

Govt outlines vision for education sector

Policy to evaluate ways to finance education, raise India's spending on higher education and focus on R&D



The government also sought ideas on improving the ranking of Indian colleges, an issue of some concern to policymakers, academia, and even students. Photo: Mint

New Delhi: The new government has outlined its vision for the education sector by releasing the themes of a new national education policy in the works.

The broad contours of this policy, under 33 themes, were uploaded on www.mygov.in, the official website that crowdsources ideas and suggestions on important policies from the public.

Though this is not the final draft of the policy, it sets the ball rolling on efforts to create a new national education policy, India's first in 29 years.

In a posting on the website, the government said it "would like to bring out a national education policy to meet the changing dynamics of the population's requirement, with regard to quality education, innovation and research, aiming to make India a knowledge superpower by equipping its students with the necessary skills and knowledge and to eliminate shortage of manpower in science, technology, academics and industry".

The new policy, the upload on www.mygov.in suggests, will also evaluate public-private partnerships (PPPs) to finance education, seek ways of upping India's spend on higher education to 1.5% of gross domestic product (GDP) from less than 1% now, and emphasize on research and development (R&D).

The government also sought suggestions on ways to rework the examination system for better assessment of students, restructure education regulators such as the University Grants Commission and the All Indian Council for Technical Education (AICTE) as "present regulatory systems tend to stymie quality and growth of our institutions".

An official of the human resource development (HRD) ministry said it expects feedback from both India and abroad, from academia and industry, and from administrators and common people.

"PPPs in education have not shaped up well over the years but we understand these will be key to education financing," added this person who asked not to be identified.

"Higher education cannot sustain only through public funding. While PPPs in higher education have been pursued as a strategy, not many have shown successful results. Hence, the PPP models need to be revisited so as to allow more meaningful collaborations. A critical analysis of PPP in HE (higher education), the existing legal provisions and which viable models are possible need to be carried out," the upload on www.mygov.in said.

A final policy could be ready as early as six months from now, the official said.

India got its first national policy on education in 1968 when **Indira Gandhi** was prime minister. The second policy came in 1986 under **Rajiv Gandhi's** leadership.

The 1968 document established the 10+2+3 education model, and the 1986 one focused on access and equity.

The year 1992, saw some minor tweaks, but no new policy was released.

The government also sought ideas on improving the ranking of Indian colleges, an issue of some concern to policymakers, academia, and even students.

“There has been a growing concern on the poor performance of our universities in world ranking and global ratings. What changes could be suggested in the accreditation systems of our country so that our higher education institutions acquire better global rankings,” it said in the upload.

It also called for reducing regional disparity in access to higher education, a point that perhaps drove the Modi government to announce around 20 top higher educational institutes including 11 Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) within two months of coming to power.

Another key area the new policy will focus on is ensuring learning outcomes in elementary schools. “Several studies have shown schoolchildren do not seem to acquire age appropriate skills in reading, writing and numeracy. There is a need to explore the various approaches to improve teaching–learning at the elementary stage. The objective of this theme is to understand the issues of low learning achievement levels in elementary schooling, assess the system...and suggest ways and methods of improving the learning outcomes,” the document on the website said.

A recent Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) released by education non-profit Pratham said over the last 10 years, although access to schooling has improved significantly, learning outcome remains a challenge. In one of the indicators, ASER found every second Class 5 student in rural India can’t read texts of Class 2 level.

Parth J. Shah, president of think tank Centre for Civil Society, said though a new policy is a good idea, the biggest challenge is the way “we think about education and its regulation.”

He said the government’s approach of standardizing the education sector so as to achieve quality and equity has not done much good to the sector and warned that unless this approach is changed, “standardization and uniformity formula” could be the undoing of the new policy as well.