

Correspondence

Interviews for academic positions: Applicants' perspective

We thank Professor Sunil K. Pandya for his useful guidance¹ for those who are applying for and appearing in interviews for an academic position. Given the increasing number of new academic positions becoming available or scheduled to become available at institutes such as the newly established (and announced) All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in various states, the article will help provide those interested in applying for academic positions with an insight into the expectations of the interview panel, and to prepare accordingly.

We have been following the application and selection process in many medical colleges in India, especially national institutes, and would like to share some suggestions to improve and streamline the process from the perspective of potential applicants:

1. The selection and interview process needs to be transparent. The rationale of decisions of the selection committee should ideally be available in the public domain (and not require interventions such as the filing of a Right to Information request). It is encouraging to notice that applicant profiles with detailed professional information are available online in many past faculty selection exercises.
2. The selection process needs to be objective, with pre-defined (publicly available) eligibility/marketing criteria and process for decision-making.
3. Eligibility criteria for applicants should be clearly defined and advertised in a non-ambiguous manner. Once decided, the criteria should be strictly enforced without exceptions. Merit of the candidates (as per the established criteria) should be the guiding principle for selections.
4. Many selection panels for recruitment of faculty for national institutes tend to be regionally biased in composition—this needs to be changed, and selection panels should be representative of the regional diversity of the country.
5. Similarly, ensuring gender parity in selection panels is a must. Many senior women medical professionals are well qualified to be in various selection committees/panels. There have been calls to boycott all-male or male-dominated panels in conferences.² In the same spirit, selection panels should ensure gender balance.
6. Selection panels need to recognize the need to make the environment for the interview conducive and not adversarial—especially since the field of medicine in India continues to be imbued with hierarchy.
7. Where possible, panels should also use communication technologies such as skype/video-conferencing during meetings. This can help those applicants who stay geographically far away from the venue of the selection committee meeting to be able to participate virtually. Such arrangements would of course require robust technical capacity at both ends to ensure seamless conduct of the interview.
8. Selection results should be made publicly available after finalization as soon as possible after the meeting, ideally on the same day at the end of the meeting. This will help ameliorate any concerns or allegations of change of results at a later time due to political/bureaucratic interference.
9. Allegations of corruption or change of results to favour certain candidates have been made in the past. India has seen multiple scams in medical college admissions, including the 'Vyapam Scam' in Madhya Pradesh.³ Thus, it is important that steps are taken to ensure accountability and transparency in the process. Members of selection committees should be eminent leaders of the profession with impeccable credentials who will ensure a selection process of the highest standard. Information on the composition of the selection panel should be put in the public domain after the completion of the selection process.

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- 2 Gibney E. Boycott hopes to break up boys' club. *Times Higher Education* Jan 17 2013. Available on www.timeshighereducation.com/boycott-hopes-to-break-up-boys-club/422408.article (accessed on 15 Dec 2015)
- 3 Sharma DC. India's medical education system hit by scandals. *Lancet* 2015;**386**: 517–18.