

# Private university enrolment looking up

YEAR	ADMITTED	VACANT
2018	<b>1,24,026</b>	<b>1,60,242</b>
2019	<b>1,20,276</b>	<b>1,57,870</b>
2020	<b>99,771</b>	<b>1,77,584</b>
2021	<b>93,503</b>	<b>1,81,644</b>
2022	<b>1,48,456</b>	<b>91,950</b>

Private universities are seeing enrolments for their undergraduate and postgraduate courses picking up after a drop during the pandemic.

In 2022, which is the latest available data from the University Grants Commission, 38.2 percent of the 240,406 seats available in the 110 private universities were vacant, the lowest in five years. Enrolments too were the highest since 2018.



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Between 2018 and 2021, 60.8 percent of the seats available in private universities were vacant on average.

"There is a connection between the quality of education and enrolment," said Sheikh Kabir Hossain, president of the Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh (APUB), a guild of owners of private universities.

Some universities earned a reputation by maintaining a certain standard of education by appointing qualified teachers and ensuring better education facilities.

"Those have no problem attracting students," said Hossain, also the president of the Bangladesh Insurance Association.

Of the 114 private universities, only 15 to 20 are providing quality education, said MA Mannan, a former UGC chairman.

"There is no point in setting up new universities without preparing the teachers," Mannan added.

The profiteering attitude of many trustees is a big barrier for private universities in ensuring quality education, said AK Azad Chowdhury, another former UGC chairman.

"They do not want to invest in appointing qualified teachers, vice-chancellors and developing the infrastructure," he added.

The situation centring the number of vacant seats in private universities has actually improved, said Biswajit Chanda, the UGC member who monitors private universities.

"The observation that the quality issue decreases enrolment is by and large accurate. It is like survival of the fittest. If you cannot ensure facilities to maintain the standard of education, you have to face consequences."

However, it is at universities outside of Dhaka where the number of vacant seats is high, Chanda said.

"Everyone wants to come to Dhaka to study, particularly the insolvent ones as they get the scope to do part-time work."

At present, Dhaka has 57 private universities and Chattogram has 11.

However, the private universities in outlying districts where there is no public university do lack qualified teachers, Chanda added.

Most of the private universities, especially those situated in outlying districts, usually fail to ensure the standard of education, said Dil Afroza Begum, a former UGC member.

In places where the government has set up new public universities, the private universities are seeing low enrolment, said the APUB president Hossain.

When asked if new private universities are getting approval on political considerations, he said: "I don't agree at all."