

Operation 'Faculty Recharge': A UGC initiative for augmenting the research and teaching resources of universities

1. Purpose

The intent is to strengthen high quality research in science related disciplines at internationally competitive level and promote innovative teaching in the universities through induction of fresh talent, at all levels of academic hierarchy, in selected departments/centers. The new inductees will be selected through a nationally conducted competitive process and placed as **Lecturers/Readers/Professors**. To impart distinct identity to these specially selected faculties, a prefix 'UGC' will be added to each of these categories. It is to be ensured that individuals with exceptional creativity, zeal and commitment to research and teaching will be selected. This is a pressing requirement that brooks no delay as scientific output from the universities has been on sharp decline in recent years and a majority of our universities have not recruited faculty on a significant scale for a long time and are in danger of losing more than a generation of researchers. Lack of availability of faculty positions besides other endemic problems associated with hiring of faculty are often cited as causative factors of this serious malady. The 'faculty recharge' initiative offers an effective mechanism to address this problem in some ways and should provide a unique opportunity to the universities aspiring to upgrade and reinvigorate faculty resources in their science related departments.

2. Process

- a. The 'faculty recharge' initiative will be advertised nationally (institutional websites) and internationally (SCIENCE, NATURE.... + two leading Journals in each major discipline) through a 'rolling advertisement' to reach out and draw the very best available talent on a regular basis. The scheme will be open to both first timers as well as those already in service. Some of the operational details like the deadlines, application format, processing protocols etc will need to be worked out.
- b. Initially 200 faculty positions will be available (80, 80, 40 at Lecturer/Reader/Professor level, respectively). The intent is to ultimately induct up to 1000 faculty during the next five years with a yearly repeat cycle. Emoluments and benefits for these positions will be on par with those given to Lecturers/Readers/Professors at the central universities.
- c. Eligibility criterion has to be rigorous, yet flexible. For example, Ph. D with post-doctoral experience and substantial publication record could be a common minimum requirement. Depending on the individual

accomplishments and professional standing, the selection committees can decide at what level a particular candidate fits.

- d. Selections are to be made through a two tier process. In the first tier subject experts in areas like *mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, earth sciences, engineering sciences etc* will short list candidates on the basis of CV/reco letters. The final selections will be through personal appearance (video-conference for overseas candidates) before an apex level, multi-disciplinary committee to ensure uniform standards of selection across disciplines.
- e. Initial tenure of the appointment will be 5 years, and following a peer review it can be terminated, extended or elevated to the next higher level. Subsequent evaluations will also follow a five year cycle but the 'faculty recharge' positions can in principle be carried through to superannuation. There will be a provision for mid-term appraisal during each of the five year cycles.
- f. Concurrently, Vice chancellors/Heads of academic institutions are to be engaged by UGC, to obtain firm commitment from those interested in inducting fresh talent through the 'faculty recharge' initiative, that the host universities will provide research facilities, research guidance (Ph. D), teaching opportunities (maximum of 6h/per week) and other perquisites to the new inductees, at least on par with the faculty in their own university, if not more. This arrangement will need to be formalized through an abiding agreement between the host university and UGC.

3. Placement

Nationally selected candidates under the 'faculty recharge' initiative will be located/placed through harmonization of their own preference, response of the host institution and availability of infrastructure for the execution of the project. Commitment from the host institutions with regard to housing etc could greatly facilitate this process.

4. Project

Each candidate will be required to submit a research project, briefly outlining its main thrust, novel features and expected research output. Appropriate funding for the project, together with a start-up grant to set up basic laboratory facilities will need to be dove-tailed to the award.

Concerns: Faculty selections are an intense, time consuming and insightful exercise and its execution on such a massive scale would be an extremely challenging endeavor. Without adequate diligence and utmost care, such 'talent hunting' expeditions can eventuate in more harm than good. It can be orchestrated on a sustainable basis only through an innovatively designed and properly delegated mechanism.