

NATIONAL FELLOWSHIP FOR OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES (OBC) STUDENTS

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सत्यमेव जयते

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The National Fellowship Scheme for OBC aims at providing financial assistance to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) Students in obtaining quality higher education leading to degrees such as M.Phil and Ph.D in universities, research institutions and scientific institutions.
- The scheme aims to target and thereby benefit the unemployed OBC candidates who have passed the Post Graduate Examination in the concerned subject and who are to pursue full-time research. The eligibility criteria includes the followings: i) The candidate should belong to the OBC category and should have passed the post-graduate examination, ii) To be eligible for the award, the candidate needs to be registered for an MPhil/PhD program. There are 1000 slots for the award of fellowship every year for all the subjects for consideration of application received through an online submission form research scholar belonging to OBC category. There is a provision of 4% reservation for slots for consideration of award of fellowship to research scholars for Persons with Disability (PwD) who belongs to OBC category.
- The intake of JRF has been enhanced from 300 to 1000 per year from April 2018 onwards, in order to undertake advanced studies and research leading to MPhil/PhD degrees, who have qualified in NET-JRF of UGC for Humanities/Social Sciences or UGC-council of Scientific and Industrial Research (UGC-CSIR) NET-JRF joint test for Science stream including Engineering and Technology. The scheme also covers all universities/institutions recognized by the UGC and are implemented by the UGC itself on the pattern of the scheme of UGC fellowships. The 1000 slots are over and above the number of OBC students selected under the normal reservation policy of the government for the UGC fellowship. The tenure of the fellowship is for five years and it will be effective from 1st April of the date of joining under the fellowship.
- The fellowship provided under the scheme is granted until the date of submission of PhD or five years of tenure whichever is earlier. The scheme provides that no such extension is permissible beyond the stipulated period of five years wherein the fellow ceases to be a UGC research fellow immediately after the expiry of the due date. Initially, the tenure of the fellowship is for two years under the scheme. A committee

of three members comprising of the Head of the Department, supervisor and one expert to be constituted by the concerned Department of the University/Institution/College. The up-gradation of the fellowship from JRF to SRF will have to be made at the level of the university/Institution/College itself based on the recommendation of the three members committee report. The scheme also states that any such up-gradation of the fellowship in respect of the awardee needs to be identified agency for further action.

- The scheme covers all universities/institutions recognized by the UGC in 26 States/UTs for the year 2017-18. The actual expenditure in 2017-18 was ₹ 359097582 which included ₹ 159097582 from the previous year i.e. 2016-17. The distribution of awardees by state, gender and programme (as tabulated in table 2.3) provides some interesting findings. It shows a shortage of 31.33% in the allotment/coverage. Furthermore, a total of 93 women and 113 men were awarded the fellowship. As such, 45.1% of the slots were given to beneficiary women whereas, 54.9% awarded to men. The data reveals that out of the total slots awarded, 29.1% of the slots awarded to Engineering and Technology Stream, 47.1% to Humanities and Social Sciences and 23.8% to Sciences. The physical achievement of the scheme for the year 2017-18 contains 206 awardees, as compared to the year 2016-17 with 151 awardees. It shows a 26.7% increase in one year i.e. from 2016-17 to 2017-18.
- The approach adopted for the evaluation of the scheme understudy is goal, process and outcome-based. The goal-based approach measures if the objectives of the scheme are duly met. The process-based approach studies the strengths and weaknesses of the scheme and finally, the outcome-based approach evaluates if the outcomes align with the pre-specified objectives of the scheme. In this context, the secondary information on funds released and allocated have been collected from the reports of the Department of Social Justice and empowerment, a handbook on social Welfare Statistics, website review, UGC website and demands for grant report of the standing committee on Social Justice and Empowerment Govt. of India.
- Questionnaires were administered to student beneficiaries and UGC staff related to the fellowship. Observation-based detailed discussion was held with the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment. Considering OBC (MPhil/PhD with NET/JRF) students as key beneficiaries in availing the benefits of the Scheme, they were interacted

telephonically to get the required information for the study. Considering the adverse situation within which the study was to be conducted, the approved questionnaires were integrated with Google forms. The questionnaire was administered to get the responses of both beneficiaries and university/institution representatives. The approach was applied to find out problems, challenges and constraints in the implementation of the Scheme. The attempt was also laid down to assess the criteria adopted for identification of the OBC (MPhil/PhD with NET/JRF) student's beneficiaries and method applied for motivating them for financial assistance. Nevertheless, using primary and secondary sources, shortcomings in the design of the Scheme has also been identified.

