

**EVALUATION STUDY REPORT OF NATIONAL
FELLOWSHIP FOR SCHEDULED CASTE (SC)
STUDENTS**

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**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
JUSTICE AND
EMPOWERMENT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Fellowship for Scheduled Castes (SC) Students is a central sector Scheme which envisaged creating opportunities for Scheduled Castes students, pursuing higher education leading to M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees in Sciences & Humanities and Social Sciences. The scheme caters to the requirements of the Scheduled Caste students for pursuing a research degree in universities, research institutions, and scientific institutions. The scheme equips SC students to effectively take advantage of the growing opportunities at the national and international level in the context of the new economic order.

The fellowship is categorized into two parts, namely the Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) and Senior Research Fellowship (SRF). For the M.Phil programme exclusively, only JRF is awarded for two years. For the integrated M. Phil and Ph.D. programme, the fellowship is given for five years wherein the duration of JRF is 2 years and for the remaining three years, it is converted into SRF. For direct Ph.D., the same condition is applicable. The JRF and SRF for scholars from Sciences & Humanities and Social Sciences are paid Rs. 31000/- and Rs. 35000/- respectively. The annual contingency for the Scholars of Humanities and Social Sciences availing JRF and SRF are Rs. 10000/- and Rs. 20500/- p.a., respectively. However, the annual contingency for the Sciences for the Scholars availing JRF and SRF are Rs. 12000/- and Rs. 25000/-p.a., respectively. An escort allowance of Rs. 2000/-per month is admissible to escorts of the physically challenged fellows. The fellows are given house rent allowance (HRA) at the rate of 8%, 16%, and 24% for not provided with hostel accommodation, in accordance with Govt. of India norms as applicable in the city/location where the fellow is working. It goes with stipulations like: (a) In case, hostel accommodation is provided to the scholars by their institutions, the scholar is eligible to draw only the hostel fee excluding mess, electricity, water charges, etc., (b) In case hostel accommodation offered by the university/institution is refused by the candidate, the has to forfeit his/her claim of HRA, (c) In case of non-availability of hostel accommodation, the scholar may be provided with single accommodation by the host institution. In such cases, the rent paid by the scholar on the actual basis is to be reimbursed, subject to the ceiling of HRA as per Govt. of India norms, (d) If the scholar makes his/her own arrangements of accommodation, he/she is entitled to draw HRA as per ceiling and categorization of cities by the Govt. of India, (E) In case, the scholar wishes to draw HRA, he/she is required to claim HRA on monthly basis by submitting monthly confirmation certificate in the prescribed format, to his/her institution.

Other facilities such as medical facilities, leave including maternity leave are governed as per the guidelines of the UGC in case of their fellowship programme.

In this backdrop, the central objective of the scheme is to provide fellowships in the form of financial assistance to students belonging to the SC category to pursue higher studies leading to M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Sciences and Humanities and Social Sciences in Indian Universities/Institutions/Colleges recognized by University Grants Commission (UGC).

The institutions are to be entitled with the following provisions where the beneficiary scholars are registered: (1) Universities/Institutions/Colleges included under section 2(f) and 12(B) of UGC Act, (2) Deemed to be Universities included under Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956 and eligible to receive grants-in-aid from UGC, (3) Universities/Institutions/Colleges funded by Central/State Government, (4) Institutes of National Importance.

The findings of the study are summarised as under:

1. The National Fellowship Scheme for Scheduled Caste (SC) Students is implemented by the University Grants Commission (UGC). There are 2000 slots in the Scheme. The UGC notifies the scheme by inserting a suitable advertisement in the press. The Junior Fellowship is awarded for two years. After two years, if the progress in the research work of the awardee is found satisfactory, his/her tenure is extended for a further period of three years as Senior Research Fellowship (SRF). The research work is assessed by a three-member committee set up by the University/Institution. The committee consists of the Supervisor, Head of the Department, and one outside expert in the subject. Junior Research Fellowship may be terminated in case the progress of the candidate is not found satisfactory by the committee. The Senior Research Fellowship (SRF) is sanctioned on a year-to-year basis on the recommendation of the Supervisor of the candidate duly accepted/rejected by the Head of the Department and finally approved by the Vice-Chancellor. The total period of award of JRF and SRF are not exceeded for 5 years. The fellowship is paid from the date of registration of the students in Ph.D. /M. Phil. Course.

