Research Article

An Analysis of the Council of Architecture's Interim Response to India's National Education Policy 2020

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Abstract

The Indian government's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 visualizes a comprehensive transformation of the country's higher education, giving emphasis on multidisciplinary, flexibility entry and exits, and changes in regulatory regime. This research paper provides a critical analysis of the Council of Architecture (COA)'s Interim Report, "Architecture Education: Way Ahead," which serves as a strategic response to the NEP from the perspective of architectural education and practice. The paper examines how the COA infers and adapts the NEP's broad mandates to the precise, difficult demands of producing professional architects. It finds that the COA establishes a strategy of strategic orientation towards a proactive adaptation. The report has been worked on the core principles of multidisciplinary and flexibility in choices of curriculum but also ingeniously re-defines it to protect the integrity of architectural profession by robust licensure model centered on a professional degree equivalent to master's level.

The paper details the COA's comprehensive framework for outcome-based education, its suggested curricular restructuring, and its faculty recruitment models. Ultimately, it concludes that the COA's Interim Report is a sophisticated blueprint for navigating national educational reform while safeguarding professional standards, though it also highlights underlying tensions regarding regulatory independence and institutional scalability that remain unresolved.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, NEP, Council of Architecture, architectural education, higher education reform, multidisciplinary education, professional licensure, India.

Introduction

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Architectural education since its initiation in our country has been multi-disciplinary, amalgamating quite a few parallel and lateral fields into its fold, making it more versatile and holistic. The New Education Policy 2020 which also talks of a similar structure will further liberate architecture education and if implemented effectively will improve its quality substantially. (Habib Khan, 2023) India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, approved by the Union Cabinet in July 2020, represents the most comprehensive reform of the country's education system in over three decades. Its vision for higher education is radical, proposing to dismantle rigid disciplinary boundaries, introduce unprecedented flexibility in student pathways, and consolidate a fragmented regulatory architecture into a single overarching body (Government of India, 2020). While the policy provides a broad national framework, its execution poses unique challenges and occasions for specialized professional fields. Architectural education, is the combination of artistic creativity with technical precision and a deep sense of social and environmental responsibility, it stands at a critical junction under this new policy regime.

The Council of Architecture (COA), the statutory body established by the Architects Act of 1972 to regulate both the profession and education of architecture in India, has responded proactively. In January 2023, it released an "Interim Report - Architecture Education Way ahead, in pursuit of Education Reforms" (Council of Architecture, 2023). This document is not merely a passive reception of policy decrees but a planned, nuanced and comprehensive attempt to interpret the NEP's ambitions through the definite lens of architectural pedagogy and practice.

This research paper analyzes the COA's Interim Report as a critical case study of how a professional governing body directs complete national education reform. It argues that the COA's strategy is one of strategic alignment coupled with practical adaptation. The Council holds the spirit and letter of the NEP—particularly its emphasis on multidisciplinary and flexibility—but simultaneously engineers mechanisms to reserve the core truthfulness and standards of the architectural profession. This is primarily accomplished by redefining the pathway to licensure, developing an exhaustive outcome-based framework, and providing a roadmap for institutional transformation. However, the report also betrays underlying pressures, notably a concern over the possible dilution of governing control and the practical challenges of scaling architecture education within large multidisciplinary institutions.

The Framework of NEP 2020: A Paradigm Shift

To understand the COA's response, one must first appreciate the fundamental shifts proposed by the NEP 2020. The policy's implications for higher education are profound and can be distilled into four key pillars:

1. **Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education:** The NEP seeks to break down the "rigid separation of disciplines" predominant in Indian universities. It envisions "large, multidisciplinary universities and colleges" that offer a vibrant mix of subjects in sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, and professions (Government of India, 2020, p. 11). The goal is to create well-rounded, creative individuals with a broad

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knowledge base. And also to keep a wide scope for change in subjects as per the choice development after the maturity in any discipline.

