

Standing Committee Report Summary

The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010

- The Standing Committee on Human Resource Development submitted its 238th Report on 'The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010' on August 12, 2011. The Chairperson was Shri Oscar Fernandes. The report includes one dissent note.
- The Bill makes it mandatory for every educational institution and every programme conducted by it to get accredited by an accreditation agency in order to certify academic quality. The Committee recommended that the Bill be passed after incorporating its suggestions. It also criticised the government for not having adequate consultations with stakeholders.
- The Bill seeks to provide accreditation to all institutions, which includes institutions offering medical education. Given the specialised nature of the subject, the Committee recommended that specific provisions for medical institutions be included in the Bill. It would avoid any overlapping and conflict of interest with other institutions that are to be set up under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to specify standards of evaluating institutions imparting medical education.
- The Bill excludes institutions providing agricultural education on the grounds that it is a State subject. The Committee was of the view that there was no justification to deprive students of agriculture from the benefits of mandatory accreditation. Therefore, the Ministry should take the initiative to cover such institutions in accordance with Article 249 of the Constitution.
- The Bill states that every institution must get accredited before it starts the process of admission. While agreeing that accreditation should be mandatory, the Committee recommended that assessment for accreditation be started after two batches of students have passed out of the institution. It also suggested that if an institution is not able to get accredited for justifiable reasons, it should be given another opportunity to get itself assessed.
- The Bill establishes the National Accreditation Regulatory Authority (NARA), which shall register accreditation agencies and lay down norms for assessing institutions. It shall consist of a Chairperson and four members. Given its wide mandate, the Committee advised that the strength of NARA be increased to represent various stakeholders.
- The Bill states that members of NARA shall be appointed on the recommendation of a selection committee. The Committee suggested that the committee should be headed by a person of academic eminence and should include an expert in the field of social science/science/technology.
- Under the Bill, an accreditation agency has to meet two conditions: (a) it should be a non-profit organization registered as a company under Section 25 of the Companies Act, a society or trust; and (b) it should be controlled by the central or state government. The Committee recommended that private societies and trusts be avoided while granting registration to accreditation agencies. Also, the "Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance", formulated by the International Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, may be used as an additional input along with the eligibility criteria prescribed for agencies.
- The Committee was of the view that the procedure to grant a certificate of registration to accreditation agencies should be made transparent and have reasonable time-frames. It also recommended that initially the agency be registered for five years, which could be extended to 10 years.
- The Committee termed the provision that allows any person, aggrieved by the decision of an accreditation agency, to apply to NARA for withdrawal or modification of such accreditation as vague. It advised that a grievance redressal mechanism be put in place to ensure transparency.
- The Committee felt that the provision to penalize any person who resists or obstructs any officer of NARA to be too vague and liable to be misused. It suggested that the accused be given an opportunity to clarify his position.
- The Bill includes a penalty for any person who contravenes the provisions of this law. The Committee recommended that procedure for enforcement of this provision be clearly prescribed through Rules. It also advised against charging Governors of states in case an offence is committed by a society or trust or institution.
- The Bill allows the central government to exempt any class of institution from this law. The Committee objected to this provision and suggested that it be deleted or specific norms be framed on the basis of which the central government can exempt an institution.

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