- As far as the sample size of the evaluation study is concerned, a total of 62 beneficiaries have been covered who have actually availed the scheme as against 106 beneficiaries mentioned in the LoA. The data shared by UGC was detected with duplicate names. This has been found particularly in the case of Uttar Pradesh. Then the duplicate names were eliminated considering the responses received from the beneficiaries. The five states include Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.
- The sample under study indicates that around 42% of the beneficiaries belong to the state of Uttar Pradesh followed by Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Haryana with 21%, 16%, 15% and 6% of the sample population, respectively. The sample under study also provides crucial insights into the popular streams that the beneficiaries have enrolled themselves in under the scheme. It depicts that around 47.6% of the beneficiaries in the sample have opted for Humanities and Social Science stream followed by Engineering and Technology and Science stream constituting for 41.7% and 10.7% of the sample respectively.
- Moreover, around 18.4% of the sample beneficiaries have benefitted from the scheme, having enrolled in the Humanities and Social sciences stream at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University of Social Sciences. Humanities and Social sciences stream remain a popular area of interest among the sample beneficiaries in the states of Bihar (50%), Rajasthan (50%) and Uttar Pradesh (47%). However, in the states of Haryana and Madhya Pradesh, majority of the beneficiaries have enrolled themselves in their chosen stream of Engineering and Technology.

- The data provided by the bank was of 103 beneficiaries of which some of the beneficiaries were uncovered. Later, the bank representative informed that the list shared by them was mixed of beneficiaries of the other schemes. The UGC provided a list of 206 beneficiaries of which for the selected states, the total number of beneficiaries were identified as 61. We compared both the sheets and talked to the beneficiaries. Finally, a total of 62 beneficiaries were found availing/availed the scheme. The maximum female representation is from Rajasthan (32.1%), followed by Uttar Pradesh (28.65%), Madhya Pradesh (25%), Bihar (10.7%) and Haryana (3.6) among the sampled states. Out of the total beneficiaries drawn, the maximum allocation is vivid in the state of Uttar Pradesh (33.9%), followed by Rajasthan (22.6%), Madhya Pradesh (21%), Bihar (14.5%) and Haryana (8.1%).
- A before and after approach is adopted in terms of changes in the socio-economic conditions of the target population courtesy the scheme. The Questionnaire which contains process-related and multiple issues provide the basis of a robust framework to critically examine the sustainability of the scheme under study. The approach to the study is the balanced blend of primary and secondary information shared by the beneficiaries. Importantly, the views of beneficiaries have also been taken as to what extent the scheme has influenced them. The evaluation study has considered outcome/output indicators to assess the extent which the scheme has brought about changes in the socio-economic conditions of the beneficiaries.
- The questionnaire was designed for the beneficiaries and UGC staff. The questionnaire included their basic profile, the profile of beneficiaries, the socio-economic conditions of the beneficiaries before the scheme, and the situation changed after the beneficiary was covered. In-depth interview was conducted with the UGC officials who are responsible for designing and coordinating the fellowship programme, which helped in providing comprehensive details regarding the objective, structure, implementation and the existing challenges of the scheme. In-depth discussions were also done with university representatives, telephonically. Key observations were made during having telephonic discussions with the beneficiaries and the stakeholders such as fellowship beneficiaries, the UGC and the heads of the institutes. The observations drawn from the responses provided deep insights into the implementation and the benefits experienced by the demand side stakeholders namely the OBC students. The in-depth interview

enhanced the qualitative findings. In aligning with the objectives of the scheme, the set of key performance indicators have been designed, *the findings of which has been outlined below.*