2. **Flexibility in Learning Pathways:** A keystone of the NEP is the outline of multiple entry and exit points in undergraduate programs. A student could exit after one year with a certificate, after two years with a diploma, after three years with a Bachelor's degree, or after four years with a Bachelor's degree with Research (Government of India, 2020, p. 37). This flexibility is intended to decrease student dropout rates and let learners to tailor their education to their necessities. It also helps students to earn at multiple exits and rejoin the discipline after the gap given to the studies this is a dual advantage of the entry exit theme of studies.

3. **Regulatory Re-engineering:** The NEP offers to consolidate the complex and often overlapping higher education governing system. It directives the establishment of a solitary, overarching regulator—the National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC). Existing bodies like the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) would be subsumed under this new body (Government of India, 2020, p. 45). This directly threatens the existing model of professional regulators like the COA, which currently holds all the tasks for regulating education and the profession.

4. **Outcome-Based Education:** The policy emphasizes a major shift from rote learning to a focus on achieving clearly defined learning outcomes. It proposes a National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) that will define "graduate attributes"—the skills, knowledge, and values a student should possess upon graduating (Government of India, 2020, p. 46).

In India most of the institutes are standalone Architecture College, for this colleges this mandates are disruptive. This leads to a complete reimagining of their structure, curriculum and very identity.

The COA's Strategic Response: Alignment and Adaptation:

The COA's Interim Report is a direct appointment with these four pillars. Its approach is not to resist but to reinterpret and adapt, safeguarding that the essence of architectural education is not lost in the change.

1. Embracing Multidisciplinary and Flexible Pathways (with Safeguards)

The COA report wholeheartedly endorses the NEP's vision, stating that architectural education, by its very nature, is "multi-disciplinary, amalgamating quite a few parallel and lateral fields into its fold" (Council of Architecture, 2023, p. 3). It acknowledges that current single-program institutions will have to "expand horizontally to offer multiple disciplines or perish" (Council of Architecture, 2023, p. 4).

As technology increasingly shapes human endeavours, technical education is evolving to be integrated within multidisciplinary educational institutions and programs. This shift emphasizes deeper engagement with other disciplines.". (Naveen, 2021)The report goes to great lengths to map the NEP's flexible entry/exit structure

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onto the traditionally rigid five-year Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch.) program. It outlines three distinct candidate categories with complex pathways:

- **Category A (after 10th grade):** Options like 3+2+2 or 3+3+1 to acquire a professional degree.

- **Category B (after 12th grade):** Options like 3+2, 4+1, or 3+3.

- **Category C (after another Bachelor's degree):** A 1+2 pathway (Council of Architecture, 2023, p. 6).

However, this is where strategic adaptation becomes evident. The COA introduces a crucial safeguard: **"both [a 3-year and 4-year UG degree] will not be considered as degree sufficient for registration"** (Council of Architecture, 2023, p. 7, emphasis added). This is the report's masterstroke. It allows institutions to comply with the NEP's structure of offering 3-year and 4-year degrees, but it restricts the right to practice architecture behind a higher bar. The final professional qualification is effectively positioned at the Master's level—a five-year cumulative learning period culminating in a "professional degree," for which the COA suggests scrapping the "B.Arch." nomenclature to avoid confusion and replacing it with "M.Arch." (Council of Architecture, 2023, p. 8).

This adaptation allows the COA to have its cake and eat it too: architecture schools can become multidisciplinary and offer flexible exits, but the pathway to becoming a licensed architect remains a rigorous, safe, and uniform process.

2. Redefining the Regulatory and Licensure Model

The NEP's proposal for a single regulator (NHERC) poses an existential question for the COA, whose authority currently stems from its control over recognizing architectural qualifications. The Interim Report accepts this new reality but strategizes a new role for the Council within the proposed four-vertical structure (Council of Architecture, 2023, p. 5):

- **NHERC:** COA should seek representation within this single regulator.

