

The Future of Vice-Chancellor Appointments

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The Future of Vice-Chancellor Appointments: UGC's Draft Regulations and the Federal Divide

Context

The **University Grants Commission (UGC)** has proposed new rules for selecting **Vice Chancellors (VCs)** in Indian universities, which has led to disagreements between the **Centre** (central government) and **state governments**. The proposed changes aim to standardize the appointment process, but critics argue that these new regulations could **weaken state autonomy** and interfere with **federalism** in India. Here's an overview of the key provisions and the ongoing debates.

Key Provisions of the UGC Draft Regulations (2025)

1. Search-Cum-Selection Committee:

- The committee for appointing VCs will have **three members**:
 - One nominated by the **Chancellor/Visitor** (often the Governor).
 - One nominated by the **UGC Chairman**.
 - One nominated by the university's **apex body** (like the Senate or Syndicate).
- **Centre-aligned nominees** will have more influence in the selection process, raising concerns about centralization.

2. Eligibility for Vice-Chancellor:

- Candidates don't need to be **professors** anymore. Now, individuals with **10 years of senior experience** in areas like **public policy, industry, or public administration** can also apply, as long as they have contributed to academics in some way.
- This opens up the position to more people but moves away from the tradition of choosing **distinguished academicians**.

3. Chancellor's Role in the Process:

- The **Chancellor (often the Governor)** will now have the **final say** in constituting the search committee. This centralizes control, which many state governments find problematic.

4. Transparency in Selection:

- The process will be more **transparent**, with **advertisements** in national newspapers and public notifications.
- Applications will either be **nominated** or submitted through the **search process** led by the committee.

5. VC Appointment Terms:

- **VCs will serve a five-year term**, or until they turn **70**, whichever comes first.
- VCs can be reappointed for **one more term** after completing their initial tenure.

Disputes Between States and the Centre

1. Kerala:

- The conflict started in **2021** when the **Governor** opposed certain VC reappointments.
- The state passed a **Bill** to replace the Governor with the **Chief Minister** as Chancellor, which is **awaiting approval**.

2. West Bengal:

- Disagreements arose over the **Governor's unilateral VC appointments**. The state's plan to replace the Governor with the **Chief Minister** as Chancellor has stalled.

3. Karnataka:

- The state is pushing to remove the **Governor** from the role of Chancellor, with related **bills waiting approval**.

4. Maharashtra:

- In 2022, the state government reversed its earlier attempts to limit the **Governor's role** in VC appointments.

5. Tamil Nadu:

- The state is facing obstacles in **appointing VCs** without Governor approval, which has been blocked by the Centre.

Federalism Concerns Over VC Appointments

State governments are **concerned** that the new regulations **take away power** from them and put it in the hands of the Centre. They argue that:

- **States are losing control** over education, which traditionally falls under their jurisdiction.
- The regulations **undermine state autonomy** and the rights of **democratically elected state governments**.

Reactions from State Leaders

- **Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan** called the proposal “**anti-federal**” and an **infringement** on state rights.
- **Tamil Nadu CM M K Stalin** called it a “**direct assault on federalism**”.

UGC's Justification

UGC Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar defended the regulations, saying they are needed to align with the **National Education Policy 2020**, which aims to ensure **quality** and **transparency** in leadership across higher education institutions.

Detailed Guidelines on VC Appointments

1. Search-Cum-Selection Committee:

- The committee for selecting the VC will be mandatory for **all universities** (Central, Provincial, or State-based).
- The **Chancellor** (often the Governor) will directly form the committee, which will consist of three experts nominated by the **Chancellor**, the **UGC**, and the **university's apex body**.

2. Governor's Increased Role:

- The **Governor**, acting as Chancellor in most states, will continue to have significant power in the selection process, although the regulations don't explicitly mention the Governor.

3. Expanded Eligibility:

- The eligibility criteria for VC appointments have expanded. Now, candidates can come from diverse backgrounds, including **industry**, **public policy**, and **public administration**, as long as they have contributed to **academics** in some way.

4. Transparency in the Selection Process:

- There will be **advertisements** in newspapers and **public notifications** to ensure transparency.
- The selection process can involve **nominations** or a **formal search** process conducted by the committee.

5. VC Appointment Terms:

- **VCs will serve a five-year term**, or until they turn **70**, whichever is earlier.
- VCs can be reappointed for **one more term**.

6. Consequences of Non-Compliance:

- Universities that don't follow these guidelines could face consequences, such as **losing eligibility** to offer degrees or being removed from the **list of Higher Educational**

Conclusion

The **UGC's proposed regulations** have sparked significant tension between the Centre and state governments. While the **Centre** defends these changes as necessary to improve **transparency** and **quality** in higher education, **state governments** view them as an infringement on their rights and an attack on **federalism**. The outcome of this debate will likely have a lasting impact on the governance of higher education in India, as well as the relationship between the Centre and the states.



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