

# Transforming India's higher education sector

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The idea of Viksit Bharat 2047 is an aspirational objective on how India ought to be when we celebrate our 100th Independence anniversary in 2047. PM Modi emphasised the role of education, universities and youth in that transformation. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 essentially outlined the basic framework for the future of education in India. This combination of the NEP and the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 lays the foundation for what universities and higher education institutions ought to be doing when it comes to building the future.

There are five critical components: First, we need to commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence and we need to provide greater access, both of which are important. But somehow access has been juxtaposed against excellence. We need to do both, and we should not put one against the other. In some ways, we simply cannot achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 without focusing on building institutions of excellence and nurturing them.

## **Benchmark parameters**

Second, one of the major challenges we face is benchmarking ourselves with the best institutions around the world. Quality parameters are always subjective, but there is a greater consensus as to how you measure excellence and what constitutes quality. Under that framework, there are a few things that we must do. First, we should be focusing on learning outcomes and the pedagogy of teaching in our classrooms, two areas where we face challenges. Second, the quality of the faculty is essential. We need to develop the ability to attract the finest minds into our institutions, to retain them and to be able to bring out the best in them. The third and related dimension to benchmarking is research, knowledge creation and publications. If you look at all major global rankings, nearly 50% of the methodology or indicators of excellence are attributed to research publications and citations. If we aim to fulfil the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 and the objectives of the NEP 2020, we need to commit ourselves to research.

## **Holistic approach**

Fourth is recognising the importance of interdisciplinarity in our teaching and research. For a very long time, our educational institutions have been isolated in terms of disciplinary boundaries. With the recognition of the four-year undergraduate programme (FYUP) and the recognition of the barriers and boundaries of knowledge that we need to break, we have become more accepting of interdisciplinarity which is embodied in the real world of problem-solving.

Youngsters must have a holistic approach to education and we need to focus on the larger goals of educational transformation by bridging the gap between theory and practice. We are facing huge challenges concerning employment, careers and the opportunities for youth. We simply do not have enough jobs and we cannot expect the government or even the private sector to fill the wide gap. We have approximately 45 million students, over 1000 universities, and nearly 50,000 plus colleges. However, even with these impressive numbers, the fact of the matter is that our Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is hovering badly around 20% to 24%. To address this imbalance, we need to increase our GER and welcome more students to this sector, but we do not have enough opportunities in the job market. The only way to address this conundrum is to focus a lot more on innovation, technological intervention and entrepreneurship.

### **Harnessing talent**

Finally, how do we harness the intellectual powerhouse of our university to address the big public policy issues of our country? If you look at universities around the world, especially in the West, the knowledge that gets generated in universities in the form of policy papers, publications and research reports is not lying around, but constantly feeding into the system and influencing public policy reform and governance. There ought to be a robust mechanism for universities to be connected to government ministries and departments, so that the intellectual support system, knowledge base and ideas generated in universities, including research centres and institutes, are productively used for addressing the big challenges of our time.

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