

UK University Inputs For India's New National Education Policy

It was very encouraging to see some of the UK India Business Council's key recommendations mentioned in the Draft National Education Policy, including mutual recognition of qualifications, simplification of the education regulatory framework, embracing online courses, integrating vocational training into mainstream education and greater international collaboration. The new policy's emphasis on quality, equity, access, learning outcomes, teaching, and research is also to be applauded, as is the acknowledgement of the societal-level benefits of education and the decision to set up an Inter-University Centre for International Education (IUCIE) specifically to support internationalisation of universities.

Taking all these positive developments into consideration, the recommendations below seek to expand upon and refine select policy measures which we believe will help India achieve its HE objectives.

1) Mutual recognition of qualifications by the Government of India

Currently, Indian authorities do not recognise foreign qualifications obtained through articulation and pathway programmes or the 1-year master's programme offered by UK universities, which is recognised widely elsewhere. This means that Indian employers are missing out on highly educated and highly motivated graduates, and these talented young people are missing out on opportunities. In the case of undergraduates, it is difficult for them to then pursue a master's programme at an Indian university. Thus, it has a detrimental impact at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Also, Indian universities are not allowed to award dual degrees. If a student opts for a twinning programme (2+2) with a UK university, upon successful completion, he/she is awarded a UK degree which is then not recognised by India. Though he/she spends 2 years in the Indian education system, the ability to register for a master's or PhD course in India stands constrained.

Part of the rationale behind this is the 'time' element, that is the duration of a UK Masters is only one year while obtaining a postgraduate degree from an Indian university requires 2 or more years. However, a solution can be effectively reached by moving from the existing 'time-based' model to acknowledging the value of the 'outcome-based learning' model which focuses on credits acquired rather than the number of lectures taken. While the Government has taken steps towards introducing a credit-based framework, this is yet to be implemented by many institutions.

The UKIBC is pleased to see that the draft new education policy acknowledges the importance of students receiving internationally recognised qualifications and encourages more twinning programmes by allowing the mutual recognition of degrees (both undergraduate and postgraduate) of those countries that the MHRD signs MOUs with.

Mutual recognition of qualifications and allowing universities to award dual degrees will be a true gamechanger for India's Higher Education system as it will give a real boost to collaborations and will attract more foreign students to come and study in India – one of the key objectives of the new policy. Mutual recognition and dual degrees will enable students to seamlessly transition between India and other countries, unlock new opportunities, and create wide ranging cross-border linkages that go well beyond the Higher Education sector. In our experience, mutual recognition continues to be the single

most desired reform from both UK and Indian universities and would be transformational for the Indian economy when it is launched.

2) Look beyond the overall ranking to identify UK universities with the specialisms to fit India's requirements

The draft National Education Policy mentions that *“Select universities (i.e. those from among the top 200 universities in the world) will be permitted to operate in India. A legislative framework facilitating such entry will be put in place, and such universities will have to follow all the regulatory, governance, and content norms applicable to Indian universities.”*

The UKIBC believes that the Government of India's intention to allow foreign education providers to partner with Indian institutions is a step in the right direction but, as set-out in the UKIBC's November 2018 report, “Beyond the Top 200”, we believe that limiting participation to the top 200 will not achieve the MHRD's goals.

International ranking systems are designed to help students choose where to study, but they are not a sophisticated enough tool to judge which foreign universities have what India and Indians want. For example, a UK University that does not fall into the top 200 may actually be in the top 10 globally for, say, mechanical engineering, a skill needed to support Make in India. Conversely, a top-ranking UK University may not excel when it comes to their mechanical engineering course. Yet, the draft New Education Policy would allow the top-ranking university to bring a low-quality mechanical engineering course to India, but stop a brilliant course coming from a university that falls outside the overall top 200 ranking.

Another point to consider is that some UK Universities are ranked outside the top 200 because they are not very research intensive, but they do provide a very high quality of teaching. With millions of young Indians and employers hungry for quality education, it is the UKIBC's belief that India would benefit from bringing in a greater cross-section of foreign universities with diverse skills in areas that match India's needs.

