



## National education policy, 2020: Introducing the professor of practice

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### Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes integrating vocational education with general education to enhance industry-academia collaborations in higher education institutions. Considering this, the University Grants Commission has taken a new initiative to integrate industry and professional expertise into higher educational institutions through a new category of positions called “Professor of Practice”. Hence, this paper aims to discuss the role of professors of practice, who they are, how they are appointed, the qualifications required for a professor of practice in higher education, how they function in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), criticisms, advantages, potential challenges in integrating Professors of Practice into HEIs, and suggestions.

**Keywords:** NEP 2020, Professor of Practice, higher education

### Introduction

Education is the foundation of any nation's development, and a robust higher education system plays a significant role in determining the path that its young generation will pursue (Kumar, 2023) <sup>[9]</sup>. Higher education is one of the crucial stages where students prepare for the demands of the world workforce. Likewise, (Jesudasan, 2022) <sup>[7]</sup> expressed that the National Education Policy (NEP) aims to revolutionize higher education by emphasizing skill-based learning to align with the demands of the industry and the economy. To bring expertise from the world of business and other subjects such as arts, crafts, and other professional domains, the UGC recently drafted guidelines to employ Professors of Practice at universities and colleges (HEIs). According to M. Jagadesh Kumar, chairperson of the UGC, as cited in (Iftikhar, 2023) <sup>[5]</sup>, the concept of professors of practice is gaining popularity nationwide. Appointing PoP is becoming common in several colleges and universities. Experts from a variety of industries would be appropriate at this time to mentor and coach our students at HEIs. PoP can also foster excellent collaborations between industry and academia. In contrast, Yadav (2022) <sup>[13]</sup> opined that it may not be a good idea to expect engaging PoP to fit into the present academic system, as it will affect not only the students but also the PoP themselves. Their knowledge should be used to teach students about the various processes carried out in the industry. This involves involving students in real-world

tasks outside of the classroom and engaging them in live projects. Nonetheless, it will also increase job opportunities and encourage students to choose appropriate job possibilities (Jesudasan, paragraph 2020) <sup>[7]</sup>. In the same way, higher education is essential for preparing students for both the national and global job markets. Therefore, to incorporate industry courses into higher education institutions, the NEP 2020 encourages aligning vocational education with general education. Yet, a large number of higher education institutions, particularly those in rural areas, still lack personnel, financial, and infrastructural facilities. Professors of Practice in higher education are individuals who bring real-world experience and expertise into academia. They are typically appointed based on their significant professional accomplishments and practical knowledge in a specific field. While the specific requirements may vary, candidates usually need advanced degrees related to the field they are teaching. Professors of Practice play a crucial role in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by bridging the gap between theory and practice, providing students with valuable insights and skills that are directly applicable to their future careers. Therefore, this article will analyse the advantages of employing PoP in HEIs. The concept is new, so there is a need to analyse challenges while implementing policy on PoP and put forward opportunities, and suggestions to address the challenges.

**Professor of practice**

Professors of practice are professionals with experience in the business world. They impart knowledge through skill-based tasks outside of the classroom. Likewise, Kumar expressed in paragraph 8 that these professionals, often leaders in their respective fields, have a wealth of practical experience beyond the traditional theoretical knowledge typically found in academic circles. The role of the Professor of Practice in Point No. 3 of the UGC guidelines describes various responsibilities assigned to the PoP:

1. Participate in designing the curriculum and courses.
2. Present lectures following institutional norms and introduce new courses.
3. To support students in their innovative and business aspirations and provide the necessary guidance for these ambitions.
4. To emphasise enhancing industry-academia partnerships. Organize workshops, seminars, special lectures, and educational events in collaboration with the institution's permanent faculty members.
5. Engage cooperatively in a joint research project or be guided by a regular faculty member.

