

**Report of the
Review Committee
for
Functioning and
Revamping of ASRB**



Indian Council of Agricultural Research
Krishi Bhavan, New Delhi-110001

March 2018

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The President, ICAR Society and Hon'ble Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, vide ICAR office order no. 1-7/85-Per. IV (Vol. II) dated July 17, 2017 had constituted a Committee to review the functioning and suggest measures for revamping and restructuring of the Agricultural Scientists Recruitment Board (ASRB) for increased transparency, efficiency and accountability.

Accordingly, the Committee adopted a holistic approach to understand the structure and functions of ASRB, analysis of earlier review reports and implementation of their recommendations, had an effective interaction with all concerned stakeholders followed by discussions with concerned ASRB and ICAR officials. During interface meetings as well as through correspondence, the Committee had the benefit of receiving various suggestions from the former Chairmen and Members of ASRB, past and present Vice Chancellors of State Agricultural Universities, former and present Director General and Deputy Directors General of ICAR, ICAR National Professors, research managers and the scientists of ICAR, the representatives of private seed companies, retired scientists association, ARSSE, IAUA, Farmers Associations like Bhartiya Kisan Sangh and Farmers Commission of Punjab and Haryana, All India Agricultural Students Association and Students Association of IARI, New Delhi.

The Committee had extensive discussions during its ten meetings and made specific recommendations. Accordingly, we the members of the Committee are pleased to present this report to the Hon'ble Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare for its consideration and speedy implementation.



(A.K. Srivastava)
Member



(Chhabilendra Roul)
Member



(Raj Kishore Swain)
Member



(T. Mohapatra)
Member



(I.M.G. Khan)
Member



(R.S. Paroda)
Chairman

Acknowledgement

I, on behalf of all Committee members, would like to take this opportunity to thank Hon'ble Shri Radha Mohan Singh, Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare for constituting this Committee to review the functioning and suggest measures for revamping Agricultural Scientists Recruitment Board (ASRB) for increased transparency, efficiency and accountability.

Considering the broad Terms of Reference (ToR), the Committee made systematic efforts to review and analyse the current status and previous efforts made concerning the reforms in ASRB. It then decided to have the review process both comprehensive and inclusive. Accordingly, extensive discussions with concerned ICAR and ASRB officials as well as with most of the stakeholders were held in few separate meetings. These interactions were found to be highly useful and enabled Committee members to deliberate on all issues pragmatically. We are grateful to all the stakeholders for having spared their valuable time to participate actively and for providing needed feedback, suggestions as well as information.

I would like to place on record my personal thanks to all the members (Shri I.M.G. Khan, former UPSC Member; Dr. Raj Kishore Swain, former Additional Chief Secretary, M.P.; Dr. Trilochan Mohapatra, Secretary, DARE & Director General, ICAR; Dr. A.K. Srivastava, Member, ASRB and Shri C. Roul, Special Secretary, DARE & Secretary, ICAR) for having participated actively in the deliberations and for providing useful suggestions that led to finalisation of recommendations concerning different ToRs.

Several senior officers including Shri J. Ravi, Secretary, ASRB; Shri Sujit K. Mitra, Director (Personnel), ICAR; Shri Rajiv Mangotra, Deputy Secretary, ASRB; Shri S.P. Sanwal, Deputy Secretary, ASRB; Shri Rakesh Bhardwaj, Under Secretary (Personnel), ICAR and their colleagues provided support in many ways, for which Committee would like to acknowledge their help. Our special thanks are due to Dr. R.K. Mittal, Consultant, who helped the Committee in compiling the information and in drafting the report. Also assistance of Shri Chitesh Kaushik of ASRB in the analysis of data and for typing the report is duly acknowledged.



