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HOW TO ESTABLISH A DEEMED UNIVERSITY

by EduLegaL

A guide for sponsoring bodies and promoters of higher education institutions

Under the UGC (Institutions Deemed to be Universities) Regulations, 2023

KNOWLEDGE CENTRE | HIGHER EDUCATION | FAQS AND GUIDES

How to Establish a Deemed University

Eleven steps, in five stages, from eligibility to declaration

11 steps	5 stages	3 pathways
to the declaration	from readiness to compliance	General, Distinct Institution, Cluster

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Position as on 20.11.2026. The 2023 Regulations were released on 02.06.2023.

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1. General Concept and Introduction

A deemed university, formally an “Institution Deemed to be University”, is a higher education institution that the Central Government, on the advice of the University Grants Commission (UGC), declares to be a university under Section 3 of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956. The institution is created by a Notification. It is run by its sponsoring body, which is usually a society, a trust or a company incorporated under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013, but it is treated as a university for the purposes of the UGC Act and may award degrees in its own name.

The principal advantage of the status is academic autonomy. A deemed university frames its own courses and curricula, conducts its own examinations, and decides its own admission processes, subject to the regulations of the UGC and of statutory councils such as AICTE, the Bar Council of India and the National Medical Commission for the programmes that fall in their domain.

The governing instrument is the UGC (Institutions Deemed to be Universities) Regulations, 2023. The Regulations describe the pathways to the status, the eligibility conditions, the online application procedure, the governance structure and the grounds on which the status can be reviewed.

The Regulations recognise three broad pathways:

Pathway A **General category**	An existing institution that satisfies the accreditation and other eligibility conditions.
Pathway B **Distinct Institution category**	An institution working in a unique discipline, a strategic national need, Indian cultural heritage, environment, skill development, sports, languages or another discipline that the UGC Expert Committee accepts. Such institutions are exempted from the general eligibility criteria, but they must start with at least 5 academic programmes and meet the infrastructure norms.
Pathway C **Cluster of institutions**	Institutions managed by one or more sponsoring bodies that apply together as a cluster.

2. History

The concept of a deemed university was introduced by Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956, to recognise institutions of high standard that had grown outside the university system, particularly specialised and research institutions. Over the decades the status was extended to a large number of institutions, and several rounds of review by expert committees and by the Supreme Court led to the UGC framing regulations. The first set was issued in 2010 and was revised in 2016, 2019 and 2023.

At the time the 2023 Regulations were released on 02.06.2023, there were about 170 deemed institutions in the country. The 2023 Regulations are in line with the National Education Policy 2020, simplified the eligibility conditions and introduced the Distinct Institution category in place of the earlier de novo category.

Key dates and facts

Item	Detail
Source of power	Section 3, University Grants Commission Act, 1956
Current Regulations	UGC (Institutions Deemed to be Universities) Regulations, 2023 (released 02.06.2023)
Legal structure (Regulation 11)	The deemed university must be registered as a not for profit society, trust or Section 8 company. A sponsoring body exclusively established for running educational institutions is exempt from registering a separate body, and otherwise a new body must be formed
Timelines (Regulation 6)	Expert Committee report within 30 days of reference; UGC advice within 60 days of the report; Central Government decision within 30 days of the advice
Accreditation condition (general category)	Any one of: NAAC CGPA of at least 3.01 for 3 consecutive cycles; NBA accreditation of two thirds of eligible technical programmes for 3 consecutive cycles; NIRF top 50 in a specific category for 3 consecutive years; or NIRF top 100 overall for 3 consecutive years
Nature of institution	Multidisciplinary, with at least 5 departments, or a cluster offering 5 programmes across at least 5 departments; teacher student ratio of 1:20; at least 150 teachers; at least 3,000 students, of whom at least one fifth are postgraduate or research students
Corpus fund	Rs 25 crore, or such higher amount as the UGC may fix, in the name of the institution, for an institution not funded by the Government. Interest may be used only for its development
Application	Online on the UGC portal, with processing fee and documents; virtual verification by an Expert Committee
Off campus centres	Open to deemed universities with NAAC grade A or above, or ranked 1 to 100 in the Universities category of NIRF (Distinct category institutions after 5 years). A centre must start with 5 programmes, 1,000 students and 50 teachers
Admissions transparency	Prospectus on the website at least 60 days before admissions, with fees, refund policy, seats and eligibility

3. FAQs

Q1. Who can apply for the status of a Deemed University ?

