

## 9 Rationalization of Procedures for Selection of Vice Chancellors – Special Provisions for New Universities

In recent years, academic circles are anguished that nonperformers are occupying position of vice chancellor, sending wrong signals to stakeholders. If unqualified persons are rewarded with top academic positions, students and faculty members would be disillusioned and will have no meaning to pursue excellence. Besides, Government has to take the blame for the low quality governance and consequent judicial/non-judicial inquiries



It is also found that the thirty+ state universities in the state are governed by different procedures for appointment of VC. A common set of procedures for appointment of Vice Chancellors by amending the relevant provisions of these ACTs is called for.

Search committees constituted for selection of Vice Chancellors, enjoy total freedom of function, owing to the high level of academic expertise involved and are solely responsible for the names of persons empanelled. The roles of the Government and the Chancellor are subsequent to and entirely depend on the panel forwarded by the search committee. The search committee is mandated by the Act to empanel only eminent academicians and assist the Government and the Chancellor in choosing a good academician who can lead by example.

Powers, duties and responsibilities of the search committee for selection of Vice Chancellor may need to be redefined so that the desired objectives are obtained.

### Special provisions for new universities:

New universities are established to fulfill the special needs of a region, special purpose/theme to promote knowledge, technology, healthcare etc., To fulfill these laudable goals, it is fundamental to appoint the first vice chancellor who has the required experience and expertise in academic administration and academic leadership to ensure that the new university takes its roots quickly and delivers the declared services to the students. Failure/dislocation in the services would be detrimental to the interests of students and defeats the very purpose of establishing new universities at huge public expenditure.

At present, it is found that there are no particular standards for the appointment of VCs or special officers of new universities.

For instance, it is prudent to appoint an accomplished economist as the Director/VC of the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar School of Economics (BASE) and an

accomplished woman academician as the first Vice Chancellor of new Maharani Cluster University. Therefore and notwithstanding anything else mentioned in the various universities acts, the government should prudently use its special powers to nominate an accomplished academician / educationist the first vice chancellor of new universities to ensure a strong foundation to blossom into a reputed institution of higher learning.

In general, the screening process need not be limited to the applicants alone; if necessary an eminent academician / educationist may be invited from any part of the country or even an NRI to demonstrate that merit alone is the consideration for leadership of a university; putting a right man in the right place will inspire the society and universities also would add value to their vision and mission.

## **Relevance to NEP:**

My recommendation to appoint visionaries to lead the University finds ample support in the NEP as it identifies suboptimal leadership and governance of HEIs as one of the key weaknesses (performance drags) of the higher educational ecosystem in the country. This is amply reflected in section 19.1 which states " It is effective governance and leadership that enables the creation of a culture of excellence and innovation in higher education institutions. The common feature of all world class institutions globally has indeed been the existence of strong self-governance and outstanding merit-based appointments of institutional leaders, which has truly enabled and nurtured such a culture."

Other issues which are responsible for the poor state of affairs are: poor educational outcomes; rigid separation of disciplines and too many specializations; no access to students from disadvantaged sections and areas; lack of autonomy to teachers and institutions to innovate; lack of merit based faculty improvement and management system; poor research output and unwieldy affiliating universities resulting in poor undergraduate education in colleges. NEP also prescribes that in addition to the top leadership, all other leadership positions in an HEI should be offered to persons with high academic qualifications. In essence, NEP has put in place an innovative governance system for a HEI with a visionary as the leader and supported by a team of accomplished academicians. This collective of selected academic administrators is entrusted the responsibility of navigating the HEI towards competence and excellence in the national and international education ecosystem.

Some of the governance related quotes in NEP are given below to provide a glimpse of how NEP proposes to nudge the HEIs to take on the challenges of 21st century knowledge society:

Section 0.6 : This Policy proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, while remaining consistent with India's traditions and value systems.

Section 8.6. The four distinct roles of governance and regulation, namely (a) policymaking (b) the provision/operation of education, (c) ensuring professional and quality standards in the education system and (d) academic work will be conducted by separate independent bodies, in order to avoid conflicts of interest and concentrations of power, and to ensure due and quality focus on each role.

