

Draft Documents for Citizen Feedback Accessibility Guidelines for Higher Educational Institutes (HEI's) in Jharkhand

(Draft Documents for Citizen Feedback)

Department of Higher and Technical Education
GOVERNMENT OF JHARKHAND

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Accessibility Guidelines for Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) in Jharkhand

1. Background and Need

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has issued a list of guidelines and standards to ensure accessible education for disabled students in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) with a view to improve the participation and learning experiences of persons with disabilities in HEIs and to achieve the goals of NEP 2020 and provisions of Rights of Persons with Disability Act (RPWD), 2016. These guidelines are envisaged to play a very significant role in making HEIs accessible to students belonging to Socially Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDG's).

The UGC has identified key thematic areas in which accessibility shall be improved by HEI's. They are as follows: -

- (i) **Building Environment conducive for inclusion and accessibility**
- (ii) **Information & Communication Technologies**
- (iii) **Infrastructure and Transportation**

2. Suggested Key Initiatives

The UGC has identified key domains and has suggested key action pointers to be implemented in HEI's. The identified key domains are as follows: -

- a. Need Assessment and Support Provisions
- b. Accessible Information, Communication and Learning Resources
- c. Inclusive Mobility Infrastructure
- d. Universal Accessibility in Built Infrastructure
- e. Accessible Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Systems
- f. Accessible Assessment and Examination Systems
- g. Accessibility of Resources/Services
- h. Inclusive Campus Life, and
- i. Governance and Monitoring of Accessibility and Inclusive Practices

To ensure compliance with accessibility guidelines and standards for Higher Education Institutions and universities issued by the UGC (University Grants Commission), here are some key action pointers that universities can follow:

- (i) **Establish a dedicated Need Assessment Committee:** The University shall create a committee responsible for formulating and implementing accessibility policies and guidelines. This structure, roles and functions of the committee has been detailed in the Section 3 of this Guidelines.
- (ii) **Conduct accessibility audits:** The University shall perform comprehensive accessibility audits of campus facilities, including classrooms, libraries, laboratories, hostels, administrative buildings, and online platforms to identify areas that require improvement in terms of physical accessibility and digital accessibility.
- (iii) **Provide physical accessibility:** The University shall ensure that the campus infrastructure is accessible to all individuals with disabilities. It should install ramps,

handrails, elevators, accessible restrooms, tactile paving, and other facilities as required. It should make sure that pathways are clear and well-maintained, with appropriate signage.

- (iv) **Develop inclusive curriculum and teaching practices:** The University shall encourage faculty members to design courses and instructional materials that are accessible to students with diverse abilities. It should provide training and resources to faculty members on inclusive teaching practices, including alternative formats for content delivery and assessment.
- (v) **Create accessible digital content:** The University shall make sure that all digital content, including websites, learning management systems, online course materials, and multimedia resources, comply with accessibility standards (such as WCAG 2.1). It should ensure compatibility with assistive technologies, provide alternative text for images, captions for videos, and accessible navigation options.
- (vi) **Offer assistive technologies and support services:** The University shall set up assistive technology labs or resource centers where students with disabilities can access necessary software, hardware, and assistive devices. It should provide training and technical support to students and staff on using these technologies effectively.
- (vii) **Sensitize and train staff:** The University shall conduct regular training sessions and workshops for faculty and staff to raise awareness about disability rights, accessibility issues, and inclusive practices. It shall train administrative staff on providing accessible services and accommodating the needs of individuals with disabilities.
- (viii) **Establish grievance redressal mechanisms:** The University shall develop a transparent and efficient system for students and staff to register complaints regarding accessibility barriers and violations. It shall ensure that complaints are addressed promptly, and appropriate measures are taken to resolve them.
- (ix) **Collaborate with disability support organizations:** The University shall forge partnerships with disability support organizations, NGOs, and experts in the field of accessibility to seek guidance, share best practices, and stay updated with the latest developments in accessibility.
- (x) **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The University shall regularly monitor the implementation of accessibility measures and evaluate their effectiveness. It shall collect feedback from students, faculty, and staff to identify areas that require improvement. It shall continuously review, and update accessibility policies and guidelines based on feedback and emerging accessibility standards.

