

## Regulatory Framework of University Grants Commission for Open and Distance Learning for Category-I Higher Educational Institutions

**Dr. G. Rajesh Kumar**, Assistant Professor, Department of English,  
Directorate of Distance Education, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7312-8473>

### Abstract

*The University Grants Commission (UGC) mandates Category-I Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) to conform to the provisions for offering Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Online Programmes beneath unique policies as affirmed by the UGC DEB. The directive focuses on making sure on the eligibility criteria, adherence to diploma specifications and obtaining essential approvals from regulatory authorities. The Central, State and Private Universities may provide specific programmes without AICTE approval if they as category I university at the same time for deemed-to-be universities they require earlier consent. There is strict compliance with UGC recommendations for territorial jurisdiction policies and learner assist provisions. Non-compliance of the policies as per the mandate may result in penalties and cessation of programmes. The educational setup in India has witnessed significant transformations with the advent of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Online Programmes. By recognizing the potential to enhance accessibility and inclusivity in higher education, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has laid down comprehensive guidelines to regulate and ensure quality education through guidelines. In its 563rd Commission meeting held on November 22, 2022, the UGC introduced directives for Category-I Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) to offer OL and ODL Programmes from January-February 2023 and 2024. This research article explores the key aspects of the UGC's regulatory framework, its objectives, compliance requirements, and its implications for stakeholders.*

**Keywords:** UGC, OL and ODL Learning, Category-I HEIs, Regulatory Compliance

### 1. Introduction

University Grants Commission of India had consistently dedicated to enhance the level of inclusivity and teaching in Online Learning (OL) and Open and Distance Learning (ODL). UGC, in its 563rd Commission Assembly held in November 2022) have made key selections and outlined guidelines for Category-I Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) to offer OL and ODL programmes from January 2023 onward. This directive emphasizes conformity with the UGC's Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes Regulations of 2020 and next amendments. The framework is designed to ensure academic integrity and flexibility and accessibility in better teaching. As per the norms, Category-I HEIs underneath UGC (2018) regulations are eligible to offer ODL programmes upon filing affidavits and applicable files to verify adherence to UGC requirements. The proposed programmes should align with UGC's specification of Degrees and relaxed previous approvals wherever important. Category-I HEIs of Central, State and Private Universities can independently offer programmes without approval whereas the deemed-to-be universities require previous consent to conduct courses. HEIs retain entitlement to provide programmes so long as they hold their Category-I status by adhering to territorial jurisdiction and learner support rules. For the 2024-25 academic sessions, the

revised admission deadline is November 15, 2024 with student information to be submitted on or before November 30, 2024. The institutions that are held liable for any violations or inaccuracies, with penalties relevant underneath Regulation 7 of the UGC (2020) Regulations. According to these many quality changes has been made in Indian academia. Jagadesh Kumar affirms that:

**During the last few decades, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Online programmes in India have played an essential role in making high-quality and low-cost higher education accessible to millions of students. Many of these students are from economically and socially disadvantaged sections and have rural backgrounds. Since 2017, after the University Grants Commission (UGC) brought out the ODL regulations, this mode of education has seen a dynamic shift and garnered widespread acceptance. The UGC regulations played a crucial role in enhancing the credibility and recognition of the distance learning mode (P. 121)**

As per the words of the UGC head, the great transformation in OL and ODL learning is ahead of. There are some main objectives to foster OL and ODL learning according to the UGC guidelines.

## 2. Objectives of UGC's Regulatory Framework

The UGC's directives aim to:

- To ensure the academic integrity of OL and ODL Programmes.
- To expand higher education access while maintaining quality standards.
- To regulate territorial jurisdiction and learner support centres (LSCs).
- To prevent malpractices, such as franchising arrangements, that corrupts educational standards.
- To harmonize OL and ODL Programmes with the broader framework of India's higher education system to global standards.

## 3. Key Provisions of the UGC Guidelines

UGC mandates some strict guidelines on some areas that ensure academic sustenance and integrity. They are Eligibility and Compliance, Approval Process for HEIs, Learner Support Provisions, Institutional Accountability and Impact on Stakeholders. Amaresh Chandra Sahoo points out:

**The role of distance education has enabled learners from remote and rural areas to access quality education. It has also provided opportunities for working professionals to upgrade their skills and qualifications. Learners can study at their own pace and can choose when and where they want to study. (p. 64620-646201)**

These monitors assure the quality of the courses.

