

On the selection procedure of lecturers in universities and degree colleges

During the last few years, there has been considerable enhancement in the economic status of teachers engaged in higher education, which has given a major boost to adoption of teaching as a 'sought-after' profession. But together with this, concerns over the fairness of the selection procedure have surfaced, following frequent complaints of irregularities and corruption in the appointments of lecturers. In this context, there seems to be a need for a unified code for the selection procedure, which at present, is almost arbitrary and follows vastly different rules in each state. Since the teachers at the university and degree college levels represent the apex of higher education and research in India, it is necessary that they be selected strictly on the basis of merit. On the contrary, the selection procedures at present are guided by politics, regionalism, recommendations and even bribery. The situation in north Indian education commissions is far worse than their south Indian counterparts. Being the overall controller of higher education, it is the duty of UGC-CSIR to formulate and implement a set of rules for such selections throughout the country. One finds it surprising to note that no clear-cut guidelines have yet been laid down by UGC for checking irregularities.

We would like to make a few suggestions, which might bring a certain level of reasonability and transparency to the entire procedure, although we do not know how far the proposals may be practically feasible.

The first suggestion is related to the screening pattern of UGC in the NET (National Eligibility Test). At present, UGC and CSIR do not disclose the marks obtained by a candidate in the NET. Since the commission charges a handsome amount as fee for the test, a candidate has every right to know his marks. At least some grade may be accorded to the candidate. These marks or grades may then be used as a factor for deciding merit for issue of call-letters. Secondly, there should be a single eligibility test, i.e. the NET to ascertain eligibility for lecturership. Considering the state level eligibility test (SLET) as equivalent to the NET will be a blow to the uniformity of qualification. This also gives rise to regionalism, as many state higher education commissions prefer SLET-

qualified candidates to NET-qualified ones, since they belong to a particular state. Such partisan attitude is detrimental to the right of equality. Moreover, the SLET, being managed by the states, are not free from influences and cannot be maintained in terms of fairness as offered by the UGC-CSIR NET.

The next point is with regard to the interview call procedure by the state commissions and the universities. These calls are made on the basis of academic merit or marks obtained at various levels. It is well known that there is absolutely no parity in the marking patterns of most universities. The Indian universities have a conspicuous academic hierarchy and the institutions at the base of this hierarchy have extremely lenient marking patterns. This greatly enhances the overall merit of the students passing from these institutions and makes them eligible for receiving interview calls. Due to the high standards of upper-grade universities, the marking pattern therein is strict; so the students who pass out with comparatively lower grades suffer in not being called for interviews. This can be easily corrected by including the NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Committee) grade of the university in the merit points of the student. This would ameliorate the problem of students passing out of institutions with strict marking patterns, and provide everyone with a level playing field.

Thirdly, the PhD or D Phil degree should be made a must for selection to a lecturer's job. The present day NET-qualified students have no interest in pursuing research. This has led to a downfall in active research in India despite the Government's incentives. Furthermore, the quality of research work may be adjudged by the publications. The Journal Impact Factor (JIF) may be used as an index for deciding the quality of publication. Since no manipulation can be done at this level, a large chunk of merit points may be attached to this section. This would also force the guides and supervisors to take on some genuine research work, so that their students get a good placement.

Fourthly, members of the selection committees and higher education commissions should not be political appointees. The members should be chosen solely on the

basis of their contribution to the field of education and research. This is rarely done in the present system. Rather, teachers with strong political links and ideologies head these bodies and are one of the root causes of rampant corruption and unfair selections. The selection of these members should be done by UGC itself or by a school of eminent scholars appointed by UGC. This would bring a level of trust to the selections done by the boards. The same procedure may be implemented in case of subject experts for the interview. The interviews should be exhaustive and cover general subject areas as well as that of research.

Although hypothetical in approach, we would like to suggest that the requirements of teaching staff of all degree colleges throughout India be concatenated and a common interview be organized. The calls may be made on the basis of academic records, NET score as well as impact factors of publications. This would, however, require elaborate machinery like the one employed for the civil services examinations.

Even if we omit the last proposal, the implementation of earlier ones can bring a much-needed reform in the system. We would also recommend the need of a UGC observer to oversee the proceedings of the selection committee and to check if all the rules are properly followed. Similar rules and regulations may also be followed for promotion. It is high time that a debate on this front is initiated; otherwise we could head for a non-recoverable deterioration in higher education.

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