

Seats, students rise in pvt univs, drop in public ones

New public univs see poor demand

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The number of seats at the country's public universities has decreased while that at the private universities has increased in recent years, according to a University Grants Commission of Bangladesh report.

Consequently, the number of students at the public universities has dropped and that at the private universities has risen in the period, the report said.

The country's apex regulatory body on higher education has recently released the report titled '50th Annual Report 2023'.

As per UGC officials and some teachers of the public universities which reduced seats, the number of seats at the public universities dropped as different public universities opted to lower the number of seats at some departments, particularly the laboratory-based ones, keeping the imparting of quality education in mind.

Educationists said that demand for the renowned public universities still remained high while demand for the newer ones remained low.

As per the UGC's 2023 annual report, the number of seats for the honours students at the public universities declined by 6,644 in 2021-2023 and consequently the number of students enrolled at the universities dropped by 6,896 in the same period.

Between 2021 and 2023, the number of students at the country's private universities increased by about 48,300.

In the period, the number of public and private universities increased by three each.

UGC public university management division director Muhammad Jaminur Rahman said that about 2,000 seats at Dhaka University and Gopalganj Science and Technology University had decreased in recent years.

For example, defying the UGC approval to enrol maximum 40 students at a lab-based department and maximum 60 students at a non-lab department, Gopalganj Science and Technology University was admitting more students, he mentioned.

For this reason, the number of seats at this university was lowered, he added.

UGC chairman professor SMA Faiz said that the number of students at the public universities decreased as many seats remained vacant in the first year of honours courses at these universities due to the cluster-based admission system.

Due to the system, some students of some of the universities migrate to other universities even after six months of the start of the honours course, he said.

Citing the crisis as a reason, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology and Jagannath University have already left the cluster-based admission system and the commission is now working to solve the problem, he added.

Admission tests under the cluster system held for the first time in the 2019-20 academic year.

But five major public universities — Dhaka University, Chittagong University, Rajshahi University, Jahangirnagar University and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology — decided not to join the cluster system.

At least 53 admission seekers fought for each seat in the first year admission tests under the 2024-2025 academic session at Dhaka University, held earlier this year.

For the admission tests, 3,19,168 admission seekers were registered against 6,010 seats under four units.

Meanwhile, at least 17 admission seekers fought for each seat in the first year admission tests at 19 public universities under the general, science and technology group under the cluster system in the same session.

Besides the science and technology universities, under the group there are also Islamic University, Kushtia, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Mymensingh, Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur, University of Barishal, Rabindra University, Bangladesh, Gazipur Digital University, Netrokona University and Kishoreganj University.

A total of 2,37,840 applications were submitted against about 13,600 seats available at these universities in the 2024-2025 academic session, said Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University vice-chancellor professor Md Anwarul Azim Akhand.

The university is leading the cluster-based admission system for the session.

Anwarul said that the quality of education would improve if the number of seats was reduced as the reduction also improved the teacher-student ratio situation.

If a university cannot offer facilities to its students, no one will want to appoint them to their institutions after their graduation from the university, he said.

He said that during the admission the first preferences of the students were Dhaka University, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology and public medical colleges.

Then comes the other universities like Rajshahi University, Chittagong University, Jahangirnagar University, Jagannath University and agricultural universities as the second preferences and next comes the 19 universities, he said.

Anwarul also said that nowadays some English medium students preferred some private universities like BRAC and Independent for better facilities, no session jam and educational environment.

'If the public universities fail to improve their quality, these will lose more students,' he added.

As per the UGC 2023 annual report, the number of seats in the first year of four-year honours courses was 50,455 at 50 public universities against which 49,883 students got admitted. In the same year, there were 3,58,414 students at 110 private universities.

In 2021, as per the UGC 48th annual report, 47 public universities had 57,099 seats in the first year of honours courses and 56,779 students got admitted against the seats. In the same year, 107 private universities had 3,10,107 students.

Dhaka University's science faculty dean professor Abdus Salam said that before the cut in the number of seats at the public universities, the number of students at the universities had increased significantly.

For adjusting the increased number of students at the universities, a review was conducted a few years ago, which found that some departments were struggling to impart quality education as there was much higher number of students compared with available facilities, he said.

As science faculty subjects are experiment-based, each of the students need lab facilities of their own, while additional students created difficulties for all in this regard, he said.

He said that many students got enrolled at the private universities to achieve a degree after being failed to get admitted to the public ones.

Dhaka University's Institute of Education and Research teacher professor Mohammad Ali Jinnah said that some private universities offered some lucrative subjects which attracted many to get admitted there.

A senior UGC official said that it was a demand of the public universities to reduce the number of seats in 2022-2023.

The universities were then struggling to manage the huge number of students, he said.

On the increased number of students at the private universities, the official said that 22 public universities were still continuing their activities from their rented houses, which discouraged students to study at these universities.

‘There are so many private universities in Bangladesh as it is a profitable business,’ he added.

Currently, there are 56 public universities and 116 private universities in the country.