparent accreditation criteria.
- **Smaller institutions** – The smaller institutions especially in the rural areas, are likely to press for capacity-building support rather than punitive enforcement.
- **Industries** – The industry expects a push for regulatory flexibility to recognise new-age programmes, micro-credentials for skilling, and international joint degrees in emerging areas, while expecting HECI to

protect minimum standards. If the proposed bill is to enjoy broad legitimacy, it must be seen to credibly address the expectations of each of these constituencies.

What are the challenges in implementing the HECI bill?

- **Coordination issues** – With over 70% of the universities falling under the States' acts and 94% of the students enrolled in State or private universities, leaving about 6% students in Centrally funded universities, there is a need for better coordination between the Central government and the States and their integration into the governance design, for achieving tangible results.
- **Structural and systemic challenges** – Most of the institutions, particularly the State-funded ones in urban and rural areas, lack digital infrastructure, qualified faculty, and quality assurance systems and need massive capacity-building to move to self-disclosure-based, technology-enabled regulation.
- **Low accreditation coverage** – NEP mandates universal accreditation by 2035, but current accreditation coverage remains below 40% and the delayed binary accreditation needs to be sped up by a drastic expansion of assessment capacity.
- The HECI bill may incorporate reforms to shorten faculty recruitment timelines and institute a reward system based on performance, particularly for research contributions, to attract and retain high-calibre academics.
- The HEGC funding vertical must balance performance-based funding with baseline equity funding. India needs significant investments to meet the GER target of 50% by 2035. The proposed HECI Bill may contain statutory provisions to ensure that the funding mechanism is transparent, merit-based, and performance-linked, ensuring that the regulatory system functions independently and credibly.

What lies ahead?

- The forthcoming HECI bill of 2025 presents a historic opportunity to transform India's fragmented higher education regulatory system into a unified, modern, and outcome-based architecture, to facilitate the achievement of NEP targets for 2035.
- However, success will depend not only on legislative design but on the effectiveness of implementation, Centre-States collaboration, robust data systems, sustained funding, and buy-in from the diverse stakeholders.

- A thoughtfully architected HECI will enable India to build a globally competitive higher education ecosystem, which can accrue significant demographic dividends to the country.

Reference

The Hindu| HEIC bill