(R.S. Paroda)

Chairman

ASRB Review Committee

Executive Summary

The President, ICAR had constituted a Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. R.S. Paroda, former Secretary, DARE & Director General, ICAR to review the functioning, revamping and restructuring of Agricultural Scientists Recruitment Board (ASRB). The Terms of Reference of the Committee were to review the functioning of the ASRB and suggest suitable measures for its revamping and restructuring in a holistic manner to increase transparency, efficiency and accountability. Besides, the Committee was asked to review and suggest ways to strengthen the structure of ASRB, focusing on all aspects including the administrative structure of the Board, independence of ASRB *vis-à-vis* ICAR, the overall role and responsibilities of ASRB, and any other issue which can improve its efficiency in functioning. To accomplish this broad task, the Committee made a comprehensive review of the background information and the present functioning of ASRB, including the SWOT analysis, and identified the major issues requiring specific actions for improvement. The Committee also went through the reports of earlier review committees, both for ICAR and ASRB, held discussions with concerned officials, scientists, farmers and student representatives, besides having detailed interactions with different stakeholders to get the necessary feed-back and suggestions for improvement in the functioning of ASRB. The Committee further met and deliberated in detail all relevant issues comprehensively. In all, the Committee had held ten meetings and decided to make in all 48 recommendations concerning the ToRs assigned. As such, this executive summary provides only a salient account of main recommendations, whereas all recommendations with justification are provided in the detailed report.

To ensure effective autonomy and independent functioning of ASRB, the Committee strongly recommends that the ASRB be delinked from its client, i.e., ICAR Society, and attached directly to the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare. Also, ASRB be made a statutory body like Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) through an Act of Parliament. Further, to provide good representation to all major disciplines and to cope with the increased workload of the Board, it should have four members, instead of three. The Chairman and Members should all be in the rank of Secretary to the Government of India, appointed for only one term of five years. Also, henceforth, the senior most Member should become the Chairman of the Board. It has been recommended that ASRB responsibility should remain confined only to the selection and assessment processes concerning the scientists, and to some extent for the senior technical positions (T-6 and above), whereas ICAR should take over immediately the responsibility for the recruitment of all administrative and financial positions in the Council. Further, the Committee is of the view that the recruitment of all junior level administrative and technical positions be decentralised by the ICAR at the institute level, as existed before.

The restructuring of the existing organogram of ASRB has been suggested for better efficiency and functioning with reallocation of staff in to different functional units out of existing

sanctioned strength of 80 in the ASRB secretariat. To further strengthen the secretariat for improved administrative control, the position of Secretary, ASRB, which presently is of Director level, be now upgraded to that of a Joint Secretary with a provision to fill the same through Central Staffing Scheme. Also, the core recruitment, assessment and vigilance functions are proposed now to be headed by either Director or Deputy Secretary level officer and the financial aspects by a Deputy Director (Finance). Through proper cadre review, within overall sanctioned strength of ASRB, all these officials are proposed to have appropriate administrative support at the needed levels. In future, all disciplinary matters relating to staff working in ASRB secretariat be dealt independently by ASRB for which a separate vigilance cell under the overall control of Chairman, ASRB is proposed.

Both ICAR and ASRB, through a coordination committee, should develop an in-built mechanism for efficient manpower planning and recruitment, so that all likely vacant posts are filled well in time. ICAR must ensure that the requisitions for the vacant posts, along with well-defined qualifications, are sent to ASRB at least six months in advance. It is suggested that the proposed qualifications for each research management position (RMP) are discussed and proposed by the ICAR-ASRB Coordination Committee, which then be got approved by the Governing Body and the President, ICAR.

To make examination/recruitment and assessment system more efficient, ASRB should follow a calendar of activities for conducting the ARS and NET examination, direct selections and assessments, and also reduce the time taken to complete ARS examination each year from present 10-12 months to only 8 months, for which a doable calendar cycle has been proposed. However, to ensure this, ICAR must notify the vacancies to ASRB at least six months in advance. It is also suggested that the capacity of question bank be raised to around five lakhs in the next two years and the quality of question papers be reviewed and improved periodically. For required secrecy and confidentiality, it is proposed that all modern security measures be adopted by ASRB. The Committee also recommends that the necessary IT hardware, software and required competent manpower, including option for out sourcing, be made available to ASRB to hasten the process of screening/evaluation of applications, record management, database development, question bank management and online correspondence to ensure greater efficiency and transparency.