## 4. Eligibility and Compliance

The Category-I HEIs that are defined under the UGC (Categorization of Universities for Grant of Graded Autonomy) Regulations, 2018 must submit the proper affidavits and supporting documents to demonstrate the compliance of the HEI with UGC regulations. The proposed programmes must adhere to the UGC's Specification of Degrees, regulations of 2014 and future amendments. The regulatory body approvals are mandatory for programmes that require oversight, ensuring conformity with professional standards.

## 5. Approval Process for HEIs

The Central, State and Private Universities are permitted to offer specific programmes such as those in management, computer applications and travel and tourism without prior

approval from the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). However, the Deemed-to-be universities must obtain AICTE's approval before offering such programmes in OL and ODL modes. Institutions can offer OL and ODL programmes as long as they maintain their Category-I status. The non-compliance of UGC directives results in programme cessation, and ban of the university for a period of 2 years. Although, the enrolled students can complete their courses. HEIs must ensure that all programme activities, including admission, teaching and examinations occur within their territorial jurisdiction. The institutions must submit all documents to the UGC that affirm to all regulations. The institutions that are nonconformity to the guidelines may get penalties as stipulated in Regulation 7 of the UGC (2020) Regulations. For the academic year 2024-25, the UGC DEB has revised the deadline for student admissions and has been extended to November 15, 2024, and institutions must upload student admission details by November 30, 2024 to the UGC DEB.

## 6. Learner Support Provisions

### 6.1. Territorial Jurisdiction

The territorial jurisdictions of the universities are different to the types of universities. The Central Universities that conduct OL and ODL courses can operate within jurisdictions defined by their respective Acts. The State and Private Universities that conduct OL and ODL courses must function strictly within their state's boundaries. The Deemed-to-be universities that conduct OL and ODL courses may operate only at approved campuses only. The institutions that did not follow the rules are disqualified to conduct the courses.

### 6.2. Prohibition of Franchising Arrangements

The HEIs are prohibited from outsourcing any aspect of programme delivery, including admissions, teaching or learner support services to third-party franchises. The institutions must own and manage their learning platforms to ensure direct accountability and quality control of OL and ODL programs.

### 6.3. Learner Mobility and Enrolment

Students can shift between OL and ODL modes within the same HEI. They are subject to the institutional regulations. However, the enrolment remains valid until the programme is completed even if the HEI loses recognition during subsequent years from UGC DEB.

### 6.4. Equivalence of Qualifications

The Degrees and diplomas obtained through recognized OL and ODL Programmes are treated as equivalent to those obtained through regular courses when they conform to the UGC's Specification of Degrees, 2014 regulations. This equivalence underscores the credibility of these programmes and enhances their acceptance in academic and professional domains. Ritimoni Bordoloi affirms,

**The common motto of the ODL institutions and universities is to bring the positive social transformation in society, and to make the people empowered economically, socially, culturally, and educationally. However, for proliferating the benefits of education, there is an urgent need to reduce the disparities present in the Indian education system, and make education accessible in the real sense, so that everyone irrespective of caste, class, religion, sex, place, occupation, etc. can avail the benefits of education (p. 30)**

It will help the youth of India to study and attain jobs when they have disturbance in regular modes of education.

## 7. Challenges and Prohibited Programmes

## 7.1. Prohibited Fields of Study

There are certain fields of study that are prohibited through OL and ODL modes. The disciplines including engineering, medical, nursing and architecture are prohibited to study under OL and ODL modes due to the need for intensive practical training in the courses. Moreover, research-based programmes such as M.Phil and Ph.D. are also excluded to study in OL and ODL modes.

## 7.2. Institutional Accountability

The institutions must avoid false claims or non-compliance that can result in severe penalties. It includes the cessation of programmes and reputational damage. The HEIs are instructed to ensure that their courses align with UGC regulations and maintain high academic standards.

## 8. Implementation and Monitoring

The implementation of new rules and monitoring the institution has become mandatory by the UGC DEB. Yasmin says, “distance education can be a useful tool for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Institutions to understand the requirements of their target segment, help in fine-tuning service offerings for attracting potential students and finally retaining them throughout the course duration.” (p. 16) Student verification process and compliance to the UGC regulations will boost student enrolment because of the quality from them.