The sponsoring body of an existing institution of higher education, in most cases a society, a trust or a Section 8 company, applies through the UGC portal. The sponsoring body should have clear title to the land and assets that will be used by the institution, and it must satisfy the conditions of Regulation 11 on legal structure, as explained in Q2. After the 2026 Amendment, a no objection certificate from the State Government is also required.

Q2. Do we have to create a separate society, trust or company for the deemed university?

It depends on the sponsoring body. Under Regulation 11(1) the proposed deemed university must be registered as a not-for-profit society, trust or Section 8 company. A sponsoring body that is exclusively established for running educational institutions is exempt from registering a separate body, provided that its registration deed states specifically that it is exclusively for educational activities and that no other activity is or will be carried out under the sponsoring body.

In the event that the sponsoring body does not satisfy this condition, for example because it runs commercial, real estate or other non educational activities, it must form a new not for profit society, trust or company for the deemed university. The sponsoring body must also provide the infrastructure to the institution without rent or other charges.

Q3. What are the main eligibility conditions in the general category?

The institution should be multidisciplinary, with at least 5 departments, or a cluster offering 5 programmes across at least 5 departments. It should also hold any one of the following: NAAC accreditation with a CGPA of at least 3.01 for 3 consecutive cycles; for technical institutions, NBA accreditation of two thirds of the eligible technical programmes for 3 consecutive cycles; a place in the top 50 of NIRF in a specific category for 3 consecutive years; or a place in the top 100 of NIRF overall for 3 consecutive years. The institution should have a teacher student ratio of 1:20, at least 150 teachers and at least 3,000 students on rolls in regular classroom mode, of whom at least one fifth are postgraduate or research students, or as per the norms of the relevant statutory body. The Regulations also contain conditions on governance, finances and infrastructure, and the 2026 Amendment has refined the accreditation requirement.

Q4. What is the corpus fund, and how much must the institution create?

The corpus fund is a sum that the institution must create and hold in its own name. Under the 2023 Regulations, an institution that is not funded by the Government must create a corpus fund of Rs 25 crore, or such higher amount as the UGC may fix. Only the interest on the corpus fund may be used, and only for the development of the institution. The corpus fund is one of the financial papers that the sponsoring body assembles before applying (see Step 6 of the step by step guide).

Q5. What is the Distinct Institution category, and who benefits from it?

It is meant for institutions focusing on unique disciplines, strategic national needs, Indian cultural heritage, environmental preservation, skill development, sports, languages or other disciplines accepted by the Expert Committee. Institutions in this category are exempted from the general eligibility criteria, but they must satisfy the Expert Committee on the distinctiveness of the discipline and on their capacity to deliver. A sponsoring body applying in this category must start with at least 5 academic programmes and meet the infrastructure norms.

Q6. Can a new institution without any track record apply?

Yes, in the Distinct Institution category. The applicants include a sponsoring body with a philanthropic aim or a commitment to society, and the Central Government, a State Government or a Union territory administration. The institution must start with at least 5 academic programmes. The Government may first issue a Letter of Intent, valid for 3 years, with conditions. The sponsoring body must report compliance, and the declaration follows only after the conditions are met and verified.

Q7. How long does the process take?

The Regulations fix time limits for the stages after the application. The Expert Committee reports within 30 days of the reference, the UGC advises the Central Government within 60 days of the report, and the Central Government decides within 30 days of the advice. In the Distinct category the Government may issue a Letter of Intent valid for three years. These limits do not include the time the institution takes to prepare, to answer queries and to comply with conditions, and the State no objection certificate under the 2026 Amendment adds to the time. In practice the process spans many months, and in the NCERT example the period from Letter of Intent to declaration was longer than two years.