Section: 18.6: The higher education system must be restructured to promote: holistic education, research in universities , include research and internships in the undergraduate curriculum, create faculty career management systems with due weightage to research, and bring in governance and regulatory changes that encourage faculty and institutional autonomy and innovation. In order to focus on research and promote research culture in all HEIs in an interrelated and coordinated fashion, there shall be a National Research Foundation (NRF) which would bring a quantum jump in funding and support for research

Section 9.5: This policy envisions a complete overhaul and re-energising of the higher education system to overcome these challenges and thereby deliver high-quality higher education, with equity and inclusion, to all young people who aspire to it. The policy's vision includes the following key changes to the current system: (a) moving towards a higher educational system consisting of large, multidisciplinary universities and colleges, with at least one in or near every district; (b) moving towards a more multidisciplinary undergraduate education; (c) moving towards faculty and institutional autonomy; (d) re-vamping curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and student support for enhanced student experiences; (e) reaffirming the integrity of faculty and institutional leadership positions through merit-appointments and career progression based on teaching, research, and service; (f) establishment of a National Research Foundation to fund outstanding peer-reviewed research and to actively seed research in universities and colleges; (g) governance of HEIs by highly-qualified independent boards having academic and administrative autonomy; (h) “light but tight” regulation by a single regulator for all of higher education, including professional education; and (i) increased access, equity, and inclusion through a range of measures, including open schooling, online education and Open Distance Learning (ODL), keeping in view needs of learners with disabilities, and substantial increases in scholarships at private/philanthropic universities for disadvantaged and underprivileged students.

Section 9.4: Some of the major problems currently plaguing the higher education system in India include: i) a severely fragmented higher educational ecosystem, with more than 50,000 education institutions (HEIs), a large proportion of which offer only a single programme and have fewer than 100 students and a large percentage of which are commercial enterprises in which little or no education is taking place; ii) poor learning outcomes and development of cognitive skills of students; iii) rigid separation of disciplines, with too much early specialisation and streaming of students into narrow areas of study; iv) a lack of access to higher education, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged areas; v) a lack of teacher and institutional autonomy to innovate and excel; vi) inadequate mechanisms for merit-based career management and progression of faculty and institutional leaders; vii) a lack of research at most universities and

colleges, and transparent and competitive peer-reviewed research funding across disciplines; viii) suboptimal governance and leadership of HEIs; ix) a regulatory system that is not empowered to close down fake colleges, while constraining excellent and innovative institutions and x) problems associated with large affiliating universities resulting in poor undergraduate education in colleges.

10.12. The new regulatory system envisioned by this Policy will foster this overall culture of empowerment and autonomy to innovate, including by gradually phasing out the system of 'affiliated colleges' over a period of fifteen years.

## 19. Effective Governance and Leadership for Higher Education Institutions

19.2. All higher education institutions in India must aim to become independent self-governing institutions pursuing innovation and excellence, through suitable measures that ensure the leadership of the highest quality and promotes a culture of excellence.

19.4. All leadership positions (not only the Head) in institutions must be offered to persons with high academic qualifications and demonstrated administrative and leadership capabilities along with abilities to manage complex situations. Leaders of an HEI must demonstrate strong alignment to Constitutional values and the overall vision of the institution, along with attributes such as a strong social commitment, belief in teamwork, pluralism, ability to work with diverse people, and a positive outlook. Leadership changes will come with sufficient overlaps, and not remain vacant, in order to ensure smooth transitions.

Outstanding leaders will be identified and developed early, working their way through a ladder of leadership positions.

20.4. There will be one common regulatory regime for the entire higher education sector, eliminating duplication and disjunction of regulatory efforts. A single regulator, the National Higher Education Regulatory Authority (NHERA), will be set up to regulate in a 'light but tight' and facilitative manner, meaning that a few important matters - particularly financial probity, good governance, and full online and offline public disclosure of all finances, procedures, faculty/staff, courses, and educational outcomes - will be very effectively regulated, while leaving the rest to the judgment of the HEIs, which is essential to institutional autonomy, innovation, and pursuit of excellence.

24.6. To ensure the effective implementation of many of the recommendations contained herein, the concomitant expansion of the administrative structures and the creation of professionally-qualified and competent educational planners and administrators are needed.