### 8.1. Student Verification and DEB-ID

The students must verify the recognition status of HEIs and programmes through the UGC-DEB web portal. Creation of ABC-ID is very important for registration. Then, a unique DEB-ID is linked to the Academic Bank of Credit (ABC-ID). These are mandatory for student enrolment to ensure transparency and credibility of the course.

### 8.2. Adherence to UGC Notifications

According to the Distance Education Bureau, the HEIs must regularly update the programme details, statutory body approvals and compliance documents on their websites. It should be also submitted it to DEB whenever it ask for reference and scrutiny. This transparency fosters trust among stakeholders and facilitates informed decision-making.

## 9. Impact on Stakeholders

### 9.1. Students

The UGC guidelines safeguard the interests of students by ensuring the quality and credibility of OL and ODL Programmes. The transparent admission processes and mandatory DEB-ID creation protect students from fraudulent institutions. This helps the student study hassle free and gain knowledge.

### 9.2. Institutions

The HEIs will benefit from the opportunity to expand their reach and enhance enrolment by offering OL and ODL Programmes. However, they must invest in infrastructure and comply with strict regulations to maintain their status and reputation. This will also help the learners to get quality education and Jobs.

### 9.3. Regulatory Bodies

The proactive approach of UGC and UGC DEB streamline the monitoring and evaluation of OL and ODL Programmes and ensure the consistency across institutions and preventing malpractices. The present structure of approving the courses to the institutions of various levels and the transparency in student admission process show the global standards in higher education of India.

## 10. Conclusion

The UGC's regulatory framework for Online Learning (OL) and Open and Distance Learning (ODL) reflects its commitment to enhancing access, equity and quality in higher education. By mandating strict adherence to guidelines and fostering transparency, the guidelines ensure that HEIs deliver credible and impactful educational programmes to the Indian youth and aspirants from the other countries. As institutions align with these guidelines, they contribute to India's broader educational objectives, bridging gaps in accessibility and empowering learners across diverse geographies. Thus, the UGC DEB guidelines on Online Learning (OL) and Open and Distance Learning (ODL) reinforces its commitment to making sure high quality and equity in better education. By following strict compliance with these guidelines, the UGC helps the growth of quality education through the higher institutions liable for retaining academic standards to make a better world without education.

## References

- [1] Amaresh Chandra Sahoo. "Importance of Distance Education in India". *International Journal of Development Research*, 14, (01), 2024, pp. 64620-64622. <https://doi.org/10.37118/ijdr.27695.01.2024>
- [2] Jagadesh Kumar, M. "The Emergence of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Online Programmes in India." *IETE Technical Review*, 41(2), 2024, pp. 121–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02564602.2024.2326750>
- [3] "Precautions to be taken by the students before enrolling in Programmes offered under Open & Distance Learning (ODL) and/or Online Learning (OL) mode." 11 November, 2024. [https://deb.ugc.ac.in/Uploads/Notices\\_Upload/UGC\\_20241112154715\\_1.pdf](https://deb.ugc.ac.in/Uploads/Notices_Upload/UGC_20241112154715_1.pdf)
- [4] Ritimoni Bordoloi. "Transforming and empowering higher education through Open and Distance Learning in India." *Asian Association of Open Universities Journal*, Vol. 13 No. 1, 2018, pp. 24-36. <https://doi.org/10.1108/aaouj-11-2017-0037>
- [5] Yasmin. "A Learning Analytics Approach to Identify Factors Influencing Enrolment in Open and Distance Learning in India". *Asian Journal of Distance Education*, Vol. 14, no. 2, Dec. 2019, pp. 16-25, [www.asianjde.com/ojs/index.php/AsianJDE/article/view/419](http://www.asianjde.com/ojs/index.php/AsianJDE/article/view/419)
- [6] "University Grants Commission Distance Education Bureau F. No. 1-26/2024(DEB-I)" September, 2024 regulations. [deb.ugc.ac.in/Uploads/Notices\\_Upload/UGC\\_20241030093813\\_1.pdf](https://deb.ugc.ac.in/Uploads/Notices_Upload/UGC_20241030093813_1.pdf)

**Author Contribution Statement:** NIL.

**Author Acknowledgement:** NIL.

**Author Declaration:** I declare that there is no competing interest in the content and authorship of this scholarly work.



The content of the article is licensed under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> International License