2. The objectives of the evaluation study are: to analyse the socio-economic background of students belonging to Scheduled Castes who have received assistance under the Scheme during the last five years, to assess the subject wise demand Vs Actual number e.g. Science/Humanities/ Social Sciences/Commerce/Medical/Engineering etc., to ascertain the number of students completed Fellowship (JRF/SRF) during the last five years, to ascertain the number of fellows got employment (e.g. Lecturer, any other) after completion of the periods of Fellowships, to ascertain the number of students discontinued Fellowships (JRF/SRF) and reasons thereof during the last five years, to assess the opinion of students

regarding the implementation of Scheme by the University Grants Commission, to advise on the essentiality of documents required to award the Fellowships, to suggest simplification of procedures for awarding the fellowships, to suggest a strong monitoring system for timely submission of utilization certificate, to study the efficacy of the procedure adopted for the selection of candidates, eligibility criteria, rates of fellowships, to study the optimal utilization of funds under the Scheme by the University Grants Commission, key findings based on the data collected from the field on the objectives of the Study, shortcomings identified in the design of the existing scheme if any, and recommendations/suggestions for necessary restructuring to be carried in the Scheme to achieve desired results and need for its continuation.

3. Aligned with the objectives of the evaluation study, the performance of the scheme based on output/outcome indicators were developed to arrive at irrefutable findings. These indicators were: (1) Socio-economic background of SC Fellows in the last five years, (2) Subject wise demand Vs Actual number of the fellowship awarded in the stream of Sciences/Humanities/ Commerce/Medical/engineering, etc., (3) Number of students completed the fellowship in the last five years, (4) Number of fellows got employment after the completion of the period of the fellowship, (5) Number of students discontinued the fellowship (SRF/JRF) and reason the reason thereof in the last five years, (6)Opinion of students regarding the implementation of the scheme by UGC, (7) Essentiality of documents required to award the fellowship, (8) Simplification Procedure to be adopted for the selection of candidates, (9) Monitoring system for the timely submission of UC, and (10) Optimal utilization of funds under the scheme by the University Grants Commission.

4. The methodology of the study involved a positivist approach. With the analytical frame of reference, the study has considered mixed methods to suitably take the feedback of stakeholders. Both quantitative and qualitative information have been garnered. The evaluation study has relied upon both primary and secondary sources. The secondary information on the budget estimate, revised estimate, and actual estimate have been taken from the indiastat.com. The documents of the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, a handbook on social Welfare Statistics, website review, and demands for grant report of the standing committee on social justice and empowerment Govt. of India have judiciously been used. On the structure, design, and implementation of the Scheme, the UGC representatives were contacted. For data collection, a semi-structured questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and observation tools were used. Secondary information was gathered from the Programme Division, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, the UGC, and the

Canara bank. Based on the secondary information, research tools were designed and after seeking approval of the Ministry, research tools were used to collect information.

5. A total of 1397 beneficiary students were covered from 16 universities of eight States. 282 JRF holders and 64 SRF holders from science, 671 JRF holders and 245 SRF holders from Humanities and Social Sciences, and 90 JRF holders and 40 SRF holders from Engineering & Technology constituted the sample of the evaluation study. In place of 1385 beneficiaries to be covered in the study from 16 universities of 8 states, a total of 1397 beneficiaries were covered from 16 universities of eight states. Out of the 1397 beneficiaries covered, a total of 986 beneficiary students personally interacted whereas, a total of 411 beneficiaries sent their feedback through google forms. Out of the total sampled beneficiaries, we have taken beneficiaries from the base year 2017-18 & 2018-19. This is how a total of 1397 beneficiary fellows have been covered across the sixteen universities from eight states.

