

TOWARDS A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY RENAISSANCE: THE FUTURE OF BENGAL'S PRESIDENCY UNIVERSITY

Third Report of the Presidency Mentor Group, August 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMMARY

One year ago we had submitted our first report with a set of recommendations on how to reshape Presidency as a center of excellence. A second report followed in January 2012. Our aim remains the transformation of Presidency University into a world-class research and teaching institution by the time of its 200th anniversary in 2017. Since the submission of our last report excellent progress has been made at Presidency University, especially in recruiting outstanding new faculty members.

We have every reason to applaud both the process and the outcome of this first round of faculty recruitment. With fifty excellent appointments already made, we fully expect more than a hundred outstanding new faculty members to have been selected by the time the first round of recruitment concludes in October 2012.

It may be necessary in the second round to indicate preferences for particular specializations in order to build balanced departments with adequate coverage of essential fields of knowledge. This does not preclude any deliberate decision to excel in certain sub-fields by creating a genuine depth of faculty expertise in those areas.

We recommend that the initial total compensation for the Distinguished University Professors should be at least Rs 160,000 (Rupees One Lakh Sixty Thousand) per month with a provision of annual increments at a rate of 5% to 7%. Announcements seeking nominations and applications for the five Distinguished University Professorships should be published in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* as well as in national newspapers. In addition, an announcement of the Jagadish Chandra Bose Distinguished University Professorship ought to appear in *Science and Nature*. The Vice-Chancellor should appoint and chair five high-level Search Committees, each with a membership of three senior and eminent scholars in the relevant branches of learning.

We further recommend that 15 of the currently sanctioned full Professorships be made available for re-designation as department-based Heritage Chaired Professorships with salary levels higher than the full Professorships and lower than the Distinguished University Professorships. This will enable Presidency to recruit and retain senior scholars of great merit who have shown or are displaying interest in joining the Presidency faculty. Very high standards should be applied for promotion to these department-based Heritage Chaired Professorships.

Top-up funds allocated by the state government for this purpose will be utilized only when exceptional scholars are available to fill these posts with some attention paid to inter-departmental balance.

The initial faculty recruitments at Presidency University have followed the preexisting disciplines such as Botany, Physiology, Zoology, Biochemistry, Biotechnology and Bioinformatics. However, in the 21st century, Biological Sciences have become highly interlinked, and we envision that Presidency University will benefit from the integration of these different departments and centers in to a single 'Department of Life Sciences'. We recommend that the current and future faculty recruitment processes take place in the context of such a unified department.

Land for the second campus was made available after the submission of our second report. It is a square 10-acre corner plot at a very good location in Rajarhat behind the HIDCO building (see attached map). State-of-the-art new scientific laboratories and facilities should be built in the second campus. In addition to labs, the academic zone of the second campus should have space for classrooms and stand-alone professional schools. It should definitely have residences for faculty, a guest house, hostels for post-graduate students and perhaps some undergraduates as well, a Vice-Chancellor's Lodge, and an international conference center.

We envision the recreation of the College Street atmosphere in one quarter of the second campus, albeit without the clanking and clattering of trams and other vehicular traffic. This would be a pedestrian zone with lively and well-designed cafes and bookshops. We would like this part of the campus to be open to the public. The other parts where academic facilities and residences are located will be private and more secure.

Meanwhile, the infrastructure on College Street needs to be upgraded swiftly for the incoming faculty. Of the three heritage buildings - the Main Building, the Baker Building and the Eden Hindu Hostel Building - in the old campus, it will be the centenary of the Baker Lab next year. It needs thorough repair and refurbishment not just for historical reasons: it urgently needs upgrading to attract and retain outstanding scientists at Presidency in the future.

We gave considerable thought to the question of an appropriate governance structure for Presidency at our July 2012 meeting. There is now considerable research to suggest that distinguished alumni play a key role in the governance structures of the world's leading universities. We need not imitate the best practices of these universities, but rather adopt their basic principles while modifying the structures to suit Indian conditions, especially the particular requirements of Presidency University. For a unitary university of the size of Presidency University, we continue to believe one Governing Board rather than a Court and a Council may provide a more efficient and streamlined system of governance.

We recommend that the composition of the Governing Board should be as follows. The Chancellor or, in his absence, the Vice-Chancellor should chair

the meetings of the Governing Board. Ex-officio representatives drawn from government functionaries should be kept to the bare minimum and should not exceed a maximum of three such members. There should be a judicious balance between faculty representatives and nominated members who should be eminent scholars or distinguished alumni. We suggest a maximum of nine faculty representatives: the two Deans of the Faculty of Natural and Mathematical Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences; three Heads of Departments by rotation for one year in alphabetical order to be selected by the Vice-Chancellor; two teachers from the Faculty of Natural and Mathematical Sciences elected by the teachers of the Faculty of whom at least one shall be a Professor; and two teachers from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences elected by the teachers of the Faculty of whom at least one shall be a Professor. We suggest a maximum of nine members who are eminent scholars or distinguished alumni, but not employed by the University: two members to be nominated by the Chancellor from amongst eminent scholars or distinguished alumni interested in University education of whom at least one shall be an alumnus of Presidency College/University; three members to be nominated by the State Government from amongst eminent scholars or distinguished alumni interested in University education of whom at least two shall be alumni of Presidency College/University; and four members to be nominated by the outgoing Council/Governing Board of whom at least two shall be eminent scholars and at least two shall be distinguished alumni of Presidency College/University.

Based on the current pace of recruitment of a critical mass of Presidency University faculty and the time required to draw up the statutes, we recommend setting as our goal the first day of classes in the academic year beginning in July 2013 to be the appointed day. In order to achieve this goal, the statutes must be ready by June 30, 2013.

Vice-Chancellor Malabika Sarkar has been highly successful in her leadership role since her appointment in October 2011. We need continuity and stability at Presidency as we progress towards the appointed day. On the advice of Professor Amartya Sen, we respectfully request the Chancellor in consultation with the Education Minister to extend her term for a second year under the provisions of Section 55 (4) of the Presidency University Act.

We are grateful to Shrimati Mamata Banerjee, Hon'ble Chief Minister, for the courtesy extended to the Chairperson and her swift decisions regarding land for the second campus, the Distinguished University Professorships and the guaranteed annual supplements for faculty in the form of research and professional development funds as well as moving expenses for faculty from outside West Bengal.