

Coordination among institutions

This is in response to the correspondence by Basa. We agree that he raises a few valid points. We would like to take it further so as to recommend some concrete steps in that direction, to reverse the quality degradation which he points out.

In India, at this point we have quite a few well-funded research institutes. In most cases they are in cities where universities exist, but no fruitful link is maintained. Institutes exist, as if behind an iron curtain, isolated for all practical purposes from the academia of the universities. So, what is to be done? We propose that, every such institute should actively entertain students from neighbouring universities and beyond, to get into the laboratories and acquire first-hand research experience. This does exist in an incipient form in some institutes, but the initiative has to be made universal. Equally important is the accessibility of well-stocked libraries of institutes to general students of universities whose libraries are dismal in most instances.

It is apparent that the shift of research focus from university to institutes has to do a lot with the differential research funding of the two. Once-famous university research departments are now gasping for a last breath of life. What causes

this situation is an entirely different debate, but the point is to revitalize such departments. It could start with an initial generous departmental funding to new faculty and their promotion to be inextricably linked with subsequent research work, to be assessed, not subjectively by 'confidential reports', but by taking into account publications and successful extramural grants as well as student assessments.

Research institutes also have their own duties for most grants are, after all, public money. It should be made mandatory for the faculty in these institutes to take classes in universities regularly or alternatively, university students are to be allowed to audit/credit classes they take at the institute.

It is in the best interest of the research institutes that they should do so, because the ill-training of university students at the Bachelor's and Master's level will invariably be reflected in the Ph D students the institute acquires. This is the standard norm for all leading universities in the USA and UK and in most fields, the best places to do research are the university departments themselves. The point of referring to this is not so much to replicate it, but to draw lessons and customize it to the Indian situation.

Another but not quite separate issue is the point of increasing dissociation between medical colleges and universities. In fact, the recent short-sighted trend of affiliating medical colleges to 'medical universities' is the exact recipe to achieve complete alienation between medical sciences and the rest.

This is not a guideline for overnight change, but at least its implementation should hopefully lead to healthy changes.

-
1. Basa, D. K., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **84**, 861–862.
-

SAMARJIT BHATTACHARYYA^{†,*}
GARGA CHATTERJEE[#]

[†]*National Centre for Biological Sciences, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, UAS-GKVK Campus, Bangalore 560 065, India*

^{*}*For correspondence.*

e-mail: samarjit@ncbs.res.in

[#]*Medical College, University of Calcutta, 88, College Street, Kolkata 700 073, India*

The plight of 'contract lecturers'

This has reference to a correspondence on 'Science teaching in universities on contract basis' by Yamini Bhusan Tripathi¹.

I disagree with the views expressed in the letter. Many universities run by the state government in Tamil Nadu employ so-called contract lecturers, either on hourly basis or on a consolidated monthly pay, a meagre sum for regular full-time work in the university departments and/or colleges owned by them. The universities pay just five thousand rupees per month as a fixed salary for lecturers and the appointment is for that particular

academic year only, for full-time work. Some universities pay just one hundred rupees per hour of class taught to a lecturer appointed on an hourly basis for full-time courses. Neither the student nor the permanent staff will respect such a contract or the poorly paid teachers. While the UGC recommends universities and colleges to provide UGC/AICTE scale of pay to teachers, even the Government-owned colleges and universities are not providing UGC scale of pay for contract lecturers appointed on one-year basis. The facilities available to permanent teachers are

not given to contract lecturers. The students have neither the maturity nor the right to judge such teachers.

-
1. Tripathi, Yamini Bhusan, *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **84**, 258.
-

U. ANNADURAI

Institute of Correspondence Education, University of Madras, Chepauk, Chennai 600 005, India