- **National Accreditation Council (NAC):** COA can assist in formulating architecture-specific accreditation parameters, ideally aligned with the international **Canberra Accord**.

- **General Education Council (GEC):** COA should be a member to help define the NHEQF and "Graduate Attributes" for architecture.

- The report concludes that the COA's primary future role will be as a **Professional Standards Setting Body (PSSB)** and the authority for registration.

This leads to the most important proposed change: the introduction of a **licensing examination**. The report outlines a new three-step pathway to registration:

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1. **Education:** A Master's degree in Architecture from an accredited program, with a minimum of five years of learning, ensuring the acquisition of prescribed "core architecture credits."

2. **Training:** A minimum of two years of full-time professional practice under a registered architect, with at least one year of this training required in India.

3. **Examination:** Upon fulfilling the above, the candidate becomes qualified to appear for a registration examination conducted by the COA. Only upon passing this exam can one be registered as an architect (Council of Architecture, 2023, p. 6).

This model moves the COA's focus from *input-based* regulation (inspecting infrastructure and curricula of colleges) to *output-based* regulation (ensuring that every individual who earns the license, regardless of their exact educational pathway, meets a sole, high national standard). This is a profound adaptation that aligns with global best practices in professional license

3. Operationalizing Outcome-Based Education

While the NEP mandates a shift to outcome-based learning, the COA's report provides an exceptionally detailed framework to achieve this. It moves from abstract policy to concrete pedagogy. The report defines **37 Graduate Attributes** (GAs), covering a vast spectrum from "Architectural Design" and "Building Science Concepts" to "Social responsibility," "Ethics and Professional Judgment," and "Self-awareness and achieving higher goals" (Council of Architecture, 2023, pp. 9-12).

COA proposes various initiatives to improve the role of the architects in the society and also suggests ways in which such awareness programs can be planned with the various stakeholders in the society such as laymen, government officials from various departments, school children and senior executives in private organizations and Such workshops could help to improve the awareness of architecture as a professional in society and the ways in which buildings and their performance can be enhanced with the involvement of architects at the planning and design stage. The document also suggests that COA and Indian Institute of Architects can take the lead and involve colleges in this exercise. (Shalini Sheoran et al,2024).These GAs are then translated into four demonstrable competencies that a "consummate architectural professional" must possess (Council of Architecture, 2023, p. 12):

1. **Vocational Skills:** The "seven basic R's," including graphics, digital competency (BIM, parametric design), structures, site analysis, construction, understanding of urbanism, and soft skills.

2. **Professional Skills:** The skill to involve in critical and philosophical design thinking, moving beyond basic problem-solving to creating a "discourse through design."

3. **Critical/Reflective Thinking:** The ability to think, argue, analyze, and synthesize textual and historical knowledge, moving beyond history being a "handmaiden of design."

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4. **Ethical Sensibilities:** The ability to act for the larger good, understanding the architect's role in society, regarding variety, and ensuring ecological sustainability.

The report then provides a comprehensive list of **20 measurable outcomes** to demonstrate these competencies, almost all of which are portfolio-based and practical, moving away from high-stakes theoretical examinations (Council of Architecture, 2023, pp. 14-16). These range from measured drawings of heritage buildings and BIM models to a scholarly 6000-word thesis and a "consummate thesis project." This framework ensures that the NEP's outcome-based mandate is met with a robust, profession-specific assessment structure.

4. Curriculum Restructuring and Faculty Innovation

The report provides a practical blueprint for institutions to redesign their curriculum according to the NEP's and COA's new vision. It proposes organizing learning into four streams (Council of Architecture, 2023, p. 17):

- **Design Stream** (Studios and complementary modules)

- **Technology Stream** (Construction, Building Services)

- **Knowledge Stream** (History, Theory, Humanities)

- **Skill Stream** (Graphical, Digital, and Life Skills)

Permitting the introduction of B.Sc. programme in Architecture, and similar degree programs in Interior Design, Fine Arts, Animation, Product Design, Urban Planning etc. under the same umbrella may result in a good synergy while at the same time giving an economy of scale to the operation of the college. (Shalini Sheoran et al,2024). A detailed credit distribution table shows how the focus shifts across stages: the foundation year is heavily weighted towards Skills (45-50%), the undergraduate years balance Design, Technology, and Knowledge, and the final professional year is dominated by Design (75-80%) (Council of Architecture, 2023, p. 20).

