

AICTE Guidelines, 2021 for Open and Distance Learning and Online Education in Higher Technical Institutions

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Abstract: AICTE has through gazette notification issued Guidelines in 2019 for imparting education through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode by Standalone Institutions, and Institutions – Deemed to be Universities, and amended the same in 2020 to bring these guidelines in conformity with UGC (ODL) Regulations, 2017 and 2018. As the NEP, 2020 has laid emphasis on increasing GER through the use of ICT and to promote ODL and Online Education, AICTE has framed comprehensive guidelines entitled as **AICTE (Open and Distance Learning Education and Online Education) Guidelines, 2021**. These guidelines are applicable to Standalone Institutions, Institutions – Deemed to be Universities, and Universities conducting Diploma, Post Diploma Certificate, Post Graduate Certificate, Post Graduate Diploma and Post Graduate Degree level programmes in the field of Management and allied areas, Computer Applications, AI and Data Science in the Engineering and Technology domain, Logistics and Travel and Tourism. These Guidelines will lay down the minimum norms and standards for programmes, curricula, admissions, physical and instructional facilities, faculty and staff patterns, their qualifications, quality teaching and learning, instructions, assessment and examinations for the award of degree. This article enlighten the readers on these key aspects of AICTE (ODL and/or Online) mode(s) of Education.

Keywords: AICTE Guidelines, Open and Distance Learning Education, Online Education, UGC (ODL and Online Programmes) Regulations, Recognition, Infrastructure, Academic Standards, Examination, Learner Support Services

I. Introduction

The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) admits that Education can be delivered in Synchronous and Asynchronous mode. In synchronous mode the teacher and learners' interaction occurs either in face-to-face mode or using online mode. However, the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode of education is largely asynchronous, where the learners get self-learning materials and prepares without much interaction with the faculty. AICTE has issued guidelines in 2019 for imparting education through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode by 'Standalone Institutions' and 'Deemed to be Universities', and amended the same in 2020 to bring these guidelines in conformity with UGC (ODL) Regulations, 2017 as well as 2018. The new National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 has laid emphasis on increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) through the use of technology and ICT. In order to fulfil this objective and to promote ODL and Online Education, AICTE has framed comprehensive guidelines for imparting education through ODL and Online mode during 2021. These are popularly known as *AICTE (Open and Distance Learning Education and Online Education) Guidelines, 2021*.

These Guidelines shall apply to Institutions, viz., Standalone Institutions, Institutions-Deemed to be Universities and Universities for conducting programmes of specified duration at the Diploma, Post Diploma Certificate, Post Graduate Certificate, Post Graduate Diploma and Post Graduate Degree levels in the field of Management and allied areas, Computer Applications, Artificial Intelligence and Data Science in the Engineering and Technology domain, Logistics and Travel and Tourism.

These Guidelines lay down the minimum norms and standards for programmes, curricula, admissions, physical and instructional facilities, faculty and staff pattern, their qualifications, quality teaching-learning, instructions, assessment and examinations for the award of Diploma, Post Diploma Certificate, Post Graduate Certificate, Post Graduate Diploma and Post Graduate Degree Level Programmes as defined in (Approval Process Handbook) through Open and Distance Learning mode and/or Online Mode, and shall be in addition to Guidelines, Notifications or Instructions issued by the AICTE from time to time.

II. Recognition of Institutions

Institutional Eligibility Criteria

Any institution which fulfils the following condition is eligible to offer ODL and/or Online mode courses:

- (a) Institution having NAAC score of 3.26 and above on a scale of 4, or NBA Score of 700 on a scale of 1000, or having rank in Top-100 in University category of National Institutional Ranking Framework, at least twice in three preceding cycles (at the time of application), shall be permitted to offer full-fledged ODL courses and/or Online courses without prior approval of the AICTE only in the NBA accredited programmes, provided it satisfies all the conditions mentioned in the regulations.
- (b) Even the Institution which fulfils the following conditions may apply for offering programmes :
 - (i) shall be in existence for at least five years ; and shall be accredited by the NAAC with minimum score of 3.01 on a 4-point scale ;
 - (ii) NBA accreditation with at least 650 pints on a scale of 1000 ;
 - (iii) shall be in the top-100 in the University category in the National Institutional Ranking Framework for at least twice in last three preceding cycles (at the time of application).
Provided further, institution has to acquire NBA Accreditation with a minimum score of 650 pints on a scale of 1000 in next 2-years from the data of initial approval.

Intake

The approval of intake is maximum of three times of the sanctioned intake of specific programme in conventional/regular mode.

