Best Practice 1

1.Title: Catering to Diversity and Openness in Learning and Pedagogy

2.Objectives: The objectives of this best practice '**Catering to Diversity and Openness in Learning and Pedagogy'** include:

a) To help students develop tolerance and a greater sense of security while in diverse environments.
b) To help students learn about religious, linguistic, regional, racial, gender and cultural diversities, developing a sense of respect and acceptance of others encouraging them to be interculturally sensitive.
c) To celebrate diversity among the stakeholders and to help foster a sense of inclusivity and establish a sense of belonging.
d) To provide effective and diverse modes of learning that addresses issues of individual learners and thus to remove monotony.
e) To help teachers develop effective pedagogical tools and administer them to student communities
f) To offer flexible teaching-learning environments and solutions.

3. Context: It is important that all of our stakeholders feel welcomed and comfortable in our college environment. Performance to the best of our potentials is most likely to happen when everyone feels valued and welcomed. Hence inclusivity emerging from respect for diversity with an open mind is prerequisite for cohesive learning especially in the context of our college which is a minority college that has an intake of diverse groups of students from across the country. Besides, for the effectiveness in teaching-learning, diverse pedagogical tools and content development strategies would be of immense help. With this view '**Catering to Diversity and Openness in Learning and Pedagogy'** has been accepted as a best practice to be endorsed.

4. Practice: Sophia caters to an academic policy of openness and respect for diversity. Pursuance of the same spirit has been reflected not only in the content of learning but also in the strategies and tools employed in learning and pedagogy.

Some of the departments of the college designed 'Add on courses' https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1awQzJfGuXzTRc21m_LhpZrL85hdgPkkI8gB-Wnq_0bl/edit?resourcekey#gid=940087581 that directly fell in line with the objectives of this best practice. For example: (1) Add on Courses on 'Changing Frames 2022-23', (2) 'Peace & Conflict Resolution', (3) Understanding Diversity, (4) Mumbai Meri Jaan (On Local Culture) (5) Posthumanism. A number of activities and commemorative event that fostered the spirit of inclusivity were organized. https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1Jz0m4_BSq0LcHi5EBhgj6oKNVhnQ2qk8

Blended learning, which combines online and in-person instruction, is an efficient educational setting that caters to diversify modes of teaching-learning. By clearly defining the learning outcomes and objectives for both these components, we at Sophia ensure that learners have a clear understanding of what they are expected to achieve in each setting. Use of ICT enabled pedagogy through Google classrooms and online zoom sessions for extra lectures and co-curricular events and committee meetings along with the regular offline classroom teaching provide effectiveness and an extended space for teaching-learning. The online mode allows learners to engage with the content in a meaningful way, through interactive exercises, discussions, and multimedia resources. By structuring the online activities in line with the learning outcomes, we are creating a purposeful learning experience that promotes deep understanding and application of knowledge. Similarly, in the in-person component, it was felt important to align the activities and assessments with the defined objectives. This involved group discussions, hands-on activities, or practical simulations that allow learners to apply what they have learned online.

Faculties were exhorted to create compelling and interactive online materials that integrate multimedia components like audios, videos, interactive quizzes, and simulations. Faculties trained themselves in e-content development through FDPs which led them to employ diverse teaching techniques to cater to various learning styles and foster active participation. The newly established studio and Kindle corner (library) were all set to aid this process of creating and designing diverse and efficient pedagogical tools. https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1sWeUDso8SuMAbk8Szyl4LzPbnYH1pwfl

The G-suite and zoom licenses procured and the use of Google classrooms as Learning Management System (LMS) to provide support to the teaching staff towards ensuring pedagogical diversity and guide students towards cohesive learning are structural measures undertaken on this behalf.

5. Evidence of Success: The Add on courses directly linked with this best practice attracted students in good number (186 registrations in all) and the feedbacks received from the students who attended them indicated they were very much appreciated by students as very effective. https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1awQzJfGuXzTRc21m_LhpZrL85hdgPkkI8gB-Wnq_0bI/edit?resourcekey#gid=940087581 Establishing a sense of belongingness is an important first step in our diversity and inclusion efforts along with practicing fairness and an accommodative flexibility. Due to familiarity with blended learning and hybrid platforms even the College Union committee and student groups and clubs conduct sessions in either form (online or offline) whenever required for student activities.

6. Problems Encountered and Resource Required: It's not uncommon for diverse groups of students to experience some form of prejudice and stereotyping. Unfortunately, this can result in groups not communicating effectively or using stereotypes to avoid collaborating with their classmates. This had to be carefully handled with sound teaching and proper attitudes. As far as infrastructure and requirements for development of pedagogical tools were concerned, with the existing and the available resources especially the RUSA grant success was made possible in all the programmes initiated.