1. In terms of gauging the impact of the scheme on the success rate of degree completion, the data collected informs that there was no entry for the Ph.D course before the scheme. After the implementation of the Scheme, the number of advance qualifications has considerably gone up. It has significantly impacted the qualifications of the beneficiaries. Based on both secondary and primary information collated, it has been found that out of 62 beneficiaries reviewed in the five States, 74.1% beneficiaries have either completed their Ph.D degree or about to complete Ph.D. Most of the Master and M.Tech/M.Phil holders have shifted to the Ph.D courses.

2. So far as the changes in the qualification of the beneficiaries are concerned, it has been found that 17.02% of beneficiaries are still with their Master degree. A total of 53.3% of beneficiaries have shifted to M.Phil degree as a result of inclusion under the scheme. The stream of Engineering & Technology has outperformed the other streams. Findings suggest that the students with Engineering and technology received 100% educational attainment, as compared to other streams. There has been a change in 95.5% of master degree holders, 35.71% in M.Phil degree holders and 100% in the Ph.D degree holders. Overall, it shows 76.6% changes in the educational attainments of the beneficiary scholars.

3. In studying the impact of the scheme about the participation of the university under UGC, a total of 32 universities/institutions recognized by UGC have participated in the scheme, considering the beneficiary students from the five sampled states. Based on participation of beneficiary OBC students, the participation of universities has been classified in five slabs, namely (1) 8.1%, (2) 6.5%, (3) 4.8%, (4) 3.2% and (5) 1.6%. The first slab is with 5 student beneficiaries, the second slab with 2 scholars, the third slab with 2 fellows, the fourth slab with 4 recipients and the fifth slab with one beneficiary.

4. Overall, four universities/institutions have participated with 81.% of the beneficiaries, two each for 6.5% and 4.8% of the beneficiaries, four for 3.2% of the beneficiaries and remaining with 1.6% of the beneficiaries. Out of the total beneficiaries registered in the universities Institutions, Uttar Pradesh has outperformed (33.9%) the other sampled states viz. Rajasthan (22.6%), Madhya Pradesh (21%), Bihar (14.5%) and Haryana (8.1%).

5. After availing the financial assistance, the expenditure pattern of the beneficiary student has changed. The JRF holders' expenditure has changed at the rate of 35.2 percentage point whereas, SRF holders' 13.8% percentage point. Overall, the change in the expenditure pattern has been recognized to the tune of 23.7%. Based on the feedback of 58 beneficiary students, the monthly expenditure has been calculated. The monthly expenditure pattern calculated is inclusive of expenditure on books, hostel fee, mess charges, stationery, and other required expenditure. Average monthly expenditure of Rs. 19725 has been calculated for a JRF holder. The average expenditure of Rs. 21408.3 has been calculated for a SRF holder. As such, the unutilized amount in the case of JRF is Rs. 11275 (36.3%) and for SRF Rs. 13591.7 (38.8%).

6. The educational details of parents of OBC students were obtained from beneficiary students through google forms. It has been found that no parent was found having a Ph.D degree or M.Phil degree. Most of the beneficiaries were first-generation researchers. Out of the total beneficiaries' fathers educational information received, 58.6% of the fathers were having graduation and professional degrees, followed by XII (17.2%), X (6.9%) & diploma (6.9%), and 3.4% each for V, VIII and Master degrees. The beneficiaries surveyed informed that 22.4% of mothers were illiterate. Out of the total information garnered, 22.4% mothers were educated upto 12th class, 20.7% upto 10th level, 17.2% upto 8th class, 10.3% educated up to 5th standard and 6.9% upto graduation.

7. Based on average monthly expenditure and admissible financial assistance under the Scheme informs about the surplus amount unspent with the beneficiary students. Considering the calculation, the amount being paid to the beneficiaries are enough and presently requires no enhancement. On the feedback received from the beneficiary students, a total of nine have said that the amount needed to be increased. For scaling up of the monthly financial assistance under the scheme has been expressed by 5.22% of the total beneficiaries responded. Remaining 94.8% of the beneficiaries are satisfied with monthly financial assistance.

