

Problems of faculty recruitment: a case of new Central Universities

The lack of quality teaching faculty is one amongst the many issues confronting the higher education system in India. An ambitious plan of establishing centrally funded institutions of higher education (e.g. Central Universities, IISER, IITs, NITs), at least one in each state of the country, is being implemented. However, lack of planning, idiosyncratic attitude of the bureaucracy and governing agencies and lackluster behaviour of the concerned state governments have hampered the growth of newly established Central Universities.

A more serious challenge faced by these institutions is to recruit faculty for senior positions (i.e. Associate Professor and Professor), mainly because of factors that inhibit faculty mobility. Under the currently existing rules, those under GPF-cum-pension scheme will not be allowed to continue in the same scheme after joining new central institutions established on or after 1 January 2004. Ironically, the same faculty, if appointed, will be allowed to retain GPF-cum-pension in old Central Universities (established before 31 December 2003) as well as State Universities established

before that date and later upgraded to the status of Central University. The reason as stated by UGC is that 'there is no provision for carrying the pension scheme of parent organization when the organization itself does not have a (sic) pension scheme'. Obviously, newly established Central Universities do not have GPF-cum-pension scheme. Thus, the office memorandum issued on the mobility of teaching faculty by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension, Government of India has no real meaning. Here, I would like to mention that continuing such a scheme would put a nominal financial burden on the government, as only those already covered under such a scheme could enjoy this benefit. Furthermore, if permitted by the Ministry, GPF accounts can easily be opened in treasury or any nationalized bank. Absence of experienced and quality senior faculty at the helm will certainly have a negative effect on the growth and development of the newly recruited Assistant Professors.

The ambiguity of UGC rules and their subsequent misinterpretation by the university administration is another issue.

For example, to ensure and maintain the quality of PhDs, UGC developed a set of regulation(s) in 2009, and executed the same with retrospective effect. Consequently a newly appointed Assistant Professor, with a PhD degree before 2009, who according to UGC rules is entitled to get six non-compoundable increments, is being denied the same. He/she asked to justify that his/her PhD is according to UGC Regulation 2009. What one fails to understand is that a PhD awarded in 2003 cannot fulfil the norms formulated in 2009. I agree that excellence and innovation are not related to perks, but they do have a role in creating positive frame of mind. Creating sub-standard institutions is not going to help higher education in India.

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NET versus Ph D holders in India

I read with great enthusiasm the editorial 'Should we produce more PhDs' by Balaram¹ and agree with the most important aspect of employment opportunities for PhDs in our academic institutes and industries. I would like to highlight the controversy regarding the recent University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations on minimum qualification for recruitment of assistant professors in Indian universities. To become an assistant professor one has to clear NET/SLET along with 55% marks in his Master's programme and exemption from NET is given to those who have been awarded a PhD according to the UGC regulations 2009 (see ref. 2). There is confusion in the UGC regulations 2009, whether the PhD candidates (those who registered before July 2009 and sub-

sequently got their PhD degrees in later years) are totally exempted from NET or not. To address this issue, once again UGC conducted a meeting (UGC 472) with experts and reported, 'The Commission giving exemption to MPhil/PhD degree holders on or before 31st December 2009 and candidates who had registered themselves for PhD degree on or before 10th July 2009 and are subsequently awarded PhD degree' (see ref. 2). However, the UGC 472 meeting was not approved by the Human Resource Development Ministry. If there are no modifications in the UGC regulations in the near future, many of our young researchers will prefer to go abroad for their teaching/research career. In general, PhD is 'passion, hard work, tolerance and achievement'. We cannot compare it

to the general competitive examinations like UGC NET. The quality of a PhD thesis can be ascertained by the number of quality publications arising from it. It is high time that UGC and HRD set clear-cut eligibility criteria for recruiting assistant professors at Indian universities/institutes.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2013, **104**, 807–808.
2. <http://www.ugc.ac.in/>

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