3. Need Assessment Committee

All Universities shall set up Need Assessment Committee at University Level to assess the needs of students. The University Level Committee shall issue guidelines for all constituent and affiliated colleges under it. The structure, roles, and functions of the Need Assessment Committee at University shall be as follows: -

I. Committee Structure:

The following shall be the proposed structure of the Need Assessment Committee: -

Dean, Student Welfare	Chairperson
Registrar of the University	Vice-Chairperson
Financial Advisor of the University	Member
Controller of Examinations	Member
Representative from Building Construction Department not below the rank of Junior Engineer appointed by the District Collector	Member
Head of the PG Department /HoD (2 members) on rotational basis for 2 years	Member
Principal / Professor-in-Charge of any Constituent College (Max. 2 members) nominated by the Chairperson	Member
Principal / Professor-in-Charge of any Affiliated College (Max. 2 members) nominated by the Chairperson	Member
Head of the Department, Department of Psychology/Sociology or any other Department of the University as decided by the Chairperson	Member Secretary
Special Invitee/s as and when required by the Chairperson	

II. Roles and Functions:

- a. **Policy Development:** Formulate and review accessibility policies, guidelines, and procedures for the university. Ensure alignment with national or international accessibility standards, including those specified by the UGC.
- b. **Strategic Planning:** Develop a long-term strategic plan for promoting accessibility and inclusivity across the university. Set goals, objectives, and milestones to guide the committee's work.
- c. **Advocacy and Awareness:** Raise awareness about accessibility issues among the university community. Promote a culture of inclusion by organizing workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns.
- d. **Campus Accessibility:** Conduct audits and assessments of physical accessibility on campus. Identify barriers and develop plans to address them, such as installing ramps, handrails, elevators, accessible signage, and accessible restrooms.
- e. **Digital Accessibility:** Ensure that digital platforms, websites, learning management systems, and online course materials are accessible to individuals with disabilities. Collaborate with IT departments or experts to implement and monitor digital accessibility standards.
- f. **Curriculum and Instruction:** Collaborate with faculty members to develop inclusive curriculum and teaching practices. Provide resources, training, and support on creating accessible instructional materials and employing inclusive teaching strategies.

- g. **Assistive Technologies:** Establish and maintain assistive technology labs or resource centers. Procure and provide access to necessary software, hardware, and assistive devices. Offer training and support to students and staff on utilizing assistive technologies effectively.
- h. **Grievance Redressal:** Establish a transparent and efficient system for individuals to report accessibility-related grievances. Receive, investigate, and resolve complaints promptly. Ensure appropriate actions are taken to address grievances.
- i. **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Forge partnerships with disability support organizations, NGOs, and experts in the field of accessibility. Collaborate with relevant departments and stakeholders to implement accessibility initiatives effectively.
- j. **Monitoring and Reporting:** Regularly monitor the implementation of accessibility measures and evaluate their impact. Collect feedback from students, faculty, and staff. Prepare reports on progress, challenges, and recommendations for senior management.

III. Steps for assessing the needs of students by the Needs Assessment Committee

- a. Application in a prescribed format to be received from the student.
- b. Assessment by internal committee and granting of reasonable accommodation.
- c. Wherever Needs Assessment Committee is not able to arrive at a conclusion, it may take support from external collaborator such as District Disability Rehabilitation Centre (DDRCs), etc. and grant reasonable accommodation.

Universities / HEIs to connect with the nearest rehabilitation / reasonable accommodation support such as CRCs / (DDRCs) for need assessment from time to time. This may be done at the beginning of the admission process to clearly assess health or medical / rehabilitation needs and education / campus living needs of persons with disabilities.

- (i) The needs of students can be categorised as: -
 - a. **Health / Medical & Rehabilitation:** - At the time of joining the institution / university need assessment shall be carried out by the Need Assessment Committee, which shall assess the specific needs of the persons with disabilities.

A non-exhaustive list of disabilities for which needs are to be mapped: -

Acid Attack Survivors	Cerebral Palsy	Leprosy Cured Persons	Short Stature/Dwarfism
Muscular Dystrophy	Blindness and Low Vision	Deaf and Hard of Hearing	Speech & Language Disability
Intellectual Disability	Specific Learning Disability	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Mental Illness
Multiple Sclerosis	Parkinson's disease	Sickle Cell Disease	Thalassemia

The Needs Assessment Committee shall refer to the specific needs for above disabilities in the UGC Accessibility Guidelines and take appropriate measures to ensure that he needs of the students are met.

