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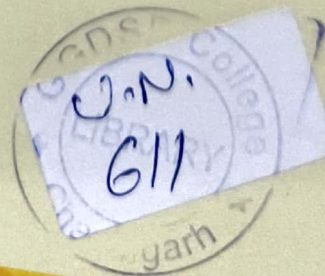
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# Integration and Flexibility: New Horizons in Higher Education through the UGC (Minimum Standards of Instruction) Regulations, 2025

Subhash Misra\* and Shishir Kumar\*\*

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As India's higher education landscape rapidly evolves, innovative delivery modes such as accelerated degrees, online learning, blended learning, and modular courses are gaining prominence. These flexible formats aim to expand access, cater to diverse student needs, and support working adults, rural learners, and first-generation students. In a global knowledge economy that demands adaptability and interdisciplinary expertise, India's higher education framework must adapt to meet international standards while addressing local needs and aspirations.

The University Grants Commission's (UGC) 2025 Regulations on Minimum Standards of Instruction for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Degrees, notified in April 2025, signify a paradigm shift in India's higher education landscape. This transformative framework diverges from traditional models, which emphasised rigid discipline-specific learning, and instead promotes integration, flexibility, mobility, and recognition of diverse learning pathways. Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Credit Framework (NCrF), these regulations support broader educational goals. The NEP 2020 aims to boost the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and foster lifelong learning, acknowledging that knowledge acquisition extends beyond formal education. The NCrF facilitates recognition of all learning forms, including Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which validates experiential learning against formal qualifications. By bridging the gap between formal and informal learning, RPL can drive economic growth, skill development, and social inclusion, particularly for marginalised groups.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is known by various names globally, reflecting regional nuances. Terms like Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) in the US, Prior Learning Assessment Recognition (PLAR) in Canada, Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), and Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) are used interchangeably with RPL. These frameworks formally acknowledge skills and knowledge gained through non-traditional pathways, such as on-the-job training, internships, apprenticeships, project-based learning, and self-directed learning. RPL enables learners to earn credits towards qualifications based on diverse experiences in the formal and informal learning settings, including:

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