6. Presently the scheme covers 29 States/UTs. The states are (1) Andhra Pradesh, (2) Assam, (3) Bihar, (4) Chandigarh, (5) Chhattisgarh, (6) Delhi, (7) Gujarat, (8) Haryana, (9) Himachal Pradesh, (10) Jammu and Kashmir, (11) Jharkhand, (12) Karnataka, (13) Kerala, (14) Madhya Pradesh, (15) Maharashtra, (16) Manipur, (17) Odisha (18) Puducherry, (19) Punjab, (20) Rajasthan, (21) Tamil Nadu, (22) Telangana, (23) Uttar Pradesh, (24) Uttarakhand, (25) West Bengal, (26) Chhattisgarh, (27) Andaman & Nicobar (28) Meghalaya, & (29) Tripura. The aforementioned information is based on the materials shared by the UGC consisting of both June and December 2018 data of CSIR and UGC. As per the information furnished by the UGC, a total of 2311 beneficiaries were covered. Out of the total 2311 covered in 2018-19, 37.04% were female while 62.96%, male.

7. Looking into the financial aspect of the scheme, it is clear that the budget estimate has continually been growing. So is the case with revised estimate during the past five years. There is no difference between the revised estimate and actual expenditure. The information has been taken for the year 2014-19. However, the data of actual expenditure has not been taken for the year 2018-19. In the year 2016-17, the number of women beneficiaries is relatively less. Nevertheless, in the past years and even after the year wherein fewer women were covered, the women's participation looks satisfactory in preceding years.

8. Out of the total fellowship awarded to the sample SC students, 20.2% were from SRF (Science), 4.6% from JRF (Science), 48.1% from SRF (Humanities and Social Sciences), 17.5% JRF (Humanities and Social Sciences), 6.8% SRF (Engineering and Technology) and 2.8% (Engineering and Technology). Out of the total sampled target group, it has been found

that the maximum 16.2% beneficiaries were from Dr. Babasahab Ambedkar Marathwada University, followed by Mysore University (12.7%), Andhra University (8.9%) and so on.

9. Out of the total 1397 sampled beneficiaries, 72.2% belonged to the rural area and 27.8%, from the urban area. Out of 1009 beneficiaries from rural areas, maximum scholars were found studying in Karnataka (18.9%), followed by Telangana (18.7%), Maharashtra (17.6%) and Andhra Pradesh (14.9%), West Bengal (11.1%), Tamil Nadu (8.7%), Delhi (5.35) and Uttar Pradesh (4.8%). Out of the total 388 urban students, most of the scholars were from urban areas. They were mostly found studying in the universities of Karnataka (23.7%), Andhra Pradesh (22.2%), Telangana (14.4%), Maharashtra (12.6%), Uttar Pradesh (10.1%), Tamil Nadu (8%), Delhi (4.9%), and West Bengal (4.15%).

10. 33.6% of beneficiaries' fathers were educated upto secondary level, followed by upper primary level (25.7%), illiterate (21.3%), graduate and above (9.7%), higher secondary (9.4%), and primary level (0.2%). 40.4% of beneficiaries' mothers were illiterate, followed by 25.8% upper primary, 19.8% primary, 7.7% secondary, 3.4% higher secondary, and 3% graduate. The occupational status of fathers of the beneficiaries was categorized as 37.2% daily wagers, 26.6% farmers, 15.2% govt. employee, 13.2% self-employed, and 7.8% casual laborers. The maximum percentage of casual laborers were found in Maharashtra (67.9%), daily wagers in Telangana (22.7%), farmers in Telangana (23.4%), self-employed in Maharashtra (37.3%), and govt. employees in Karnataka (23.6%). 78.3% of beneficiaries' mothers were homemakers, 12.4% self-employed, 3.1% daily wagers, 2.2% casual laborers, 2.1% govt. employees, and 1.9% of farmers. The maximum percentage of casual laborers were found in Maharashtra (54.8%), daily wagers in Andhra Pradesh (36.4%), farmers in Tamil Nadu (43.2%), govt. employees in Maharashtra (20.7%), homemakers in Karnataka (21.5%), and self-employed in Tamil Nadu (31.8%). The collected data on the income reveals that the main workers of the households were fathers of the beneficiaries. However, the income contributions made by mothers were also significant to the tune of 10.8% of the average monthly household income.