- b. **Education & Campus Living:** - Once the person is admitted to the University / HEIs, they may then conduct a thorough assessment to identify the specific needs for education or inclusive campus living. The Universities shall also refer to the UGC guidelines for action pointers along the following major themes: -
- i. Support with curriculum and assessment
 - ii. Social and emotional inclusivity
 - iii. Support for transgender persons, acid attack survivors

4. Accessible Information, Communication and Learning Resources

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) play a vital role in today's learning environments and in enhancing accessibility to information. All HEIs and universities shall strive to integrate the best possible ICTs and other means of communication to ensure access to information to diverse users including ones with visual and hearing impairments.

(i) Procurement Guidelines to ensure ICT Accessibility

- a. All HEI's should adhere to **Section 16 and 17** (Chapter 3 on Education) and Section 42 on Access to Information and Communication Technology of the RPWD Act, 2016.
- b. All HEI's shall adhere to Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) standards on ICT accessibility, namely **IS 17802**.
- c. All HEI's shall ensure that the specifications drawn for inviting quotations or issuing tenders on ICT products and services such as computers, software, etc., would need to mention the clause adhering to the BIS standard **ETSI ES 200 381-2** as provided under the **IS 17802**. The HEI's shall not purchase any ICT devices or services that are not usable by persons with disabilities.

(ii) Accessibility of instructional material and learning resources

- a. All HEI's shall ensure that if the content in its original format is not accessible, then the same is converted to a format that is usable by persons with disabilities.
- b. All education institutions shall ensure that all e-content (online or offline) adheres to the e-content accessibility guidelines issued by the Department of Education, Government of India. The table below provides a list of accessibility guidelines and their validation tools for different digital content formats: -

Content Type	Standard	Validator
Microsoft Word Document	Office Accessibility Guidelines	Word accessibility checker
PDF	PDF-UA	PDF Accessibility checker
EPUB	EPUB Accessibility Guidelines	ACE (Accessibility Checker for EPUB)

Websites, Videos, and apps	WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) or GIGW	AXE, WAVE, Etc.
Audio	DAISY	DAISY Validator
Fonts for Indian languages in all above types	Unicode	

- c. All HEI's follow e-content guidelines right at the stage of creation of any digital content by the institution, including for creating handouts, correspondence, instructional materials, question papers, and any other documents and publications. The following steps shall be taken to ensure that the e-content guidelines are followed: -
- i. Organize awareness events and training for course content creators on the Learning Management System (LMS).
 - ii. Issue clear guidelines for course content creators on LMS regarding accessibility practices.
 - iii. Ensure accessibility guidelines form part of all processes drawn for content creation on courses hosted on SWAYAM or LMS.
- d. HEI's shall ensure that all instructional materials are converted into an accessible format. This can be done the following two methods: -
- i. The HEI's may take assistance from Sugamya Pustakalaya - a shared online library of accessible format books created jointly by the Government of India and Non-Government Organizations. Whenever there is a need for any book in an accessible format, HEI's shall search for the book on Sugamya Pustakalaya. If the book is not available, then the HEI's shall follow the next enumerated method. The following are the key action pointers for the HEI's wrt Sugamya Pustakalaya: -
 - Subscribe to Sugamya Pustakalaya www.sugamypustakalaya.in.
 - Upload instructional materials and books converted to accessible format on it.
 - Provide membership of it to all students and faculty with print disabilities
 - ii. The following shall be the workflow for HEI's in case the academic material is **not available** on Sugamya Pustakalaya: -
 - Faculty and students with disabilities determine the required academic materials in an accessible format.
 - The HEI may get material converted to accessible format through book conversion facility within the HEI/State Government or,

- Get the book converted through external resources such as conversion companies or NGOs providing such services on paid or voluntary contributions.

(iii) Accessible Communication

Communication is vital for any learning environment and particularly for students with hearing impairments. The HEI's can take the following measures: -

- a. It can install amplification systems such as loop induction and/or FM system.
- b. It can ensure that videos in Indian Sign Language (ISL) are developed for awareness.

(iv) Use of Assistive Technologies for Diverse Needs

All HEI's shall promote the use of assistive technologies for needs of students. The following are some of initiatives it can take:-

- a. Organising awareness campaigns / workshops/trainings on assistive technology.
- b. Set up assistive technology centre for hands-on training of students.
- c. Provide assistive technology equipments at subsidised rates.
- d. Collaborate with local and global organisations working on assistive technology.

