

Insights from policy dialogue discussion on Internationalisation of higher education ambition in India's National Education Policy 2020

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India's readiness for internationalisation

Institutions in India are keen and want to interact and exchange with international counterparts. This is the attitude most of the institutions have now. In initial phase, the confusion is likely to be there but slowly and gradually it will be overcome. Floodgates have opened and India is keen to do lots of things.

Internationalisation of higher education was in active consideration in India for more than a decade when the foreign education bill was first brought out. Some able, autonomous and well performing institutions did foray into this area to develop academic and research exchanges. Importance and the advantages of internationalisation were known but the framework in the form of NEP has come only two years ago.

The ambition of internationalisation of the government is to make India 'Vishwa Guru,' a world leader, similar to the earlier times of the Nalanda and Takshila when students from all around the world would come to India to study. It will take time, but it also means that India is opening the doors for internationalisation. Currently, under the Study India initiative, India is targeting 34 countries and there are thousands of students coming into India but to reach more, the policy changes need to come in, particularly of the single regulator, the Higher Education Commission.

The collaborations or opportunities that exist are primarily in the domain of research and academics. There are a number of partnerships around integrated masters/PhD and the Indian Prime Minister has been present during signing of bilateral MoUs and agreement which signals the level of importance given to these. There are also a semester abroad programmes, where students spend one semester out of the 4/6/8 semester.

India has been promoting research partnerships through programmes like UKIEIRI etc, and under the new framework, research will get active support. Covid also showed that research and innovations became globally applicable, shared across countries which helped each other. This will be the new approach/philosophy going forward in research practise.

A new scheme called the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC framework) has been launched which opens the door to earning credits from anywhere and more than one institution under the provisions. ABC

will propel partnerships within domestic system, and this will amplify into and towards international collaborations. It will give infinite type of freedom and autonomy to form academic partnerships in Indian conditions.

It is expected that the rigidity of time stamping associated in award and recognition of degrees will go away soon. That is, the stipulated time duration of acquiring undergraduate degree or post-graduation degree will change with the ABC framework as it states that various programmes can be done in compressed duration as long as credits are matched and fulfilled. With that notion and thinking there will be a lot of liberalism in recognising the degree and qualification both ways.

Another new development is the setting up of the Digital University concept which is important. This is because India looks at online and distance education with some reservation but with the Prime Minister of India speaking about it at public forums suggest strong backing and a likely fillip in puncturing the boundaries around this, such that there will be no difference between national and international studies and a free-flowing learning pathway for students.

Role of State Higher Education Councils in establishing international linkages

A State Higher Education Council is a key advisory body for the state government to shape the policy environment and reforms in higher education at state level. It develops policies, promotes academic excellence and inclusiveness through inputs, research and development of reform-oriented projects. It also drives academic linkages between higher education institutions within and outside the country.

Karnataka is one of the states which has adopted the NEP and its vision of internationalisation is aligned with the newly published HE international guidelines of the Indian government. Given the wide programme of change set out in the NEP, the Karnataka state higher education council (KSHEC) in its role will be guiding the state government as an expert problem solver and exploring global best practices for learning and linkages. In the next 2-3 years, KSHEC will focus in making state funded universities eligible and capable to attract quality international partnerships.

International partner's perspective/expectations

Internationalisation is woven right through the NEP and being seen as a driver for change, and this is promising for the international HE sector. The positive development being seen is the true engagement in delivering change set out in the NEP and using collaboration for internationalisation as a way of doing that.

Many more Indian institutions are interested and want to engage, want to find partners and want to understand how they can work collaboratively to increase opportunities and access for Indian students to 21 century standards and quality across the global HE.

Another interesting intervention is that every university will have an International Office and that capacity and capability can be developed in each institution to engage with international partners and allow them to understand how these collaborations can be built because previously this was difficult for international partners.

Other interesting areas are developing curriculum, teaching-learning strategies and innovation in subject areas so that the matches between the courses can be calibrated and UGC setting out the collaborative provisions for what they want to see and also what they do not want to see is a positive signal for international universities.

UK universities should not work with a long list in order to do everything but focus on what will be the benefit for them and their partner. Using a thematic approach and developing a mutually agreed model and outcomes and building consensus are key to meaningful partnerships. Buy in of delivery partners is equally important.

Some of the international partnership models that have been most common in the world have been in Europe, SE Asia and China with the credit transfer arrangements which made it easy to engage and processes streamlined.

Further, it is important that UK universities must not just lift and shift models from elsewhere and rather see what can be adapted in order to align with what India needs. It should be tailored.

There has been a lot of discussion on the initial focus on bringing in top 100 -200 international universities for collaboration with India, but most universities are interested in recognition of diversity. A lot of international universities will be looking for is the recognition that ranking is not the only way to identify quality but how a university can deliver for India, such as subject strength, mission matches and underpinning focus in how they are targeting and supporting students and enlarging access.

As an example of system-to-system engagement in India is the partnership between Telangana state government and the Global Wales programme, which is a consortium of Welsh government, HE Funding Council of Wales, universities in Wales and British Council. The uniqueness of the partnership is that it has been able to leverage all levels of Welsh HE system including regulators, government and the sector to support NEP ambition of state government. So far, it has developed a scholarships programme curated through the British Council and two universities are helping with curriculum development.

The international HE sector will hope that the current momentum towards internationalisation in India carries on. It embraces online and blended recognition that it can deliver a whole range of benefits. It is also hoped that sustainable and non-transactional partnerships are developed for curriculum development, government to government system etc.

Further, UK is able and ready to respond to opportunities in India. There is rich experience to share around global best practice in areas over and above academics such as leaderships and governance, risk management, vocational skills like degree apprenticeships which are forgotten. There is support from UK government through its international education strategy with India as a priority. Building blocks are there and more than universities doing things on their own, a consortium approach and way of thinking should be applied like just like the Global Wales programme. It should be about universities collaborating and not competing amongst them.

Challenges

Using an analogy to the cricket sport, Internationalisation is not a 20-20 match but a test match.

For Study in India initiative, the best is still not offered to international students, for example, the IITs and IIMs have not yet opened up to taking in these students.

The International office concept is good, but it will not be able to operate if budget is not provided.

Research partnerships are organic and it takes time to develop. It cannot come about in one month or even six months. And the biggest need for research is the availability of substantial funding. It cannot depend on institution's resources. There has to be funding from government, other sources,

maybe international agencies. There is also shortfall in number of research exchanges, number of publications, joint patents etc.

The confusion that stays in the university system also stays in the policy framework. There are no credible models to show us what will work and what will not work – whether a short-term exchange programme of 2 weeks or one month or a semester abroad programme is good or 3+1 exchange programme or a 2+2 programme is good. Everything is followed in India depending upon the institution and students get highly confused. This is a problem institutions' have created.

Capping on ranking to collaborate will be a challenge. If an Indian university wants to partner in a specialised area such as mining engineering, it is very possible that none of the top 100 or 200 ranked universities will have the required expertise. Whilst the point of collaborating with top one hundred is appreciated, which is basically the intention to work with best ones so that the Indian universities can be benefitted but this does not serve the purpose in this specific example. Collaboration should be encouraged where there are willing partners and there will be mutual benefits rather than looking at ranks.