Merit must be promoted

The National Eligibility Test (NET) conducted by CSIR and UGC is not new. Such types of tests are as old as the culture of higher education. In ancient periods the gurus (rishis) used to ask questions, rather conduct interviews before selecting their students; the strategy of Chanakya is well known. The present tests, viz. NET/SLET certify a student to be fit for lectureship/JRF and to carry out research. Such tests are correct in all respects. According to Nilavu[1], some students may be thorough in only one particular subject, and hence may not be able to qualify in such tests. In my opinion, lecturers in degree colleges or universities are generally not restricted only to one particular stream or a discipline; such thorough specializations are restricted to the post of professors.

In addition, in this age of interdisciplinary approach, the curious UG or PG students may ask questions which may even cross the limits of a particular subject. In this respect, a lecturer who has cleared the test (NET) consisting of various disciplines such as botany, chemistry, zoology, microbiology, biotechnology, biochemistry, physics, mathematics and computer science, can provide a better answer and explanation.

Most students are failing to qualify in such examinations due to the lack of a right approach. To qualify in such examinations, the answers must be proportionate, specific, brief, clear, to the point and self-explanatory.

I must add that students failing to qualifying the NET/SLET tests should not be considered unfit for research. NET or SLET is not mandatory for Ph D registration. Various universities conduct Research Entrance Tests, in addition to the above, Ph D registration is open without any test or examination in many universities in India. Finally, we must admit that merit must be promoted with positive attitude, at least in academia.

1. Nilavu, S., *Curr. Sci.*, 2005, **89**, 241.

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Institutional learning and change for universities and national laboratories

The article by Raghuram[1] is well timed; it is high time that we debate to understand what is actually needed to revitalize our universities and national laboratories. Just by giving the deemed university status to national laboratories will not bring excellence in our R&D system and professional authority among our scientists. The dichotomy between the universities and national laboratories/institutions has been brought out well by the author. There is no doubt that the objectives with which national laboratories and universities started need to change in the changing context.

Institutional changes are a must. However; understanding of the processes involved in their functioning must be based on institutional learning. Institutions must admit mistakes and confront failures and its causes or revisit key assumptions about their roles or ways of working. They should bridge the gulf between policy rhetoric and research practice, and involvement of major stakeholders in this exercise. Learning processes are chiefly intuitive; they can help organizations to adapt and enhance performance. However, making learning a more systematic activity will increase its scope for wider capacity development[2] of the organization. Shedding some of the institutional rigidities and bringing more flexibility in the working of national laboratories and universities is crucial, with need-based linkages among them. Universities also have to throw their rigidity of doing only disciplinary science/research and must be able to take up problem-oriented or location specific interdisciplinary research. Bringing in coordination between the two or breaking the dichotomy between the two could be a useful source of well-trained scientists for the national laboratories. This will bring excellence and more professional authority among the scientists. Universities also have to open up and provide more flexibility with respect to the problems being investigated and in revising the curriculum with the changing contexts and not indulging in ritualistic, repetitive research so that students working on problems that need interdisciplinary approaches do not face problems in carrying out their work or getting registered for Ph D, etc. Linkages will also help in avoiding duplication in research, which is very common in our R&D system.

1. Raghuram, N., *Curr. Sci.*, 2005, **89**, 21–22.
2. Hall, A. J., Yoganand, B., Sulaiman, R. V., Rajeswari Raina, S., Shambu Prasad, C., Naïk Guru, C. and Clark, N. G., *Innovations in Innovations: Reflections on Partnerships, Institutions and Learning*, ICRISAT, and NCAP, 2004, p. 252.

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