To truly unlock the potential of India's young population, the UKIBC believes that a more flexible approach is needed. This means not only welcoming foreign courses that best fit India's requirements, irrespective of where the delivering institution is placed on overall rankings, but also allowing them to collaborate with any Indian institution that exhibits a real need and capacity for collaboration.

Thus, we recommend that all institutions within India, public and private, irrespective of tier, UGC category, or NAAC score be permitted to forge international partnerships should such a partnership demonstrate, to both parties, real added value. Limiting this could prevent many Indian higher education institutions from accessing the very teaching and research resources they need to improve and deliver for students and employers regardless of their focus or tier.

By looking beyond the global 'Top 200,' the new policy will facilitate collaboration with foreign higher education institutions in a way that matches India's social and economic priorities with the best curriculum from across the world to effectively unlock the potential of India's higher education ecosystem.

3) **Collaborate with UK universities to deliver online learning programmes on a nationwide scale.**

Digital India creates a fantastic platform on which India can lead the world in many areas, including the delivery of higher education. To meet its enrolment ratio target of 30% by 2030, India will need to build another 1,500 institutions. This does not seem feasible. Accordingly, a blend of bricks and mortar and digital engagement will need to be deployed.

Digital learning technologies represent the biggest opportunity. They are set to transform the Indian higher education landscape, address capacity issues, and meet the expanding future student demand from all strata of society. Given the magnitude of this task, Indian educational institutions have told the UKIBC that they would benefit hugely by collaborating with UK universities to share best practices and build their capability to deliver online education across the country.

Given its emphasis on digitisation and inclusive education, the Government of India is ideally placed to be the enabler and active supporter of the flexible model of education. It can do this by encouraging and facilitating Indian and UK universities to work together to offer distance learning, blended learning and online learning programmes on a nationwide scale especially in the more rural areas. The fact that the new National Education Policy acknowledges the need for more online courses and endorses international collaboration, as well as mutual recognition for overseas and distance learning programmes (ODL) is a real step in the right direction.

4) **Make employability skills a top priority and consider UK models to effectively integrate vocational skills with mainstream education**

According to a 2016 report by Indian employability assessment firm, Aspiring Minds, more than 80% of engineers in India are 'unemployable'. This is not limited to engineering. Research by the British Council suggests that up to 75% of graduates from Indian universities are not considered 'employable.' This is because, more often than not, they lack general soft skills such as analytical thinking, decision making, leadership, project management and effective communication in the workplace. Soft skills are crucial to a graduate's employability and, indeed, if they are entrepreneurs setting-up their own businesses.

To fill the skills gap, Indian firms are increasingly turning to in-house training and courses. This is a costly endeavour and not financially feasible for most SMEs, which are engines of India's future growth. Expansion of educational institutions and university places is not enough and, if done in the wrong way, could simply compound these problems.

To capitalise on its demographic dividend, and achieve its economic and social potential, The UKIBC believes that India will need to act quickly to produce graduates with the skills and qualities employers need. A nationwide focus on building employability skills by deepening the links between industry and higher education and ensuring employees are trained to workplace standards is what is urgently needed.

A particular characteristic of UK universities is the excellent engagement and ongoing dialogue they have with businesses, particularly those in their locality but also much further afield including Indian businesses. In terms of academia-industry collaboration, there is a lot of transferable knowhow across the UK Higher Education system. For example, the UK's new regulatory body, the Office for Students, prioritises working with education providers and employers to directly address skills gaps and ensure

graduates are more employable. This means businesses – the employers - are engaged as important partners in shaping courses and training in UK institutions. This best practice needs to be adopted by the wider Indian Higher Education system.

The MHRD's decision to merge high quality vocational training with mainstream education at the secondary, college, university and post university level is to be commended. As is the requirement that HEIs should develop channels to help India's workforce in the unorganised sector move from being unskilled and semi-skilled into becoming skilled labour and being paid correspondingly higher wages.

