National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF)

Why in news?

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has finalised the National Higher Educational Qualification Framework (NHEQF), a regulatory reform proposed by National Education Policy 2020.

Status of Higher education in India

- Despite having the largest base of 900-plus universities in the world, only 15 higher education institutions from India are in the top 1,000 according to QS World Universities Ranking 2022.
- India has the largest population in the world in the age bracket of 5-24 years with 580 million people, presenting a huge opportunity in the education sector.
- India has the world's 2nd largest higher education system, with around 38 million students in 50,000 academic institutions.
- India aims to double the gross enrolment rates for HEIs from the current 26.3% to 50% by 2035.
- India is the 2nd largest source of international students (after China) globally.

To know more about higher education in India, click here

What is the historical background of formulating NHEQF?

- The idea was deliberated at the *60th meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education in 2012*
- The *University Grants Commission (UGC)* was assigned the responsibility to prescribe two separate frameworks — ***the NHEQF and the National Credit Framework.***
- Higher educational institutions are separately required to implement the ***Academic Bank of Credits*** as a mandated modality for recognising, accepting, and transferring credits across courses and institutions.
    - **NHEQF** - National Higher Education Qualification Framework aims to bring changes in the education system right from the school to the higher education levels.
    - **NCrF** – National Credit framework was jointly developed by the Regulators of School, Skill and Higher Education for accumulation of credit from academics and skill programmes.
    - **Academic Bank of Credit (ABC)** - It is a digital or virtual or online store-house of academic credit data base of Higher Education Institution.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment developed the National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF) and the Ministry of Education developed the National Vocational Education Qualifications Framework (NVEQF).

What about the draft NHEQF?

- Based on a set of performance criteria, the NHEQF represents a comprehensive framework that specifies qualification types and framework levels and the expected learning outcomes.
- **Levels -** The framework divides education into ***8 levels*** - first 4 (school levels), last 4 (higher education).
- The first four levels will be taken up under the *National School Education Qualification Framework (NSEQF)*, while the *NHEQF includes* ***Level 4.5 to 8*** *(4.5, 5, 5.5, 6, 7 and 8).*
- **Qualification type** - It refers to the broad discipline-free nomenclature such as a *certificate, diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and PhD.*
- The NHEQF also incorporates the qualifications from technical and vocational education and training and professional and technical education programmes, *except medical and legal education* under one qualifications framework.
- **Parameters for assessing** – It include generic learning outcomes, constitutional, ethical, and moral values, employment ready skills, entrepreneurship mindset, application of knowledge and skills, etc.
- **Credit system under NHEQF** - A credit is a unit by which the coursework done by a student will be measured.
- To obtain a four year undergraduate programme, students will have to earn a *minimum of 160 credits*, with a minimum of *40 credits* each at level 4.5, 5, 5.5, and 6 of the NHEQF.

What are issues in qualification framework in India?

- **Multiplicity of frameworks** – NHEQF, NCF, and ABC are all focussing on similar qualification framework making it confusing.
- **Vague** - The eligibility conditions and pathways through which a student can enter a programme at a particular level are vague.
- **Non- Coverage of certain disciplines** – Qualification for awarding in disciplines such as agriculture, law, medicine, and pharmacy are not covered under NHEQF.
- **Traces of colonial past** – The NHEQF draws abundantly from the ***Bologna process*** that led to the European Qualifications Framework and the Dublin descriptors.
- But the higher education system in India is far more diverse and complex than European contexts and warrants much wider and more intense consultations with the States.
- **Measuring learning outcomes** – It may not be measurable by the same yardstick across disciplines.
- NHEQF fails to recognise that learning and knowledge must go beyond earning a livelihood.
- **Elitist** – Those who hold four-year undergraduate degrees with a minimum CGPA of 7.5 are eligible for admission to PhD programmes.

- **Unequal comparison**– It places all higher education qualifications on a continuum of 4.5 to 10 and thus equates postgraduate diplomas with four-year undergraduate programmes.
- **Credit system**– It mandates that each semester must have a *minimum of 20 credits* where one credit must comprise 15 hours of direct and 30 hours of indirect teaching.
- Higher educational institutions with minimal infrastructure and meagre faculty resources may find this challenging.

What lies ahead?

- Wider and more intense consultations with the States is required as they spend a lot more on education than the Centre.
- The process of formulating the NHEQF should duly recognise various aspects like the sheer size of the higher education system and the variations in it.

References

1. The Hindu| Issues in NHEQF
2. UGC | NHEQF
3. University World News| Status of Higher Education in India

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