Q8. Can a deemed university affiliate colleges?

No. A deemed university functions through its own constituent units and permitted off campus centres. It cannot grant affiliation to other colleges in the manner of an affiliating university.

Q9. Can a State university or a private university apply?

Under the UGC (Institutions Deemed to be Universities) Amendment Regulations, 2026, a university established under Section 2(f), or a constituent unit of such a university, may now apply to become a deemed university, or an off-campus centre of another institution deemed to be a university. This is possible only with a no objection certificate from the State Government, which denotifies the institution if it is found eligible. Off campus centres and new programmes still need approval under the Regulations, and an off shore campus needs the prior approval of the Central Government.

Q10. Can any institution use the word "University" in its name?

No. The UGC Act restricts the use of the word "University" to institutions established or declared as such. The UGC has warned deemed institutions against using the word "University" alone in their names and has directed them to use "Deemed to be University" or "Deemed University". Using the word without authority attracts action under the UGC Act, and the same is misleading to students and parents.

Q11. Does the institution get freedom on fees and seats?

Only within the limits of the Regulations. Admissions must be strictly on merit through an entrance test conducted by a Government testing agency or by the institution, as the statutory authority prescribes. Donation or capitation fee in any form is strictly prohibited. Fees must be fixed transparently, on a non-profiteering basis, and must follow the rules of the statutory bodies. The prospectus, with the fee structure, refund policy, number of seats and eligibility, must be on the website at least 60 days before admissions begin. Reservations in admissions and recruitment must follow the Constitution and the applicable law, and must be disclosed on the website.

Q12. What happens after the status is granted?

The institution must adopt a Memorandum of Association and rules that conform to the Regulations, constitute its authorities, with the Executive Council as the highest governing body, and comply with continuing obligations such as disclosures, annual reporting and monitoring by the UGC. Existing deemed universities must meet the eligibility criteria within 10 years and must amend their Memorandum of Association or rules within 1 year of the commencement of the Regulations. Institutions graded below NAAC A, or ranked beyond 100 in NIRF, are monitored at least once every 5 years. The Commission may recommend withdrawal of the status to the Government after an inspection or a forensic audit.

Q13. What is the difference between a deemed university and a private university?

A deemed university is declared by the Central Government under Section 3 of the UGC Act on the recommendation of the UGC, and it is regulated mainly by the UGC. A private university is established by a separate Act of a State Legislature. The two have different approval routes, different regulators at the point of entry, and different rules on territorial jurisdiction and off campus centres.

Q14. Can a deemed university franchise its programmes?

No. Franchising is prohibited by the Regulations, with certain listed exceptions. The exceptions should be read in the Gazette text before any collaboration arrangement is entered into.

4. Step by Step Guide

Stage 1 | Eligibility and pathway

1. **Assess readiness.** Review the sponsoring body, the institution's age and record, accreditation status, finances, land, faculty and governance, and compare them against the 2023 Regulations.

2. **Choose the pathway.** Decide between the general category, the Distinct Institution category and the cluster route. The choice drives the evidence that has to be assembled and the Expert Committee that will review the application.

Stage 2 | Structure and State NOC

3. **Obtain the State no objection certificate.** Under the 2026 Amendment, the State Government's no objection certificate is required before the institution is declared a deemed university or becomes an off campus centre. Approach the State Higher Education Department early, because the process can take time, and confirm the exact scope of the requirement in the Gazette text.

4. **Settle the legal structure.** Check whether the sponsoring body is a not for profit society, trust or Section 8 company exclusively established for educational institutions, and whether its registration deed says so. If it is, no separate body is needed. If it is not, form a new not for profit society, trust or company exclusively for the deemed university, and file the notarised affidavit on the assets if they are not to be transferred. Align the objects and the constitutional documents with the education and non-profit requirements, and document the relationship, including the free provision of infrastructure.

Stage 3 | Land, funds and papers

5. **Secure land and infrastructure documents.** Collect land documents in the name of the institution or the sponsoring body. These must be a sale deed, or a lease deed of at least 30 years. Also collect building approvals, fire and safety certificates, and evidence of laboratories, library and other facilities.