Standalone Institutions conducting in DGDM/PGCM or Travel and Tourism programmes shall be given approval after going through the process. As per the UGC (Online - ODL) Regulations 2020, approval of respective regulatory body is necessary for running the programmes. Accordingly, institutions which Deemed to be Universities, and Universities shall take approval of both the AICTE as well as the UGC. None of the affiliated colleges/institutions are allowed to conduct programmes in ODL mode and/or Online mode.

III. Maintenance of Infrastructural, Academic and other Facilities

The Institution shall maintain infrastructure, academic and other quality standards as notified in UGC (Online-ODL) Regulations for HEIs, 2020 and updated from time to time as per the *AICTE-Approval Process Handbook* of the respective year. Provided that the Teachers shall be appointed as per the minimum qualifications laid down by the AICTE and satisfy other guidelines specified in the UGC (Online-ODL) Regulations, 2020.

Staffing Pattern at Head Quarters

Academic Staff Strength

At least two faculty members per Open and Distance Learning Programme at Professor/Associate/Assistant Professor level

Administrative Staff Strength

- (a) Deputy Registrar – 1
- (b) Assistant Registrar – 1
- (c) Section Officer – 1
- (d) Assistants – 2
- (e) Computer Operators – 2
- (f) Multi Tasking Staff – 2

In case if the enrolment exceeds 5,000 students, the number of positions in the Centre for Distance and Online learning may be increased proportionately.

Physical Infrastructure

Sl. No.	Type	Percentage (%)	Built-up Area (Carpet Area in Sq. ft.)
1	Academic Section	50%	7500
2	Administrative Section	10%	1500
3	Library, Reading Room, Computer Centre, ICT Lab, Audio and Video Labs, etc.,	30%	4500
4	Amenities or other Support Facilities	10%	1500
		Total	15000

Note: Built up area for washrooms shall be separate

Programme Launching Process

The AICTE reiterate that the HIEs shall follow guidelines specified in the UGC (Online-ODL) Regulations, 2020, with regard to programme launching process. The details are as follows :

The HEI shall offer programmes in ODL mode and/or Online mode with total credits and minimum duration for the programmes on par with corresponding programmes in conventional mode. The programmes shall be designed for conventional learners, as well as for working professionals and for individuals aspiring to acquire knowledge also.

AICTE norms for offering programmes through ODL mode and/or Online mode based on a credit system is as follows :

Norms for Offering Programmes

Level / Programme	Credits	Duration of the Programme
Diploma after Class X	120	3 years
Master Degree in Computer Applications	80	2 years
Post Graduate Degree in Management	80	2 years
Post Graduate Diploma	80	2 years
Post Graduate Certificate	40	More than 1 year but less than 2 years
Post Diploma Certificate	40	More than 1 year but less than 2 years

Note :

- One credit is equivalent to 30 hours of learning in case of ODL Mode (combination of synchronous asynchronous or face-to-face mode)
- The maximum duration of completing the programme under ODL mode and/or Online mode shall be double the duration of the respective programmes.

Provisions for ODL Mode

A HEI offering a programme in ODL mode shall prepare Self Learning Material (SLM) in order to facilitate the pace of learning and multiple choice for learners on the following lines :

- SLM has clearly stated objectives, intended learning outcomes, study guidance for the learners, suggested reference material, and linkage within the text with other media (digital SLM) for additional enrichment of knowledge.
- At least 60 per cent of the SLM shall be developed by the in-house faculty and the remaining material may be out sourced from other HEIs, Open Educational Resources (OER), and SWAYAM.
- Developed SLM must be self-explanatory, self-sufficient, illustrative, easily comprehensible and in the form of Units and Blocks.
- SLM must provide adequate mechanism for the learners to share their feedback on their understanding of the subject.
- SLM must be revised periodically from the point of view of improving the quality and learner support.

Provisions for Online Mode

A HEI offering programme in Online mode shall prepare the E-Learning Materials taking into consideration the following aspects :

- The Online Learning shall have the four quadrant approach ; as per UGC (Credit Framework for online learning courses through SWAYAM) Regulations, 2016 ;
- At least 60 per cent of e-learning Material shall be developed by the in-house faculty and remaining per cent of the material can be sourced from available e-resources such as Open Educational Resources (OER), SWAYAM or other sources ;
- An HEI shall have a capability for developing and production of Online programmes, with the technology for production including in-house or duly out-sourced production facilities for converting the courses into Online Programmes, defined as follows :
 - learning videos with recording/dubbing/editing facilities for graphics or animation creations ;
 - e-content for reading and improving comprehension of learners;

- tests and assignments that test the understanding ;
- discussion form that clarifies the doubts of the learners.
- (iv) The Online programmes' delivery shall be through the SWAYAM portal or any other learning platform duly approved by the Technical Expert Committee.
- (v) The Programme through Online mode shall also conform to the condition that apart from the course delivery, other components such as Counseling Process, Online Application Processing and fee payment shall also be provided through Online mode.