25.7. Education is a public good and must not be a commercial activity or a source of profit. The matter of commercialisation of education has been dealt with by the Policy through multiple relevant fronts, including: the 'light but tight' regulatory approach that mandates full public disclosure of finances, procedures, course and programme offerings, and educational outcomes; the substantial investment in public education; and mechanisms for good governance of all institutions, public and private.

Section: 13.7.

High-quality institutional leadership is extremely important for the success of an institution and of its faculty. Various outstanding faculty with high academic and service credentials as well as demonstrated leadership and management skills will be identified early, and trained through a ladder of leadership positions.

Leadership positions shall not remain vacant, but rather an overlapping time period during transitions in leadership shall be the norm to ensure the smooth running of institutions. Institutional leaders will aim to create a culture of excellence that will motivate and incentivize outstanding faculty members.

## **Analytical Comments:**

The set of mandates put in place by NEP to promote merit based appointments to lead HEIs is a welcome fresh breeze to revitalize the otherwise stagnant educational ecosystem. The mismatch between the expected knowledge outcomes from the HEIs, enabling the nation in self reliance and carving out a unique niche in international education ecosystem and the ground realities of a fractured education system unable to deliver the expected services has been bridged by the transformational reforms envisioned by the NEP. The mandate of competent leadership assisted by a team of efficient academic administrators not only demonstrates the global vision of the NEP but also its acumen to details within the permissible limits of a policy document.

The key tasks expected of a Vice Chancellor of a university in 21st century, as detailed in the quotes from NEP set very high expectations. He/she has the challenging task of aligning the university with the aspirational mandates of the NEP by:

- Revamping the administrative system to deliver the expected services prescribed by NEP
- Exercise the powers vested in the office with caution and prudence to galvanize the academic potentials of the institution and promote it to perform to full potentials in the best interest of the institution and the nation
- In addition to a congenial academic ambience, a research culture has to be put in place to earn a niche among HEIs in the State/Country
- Chose competent academicians and educationists to the key positions of Academic Council and the Syndicate/Executive Council

- Organize a Mentoring system to help the affiliated colleges attain competence for self-governance (autonomous status)
- Organize a Mentoring system to help the affiliated colleges attain competence for self-governance (autonomous status)
- Usher in the new 4-year undergraduate degree format and devise mechanisms and processes to ensure student choice prevails;
- Ensure maximum placement/employment opportunities for the graduates by establishing a University-Industry linkage
- In essence, lead the university from the front in academic, administrative and research to inspire staff and students to follow suit.

Obviously, only an accomplished visionary-academician qualifies for the post of a Vice Chancellor to deliver the above solutions; appointing a VC merely on qualifications on paper without real academic accomplishments would be a self-defeating exercise by the authorities responsible for appointment.

As pointed out in my recommendation one key issue in the entire issue is the composition of the committee of experts appointed to screen the applications. To appoint a visionary Vice Chancellor, the screening committee members themselves need to be competent themselves. Prudence and Caution are the twin mantras that the concerned regulatory authorities should bear in mind.

## **Recommendations:**

1. Government should initiate immediate and urgent steps to align the procedures for appointment of Vice Chancellors with my recommendations and the aspirational mandates of the NEP.
2. Government as a regulatory stakeholder should exercise prudence and high caution in appointing a VC as he/she is expected to lead the University by example.
3. Prudence should also be exercised by the authorities nominating experts to the screening committee; any compromises in this regard will not only defeat the very purpose of transformational aspirations of the NEP
4. New Universities need special attention since the government is vested with powers to appoint the first Vice Chancellor, without the elaborate procedures laid down in the KSU Act, 2000.
5. In about a decade or so, the colleges would move towards self-governance and autonomy as degree awarding institutions; they will have an academic council similar to universities. Therefore, the stringent yardsticks prescribed by NEP for leadership of HEIs are also equally applicable to the Principals/Directors.
6. In view of NEP recommendations on an entire gamut of issues related to higher

education, it is incumbent upon the government to bring modifications to the existing Act. The issues discussed above, should be reflected with appropriate emphasis to carry forward the objectives of NEP.