8. Most of the beneficiaries (31%) shared that after completion of their studies, they found employability, followed by improvement in the research capacity (22.4%), the number of slots to be increased (19%), amount to be increased (15.5%), easy to access fellowship (8.6%) and timely release of money (3.4%).

9. Overall impression of the course was assessed using Likert scale of 1-5 wherein qualitative experience was associated with the NFS-OBC. On the scale, 2.5 score is generally

considered to be good. The responses of the beneficiaries have been taken by both stream and course. The average score given on stream and course have been recorded as 3.9. The value of 3.9 is better score because it is above the average of the rating scale (2.5). The score of 3.9 is 35.9% better than the average score on the rating scale. The highest rating (4.3) has been given by the beneficiaries of Engineering and Technology, followed by Science (4.2) and Humanities and Social Sciences (3.6).

10. On assessing the change in the expenditure pattern of the beneficiaries, the Engineering & Technology beneficiaries have started spending additional 38.53%, Humanities and Social Sciences beneficiaries have identified with additional 15.91% expenditure, and scholars of science have spent 26.31% additionally due to coverage under the Scheme. Findings also illustrate the fact that the expenditure on books, stationery, hostel and mess have gone up on average across the various streams.

11. Employability is a key performance outcome of the scheme under study as the scheme envisages equipping scholars to effectively take advantage of the growing opportunities at the national and international level in the context of the new economic order. 37.9% of the beneficiaries have got employment both in private and govt. sectors. However, 62.1% of beneficiaries are yet to be employed. A break-down of the employability status in light of the stream opted by the beneficiaries suggests that of the total 12 beneficiaries from Engineering and Technology, 66.7% were found engaged in private jobs, none in Govt. jobs and 33.3% were yet to be employed. Moreover, of the total 27 beneficiaries responded from Humanities and Social Sciences, 22.2% had private jobs, none in the govt. jobs and 77.8% remain unemployed. Out of the total 19 beneficiaries responded from Science stream, 36.2% were privately employed, 5.3% employed in govt. and 57.9% unemployed.

12. Changes in average score before and after the scheme weren't not found very effective. Having covered under the scheme, a 7.1% gain in the score of beneficiaries from Humanities and Social sciences and 4.8% drop in the average score of beneficiaries from the Engineering and technology & Science stream were found. Hence, it can be concluded that the composition of the average score of beneficiaries, before and after the scheme and across the streams have altered merely in favour of the Humanities and Social Sciences stream and has seen a decline in the Engineering and technology and the science stream.

13. Perceived satisfaction of the beneficiaries has also been documented with regard to before and after the scheme. It has been found that before the scheme 55 beneficiaries perceived satisfaction with their academic score whereas, after the scheme, their number became 47. Around 22% of the respondent beneficiaries were satisfied with their grades while pursuing Engineering and technology before participating in the scheme under study which saw no change even after availing the scheme. This trend was similar across the other streams of study. This suggests that the score improvement or changes in the grades of beneficiaries can't be attributed to the impact of the scheme.

14. A total of 53.3% of beneficiaries have expressed that the fellowship support has reduced the financial burden of their parents. However, the rest 46.7% of parents did not find any relief by availing the fellowship by their wards. In the Engineering and Technology stream, around 23% claimed to have not been dependent on their parent's financial support before the scheme which changed to 19% after the scheme. Similarly, for the humanities and social sciences stream, around 50% of the enrolled beneficiary didn't seek financial support from their parents before the scheme the response of which changed to 47% after the scheme. As far as the Science stream was concerned, there was an increase in the proportion of enrolled students not seeking financial support from the students from 27% before the scheme to 34% after the scheme.

15. 89.7% of beneficiaries have found the scheme beneficial to them. A meagre 8.6% of the beneficiaries have found the scheme being non-beneficial to them. 100% from Science, 91.7% from Engineering and Technology and 89.7% from Humanities and Social sciences beneficiary students have reported the scheme effective and beneficial.

