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Developing a FLAIR for teaching

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FLAIR — Fostering Linkages in Academic Innovation and Research — will help college teachers in the State develop teaching skills, writes B.S. WARRIER.

In a country which insists on having only trained schoolteachers, no pedagogic training is, however, required to join the faculty of a university or college. Clearing the National Eligibility Test for lectureship makes one eligible to teach in a college, but it is no substitute for systematic training in educational psychology, education technology, evaluation techniques, preparation of lesson plans, classroom management, educational administration, planning and execution of research and so on.

In this context, the Higher Education Department is launching a venture aimed at enhancing teacher quality in government colleges and universities.

The scheme, it is hoped, will be extended to other colleges.

What is debatable is whether the campuses which lack basic discipline will permit any such process of refinement. The scheme will succeed only if the campuses were to be made congenial to the achievement of academic excellence. Let us have a quick look at the scheme that the government launches with optimism. The catchy acronym FLAIR tells us of the content in brief: Fostering Linkages in Academic Innovation and Research.

The key elements

The scheme targets mainly members of the faculty having less than five years of service. In the initial stage, it will be administered in government arts and science and engineering colleges and university departments. The three components of the programme are F1, F2 and F3.

F1: induction training in two phases, each of five days. This will touch areas such as course design, instructional methods, assessment, e-learning and research. This has an advanced level for a fortnight that includes training in reputable national institutions and a two-month internship in prestigious national and international institutions or universities. Selection to the advanced level will be based on the teacher's academic profile and performance during induction training.

F2&F3: the basic objective of these two phases is to promote student and teacher excellence. Appropriate rewards will be given for quality publication in international journals and for acquiring

patents through innovative research. To promote innovation, student project teams that break new ground and bring out ideas suitable for industrial application will be given special recognition.

Short-term training

This envisages two-week short-term training for 220 teachers on diverse aspects of teaching and learning. This will cover areas such as effective communication, educational management, student counselling and support, e-teaching and learning strategies and creative writing. Similar two-week training for 80 teachers will embrace aspects of research, including formulation of research problems, managing research projects, and technical writing. The short-term training programmes will be offered in leading national institutions.

Internship

This is open to new members of the faculty. Observing quality teaching, offering teaching assistance and doing short-term research will be part of the internship. In the teaching-learning segment, 60 teachers will be exposed to the old Gurukul pattern in which the shishya moves with the guru and acquires skills. The intern would do a small project as well. Those who go for the research segment will have the benefit of exposure to state-of-the-art facilities in laboratories by undertaking short projects. This opportunity is given to 40 teachers. They are supposed to produce a good publication in a leading journal based on their work. Some of them will be assigned to international universities for internship.

CAN

Teachers who get the opportunity to be part of the FLAIR programmes will share their knowledge with other teachers. A web-based platform, CAN (Collaborative Academic Network), will be available with facilities for blogging, discussion in subject-based forums, posting of videos and chatting.

The quality of the participation will be a criterion for the selection of the young members of the faculty for advanced training and internship. FLAIR has an in-built excellence promotion scheme that embraces the entire academic community, including students and teachers. Under this scheme, outstanding contributions from students and teachers such as journal papers, patents and innovative technology will be rewarded.

The nuts and bolts of FLAIR

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The pilot phase of the Fostering Linkages in Academic Innovation and Research (FLAIR) programme will be launched soon in government arts and science and engineering colleges and university departments in the State.

A FLAIR cell will be formed under the internal quality assurance cell of the selected arts and science colleges and universities and career guidance and placement cells of the engineering colleges.

The cell will be headed by the principal or coordinator and will assist the FLAIR secretariat with regard to the nomination of the faculty members for training programmes and internships.

It will handle the nomination of students and teachers for excellence and innovation awards and help in the operation of the collaborative academic network, says Rajoo Krishnan S., Officer on Special Duty for New Initiatives in Higher Education, who along with K.P. Jaikiran, State Coordinator, FLAIR, will manage the programme.

They recently discussed various aspects of programme implementation in Delhi with senior officials of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Science and Technology, Indian Council for Social Science Research, National University for Educational Planning and Administration and the University of Delhi.

As part of activities prior to the implementation of the programme, half-day seminars will be organised in Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Kozhikode.