To initiate this initiative, the professor of practice is essential for one academic term. This strategy enables individuals with local expertise to engage in, distribute, and exhibit their skills, even for a specific honorarium. Thus, there would be less burden in recruiting experts from various industries nationwide. Further, the procedure for selecting a Professor of Practice in the UGC Guideline Point No. 6 focuses on the selection procedure of PoP: a) The Vice-Chancellors/Directors may request nominations from renowned professionals for Professor of Practice positions. b) The experts who agree to serve may also submit a nomination, a comprehensive curriculum vitae and a summary of how they would benefit the HEI, to the Vice-Chancellor or Director. c) A selection committee composed of one distinguished external member and two senior professors from the HEI shall review these nominations. Based on the committee's recommendations, the Academic Council, Executive Council, or other HEI statutory bodies will decide on the involvement. It is imperative to ensure transparency in the selection of PoP. The selection committee should consist of experts from industries as well as local professionals.

**Appointment procedure**

According to the University Grants Commission guidelines, 2023, the eligibility criteria to appoint a Professor of Practice are individuals who have made remarkable contributions in various fields such as engineering, science, technology, entrepreneurship, commerce, social sciences, media, literature, fine arts, civil services, armed forces, legal profession, community development, Panchayati raj, rural development, watershed development, water harvesting, organic farming, small green energy systems, municipal planning, community participation, gender budgeting/planning, inclusive development of tribals, and public administration, among others. Furthermore, individuals who have demonstrated expertise in their particular profession or role with a minimum of 15 years of service/experience, ideally at a senior level, will be eligible

for the title of Professor of Practice. In addition, Kumar (2024) <sup>[8]</sup> states that the guidelines also mention that industry experts would be exempt from the requirement of publishing a research paper, which is typically essential for faculty recruitment at such institutions. The only difference was that most experts joined academia after retiring, wanting to share their experiences with young students.

**Types of Engagement for PoP are in UGC Guideline**

**Point No.5:** A. Professor of Practice funded by Industries- Nowadays, the job market seeks graduates who possess specific skill sets. However, graduates from higher education programs tend to lack the required skills. As a result, many industries now hire graduates and provide thorough training before employing them. Higher education institutions and the industry will benefit from having industry experts. To support the duties of the Professor of Practice, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) may collaborate with industries by engaging professionals and industry experts in this field, as outlined in UGC Guideline paragraph 1. Therefore, to ensure the success of this initiative, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and industries must establish specific guidelines and protocols to facilitate the seamless operation of the institutions. B. Professor of Practice funded by HEIs from their resources - National Education Policy 2020 guidelines require a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to modifying graduate curriculum. HEIs may evaluate the necessary gaps in various professions and involve professionals with leadership roles in these fields. In this regard, HEIs offer compensation to the Professor of Practice from their funds, as outlined below: Payment: Full-time/part-time participation: Total sum, determined by mutual agreement between the expert and the institution, as highlighted in the UGC guideline paragraph.2. Therefore, offering high-quality skill-based activities might be more challenging, as HEIs often struggle to uphold standards and manage how they pay incentives with their funds. C. Professor of Practice on an honorary basis- Experts who meet the criteria required to become Professors of Practice are encouraged to offer their services as honorary professors and share their knowledge with students. These professionals may be appointed as Honorary Professors of Practice, and students might benefit from their expertise. The amount of honorarium to be given to the Professor of Practice in this field may be decided by the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) utilizing their funds as stated in UGC Guideline paragraph 3.

**Criticisms**

If the institution were to involve the (POP) based on their 15 years of experience in the relevant field, the appointment process would inevitably be extended. We suggest appointing local professionals skilled in the specific area to lead the initiative. In addition, as cited in Hemant (2022), JN Baliya from the Central University of Jammu suggests that "The norm of hiring experts as 'adjunct faculty' has been in practice for some time now." Selecting suitable working professionals to serve as "Professors of Practice" may require more time than anticipated. On the other hand, the main issue with the Professor of Practice concept is that it could be misused by altering the eligibility requirements.