16. In terms of existing challenges and key bottlenecks that continue to prevail, some of them include a) The data-set of beneficiaries confronts with several issues like the update in domicile state, proper upkeep of data at the level of banks and the UGC, b) Some of the beneficiaries have been found availing the scheme for three months (one quarter) and shifting to some other Scheme or leaving. This creates a major roadblock in the smooth flow and functioning of the Scheme, c) The publicity of the 'National Fellowship Scheme for OBC Students' was not necessarily publicized on the University/Institute websites/notice boards, d) The dedicated page on UGC website for 'National Fellowship Scheme for OBC Students' has a tab for 'outcome report'. The outcome report has been classified into three parts, namely papers published (National/International), conference attended (National/International) and

seminar attended (National/International). All the cells were found empty. It shows the active coordination deficit on the part of UGC with university/Institution participated as well as the beneficiaries covered, e) The scheme is not implemented annually by the UGC as shared by some of the beneficiaries from Aligarh Muslim University, who believed that the applications for the scheme were solicited alternate years, and f) The payment of the first instalment was released quarterly, and in some cases on a half-yearly basis. The periodicity in payment was flagged-on as one of the major bottlenecks. The scholars required money to be disbursed monthly to meet their emergent educational needs.

17. Input use efficiency, also known as the productivity ratio indicates that the scheme has had positive results in terms of efficient use. This is to say that for every 1 crore spent, around 32 beneficiaries benefitted in FY15 followed by 33 beneficiaries benefitting in FY16. A massive jump was noticed during FY17 and FY18 wherein beneficiaries impacted almost doubled for every 1 crore spent (from 33 individuals to 60 individuals). As of FY19, approximately 73 beneficiaries were impacted on average for every 1 crore worth of fund released.

18. Key externalities in the light of the scheme have also been identified. These include the following: a) The fellowship program should aim at building capacity and leadership skills over and above providing financial support which would lead candidates/awardees under the scheme to imbibe innovative skills to build upon their potential to create long term change, b) The National fellowship program for OBC needs to broaden its objective by not only providing financial support but also place continued and equal focus on guidance, mentoring, capacity building as required, c) Since the fellowship program under study involves people from the marginalized background, there is a need to have a re-entry plan and sustained support in place for the post-fellowship tenure to manage the expectations of the individuals and their organizations, d) The fellowship program should not be too rigid as that constraints participation. The program should continuously evolve and promote learning and adapting to changes as necessary and e) there should be a transparent and appropriate evaluation of the performance of the individuals in carrying out the research work. Although independent interests among the individuals should be promoted, a sense of contribution to issues that matters to the society needs to be inculcated among the fellow.

19. In terms of bettering and improving the program, key recommendations have also been brought out. Some of them include a) Institutional variation needs to be taken into

consideration while providing for the fellowship funding. That is to say that the financial capacity of institutes providing fellowship to the targeted beneficiaries needs to be taken into account while disbursing the fellowship funds, b) Disciplinary differences are also a crucial factor which largely influences the organization of research, teaching requirements and also the financial support in terms of fellowship. Social sciences research is distinct from the engineering streams and specific guidelines should be designed under the fellowship which takes into account the disciplinary differences, c) Amount and type of financial support are important for the OBC candidates not only while pursuing their MPhil/PhD program but also during their graduate program. The viability of extending financial support to candidates willing to pursue research during their graduate programs should also be considered, d) Nature of research is also a key influencing factor on the which the scheme has got a direct bearing on the funding and research support, the degree to which duration of research projects and the requirement of laboratory facilities and equipment. The fellowship support should also aim at benefitting the laboratory and faculty member rather than just the individual beneficiary, e) A key measure of research productivity is the number of publications and presentations by the fellows. This places the responsibility on the UGC to make sure that the research platforms are increased and access to research platforms are made available and finally, f) Career paths and job market awareness need to be effectively made available to the targeted beneficiaries. This shall ensure that the fellowship program entails benefits to the beneficiaries.