11. The maximum average monthly income of beneficiaries' fathers was more visible in Delhi, followed by Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu. The maximum average income of the beneficiaries' mothers was more evident in Uttar Pradesh, followed by Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal, and Telangana. Overall, maximum average monthly household income was in Delhi (Rs. 26636.11), followed by Andhra Pradesh (Rs. 20550.42), Uttar Pradesh (Rs. 18678.16), West Bengal (Rs.18050.78), Karnataka (Rs. 16049.13),

Telangana (Rs. 14466.94), Tamil Nadu (Rs. 11234.45), and Maharashtra (Rs. 10888.55). The socio-economic background of students belonging to Scheduled Castes who received assistance under the scheme during the last five years was low in level. The occupation of most of the parents was either wager or contract labourer or tiller. The monthly income of the households ranged from Rs. 1200 to Rs 98000.

12. Subject wise demand upto the selection year 2017-18, the applicants were called under two broad categories i.e. (i) Humanities and Social Sciences, and (ii) Science, Engineering, and technology. The scholarship was distributed in the ratio of 50:50 between these two streams. For the selection year 2018-19 and onward, the selections are made as per the revised guidelines issued by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. As per the revised guidelines, only the UGC-NET qualified candidates are eligible under the scheme. The candidates are selected from all the subjects for which NTA and CSIR conduct the examination. In the year 2015-16 and 2016-17, each 26.7% beneficiaries were covered considering the total 6742 applicants. If we bifurcate the number of applications received for the year 2015-16 and 2016-17, then the coverage calculated is 59.2%. The actual number of beneficiaries covered are 27.38% in 2017-18, 15.64% in 2018-19 and 7.8% in 2019-20.

13. It is worth mentioning that most of the demands were expressed in Humanities and Social Sciences. The students doing the Sciences availed local schemes for financial assistance. Though the amount of local financial assistance was not sufficient, they could continue studies with the available resource base. In the case of students from Humanities and Social Sciences, they were not found with such options. It is also to be placed on record that students doing sciences belonged to relatively better socio-economic conditions, as compared to students doing Humanities and Social Sciences.

14. Based on the India Stat report, we find that since 2014-15 the total numbers of beneficiaries are 2000 each year with fluctuation in the number of beneficiaries across the States. The beneficiaries completed the fellowship in the last five year has a decreasing trend, for instance, 99.65% in 2015-16, 99.7% in 2016-17, 96.5% in 2017-18. On average, 93.3% of beneficiaries could complete the JRF. The information about the beneficiaries on the component for the year 2019-20 is not available.

15. 15.5% of beneficiaries have got employment as a result of their coverage under the scheme from the sample size. 84.5% of beneficiaries were found continuing with their higher studies or looking out for a job in terms of taking a decisive call to pursue a career in academic research or to join as industry professionals. Out of the total beneficiaries employed, 38.2% beneficiary students got inducted from Telangana, followed by

Maharashtra (33.6%), Andhra Pradesh (12.4%), Uttar Pradesh (6%) and so on. Most of the beneficiaries were found either unemployed or studying or searching for a suitable job. 22.9% of such status was found in Karnataka, 17.7% in Andhra Pradesh, 13.1% in Telangana, 13.1% in Maharashtra, 10.8% in West Bengal, and 9.7% in Tamil Nadu.

16. The beneficiaries of the National Fellowship Scheme for SC discontinued the scheme on the grounds like (1) on getting a job, (2) feeling a sense of deprivation and shifting to normal UGC/CSIR-JRF, (3) Not receiving recommendations on research proposal from Board of Studies, (4) Women left studies after marriage, and (5) Not registered with university for either M.Phil or Ph.D. or integrated M.Phil cum Ph.D. programme. A total of 388 beneficiary students discontinued JRF fellowship whereas, 165- SRF fellowship in the last five years. The JRF discontinued beneficiaries were 70.2% of the total beneficiaries discontinued. On the same indicator, the SRF was found to be 29.8%. The maximum percentage of JRF beneficiaries discontinued the fellowship was in 2018-19 i.e. 86% of the total JRF holders discontinued. In the same vein, the maximum percentage of SRF holders (88%) discontinued in the year 2018-19 of the total SRF holders discontinued in the last five years. Though the number of beneficiary students discontinued the fellowship is not large, the same seats would have been provided to other candidates which could have minimized the incurred opportunity cost in the implementation process.