Any reputable institution is unlikely to require a minimum of 15 years of senior-level experience in a professional subject matter. No one prohibits institutions from implementing additional filters for such recruitments, as explained by Sahadevan (2022, paragraph. 4) <sup>[12]</sup>. Industries may not be able to spare one person for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for the entire academic term with a full salary. Likewise, based on our experiences at higher education institutions, it is evident that some HEIs operate with limited funds and lack essential facilities such as scientific labs, libraries, playgrounds, personnel, and more.

### Advantages of appointing PoP

1. Learners would benefit from acquiring both industry-specific and academic skills. The PoP initiative is transforming the methods by which education is delivered to students, providing them with the expertise they need to succeed in today's highly competitive job market (Anand, paragraph.4). Furthermore, higher education institutions can equip graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge demanded by the industry by engaging industry experts in their teaching programs. This would enhance graduates' employability and promote economic growth.
2. The teaching-learning process would be more interesting and interactive since the teaching is not only theoretical but also conducted outside the classroom in practical situations. Industry experts bring real-world practices and experiences into the classroom, providing students with practical skills and mastery.
3. Learners would benefit from practical-based activities instead of conventional teaching methods. In a way, they would become proficient in the chosen discipline and could then apply that knowledge in real-life situations.
4. This would help the learners to interact with diverse backgrounds of people of different perspectives, thereby allowing them to learn in various fields.
5. According to Ishaq (2023) <sup>[6]</sup>, students can learn a great deal from the lifetime experiences of these professors. They will gain insights into real-life situations, problems, and challenges faced by students as well as the strategies and methods used to address them. Classroom theories and research should be implemented in practice so that students can better meet the contemporary demands of the industry and the dynamic job markets worldwide.
6. According to Shandilya (2023) <sup>[2]</sup>, this will enhance faculty resources in higher education institutions and help bring real-world experiences and skills into the classroom. In turn, skilled graduates with the necessary abilities will benefit both industries and society. In simple terms, (Anand, 2023) <sup>[1]</sup> expressed the view that this initiative will bridge the expertise acquired in academia and industry.
7. In general, involving industry professionals in the classroom enriches the educational process, emphasizes the significance of education in real-world scenarios, and enhances the job prospects of graduates.

### Some potential challenges in integrating PoP into higher education institutions

1. The biggest challenge is funding, as the majority of higher education institutions operate on tight budgets and lack essential facilities. In some states like Sikkim, higher education institutions (HEIs) provide free education, they may have funds to pay PoP.
2. Human Resources is one of the main challenges in higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly in the States of North-Eastern Region some of the states in NER do not have industries, so there is a lack of industry experts.
3. The other challenge is inadequate infrastructural facilities to accommodate PoP, and space for conducting classes by PoP. Access to ICT and the Internet.

### Suggestions to mitigate the challenges in integrating PoP into higher education institutions

1. Industries should be encouraged to generate their fund. The State Government should support HEI for internal revenue generation. Payment of PoP may be made from such funds.
2. Wide advertisement to select appropriate PoP.
3. Enhance Information and Communication Technology facilities.
4. If NEP, individuals with experience and skills in various areas such as basket making, carpentry, weaving, etc., should be appointed even if they have not fully mastered the required qualifications. In a way, they can share their talent and knowledge with the younger generation.
5. To provide practical-based activities to the learners, the concerned authority ensures the provision of infrastructural facilities. Therefore, the learners would not lose interest in the chosen discipline. Further, Lakshmi and Ugandhar (2023), suggested that the institutions must Partner with NGOs, Industries, and corporations to share resources and guarantee learning outcomes.

### Conclusion

The integration of general education and vocational education in higher education in India is one of the major initiatives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. With the introduction of the Professor of Practice position at higher education institutions, there has been a noticeable paradigm shift in the educational system. Where academics and industry professionals work together. They provide practical expertise in the selected field along with theoretical knowledge. Thereupon, students can receive highly skilled and knowledgeable preparation for both their nation and the global job market. However, the majority of higher education institutions still lag in terms of finance, human resources, and infrastructural facilities. Therefore, these points need to be pondered upon while integrating vocational education with general education. To ensure that higher education institutions (HEIs) function smoothly and effectively.

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