

## University innovation cluster launched, Industry pledges support

22 January 2014 | News | By Rahul Koul Koul



Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) has developed a focused strategic action plan to foster the culture of innovation and techno-entrepreneurship in Indian Universities, leveraging the University Innovation Cluster (UIC) and Cluster Innovation Centre (CIC) model recommended by the National Innovation Council (NInC).

Post consultations with prominent institutions in the biotech sector, the University Innovation Cluster initiative has been launched by BIRAC as a support program for Universities to proactively create vibrant ecosystems that can seed, foster and nurture innovation. Under the initiative, a Cluster Innovation Centre in Biotechnology (CIC-B), hosted in the University, will be the nerve center to manage the UIC activities.

Dr K VijayRaghavan, secretary, DBT, Government of India mentioned that the cluster will have the environment where the students are not scared to share their ideas. The encouragement to all the persons, yet we don't want to give False hope. We have selected the best ideas with great potential. It is anyways open to all. Scaling up from current five universities is a challenge and if we succeed, we can have great opportunity areas.

Along with facilitating the creation of networks, partnerships between stakeholders to strengthen the innovation ecosystem, the CIC-B is envisaged to provide pre-incubation support to innovative ideas, innovators for effective translation into products thereof. Such support will include technical trainings, IP management, technology business management, access to risk finance among others. All programs currently operated by BIRAC will be accessible through the UIC initiative and participant Universities will be encouraged to creatively leverage existing programs for maximum gain.

The program would also aim at leveraging existing resources from complementary private and public support programs, institutions. An open invitation was sent out to Universities to show interest in participating in this initiative. Judging by the potential for success and enthusiasm to take the initiative forward, the following five Universities have been selected to participate in Phase-I of this initiative.

As per Dr Renu Swarup, senior advisor, DBT and managing director, BIRAC, "The incubation experience of BIRAC is being utilized now to encourage student entrepreneurs. Students have lot of ideas and there is a requirement of stimulating their imagination. They must have an aptitude for research and development to the critical stage. For this program, we have

chosen the ideas that have best potential.

The best part is that the universities that have been selected are state universities and are considered as Tier-II as compared to national universities. These five universities include Anna University, Chennai; Punjab University, Chandigarh; Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore; University of Rajasthan, Jaipur and University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad. These universities will shortly set-up CIC-Bs and will initiate innovation-focused activities in the near future. With enthusiastic support promised by all stakeholders of the biotech sector, this initiative is envisaged to start showing positive results as early as the end of the year.

Adding further, Dr Swarup explained "The program offers support for ideas from post PhD students with Rs 50,000 and post MSc is Rs 25,000. Each innovation has to be supported by industry and securing intellectual property (IP) for student. The state universities which are also tier-II University picked up. The funding towards lab infrastructure is Rs 1.25 crore. Funding shall start by April 1, 2014 and the actual work will begin in 4 to 5 months. There are six fellowships initially and later it can be scaled upto twenty five. The criteria is that there must be enough aptitude for the research and development to critical stage. The total duration of the program is for three years."