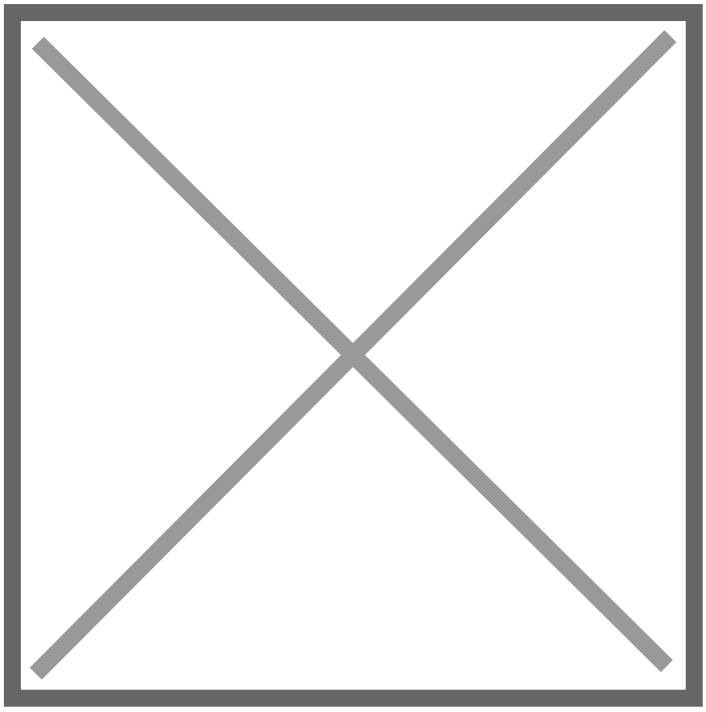
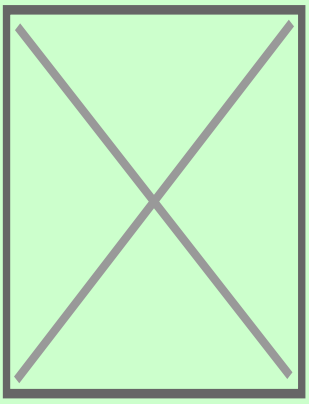
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Government ups support

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Government ups support



"This year we have evolved the system for medical professionals and now we are working on the other areas. This requires a lot of consultation with the user department. The core of the strategy is to create a pool of jobs."

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-Dr MK Bhan, secretary, DBT

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The DBT Foundation Day celebrations, held in March this year, brought happy tidings for the student community. The union minister for science and technology, Kapil Sibal, took the occasion to announce a series of initiatives to enthuse students for higher studies in life sciences.

The package announced by the minister included assistance of Rs 50-Rs 60 lakh to select undergraduate colleges in life sciences. The ministry plans to support 20 undergraduate colleges across the country, one per state, for high quality teaching in life sciences. There is also a proposal to award 1,000 undergraduate scholarships of Rs 500 per month for meritorious students from economically weaker sections to pursue career in life sciences. In addition, there will be a fellowship of upto

$2,000 per month for post doctoral students wanting to do research in the high tech areas of stem cell technology and nanobiotechnology. There will be about 25 such special overseas fellowships.

DBT Fellowship

Within the country, the Department of Biotechnology has started a novel "DBT-Junior Research Fellowship" for pursuing PhD in any university/institute. It has launched "BET" or "Biotechnology Eligibility Test" on the lines of the National Eligibility Test (NET) for pursuing research in frontier areas of biotechnology and applied biology. The selected candidates can avail of the DBT-Junior Research Fellowship. The fellowship as JRF/ SRF will be in the range of Rs 8,000-9,000 per month and a research contingency of Rs 30,000 per year. The BET will be a written admission test, which will be conducted in April every year at five different centers, namely Anna University (Chennai), Sri Venkateshwara College (New Delhi), West Bengal University of Technology (Kolkata), Hyderabad Universore and University of Pune (Pune).

Summer projects

To provide a flavor of research to young students, the DBT aims to extend summer project support in diverse fields (medicine, life science) on a very large scale. The department is planning to promote the summer projects in a big way, irrespective of disciplines, under a mentor. The students will be able to take a 2-3 month project during their summer vacation and some of these may extend and continue beyond this time frame. Giving the rationale behind this move, Dr MK Bhan, DBT secretary, said, "This is based on the feedback from a lot of scientists that early exposure to research thinking is of profound importance in the formative years. Eventually great scientists are not the ones with the greatest grades but they are people who have experience in pursuing intellectual curiosity and if they are temperamentally driven to it then they will be hooked to research. This can be done only in the formative years."

New courses

Starting from 2007, the DBT will support some new courses which include a Masters program in health sciences, PhD in health sciences and a Masters program in clinical sciences. These courses are aimed to groom physician researchers. "This year we have evolved the system for medical professionals and now we are working on the other areas. This requires a lot of consultation with the user department. The core of the strategy is to create a pool of jobs as there is no point of creating people in an area if the institutional career structure does not exist", elaborated Dr Bhan about the new courses on the anvil.

Another noteworthy initiative mooted by the department for strengthening the educational institutions is the beginning of "Institutional Innovation Grants Scheme", whereby the DBT will consider proposals for innovation grants managed by the institutes themselves for students at all levels.

These measures will definitely help students aspiring to pursue biobased sciences.

Rolly Dureha