Best Practice 2

1. Title of the Practice

Augmentation of research culture and promotion of students' publications

2. Objectives of the Practice

Sophia College has been keen on encouraging experiential learning among students and faculty. In view of this, the college believes that research culture and the promotion of publications are closely intertwined. The following objectives had been envisioned for the dissemination of research publications.

- to encourage a culture of inquiry, collaboration and knowledge sharing
- to develop an effective mentorship and support system to researchers
- to promote a culture of rigorous peer review and constructive feedback
- to facilitate a diverse and inclusive research culture
- to incentivise research among students and faculty

3. The Practice

- In continuation to the existing research culture at Sophia College, the *Sophia Research and Development Cell* (SRDC) has been reconstituted as per the new guidelines with five unique sub-committees and subsequently, the "Sophia College Research Policy" has been published online. (https://sophiacollegemumbai.com/img/Sophia%20Research%20Policy%20Document.pdf). This document reflects the core objectives of the college, in terms of assisting and fostering a spirit of curiosity and inquiry among its research community. In principle, SRDC has envisioned the setting up of a Research Centre for Humanities and Social sciences in the near future. This is besides the already functioning Suman Tulsiani Research Centre in the Science building.
- While keeping with the evolving culture of reading, the college library has constituted a Kindle-Corner in the library. The facility is accessible to the entire college fraternity for assessing research materials that are predominantly available in the kindle-format.
- The college is also registered with CCSEA (Committee for Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals), since some departments work with animals.

- In order to ensure effective mentorship and to help researchers develop their skills and navigate through the publication process, the college continues to emphatically highlight its flagship event which was initiated over twenty years ago, namely, Excellence Programmes in Arts (EXAP) (https://sophiacollegemumbai.com/research_all.aspx) and Science (EXSP) (https://sophiacollegemumbai.com/research_all.aspx). As part of this programme, students undertake several extra-academic activities such as presentations during seminars, review of literature and submission of research projects under the mentorship of faculty members. There are prizes instituted for the highest scoring students at the end of their study. Faculty mentors guide early researchers in manuscript preparation, presentation, and the publishing process. Moreover, two Science departments have recognized Ph.D. guides and several students are registered for Ph.D.
- A committed peer review and feedback process is mandated to all in-house publications, in order to help researchers improve their work and contribute to the quality of publications. (1) *Urdhva Mula*, (2) *SCRIBE (Science Chronicles in Research and Investigation based Education)* a Science research journal for students and faculty, (3) *Sophia Lucid*, a journal for faculty research and (4) *Sophia Luminous* is a multidisciplinary journal dedicated to the publication of students' research. All these journals are blind-peer-reviewed and the process of obtaining an ISSN is underway.
- The research journals, *Sophia Lucid,* (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yn6WPEYkYGSerGMeK2JOPo-puZhaFq5v/view) and *Sophia Luminous,* (https://drive.google.com/file/d/15OQ8Jqrloc3_ggbBMswwlvCCJ759kJLU/view) are both multidisciplinary in its general conduct as they welcome a wide range of perspectives and encourage researchers from various backgrounds to contribute their unique insights. This approach has led to more varied and impactful research publications. Every year on National Science Day the college organizes a *Science Research Meet* called 'Wider than the sky' where students from all classes present their project/research in the form of posters and eminent scientists are invited to visit the posters and interact with the students.
- The Science students of the college have received generous funds through the "Star Status grant" which mandates that students must undertake research projects. At Sophia, students of F.Y.B.Sc and S.Y.B.Sc have worked in groups while T.Y.B.Sc students carried out individual projects. The three departments that offer PG programmes also have mandatory projects as fulfillment towards the degree. Many of these students present their work at Local or National Conferences. Every year there are several students from all levels (UG, PG and PhD) who participate in the University Research Meet called *Avishkar*. With the RUSA grant, funds were allocated to faculty members to conduct Minor Research Projects. Several faculty members have conducted research projects using this grant money.

4. **Evidence of Success**

When students present their project work at National Conferences, they get exposure to other research and also meet faculty from Research Institutes. This helps them to get admission / positions at these Institutes. Publications by our faculties and students have considerably increased. Our first issue of student research journal *Sophia Luminous* was published online. Writing of project reports / dissertations hones the writing skills of students and help them in their later careers, as we witness today.

5. **Problems Encountered and Resources Required**

Faculty in the college have a full UG workload and hence are not able to find the required time to devote to their own research and also to give personalized attention to students doing projects which is critical to the success of this. However we are banking on the hard work and extra efforts of our faculties to cope up with. Required external grants for research and time delay in getting them along with stringent regulations on expenditure patterns also make the entire process a bit rigid for young researchers to take up.