Perhaps one of the most innovative sections addresses faculty recruitment, proposing a tri-stream model that aligns with the NEP's push for excellence and relevance (Council of Architecture, 2023, p. 18):

- **Teaching Stream:** Faculty focused on pedagogy and core curriculum progress.

- **Research Stream:** Faculty with reduced teaching loads to focus on research.

- **Practice Stream:** Professionals on fixed tenure, potentially with offices on campus, to bridge the academia-industry gap.

This model directly addresses a long-standing analysis of architectural education in India—the disconnect between academia and practice—and provides a structured way to incorporate professional expertise into the curriculum.

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Unresolved Tensions and Points of Caution

Despite its comprehensive and proactive nature, the Interim Report concludes with an epilogue that reveals underlying anxieties. Two tensions are particularly noteworthy:

1. **Regulatory Autonomy:** The COA explicitly states, "We still believe that responsibility and authority to regulate both, education and profession must be vested with the same body that is Council of architecture rather than splitting it with different verticals" (Council of Architecture, 2023, p. 22). This indicates a fundamental concern that the fragmentation of regulatory functions could lead to a dilution of standards and a loss of the cohesive oversight the COA currently enjoys.

2. **Scale vs. Quality:** There are many affiliated colleges to public universities which have one or two courses, a small piece of land without enough physical infrastructure (like single building colleges), less than 300 annual admissions, etc. Such colleges cannot- expand their operations to become multi-disciplinary colleges and hence cannot transform themselves into autonomous colleges. (Aithal .et.al.)The report questions the feasibility of the NEP's vision for large institutions, noting that "an institute with architecture at its core and sustaining total enrolment of 3000 is a far-fetched possibility. It needs to be deliberated further how we can achieve it without diluting the core" (Council of Architecture, 2023, p. 22). This highlights a practical fear that the intimate, studio-based, and resource-intensive nature of architectural education may be mismatched with the enormous scale envisioned by the NEP.

There is a sheer need to move beyond the testing of learning through examination system and adapt new assessment methods & techniques to understand the learnings. Projects, presentations, portfolios, and peer evaluations allow for a holistic understanding of student learning. Assessments can mirror real-world scenarios wherein students apply knowledge and skills to practical situations, preparing them for real life

Conclusion

The Council of Architecture's Interim Report is not a simple compliance document but it is a sophisticated, strategic, and detailed blueprint for directing the unsettling wave of the National Education Policy 2020. The COA has demonstrated a clear strategy: to align enthusiastically with the NEP's philosophy of flexibility and multidisciplinary while proactively adjusting its mechanisms to protection the high standards of the architectural profession.

By re-engineering the pathway to registration around a difficult exam, defining exhaustive and measurable graduate outcomes, providing a clear curriculum model, and proposing innovative faculty structures, the COA has positioned itself not as a vestige of the old regime but as an essential partner in shaping the new one. Efforts have been taken to translate the NEP 2020 into a discipline-specific action plan.

However, the report also serves as a reminder that grand policy visions encounter complex ground realities. The COA's expressed concerns over regulatory fragmentation and the scalability of quality architectural

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education are crucial caveats. The ultimate success of the NEP 2020 in transforming architectural education will depend on a continued dialogue between policymakers and professional bodies, ensuring that the drive for a multidisciplinary and flexible system does not come at the cost of the depth, rigor, and ethical foundation required to build the architects of India's future. The COA's Interim Report is a dominant and constructive opening impact to this necessary dialogue.

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