

in academic institutions. The performance of UGC does not inspire confidence because of the way things have transpired, viz. endless relaxation in implementation of National Eligibility Test (NET) qualification for recruitments, its inability in implementing nation-wide minimum uniform syllabus, timely modifications of subject structures, poor implementation of vocational or professional courses, limited support for research, failure in timely release of committed grants for research and developmental activities, discrimination among colleges in matters of promotional avenue and research, etc. No doubt UGC cannot be blamed for every ill in higher education, because UGC does not have direct control over academic institutions. But it is also true that UGC has shown lack of will in implementation of

norms and directives. However, UGC always remained generous in recommending higher salary for faculty.

The proposed system of tenure-based contract appointments is guided by economic liberalization and globalization. This is unlikely to solve the problems that have crept in research and teaching. The knowledge and research competence of individuals is a matter of personal commitment and is acquired by sustained efforts of years of hard labour.

Instead of searching for short cuts, the time has come to tackle the problem in totality by directing equal attention to all components of higher education: first, by recruiting competent and committed faculty by a transparent mechanism, preferably on the pan-India basis along with creation of necessary facilities. Secondly, by removing discrimination between

college and university faculties. Thirdly, by strict enforcement of stated work norms with a system of performance-based incentives and lastly, the most important by selection of quality leadership, i.e. appointing vice-chancellors and principles who can provide the right atmosphere in the institutions.

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1. Gupta, B. M. and Garg, K. C., *Curr. Sci.*, 2002, **83**, 1431–1432.
  2. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **84**, 5–6.
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A. K. BIYANI

*Department of Geology,  
D.B.S. College,  
Dehradun 248 001, India*

## Academic performance should govern open-ended salary of contractual appointments

There have been several letters expressing concern for declining standards of scientific research and teaching in India. It is well known that India is rated far behind China and many of the Asian countries, and its global ranking has fallen from 8 to 15 despite its status as the second most populous nation, as reported recently (*Science*, 15 October 2002). Scientific publishing in standard international journals has dropped by 24% since 1980. Many who take pains in writing such letters and putting forward their opinion wonder at times whether these comments often fall on deaf ears and do not reach scientific managers and planners. The recent news of bringing in contractual appointments in scientific teaching and research has clearly shown that the governing system in the country does not sit idle, despite the fact that at times they have to counter bitter opposition. Recently, *Current Science*<sup>1</sup> has also welcomed the move and has wished for its effective implementation.

When it comes to implementing contractual appointments in India, it is desirable that the details of the systems operating in some of the foreign countries should be studied in detail. The

ideas and steps have to be modified to suit Indian conditions. The educational system in India is not able to attract meritorious students to teaching and research. All those who venture to opt for such jobs, soon get frustrated because of lack of incentive, appreciation and any financial benefit. Many of them who are capable of doing much better in academic pursuit slowly get frustrated and stop spending their valuable time in teaching and research. Indian libraries are a victim of enhancing costs of scientific journals followed by enlarging list of new journals. The news regarding the government's decision to start contractual appointment is recent; we do not know of even the initial response of the academic system. It is obvious that under the prevailing conditions in the country, very few working universities and research institutes would appreciate having colleagues in the same department with different designations, and drawing better salary and availing better facilities. It has to be made foolproof in the form of a well thought out contractual agreement for their faculty or new appointees. All those who meet the requirements should be given contractual appointments for the

sake of boosting the sagging morale of those dedicated to academic pursuit in general. Very few faculty members who have surrendered to easy life and comfort can venture to take up such a challenge. Such a system would attract and motivate the younger generation. The deemed contractual system is meant to make them more conscious to deliver their best and bring out their talent. If the proposed change is properly implemented and builtup, many of our younger talents working abroad would think of returning and serving their own country.

In the foregoing discussions, emphasis has been on our talented younger generation. However, the system should not ignore the senior scientists who have battled against all odds in keeping the scientific pursuit alive. They should also be given similar opportunity for pursuing their fields of research. The scientific system should be above any considerations other than academic pursuit and delivery of desired output on par with international standards. It is perhaps the right time to go out and pick up some more young scientists and engineers serving outside the country. This is precisely what was done by late Pandit

Jawaharlal Nehru, our first Prime Minister who sent H. J. Bhabha to convince radio astronomers to return to India, build facilities and pursue similar and even better research. The outcome of this step is well-known internationally. After 50 years, the time is ripe to do the exercise once again, for upgrading science in general, and for updating and bringing it closer to developed countries. There are many scientists working abroad and given the opportunity, they would be glad to return home and do their best for the country. One thing which bothers all of them is the Indian bureaucracy. Let us hope that slowly the system will be able to overcome all odds and grow.

With rich experience in Indian and some of the leading universities in USA,

I can only say at this point of time that the academic system within the country has to rise much above the existing limitations and pressing situations prevailing within the country. If the government has decided to follow the contractual appointment system, the terms and conditions must be made clear. We should not forget that in the past, we have suffered at the time of execution of well-meaning academic programmes. For example, through a very thoughtful programme, it was decided to promote some of the qualified and deserving university teachers under Merit Promotion Scheme of UGC. What happened in practice is known to all of us and can only be lamented. We have enough talent within the country; it is primarily the question of

providing them an encouraging and respectful academic system. The national organizations must rise above academic dwarfism and be guided by academic achievements and scientific contributions of individuals for providing the needed salary and facilities.

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1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **84**, 5–6.

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R. N. SINGH

*Mitra Niketan Colony,  
Banaras Hindu University,  
Varanasi 221 005, India*

## Flora resource materials repository

We have noticed that the biological materials on which researches are done at various departments and institutions, not only in Kerala but elsewhere in India, are not properly documented and deposited according to requirements in research standardization. Most often, materials are lost and records not kept for future references, which are mandatory in research methodology. In this background, the Environmental Resources Research Centre (ERRC), Thiruvananthapuram proposes to make a beginning in establishing a pollen

repository as a start. In establishing such a repository, we will receive and maintain the source materials (herbarium), pollen slides and even live plant specimens which can be quoted in doctoral theses and also in research communications. Together with the above basic materials, collateral documents like negatives, copies of theses/publications, etc. will also be maintained in the name of the person/department. A standardized format is being developed and this communication is only a notification on

our proposal. Those interested may contact ERRC.

P. K. K. NAIR

*Environmental Resources Research  
Centre,  
P.B. No. 1230,  
P.O. Peroorkada,  
Thiruvananthapuram 695 005, India  
e-mail: errc@eth.net*

## NEWS

### National Awards for Science Popularization – 2002

The National Awards for Science Popularization for 2002 presented on the National Science Day and announced by the National Council for Science and Technology Communication, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India were given in the following three categories:

National Award for the Best Effort in Science Popularization was awarded to

‘Vigyan Parishad Prayag’, Allahabad that was set up in 1913 and has an unbroken record of publishing its popular science Hindi magazine *Vigyan* since 1915. The Parishad is presently developing a dictionary of 10,000 definitive terms in biotechnology with support from the Department of Biotechnology. The Award carries a cash prize of Rs 1 lakh. This year an award to an individual was also presented. The honour has been

awarded to D. Balasubramanian, Hyderabad for his fortnightly column on popular science in a national English newspaper for the last ten years and has to-date published over 270 articles. His other achievements besides being an outstanding biophysical chemist are radio and television programmes, popular science books and conducting workshops on communicating science for press, radio and television journalists in India