5. Inclusive Mobility Infrastructure

Mobility is critical to all forms of life including education. It is therefore extremely relevant and important to enhance accessibility to HEIs through inclusive mobility infrastructures keeping in view mobility to, from and in HEIs. The key action pointers for HEI's are as follows: -

- (i) All HEI's should get a mobility audit survey conducted of the campus to identify the needs of accessibility and prepare a 'mobility action plan'.
- (ii) All HEI's shall network with the public or state transport agencies to provide sustainable and accessible public transport facilities to the HEIs campus at subsidised rates.
- (iii) All HEI's shall evolve campus mobility systems for easy transportation within campuses.
- (iv) All HEI's shall provide wheelchair-accessible battery run shuttle service vehicles or similar alternates for intra-campus connectivity.
- (v) All street infrastructure, signages and pathways shall be in line with Harmonised Guidelines & Standards for Universal Accessibility in India, 2021 issued by Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Govt. of India.
- (vi) All HEIs should enhance the accessibility of the campus by GPS mapping or using Bluetooth beacon-based technologies so that persons with disabilities can locate different departments, buildings, services, etc.

6. Universal Accessibility in Built Infrastructure

For accessibility of built infrastructure, all HEI's shall adhere to the standards provided under Rule 15 of the RPWD Rules along with the National Building Code (as updated

from time to time). It encompasses all facets of build infrastructure like classrooms, common areas, toilets, lecture halls, auditoriums, dining halls etc.

7. Accessible Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Systems

HEI's may take the following measures to ensure that students with disabilities are given an opportunity to learn and build their self-esteem. A suggestive list of action points are as follows:

1. HEI's shall formulate an internal policy for curriculum development along the lines suggested by the UGC to make it more inclusive and accessible.
2. HEI's shall ensure the use of specific language or media to accommodate the specific needs of a student such as Braille, screen reading devices, Indian sign language, or Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC).
3. HEI's shall modify or adapt their method of instruction such that it accommodates the needs of students with disability.
4. Alternate formats should be made available by conversion of one format into another to make the content more accessible.
5. The faculty members shall ensure that all accessibility friendly resources are available such as course textbooks/e-books, audio/visual multimedia materials, online course contents.
6. The faculty members may decide to adjust the difficulty level of assessments as per the skill level of the students.
7. All faculty members shall try to engage with students with disability needs in such a way that it promotes Social and Emotional Learning.
8. The HEI's may make adaptations in the teaching-learning process to make it more accessible like reduced workload, increased time limits in examinations, student specific supports in learning needs.
9. HEI's shall ensure access to disability friendly library facilities like Talking Book Libraries of India and Bookshare International.
10. All HEI's shall apply Universal Design for Learning approach starting from course and curriculum to classroom support to ensure that students are encouraged to participate in the classroom.

8. Accessible Assessment and Examination Systems

The following steps may be taken by the HEI's to make assessments more accessible for students: -

1. Allow flexible assessment methodology like use of Braille, large print and screen reading devices for improving participation.
2. Sufficient attention shall be put to ensure that assessments have more accessible test items, maximum readability, comprehension ability and legibility.
3. The HEI's shall adopt practices as mentioned in the UGC Notification F.No. 6-2/2013 (SCT) dated 14 January 2019 regarding provisions for conducting written examinations for persons with benchmark disabilities. (https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/7348678_Guidelines_Exam-Divyangjan-JAN-2019.pdf)

9. Governance and Monitoring of Accessibility and Inclusive Practices

To ensure that the accessibility and inclusion practices are implemented thoroughly the HEI's shall implement the following monitoring mechanisms: -

1. All HEI's shall constitute the Needs Assessment Committee and separate expert committees with representatives from academia, NGOs, and industry to ensure implementation.
2. All HEI's shall proactively try to fulfill all criteria related to accessibility in National Assessment and Accreditation Council, National Institutional Ranking Framework and State Institutional Ranking Framework.
3. All HEI's shall establish and strengthen their already established equal opportunity cells as per the guidelines issued by the UGC from time to time.
4. All HEI's shall include accessibility measures while preparing their Institutional Development Plan (IDP).
5. Each HEI must develop its own action plan preferably for five years with a clear vision and a year-wise milestone-based implementation methodology.
6. Each HEI shall develop its own administrative framework for planning, preparation and monitoring of accessibility measures by constituting theme or domain-based committees as required.