IV. Admissions, Examinations and Learner Support

The Institution shall follow UGC Norms as specified in UGC (Online-ODL) Regulations, 2020 with regard to admission procedure, conduct of examination and extending learner support services.

Admission

A HEI shall admit learners to its recognized courses only from the specified academic session. The approval of intake as per the AICTE Regulations, 2021 is three times of the sanctioned intake (maximum) of specific programme in conventional/regular mode.

Admission shall be offered in a transparent manner and made directly by the Head Quarters of the HEI which shall be solely responsible for final approval related to admissions or registration of learners. Further, a Learner Support Centre shall not admit a learner to any programme on behalf of the HEI. Every HEI shall –

- (a) record Aadhaar details for Indian Learner and Passport for an International Learner ;
- (b) maintain the records of the entire process of selection for a minimum period of five years ;
- (c) exhibit such records as permissible under law on its website ; and
- (d) be liable to produce such record, whenever called upon to do so by any statutory authority.

A HEI shall accept payment towards admission fee and other fees as may be fixed by it. Transparency has to be maintained in the announcement of fees structure and collection of fees. An Institution of higher learning shall publish a prospectus (print and in e-form) containing all the details of admission, courses fees structure, application model, etc., before the admission notification.

Evaluation

The evaluation shall include two types of assessment : (i) continuous or formative assessment ; and (ii) summative assessment in the form of semester end or term end examination. Provided that no terminal examination shall be held in a subject unless :

- (i) that at least 75 per cent of the course of study stipulated for the semester or year has been actually conducted ;
- (ii) for ODL mode : the learner has minimum attendance of 75 per cent in the course specific Personal Contact Programme and lab component of each of the programmes ;
- (iii) for Online mode : the learner has minimum participation of 75 per cent in all the activities of Online course prior to semester and examination or term end examination.

The curricular aspects, assessment criteria and credit framework for the award of degree under ODL mode/Online mode shall be evolved by adopting same standards as being followed in conventional mode.

The weightage for different components of assessments for both ODL mode and Online mode shall be as under :

- (i) continuous or formative assessment (each semester) : Maximum 30 per cent.
- (ii) summative assessment or semester end or term end examination : Minimum 70 per cent.

An Institution of Higher Learning shall adopt a scientific procedure in the development of question papers, question banks, assignments and their moderation, conduct of examination, evaluation of answer scripts, and declaration of results.

Learner Support

It includes the services of three major components like '*Learner Support Centre*', '*Learner Support Services*' and '*Learning Management System*' in AICTE (Online-ODL) Regulations, 2021.

Learner Support Centre is the centre established, or recognized by the Institution for advising, counseling, providing interface between the teachers and the learners, and rendering any academic or any other related service and assistance required by the learners. *Learner Support Services* include such services which

are provided by an Institution in order to facilitate the teaching-learning experience for the learner to the level prescribed by the AICTE in respect of a programme of study. Even '*Learner Management System*' is a centralized system which keep track of delivery of e-Learning Programmes, learner's engagement, assessment, results, reporting and other related details in one centralized location. These three major components under Open and Distance Learning Education and Online Education will be acting in support of learners.

Self-Learning Material

'Online Mode' means a mode of providing flexible learning opportunities by overcoming separation of teacher and learner using internet, e-Learning Materials and full-fledged programme delivery through the internet using technology assisted mechanism and resources. Whereas, 'Open and Distance Learning (ODL)' mode means a mode of providing flexible learning opportunities by overcoming separation of teacher and learner using a variety of media, including print, electronic, MOOC, online and occasional interactive face-to-face meetings arranged by Institution through Learner Support Services to deliver teaching-learning experience, including practical or work experience.

