

STATE OF FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA - ECONOMY

NEWS: In April 2025, the University Grants Commission (UGC) officially notified the **Recognition and Grant of Equivalence to Qualifications Obtained from Foreign Educational Institutions Regulations, 2025**.

- These regulations aim to streamline the recognition of foreign degrees, replacing the earlier system managed by the **Association of Indian Universities (AIU)** which was a **non-statutory system**.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Association of Indian Universities (AIU): Overview

- The Association of Indian Universities (AIU) functions as the apex inter-university body in India, aimed at fostering coordination and promoting shared interests among universities at both national and international levels.
- AIU was established on March 23, 1925, as the Inter-University Board (IUB), following recommendations from the Sadler Commission. It was registered as a society in 1967 and later renamed as AIU in 1973.
- Its core objectives include promoting collaboration in the fields of education, research, sports, and culture, as well as protecting the autonomy of universities and advancing Indian higher education globally.

Key Functions of AIU

- AIU serves as a vital liaison between universities and governmental agencies, providing feedback and inputs on education policy matters.
- It plays an instrumental role in maintaining academic standards and advising on curriculum development and reforms.
- The organization promotes student enrichment through national-level youth festivals, cultural programs, and inter-university sports.
- AIU is responsible for issuing equivalence certificates for foreign degrees, ensuring that students returning from abroad can continue education or seek employment in India.
- It also organizes seminars, workshops, and conferences at national and international levels to encourage knowledge sharing among institutions.

Key Provisions of the New Regulations (2023–24)

- The new regulations allow foreign degrees, diplomas, and certificates to be recognized as equivalent to Indian qualifications for higher education, research, and employment purposes, provided they meet certain conditions.
- However, these regulations do not apply to disciplines regulated by Statutory Councils like medicine, pharmacy, nursing, law, and architecture.
- For the first time, qualifications obtained via distance or online education from accredited foreign institutions are eligible for equivalence.
- A centralized online portal has been introduced to simplify the application process. Expert committees will review applications within 10 working days, and final decisions will be communicated within 15 days.
- Students who have completed UGC-approved twinning, joint, or dual degree programs do not require separate equivalence certificates.

Conditions for Granting Equivalence

- The foreign institution must be legally recognized and accredited in its home country.
- The academic entry standards, including credits, research requirements, and internships, must be comparable to similar Indian programs.
- The program must follow the academic norms and regulations of the awarding institution.
- Degrees from offshore campuses of foreign institutions will be recognized only if they meet the academic standards of both the host and home countries.

Challenges in Attracting Foreign University Campuses

- Despite progressive reforms, globally prestigious universities such as Harvard, Yale, NYU, and Carnegie Mellon have not yet established campuses in India.
- Regulatory hurdles, including ambiguous procedures and complex compliance requirements, remain a key deterrent for these institutions.

Parliamentary Committee Recommendations

- The Department of Higher Education should strengthen its efforts to attract top global universities, especially those from the Ivy League and other elite institutions, to set up campuses in India.

- Indian universities should actively utilize the provision to reserve up to 25% additional seats for foreign students, with a special focus on countries in South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.
- All higher education institutions should be encouraged to set up dedicated international affairs offices and alumni cells to boost global outreach and maintain long-term international relations.
- Collaborative research between Indian and foreign universities should be strongly promoted, especially in areas like climate change, healthcare, food security, and emerging technologies.

Current Foreign University Presence in India

- Two Australian universities—Deakin University and the University of Wollongong—have set up campuses in Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City).
- Several UK institutions are in the process of establishing a presence in GIFT City, including the University of Southampton, Queen’s University Belfast, and Coventry University.
- As of now, no U.S.-based university has opened a physical campus in India, although many continue to engage through joint research and exchange programs.

Major Initiatives Facilitating Foreign Entry

- The Study in India (SII) initiative, launched in 2018, aims to promote India as an attractive destination for international students, particularly from South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.
- Indian universities are now permitted to reserve up to 25% supernumerary seats exclusively for international students.
- The government has approved over 787 joint research proposals in collaboration with institutions from 28 countries, including the U.S., U.K., Germany, Australia, and France.
- Institutions are being encouraged to set up International Affairs Offices to manage foreign student admissions, academic collaborations, and alumni relations efficiently.

Significance of the New Regulations

- These regulatory changes align with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes the internationalization of Indian higher education.

- Transferring the equivalence function to UGC ensures a structured, legally backed, and transparent process, minimizing confusion and delays previously associated with AIU.
- The simplified equivalence system benefits Indian students with foreign degrees by making it easier for them to pursue higher education or employment opportunities within India.
- Establishing a clear framework for recognizing foreign qualifications also lays the groundwork for India's emergence as a major global education hub.

Benefits of Foreign University Campuses in India

- The local presence of reputed global institutions can significantly reduce the outflow of Indian students and the associated financial burden on families.
- Foreign campuses can help improve India's Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER), which currently stands at a relatively low 28.4%, by expanding the availability of high-quality higher education.
- Indian students will gain international exposure and cross-cultural learning opportunities without needing to leave the country.
- The entry of top-tier foreign institutions will enhance the quality and global competitiveness of Indian higher education, boosting its reputation worldwide.

Source: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/indian-states-vie-become-next-location-foreign-campuses>