

UGC Principal Regulations on Appointment of Vice Chancellors

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Abstract

This article reviews the UGC notification on regulations Clause 7.3.0 on the appointment of Vice Chancellors in universities. The second sentence of the regulation has certain expressions that can possibly lead to several subjective interpretations resulting in ambiguity. No one can deny that a lot of thinking would have gone into the formulation of the said regulation. But experience has shown that a review is necessary. Expression such as “experience in an equivalent position” demands careful interpretation. Further a few words pertinent in the present context like “post vs position, professorship vs headship, professorship vs membership in the Syndicate” are analyzed for the purpose of bringing better clarity. It is hoped that this article will sensitize some of those in the apex body of higher education which constantly emphasizes transparency and merit in appointment of top officials.

Keywords: UGC Notification; Regulation; Equivalent Position; Academic Administrative Organization.

The University Grants Commission in its notification on Principal Regulations Clause 7.3.0 dated 13th June (page 3) on appointment of Vice Chancellors in a University has stated, “Persons of the highest level of competence, integrity, morals and institutional commitment are to be appointed as Vice-Chancellors. The Vice-Chancellor should be a distinguished academician with a minimum of ten years of experience as professor in a university system or ten years of experience in an equivalent position in a reputed research and / or academic administrative organization.”

The present trends in the appointment of Vice Chancellors in universities have necessitated a fresh look into the eligibility requirements for the post. There is no dispute over the first part of the requirement that stipulates highest level of competence, integrity, morals and institutional commitment for those to be

appointed as Vice Chancellors.

The second aspect of the guideline is replete with ambiguities giving scope for different interpretations resulting in confusion.

There is no doubt that the regulations and norms are framed by expert policy makers at higher education level; but practical experience has brought a need for rethinking.

The guideline suggests a minimum of ten years of experience as a professor in a university system as one of the three alternative eligibility criterion. The post of a Vice Chancellor in a university which is an academic administrative organization demands not only competencies and skills as an academician but also administrative capacities. A professor who is not heading a Department has limited responsibilities which are in general related to academic activities of a single Department like curriculum designing, updating, teaching, evaluation, research, publication and extension. A professor has hardly any exposure to university administration as a whole.

Realizing the importance of administrative expertise for a V.C. there was a practice of appointing IAS officers as Vice Chancellors who have a tendency to be rule bound with limited academic experience. Later on this was changed.

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Therefore, the eligibility criterion is to be revised as "Professor or Associate Professor with at least five years of experience as a Head and five years of experience as a member of the Syndicate or Senate within the overall ten year service requirement." This exposure is a necessity for a V.C. to get a good grasp of the university administration, especially in State universities where the term of a V.C. is only for three years. In some new Departments of a few Universities the Professor's post may not exist or remain vacant for some reason, in which case the Associate Professor who is heading the Department with administrative experience for five years may be considered.

The second alternative eligibility criterion states "ten years of experience in an equivalent position in a reputed research organization." This criterion is incomplete because just by acquiring ten years of experience in an equivalent position in a research organization the person will be devoid of administrative competencies required of a V.C. May be in the field of research, the person has good experience but that is only a part of a university activity and is more academic in nature. This is not to undermine academic experience but to stress the need for administrative exposure to the prospective V.C.

Clarification of the Expressions 'Post' Versus 'Position'

A clarification regarding the terms 'post' and 'position' is to be made in the present context. Though these terms are used interchangeably, in academic parlance the term 'post' refers to the job of a Professor, Director, Registrar and the like, whereas the term 'position' refers to rank or level of importance or standing such as 'Headship' / 'Membership' which is a responsibility assigned in addition to the responsibilities of the post already held by the concerned person. Positions may be independent of posts also. The Oxford Dictionary & Thesaurus (2007) gives the first meaning of the word 'post' as 'a job' whereas for the word 'position' only the sixth meaning is 'a job'. Universities advertise vacancies for posts in general and not for positions. The confusion in understanding the meanings of these words was explicit on one occasion which the author came across - in one of the Universities in Tamil Nadu the University administration while taking disciplinary action against a professor who was also the head of a Department issued a communication stating that the person was relieved of the post whereas it was only relieving from the responsibility as the head which is a position and not the post. Now the meaning may be better understood.

It should be remembered that a position equivalent to that of a professor may not be adequate if there are no administrative responsibilities for the post held by the person.

The third alternative eligibility requirement states 'ten years of experience in an equivalent position in an academic administrative organization'. This can be more explicitly stated as a 'university' or an 'institution of higher education' instead of 'academic administrative organization'.

It may be assumed that this refers to the Head of a Department who is an ex-officio member of the Senate or an elected member of Senate from a college and a member of the Syndicate nominated by the Chancellor or the Vice Chancellor either from a college or a university or an elected member from the college having experience both in academic and administrative activities of a university.

The Syndicate is a powerful body in a university in terms of academic and administrative responsibilities. There is no gainsaying the fact that the Syndicate is solely responsible for regulating, controlling, monitoring, reviewing, amending, approving the resolutions, recommendations and decisions of bodies like Senate, Academic Council and other Committees appointed for various purposes in a university.

Professorship Versus Membership in the Syndicate

While a Professor is focusing mainly on academic activities of a Department stated earlier, the responsibilities of the Syndicate member relate to –

1. Student admission
2. Staff appointment and promotions
3. Infrastructure Development and maintenance
4. Quality control
5. Budget preparation
6. Preparation of Annual Reports
7. Finance Management
8. Competency updating and modernization of teaching and supporting staff
9. Consolidation and expansion of Departments / Centres and other wings
10. Establishing collaboration with International, National, State Agencies for research, extension and linkages with industry and community
11. Promoting generation of funds from extra mural agencies

12. Innovations in curriculum and research
13. Staff and student welfare
14. Conducting examinations and timely publication of results
15. Conducting convocations
16. Overall governance

It must be remembered that the appointment as a professor is approved by the Syndicate only and hence Syndicate membership is a position higher to that of a professor. But nomination or election of a teaching staff as a member of the Syndicate should consider merit and integrity of the person only.

Mere academic experience as a professor for ten years will not suffice for consideration for the post of the Vice Chancellor. Persons without exposure to university administration as a whole will find it difficult to get a clear understanding of responsibilities as a V.C. That is why the search committee for the selection of a V.C. has a member from the Syndicate and another from the Senate, representing the university.

The confusion in using the expression 'and /or' in the clause may be minimized by removing the word

'and' given as an alternative.

Considerations for appointment other than the prescribed eligibility requirements for a V.C. will lead to deterioration of quality, academic unrest and legal tangles which we have been witnessing very often bringing down the dignity of an important post. Therefore persons of eminence with established merit in academic and administrative activities of the university or institutions of higher learning, having integrity and moral uprightness and without any weaknesses alone should be appointed as Vice Chancellors.

Unqualified misfits will spoil institutions of highest intellectual activity, thus eroding the value base of the campus and thereby the nation. Mediocrity slowly infects the system with an irretrievable academic cancer like disease.

Through this I make an appeal to those in authority to reinterpret the guideline 7.3.0 on eligibility criterion for a V.C. or take steps to amend the guideline on the lines suggested to ensure appointment of qualified persons for a strong higher education system so that universities in India can occupy top ranks among world universities.