17. The implementation process of the scheme was appreciated by 79% of the beneficiaries sampled. The beneficiaries from Delhi, West Bengal, and Maharashtra were found satisfied with the scheme implementation. When the beneficiary students were asked to share their responses on the implementation process of the National Fellowship Scheme for SC students by UGC, they provided their suggestions which later classified in five sub-heads, namely (1) Good Scheme, (2) Not uniformly implemented, (3) dominance of higher caste in the implementation, (4) Biases, prejudices and discrimination in the implementation process, and (5) None of these. 79% of the beneficiaries found the implementation process as good, followed by 12.3% left the question unanswered, 3.6% found not uniformly implemented, 2.9% found biases, prejudices and discrimination, and 2.3% expressed that it was controlled by higher caste people. Overall, most of the beneficiary students were satisfied with the implementation process of the scheme. A meagre 21% of the respondents have assigned one reason or the other.

18. The document required to avail the award are (1) caste certificate, (2) post-graduation marks sheet (3) certificate from the head of the department/Institute stating that necessary facilities will be provided, (4) abstract of the research and (5) Physically handicapped

certificate (in the case of Divyangjan). However, UGC/CSIR-NET certificate remains an essential criterion for the selection. These required documents were considered to be normal by most of the beneficiaries as well as the UGC. The documents are uploaded online. The poor connectivity of the internet has been expressed as one of the glitches in certificate uploads. However, income certificate may additionally be integrated to ensure that the scheme reaches out to all the needy and potential beneficiaries, keeping in view the existing 2000 slots.

19. A dashboard to monitor progress, geographic spread, discipline wise students enrolled, sanctions, completion of courses, etc. are provisioned to be put in place by UGC on its portal which is accessed by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment via login credentials. Implementation charges payable to UGC is based on actual expenditure, subject to a ceiling of 1% of the total fellowship disbursed by UGC. An active grievance redressal call centre needs to be set-up to take care of complaints of students availing JRF/SRF. The progress report window of UGC to be accessed in the output report was found lying vacant without the required entries. The UGC has informed that the payments of scholarship/fellowship schemes, for which selections are made by UGC, are done under DBT mode through UGC-Canara Bank Scholarship Portal. The same has also been endorsed by sampled beneficiary students. The payments are being generated and paid monthly, based on uploading of monthly confirmation certificate by the Institutions on UGC-Canara Bank Scholarship Portal where the student/Scholar is pursuing his/her studies. Under the system, it is ensured that the research scholar is doing his/her research work continuously and receiving the scholarship regularly. Also, for seeking fellowship at an enhanced rate, assessment by a committee is ensured. The fellowship is enhanced in cases where the UGC receives a report of the assessment committee.

20. There is a provision for entering the information about the beneficiaries on the dedicated window of UGC. They required entries were not made by the UGC. If the entries are filled-in on the dedicated window of the output report, the accountability-based compliance thereof would have been much more effective. The beneficiaries who were put to discussions expressed that there existed non-cooperation from the UGC on the grievances of scholars. As such, though the digital platform has been created for monitoring scholars' performance, the same has been left unutilized. Overall, the benefits of digital governance need to be integrated with the output reports, the way it has been envisaged in the new scheme guidelines effective from 01.04.2020.

21. The Utilization Certificate (UC) is sent to the Ministry in time, as was expressed by UGC representatives while sharing their feedback on the component. As per the information shared by Universities/Institutions, the coordination between the UGC and institutions needs to be strengthened. With regard to the monitoring of the fellowship on the ground, six alternatives were suggested through close-ended responses. The alternatives were (1) Regular supervision of the supervisor, (2) Regular reporting to a supervisor, (3) Regular attendance, (4) Extension of fellowship only after satisfactory research work is done and certified by supervisor, (5) Research to be completed before the expiry of fellowship, and (6) Fellowship to be refunded if the research work is not completed. A total of 1361 responses were received on the component, despite our consistent request to all the beneficiaries to give full responses. Out of the 1361 responses received on the component, 48.2% of the beneficiaries expressed that regular supervision should be in place for the proper monitoring of the fellowship, followed by 23% for regular reporting to a supervisor, 17.6% for regular attendance, 7.4% for extension of fellowship after satisfactory research work is done and certified by a supervisor, 2.5% research to be completed before the expiry of fellowship, and 1.2% for fellowship to be refunded if research work is not completed. Out of the 656 responses received on 'regular supervision', a maximum of 25.5% from Telangana, 313 responses documented on 'regular reporting to the supervisor', more responses were from West Bengal, 240 responses found on 'regular attendance', a maximum of 28.8% from Karnataka, 101 responses received on 'extension of fellowship after satisfactory research work is done and certified by supervisor', the maximum from Andhra Pradesh(41.6%), 34 responses received on 'research to be completed before the expiry of fellowship', maximum response garnered from Maharashtra(44.1%), and 17 responses received on 'fellowship to be refunded, if research work was not completed', maximum responses were found from Maharashtra (41.2%).

