

## Performance assessment of teachers

The common mistake made in discussions concerning the service conditions and evaluation of teachers is to treat university teachers on par with those in undergraduate colleges. The fact is that these two classes of teachers have very different jobs to do.

Except in some new universities, in general, university teachers have only low-to-moderate teaching load, the mandate being primarily to carry out research. As such, university teachers should not be treated differently from faculty of national institutions. Unfortunately, teachers themselves do not seem to be aware of this and firmly believe that besides teaching, they are free to waste time in elaborate and time-consuming examination procedures, put in place by the universities.

The result is a woeful lack of scholarship among teachers, especially among the science faculty. In such a scenario, retirements can bring in relief by weed-

ing out undesirable elements and clearing up the air within university departments.

There is no denying the need for rigorous performance assessments of university teachers. The highest standards of performance must not only be expected, but also insisted upon in practice.

Contractual appointments are however not the answer. The problem being that, members of professorial committees who are normally expected to make performance assessments are themselves men of poor scholarship and little vision. In fact, these very men are responsible for the present culture that views competence with hostility.

Centrally funded 'new-blood' appointments will create a piquant situation, with teachers doing 'equal' work under unequal conditions. In fact, the better performing teachers are uncertain of tenure, while the poorly performing state appointments are assured of tenure.

What is needed is a system with a built-in performance assessment mechanism. My suggestion is that universities pay the teachers only a part, say, 60–75% of their salary. The remaining 40–25% should be drawn by the teachers from their research grants. Central funding to the universities must be channelled through enhanced overheads within the research grants. Such a system would automatically reward competence even while providing the safety net of tenure for all, albeit at a lower salary. Hopefully, in their effort to earn their dues, teachers will also fight sloth and acquire scholarship.

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## Academia–industry gap in India

Unlike in the West, there is very little interaction between academia and industry in this country. There is the feeling among the industry that the research conducted in universities/research laboratories ends with publication of papers or leads to doctorate degree's, with no immediate benefit to the industrial community. Many good students who graduate from reputed institutions go abroad in search of greener pastures. Hence availability of good technical manpower to Indian industry is scarce. Many Indian majors and MNCs are setting up research centres in the country, especially in biotech/pharma, but they are not able to recruit the right people. Scientists working in reputed laboratories may not be keen to join the industry because of work pressure and lack of job-security.

On the other hand, many industries have cut down in their R&D spending

because of huge initial investment, long gestation, no guarantee of return on investment and risk of rejection of their product by the market due to competition from the West. Similarly, collaboration between Indian research institutions and industry for joint research has not brought out any major products so far that can replace costly imported goods, especially in health care.

Since the WTO regime is fast-approaching, it is high time that scientists in universities/institutes start working on technological problems faced by the industry, so that they can help the industry produce competitive products of international standards. Funding institutions like DST, DSIR, etc. should encourage applied research in R&D institutions and universities so that one can expect the development of cost-effective innovative products.

Like in the West, scientists in national laboratories who have developed new technologies should consider taking voluntary retirement scheme. With pension as a guaranteed source of income, by availing Venture Capital funding they can commercialize their own technologies and become technocrat entrepreneurs.

Interactive meetings with industry associations, scientists and scientific organizations (CII, FICCI, DST, CSIR, Ministry of HRD) can minimize this growing gap.

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