6. **Prepare financial and academic papers.** Create the corpus fund of Rs 25 crore, or such higher amount as the UGC fixes, in the name of the institution. Assemble audited accounts, accreditation or ranking proof, details of programmes, statutory council approvals, and the faculty and student data. Prepare a detailed project report with a 15 year strategic vision and a 5 year rolling implementation plan. Obtain a no objection certificate from the affiliating university, if the institution is an affiliated college. The university is presumed to have no objection if it does not respond within 60 days. The documents should be certified and published on the institution's website.

Stage 4 | Application and Expert Committee

7. **Apply online.** File the application on the UGC portal, within the window and in the format specified, with the processing fee.

8. **Interaction with the Expert Committee.** Prepare the leadership for the virtual inspection, the document verification and the interaction with stakeholders. Present the institution's vision, track record and plan for research and quality.

9. **Comply with the Letter of Intent.** In the Distinct category, the Government may issue a Letter of Intent, valid for 3 years, with conditions and a compliance period. Complete the conditions, file the compliance report and obtain the Expert Committee's acceptance.

Stage 5 | Declaration and after

10. **The declaration.** The UGC advises the Central Government on the Expert Committee's report, and the Government may declare the institution deemed to be a university by notification in the Official Gazette under Section 3 of the UGC Act. In the event that the Government declines, it records written reasons, and the sponsoring body may apply again only after 1 year. Adopt the approved Memorandum of Association and rules, and constitute the Executive Council, the Academic Council and other authorities.

11. **Comply with post declaration obligations.** Publish the prospectus and fee details on time, obtain the approvals of statutory councils for specific programmes, report to the UGC, maintain accreditation, and keep the governance, policy and compliance framework current.

5. Some Useful Links

Resource	Web address
University Grants Commission	www.ugc.gov.in
UGC regulations for universities	www.ugc.gov.in/regulations/UGC_Regulations_university
Ministry of Education	www.education.gov.in
NAAC	www.naac.gov.in
NIRF rankings	www.nirfindia.org

6. How EduLegaL Can Help

EduLegaL is a specialised legal advisory practice dedicated to the education sector. It is a division of RSB LegaL, Advocates and Consultants, and draws on over two decades of legal experience in advisory, litigation, arbitration and institutional legal management.

EduLegaL works with universities, colleges, schools, educational trusts and societies, coaching centres, research institutions and edtech enterprises across India. Its services cover incorporation advisory, policy formulation, regulatory compliance, contract management, intellectual property, labour laws, data privacy, real estate, and dispute resolution and litigation management.

EduLegaL assists sponsoring bodies and institutions at each stage of the journey to deemed university status and in the years that follow. The work is advisory and documentary, and the decision on whether and when to apply always remains with the promoters.

(a) Eligibility and gap assessment against the 2023 Regulations, and advice on the pathway

(b) Structuring of the sponsoring body, and drafting of the Memorandum of Association, rules and governance documents

(c) Review of land, title, building and compliance documents for the application

(d) Preparation of the application record and of leadership for the Expert Committee interaction

(e) Tracking and compliance of Letter of Intent conditions

(f) Post declaration policies, contracts, intellectual property, data privacy, POSH and student discipline frameworks

(g) Representation and advice in disputes before regulators and courts

To discuss your project, write to mail@edulegal.in or visit www.edulegal.org.

Disclaimer

This guide is general information prepared by EduLegaL as on 20.11.2026. It is not legal advice and does not create a lawyer and client relationship. Laws, regulations, fees and procedures change from time to time, and State rules differ. Please confirm the current position, and take professional advice on your facts, before acting on any part of this guide.

About EduLegaL

EduLegaL, A Division of RSB LegaL, Advocates and Consultants, Pune, is an education law practice. We advise universities, colleges, schools, trusts, societies, coaching centres and education technology companies on incorporation, governance, regulatory compliance, disputes, contracts, disciplinary inquiries, data privacy and labour laws.

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Request an eligibility review