In future, the composition of the Selection Committee for recruitment of scientists at the entry level in Agricultural Research Service should include the Chairman/Member, ASRB as Chairman and three experts from the discipline (nominated by ASRB) as Members. The marks awarded in the interview be perused and countersigned by the Chairman, ASRB. The Board be constituted in a manner to have a fair representation of SC/ST/OBC and gender balance in accordance with notified policy of the Government in this regard. For Senior RMPs (Directors of National Institutes/DDGs/National Directors), the Selection Committee, besides the Chairman, ASRB, should include DG, ICAR, a Member of ASRB representing the discipline, not less than three senior and experienced persons as technical members, drawn from outside the ICAR system (to be nominated by the Board), and one senior expert having good Administrative/

HRM experience, whereas for all other RMPs, the Committee can be the same except that DG, ICAR could either attend himself or send his nominee. For Senior Scientists/ Principal Scientists and all Non-RMPs, the Selection Committee should have the concerned Member, ASRB as chairman, concerned DDG, ICAR or his nominee, and not less than three experts, drawn from outside the ICAR system (to be nominated by the Board), as members.

In order to ensure that candidates with best talent and required leadership quality are selected for different Research Management Positions (RMPs), including those at the senior RMP level, the Committee has strongly recommended more weightage for interview process following a 'Two Tier' system consisting of: (i) Interface and personality assessment through a seminar cum discussion session and review of reference letters, and (ii) Interview by the Selection Committee. For specific feedback on interface, including the seminar presentation at the Institute/ICAR Headquarter, as the case may be, and assessment through reference letters to be obtained directly, a score based proforma is suggested to be developed by ASRB which should consider, besides individual academic achievements: impression of the seminar, vision for the Institution, capacity to express and communicate, knowledge and understanding, and general impression regarding leadership/management qualities/personality. The details of the proposed 'Two Tier' system have been specified to be followed rigidly, considering it to be an innovative selection process being followed these days in most of the International Centers/ Organisations.

To ensure better transparency and fairness, the Committee has reviewed critically the existing score card system and has recommended well defined ten parameters to be followed henceforth. Accordingly, the score cards for both RMP as well as Non-RMP positions have been suggested, including the allocation of marks both for score card and interview process. Higher marks for interview have specifically been suggested for the 'Two Tier' system to be adopted for the RMP positions, compared to the scientific positions where more weightage is proposed for academic achievements compared to interview. It is also recommended that frequent revision of score card system be avoided in future, and in any case no further revision be done at least for the next five years.

All promotions through assessment under the career advancement scheme (CAS) from Scientist to Senior Scientist and from Senior Scientist to Principal Scientist level should now be done only at the level of ASRB and no assessment be done at the institute level. This would ensure uniformity in the process, better accountability, fairness and timely assessment of all eligible scientists. Existing committee for assessment of cases of Senior Scientist to Principal Scientist shall continue whereas for assessment of cases of Scientist to Senior Scientist, a different composition of committee with ASRB Member, representing the concerned discipline, to act as chairman has been recommended. Further, a special mechanism of evaluation of Principal Scientists and Research Managers for grant of higher scale of Academic Level 15, as per VII UGC Pay Commission recommendations, based on their eminence has been suggested in order to motivate and reward good researchers for their outstanding achievements. It is suggested that a fair review system be put in place to take much needed corrective measures/

administrative decisions for better accountability of the non-performers. Further, to attract a talented pool of scientists and their continuation in the ICAR system, the number of National Professors and National Fellows be increased from present 10 and 25 to 50 and 100, respectively. Also, it is proposed that in future, their selection be done on competitive basis through ASRB only. Keeping in view the need for experienced research managers in the system, the Committee has recommended that ICAR must allow the extension for a second term (maximum) to those research managers who have performed exceedingly well in the first four years of their initial tenure.

The ICAR-ASRB Coordination Committee should be expanded, as proposed in the report, and have regular meetings at least every six months to review the timeframe of recruitments, personal promotions and other matters such as extension of tenures, post-recruitment monitoring and improvement in the functioning etc. The National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (NAARM) be mandated for support in competent talent search, post training evaluation and career progression of human resource once inducted in agricultural research service. As such, the Director, NAARM be made a member of the ICAR-ASRB Coordination Committee.

Finally, the Committee is of the firm view that for needed reforms and the improvement in the functioning of ASRB, the suggested 48 recommendations be considered as a package and implemented at the soonest possible.