It is often argued by employers in India that the demarcation of government policies between skills and education has been a barrier to providing appropriate vocational skills to graduates. Given the policy's ambitious objective to "provide access to vocational education to at least 50% of all learners by 2025" (Chapter 20), we recommend that the MHRD and the Ministry of Skills should look for ways to work more closely together to implement policies.

This could be done by considering models such as degree apprenticeships which are growing in popularity in the UK where students get a degree that requires them to learn and demonstrate strong practical skills in areas such as electrical, mechanical and aerospace engineering. This would provide a joined-up avenue for horizontal and vertical mobility and will have the added advantage of fostering dignity and social acceptability for quality vocational training.

5) Make University Social Responsibility (USR) an integral facet of the new policy

In an effort to develop an international and sustainable forum for the promotion of University Social Responsibility, the UKIBC commends the recent efforts made by the MHRD to make USR an integral facet of India's Higher Education policy.

The key idea, supported in principle by the MHRD and the University Grants Commission, is to make USR relevant to all stakeholders (universities, industry, government, students and the community) by collaborating to make 'social responsibility' relevant and responsive to emerging societal and global challenges. This has important consequences for higher education institutions in India and the UK.

In a manner that is anticipated by the MHRD's policy priorities, the UKIBC and associate organisations like Universities UK, British Council etc are thereby committed to making USR meaningful in a number of related contexts. Herein, concerted efforts are being made:

- (1) to identify and use the uptake of USR agendas in universities to refresh CSR objectives and leverage a political economy for sustainable development in India and beyond;
- (2) to address the diversity of USR agendas in India to establish USR as a core 'discipline'; and
- (3) to consider the potential areas of convergence and divergence between USR and ASR (academic social responsibility) in view of the historical, contemporary and future roles played by exponents of different disciplines in making sense of and working with 'social responsibility' rubrics, according to the diversity of contexts, people and issues that pertain.

As such, the UKIBC looks forward to connecting with the MHRD, UGC, and other stakeholders to facilitate India-UK cooperation in the numerous opportunities that are emerging for higher education providers to work collectively to ensure that 'education for sustainability' becomes not only a maxim that we all understand, but a means to ensure 'the future we want' -- a full realisation of our shared aspirations, interests and responsibilities.

6) Establishing a clear roadmap of guidelines for foreign universities to operate in India.

Foreign universities would greatly benefit from a clear set of guidelines on how to operate in the Indian education landscape. Ideally, this should be tailored to fit the various higher education models of universities and business schools. The guidelines should lay down the specific rules and channels of engagement associated with each structure. Despite a strong appetite for collaboration from both Indian and foreign institutions, the absence of such a roadmap and the uncertainty around the rules of establishing international partnerships has been detrimental to partnerships that could have flourished.

Conclusion

The Government of India's decision to remodel and restructure the Indian education system through a consultative process is to be commended. It has facilitated a debate about how to educate future generations of Indians, drawing inputs from eminent Indian experts, and well-wishers from across the world. UK universities are among these well-wishers who are committed to India and who want to deepen that commitment.

The UK India Business Council undertakes work across higher education connecting UK institutions to partners in India whether they be universities, businesses, or the all-important student. We believe that much of the change – in teaching, curriculum, international partnerships and the embedding of soft skills – should be driven bottom-up so that those students which emerge from Indian academic institutions in the future are “fit-for-purpose” within the new paradigms of rapid economic, demographic, and technological changes, and the associated evolving needs of industry.

UK higher education institutions want to play a role in India's remarkable rise and are very well-placed to do so, with expertise and experience across the four key tenets of excellence, equal access, expansion, and employability which the Indian Higher Education ecosystem rightly aspires to.

Annex - List of Participating Institutions

- University of Essex
- University of Birmingham
- University of East Anglia
- University of Surrey
- University of Liverpool
- University of London
- University of Northampton
- University of Bristol
- Heriot - Watt University
- King's College London