

A note on the Academic and Administrative structure of  
the National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bangalore

The National Centre for Biological Science was constituted in 1991. It is, at present managed through a Project Management Committee (PMC), Chaired by Director, TIFR, and a Steering Committee (STC), Chaired by Director, NCBS. PMC controls the budget of NCBS, civil works and administrative and technical appointments (Office Order D-15, 1992) and the Steering Committee deals with day to day management, research projects and academic appointments upto Fellow (C) (Office Order D-16, 1992). Appointments and promotions of academic staff above the level of Fellow are handled by Director, TIFR in consultation with Director NCBS and advisory committees appointed from time to time. The powers of Director, NCBS are governed by delegation of order Del-1-1992.

At its meeting held on November 15, 1995, the Council approved the creation of a separate Faculty for NCBS. The Faculty of NCBS is to function according to rules and bye-laws of TIFR. The National Centre for Biological Sciences has to be "grown around a core of talented scientists specially chosen to lead the Centre in its formative period and to develop it into an autonomous institution" (NCBS Proposal page 3). The bye-laws of TIFR were written when its work was restricted to Physics and Mathematics and organised in two schools. With the creation of a major Centre covering biology, it is necessary to examine these rules and consider suitable changes where necessary.

In addition to bye-laws and rules there are a variety of administrative practices, in force at TIFR. These may or may not be appropriate for NCBS. An essential requirement for growing NCBS as an autonomous Centre is to evolve academic and administrative norms and procedures that best suit its aims. The umbrella provided by TIFR should help to make such innovations possible.

In what follows I deal with the main points that have to be considered. It is important that the key features of the desired organization are implemented at an early stage in the development of NCBS. This will allow us to test the innovations and make suitable improvements in the light of experience.



## 1. Constitution of Faculty :

Faculty in TIFR consists of Associate Professors and Full Professors. It is invested with certain management functions including appointments and promotions. As it has grown in size, the entire Faculty is unable to function as an effective managing body. It must perforce be replaced by smaller and more compact bodies. On the other hand it is both necessary and desirable that all academic staff members who hold continuing appointments, specially leaders of research groups, participate fully in discussions on general academic policies. Faculties in Research Institutes and Universities all over the world include Assistant Professors and Lecturers but do not exercise managerial functions which are left to smaller bodies.

I would like to suggest that the Faculty of NCBS should consist of all group leaders. At present there are ten group leaders in NCBS including three Professors and seven Readers. The present laws permit inclusion of Readers in the Faculty as special cases. It would be better to change the rules to permit NCBS to constitute its Faculty differently. Such a non-exclusive Faculty will be a policy making body but will not be directly involved in management.

## 2. Management Board :

A management Board for NCBS has to be set up. The present project Management Board (PMC) deals with the budget and administrative matters including the creation of administrative and technical staff. It does not deal with scientific and academic matters specially academic appointments and promotions which are handled by Director, TIFR in consultation with Director, NCBS, who has been delegated with powers to make appointments upto the level of Fellow (C). The present arrangement is working smoothly so far as project management is concerned. But NCBS now, has an extensive research programme and there is need of a higher body to deal with policy matters such as the choice of research areas and the direction of research and training. It should also oversee senior appointments and promotions. The Management Board of NCBS should therefore include a sufficient number of eminent biologists who can provide strong guidance to the Centre.



### 3. Faculty Board :

A small committee of five to seven (to be called Faculty Board) needs to be constituted. The Board will be chaired by Director, NCBS. It will replace the present Steering Committee and will deal with administration of research and education at NCBS. Its powers will be similar to that of Steering Committee.

### 4. Officers of the Faculty :

Director, NCBS should be empowered to nominate other officers of the NCBS Faculty. Two principal officers of the Faculty will be dean for Research and Dean for education and training. They will replace the present Officer Incharge Administration and the Officer Incharge, Academic affairs.

### 5. Standing Committee for academic appointments and promotions :

At present recommendations for appointments and promotions are examined by ad hoc committees appointed by Director, TIFR. It is advisable to have a Standing Committee which will examine all cases for new appointments and promotions for continuing academic positions (i.e. Readers and above) after these have been taken through specialist review committees and the Faculty Board. This Committee should be sufficiently powerful and should contain external members with knowledge of different areas of biology. Such a committee is necessary to maintain uniformity and continuity of standards. During the past four years the expert committees dealing with appointments have maintained continuity. This practice needs to be formally institutionalised.

### 6. Academic advisory council :

It is very important for NCBS to have a strong Scientific Advisory Council consisting of eminent scientists. It is necessary to ensure that the advisory council does not remain a mere nominal body.

It should be entrusted with a substantive role in guiding and monitoring the activity of NCBS. Some members of the advisory council could, for instance, be also members of the Management Board or the Committee on Appointments.



7. International Advisors :

NCBS should have a formally constituted body of International Advisors. Even if the International Advisory Committee does not meet regularly, its members can visit the Centre from time to time and help in reviewing its work on an ongoing basis. This Committee can help the Centre, establish its international stature and gain for it financial and other support.

8. Administration :

At present NCBS has a small administration dealing with a) day to day general administration; b) accounts; c) purchase; and d) an architecture and engineering group dealing with construction work. When NCBS moves to its own campus, it will need an administrative staff of 20 to 30 persons. It is of utmost importance that we recruit well-qualified and motivated administrative staff at all levels. This cannot be done all of a sudden. A capable administration has to be built gradually. To attract good administrators we should be able to offer attractive conditions of service. We should also be able to pursue a policy of rewarding hard work and ability and discourage mediocrity. Currently the promotion of NCBS staff is handled at TIFR by Committee on which NCBS is not represented. This is not a satisfactory situation and needs to be remedied.

9. Conclusion :

The purpose of this note is to stress the importance of creating a suitable academic and administrative structure for NCBS as early as possible, even before it begins to function as an autonomous centre. NCBS is at a sensitive stage in its development and needs careful planning and direction. Policies and organizational methods adopted now will greatly affect the future of NCBS. I request that the issues raised in this note may be discussed in the TIFR Council and I may be given an opportunity to present my views.

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