'Self-Learning Material for Open and Distance Learning mode' includes contents in the form of course material, whether print or electronic, which is *inter alia*, self-explanatory, self-contained, self-directed at the learner, amenable to self-evaluation, and enables the learner to acquire the prescribed level of learning in a course of study, but does not include, text-books or guide-books. However, 'Self-Learning e-Module for Online mode' means a modular unit of course material in e-learning form which is *inter alia*, self-explanatory, self-contained, self-directed at the learner and amenable to self-evaluation, and enables the learner to acquire the prescribed level of learning in a course of study and includes contents in the form of a combination of the following e-learning content, namely –

- (a) e-Text Materials ;
- (b) Video Lectures ;
- (c) Audio-Visual interactive material ;
- (d) Virtual Classroom sessions ;
- (e) Audio Podcasts ;
- (f) Virtual Simulation ; and
- (g) Self-Assessment Quizzes or Tests.

In brief the Higher Educational Technical Institution (HETI) may evolve curricular aspects, assessment criteria, etc., for the award of degree under ODL mode and/or online mode at the UG and PG levels and/or PG Diploma adopting the following procedure :

- the course content for each course shall be clearly defined, each having modular e-content, delivery online in a structured format, with clearly spelt out learning outcomes.
- programmes designed shall permit the online teacher to add multi-media enriched and interactive content, activities and assessments to extend learning opportunities.
- each course in the Online Programme shall have a precise assessment mechanism for the identified learning outcomes at each level.
- the Online Programme shall be able to utilize a variety of technology tools, shall have a user friendly interface and meet accessibility standards for interoperability.
- there shall be a helpline for technical assistance throughout the course of study in order to acquaint the learners with the requisite information for the online programmes.
- the Aadhaar number for the local students and Passport for the International learners shall be required to be produced at the time of enrolment.
- active engagement in Online / virtual class shall be monitored through asynchronous or synchronous discussions, assignment activity and the analytics of Learning Management System shall be used.
- the HEIs shall have defined criteria or guidelines for the technical know-how and skill requirements for the entire staff involved in the Online Programmes.
- the HEIs shall provide Learners' Support Services and E-Learning Materials for advising, counseling, mentoring and guidance for the learners. There shall also be clear guidelines on academic integrity and internet etiquette regarding lesson activities, group discussions, chats and plagiarism.

V. Conclusion

With regard to the equivalence of qualification acquired through Conventional or Open and Distance Learning and Online modes, the AICTE declares that, the programmes offered by the institutions through ODL mode and/or Online mode is equivalent to the Certificate /Diploma /PG Diploma/ PG Degree level programme offered in Conventional mode.

In the ‘Learner Centric Provisions’, the AICTE included ‘Learner’s mobility’, ‘Admission taken during recognition period’, ‘Learner’s enrolment’ for ODL mode and Online mode.

A learner enrolled for a programme under ODL mode and/or online mode in an Institution recognized by the AICTE under these regulations shall be eligible for mobility from one mode of learning to another mode of learning within the Institution. Secondly, admission taken in a recognized programme under ODL mode and/or online mode during the recognition period stands recognized till the completion of the programme, even if the Institution does not have recognition for further years, provided the programme is offered in a territorial jurisdiction and in conformity with AICTE norms.

With regard to enrolment for a programme, a learner residing in any part of the Country may enroll to any programme under ODL mode provided that the Institution shall conduct all activities such as admissions, contact programmes, examinations, etc., for learners strictly within the territorial jurisdiction of the Institution. Further, a learner residing within or outside India may enroll in any course being offered by an Institution recognized by the AICTE under Online mode. An Institution recognized for offering programmes in ODL mode and/or Online mode may also offer Certificate or Diploma programmes through these modes.

Over and above, any AICTE recognized Institution for Online and/or ODL mode programmes shall fulfill the mandatory requirements as given in the UGC (Online-ODL) Regulations, 2020 such as : (i) Centre for Internal Quality Assurance, (ii) Conduct of examination and minimum standards for examination centres, (iii) Human Resource and Infrastructural Requirements, (iv) Guidelines on Programme Project Report (PPR), (v) Quality Assurance Guidelines of Learning Material in Multiple Media and Curriculum and Pedagogy, (vi) Guidelines on Self-Learning Material and E-Learning Material, (vii) Learner Support Centres, Assessment Criteria for offering Online programmes through Non-SWAYAM learning platform, (viii) Grievance Redress Mechanism have to be met.

The principal regulations of UGC regarding the Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes were published in the Gazette of India, Government of India, Extraordinary Part III, Section 4 (*vide* F. No. 1-1/2020 (DEB-I) dated 4th September, 2020) and were amended on 1st July, 2021 (*vide* F. No. 1-10/2020 (DEB-I) dated 1st July, 2021). Based on these basic principles the AICTE published guidelines for Open and Distance Learning Education and Online Education during 2021 (*vide* F. No. AICTE/P&AP/ODL-ONLINE/2021 dated 1st March, 2021)

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