22. The average monthly expenditure incurred in items such as Books, Stationery, Hostel/room rent/rented accommodation, food charges/mess, and other required items were also informed. After calculations, the average monthly expenditure pattern of 1397 beneficiaries has also been worked out. On average, the JRF holder expenditure is Rs. 22928/person which is less than 26.03% of admissible rate i.e. Rs. 31000/month. In the case of SRF, the average monthly calculated expenditure per scholar is Rs. 25294.40 which is 27.7% less than the admissible monthly payment i.e. Rs. 35000/month. In light of the calculations, the amount is not required to be enhanced.

23. To get the overall responses of the beneficiaries on receiving financial assistance due to the scheme was also asked. A total of 1333 beneficiaries responded to the component. It was

found that 82.9% of the beneficiaries agreed that financial assistance proved to be beneficial whereas, 17.1% expressed their disapproval. Some beneficiaries belonged to improved socio-economic conditions. Perhaps, they found the financial assistance not very moving. Out of the total affirmations, maximum beneficiaries were from Maharashtra (20.1%), followed by Karnataka (19.9%), Telangana (17%), West Bengal (11.5%), Andhra Pradesh(10.7%), Tamil Nadu(9%), Delhi(6.15) and Uttar Pradesh (5.8%).

24. Out of the 1333 responses registered on the financial assistance, a total of 1105 beneficiaries responded favorably on receiving the financial assistance by virtue of the scheme. As such, most of the beneficiary students have received financial benefits by virtue of being covered under the scheme.

25. Out of the total 1105 beneficiaries opined on the financial benefits, 1060 could respond categorically on the component. Thus, 96.1% of beneficiaries registered their views on the extent to which they received it. 34% of the beneficiaries have responded “to a great extent”, 39.7% gave their views as “to some extent” and 26.3% as ‘to a limited extent’. 26.3% for ‘to a limited extent’ and 39.7% for ‘to some extent’ inform that the scheme requires more hassle-free monitoring and implementation to address the grievances of beneficiary students on time. The other identified reason is the state governments also run scheme (with lower financial size) which other than the beneficiary students receive.

26. Out of the 1015 responses received on the component, 98.7% beneficiaries believe that other students in the locality have been inspired by the beneficiary students after availing the scheme and they would wish to join fellowship under the scheme. In Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and West Bengal, 100% of beneficiaries have expressed their positive concerns. However, in other states, namely Maharashtra (99.1%), Uttar Pradesh (98%), Andhra Pradesh (96.3%), and Delhi (90.3%) the responsiveness on the indicator is astoundingly high which shows the scheme is worth performing.

Recommendations

The ‘National Fellowship Scheme for Scheduled Caste (SC) Students’ is one of its kind in providing financial assistance to students belonging to SC category to pursue higher studies leading to M.Phil./Ph.D in Sciences, & Humanities and Social Sciences. Keeping in view the overall impression of the scheme and its effectiveness in providing timely financial assistance to Scheduled Caste candidates to pursue higher education in universities and Institutions recognized by the UGC, the study team **recommends for continuation of the Scheme with the existing rate of fellowship (i.e. for JRF-Rs. 31000 and SRF Rs. 35000 plus the same rate mentioned for contingency and escort/ reader allowance, etc. in the revised**

Scheme's guideline effective from 01.04.2020). For the continuation of the scheme, followings need to be considered:

1. Looking at the number of potential beneficiaries in the SC population, the coverage of the scheme in terms of beneficiaries impacted needs to be enhanced. The stipulated number of beneficiaries (2000) that has been provided for in the scheme which is to be achieved under the scheme needs to be increased. That is to say that the **target level needs to be broadened and the goal post needs to be further pushed**. Post assessing the performance indicators of the scheme and assessing the impact of the scheme on the socio-economic conditions of the target group, the **stipulated numbers of target beneficiaries may be considered for further extension**.
2. **Evaluation of the beneficiaries** and ensuring that the fellows produce quality research work, strict monitoring should be in place. Although the scheme provides that the award of the SRF needs to be done after an appropriate evaluation of the performance of the research work undertaken by the candidate in the JRF phase, **the performance evaluation needs to be conducted in the JRF stage too**. This shall ensure that the **awardees of the fellowship to produce quality research output**.
3. In response to enhancing the rates of the SRF and JRF, the expenditure pattern of beneficiaries after/while availing the scheme indicates that the amount given in the form of fellowship is more than per scholar's monthly expenditure. Thus, no further enhancement is recommended. However, there have been **increasing demands to increase the number of fellowships** awarded under the scheme. This may be considered by the Ministry.
4. As the demand for the fellowship is more as identified from the UGC shared information, in such a scenario there is a **demand-supply mismatch**, the **eligible candidates losing out on the scheme needs to be accommodated through the fellowships that have been carried forward from the preceding academic session**. However, in a situation of no such slots available to be carried forward from the previous year to accommodate the increasing number of deserving fellows in the current year, a **contingency fund under the scheme needs to be set up to meet the increasing demands**.
5. There exists immense scope for enhancing the scheme's outreach by upgrading the tools used for publicity. The scheme needs to be publicized in regional languages using local newspaper and local media platforms. The state governments may be requested to provide a place on their portals to publicize the scheme. The universities/institutions recognized by the UGC may be issued strict guidelines to publicize the scheme on their notice board and webpages.

6. As the awardees are being selected from the UGC-NET examination conducted by NTA and CSIR, the process of application is already simplified. The present application system is recommended to be continued. However, the UGC may be directed to make the selection list public on its website ensuring full-transparency of the selection process.
7. The utilization certificate is timely submitted to the Department by the University Grants Commission. However, the online payment made by the nodal bank branch on the recommendations of the UGC should also take the Ministry into the loop. Side by side, the UGC may be directed to take initiative to also provide an audited statement of expenditure to the Department, as and when required.
8. There exists a consideration that incentive for merits is not embedded in the NFS-SC scheme, unlike plain UGC-JRF. Strides to be taken to do away with such understandings. It has been found during the in-depth-discussions with the beneficiaries that despite being covered under NFS-SC, they were interested to join plain UGC-JRF, as it provides API advantage that helps them in the recruitment.
9. The financial assistance given in the form of fellowship should be identified with components on which the amount is to be spent by the awardees. This would judiciously let the awardees spend the fellowship amount more on educational needs.
10. A dedicated 'Call Centre'/Grievance redressal mechanism needs to be activated by the UGC under the guidance of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. To address the grievances effectively, for augmentation of grievance redressal, the UGC may like to delegate it through regional branches. The grievances expressed by beneficiary students should be addressed by the UGC and a copy of the Action Taken Report (ATR) to be forwarded to the Ministry for perusal.
11. The 'outcome report' (https://www.ugc.ac.in/nfsc/Progress_report_outcome.aspx) is placed on the website of UGC under National Fellowship Scheme for Scheduled Caste students. The space provided for the entry is almost blank. This needs to be filled in. The information entered would give an idea about the engagement of scholars with research work. The digital outcome report on the UGC website should periodically be accessed by the Ministry to suggest the UGC to take corrective measures if required.
12. Keeping in view the availability of 2000 slots for a year, the demand from Humanities and Social Sciences are more. As such, the Ministry may like to proportionately divide the slots in the place of 50:50 allocations.
13. The awardees should be brought to an undertaking that if they did not send compliance to the required output report on the UGC window, the financial assistance to be given may

be discontinued. The awardees should also be brought to an undertaking that if they did not complete the course, they may be asked to refund the entire financial assistance given to them. However, the Ministry may set-up a separate desk to monitor the scheme implementation by the UGC to keep track of awardees' research performance. This would cater to (1) completion of the degrees, (2) engage serious candidates to research work through the fellowship window, and (3) succeed in placement by keeping up a scholastic knowledge base.