

OPPORTUNITIES

Driving innovation

Academic collaborations with foreign universities can be a great advantage to Indian students

■ TIM BLACKMAN

Higher education is booming as governments across the world fuel their knowledge economies with skilled graduates. India is no exception. However, like many other countries, India has a shortage of places and a mismatch between graduate skills and what is needed to power economic growth and jobs creation. Foreign universities have a role to play in meeting these challenges, but they must help raise quality as well.

The way forward

The willingness of the Indian Government to open up opportunities for foreign universities would be a commendable step as it strives to increase the number of university places and drive up quality. But India also needs innovation in education. Indian youth needs people, places and ideas that drive innovation, such as practice-based teaching methods and unique ways of conducting classes. The creativity that comes from the students just needs the right push to help them achieve their goal.

A robust registration of outcomes on a national platform will help in understanding the virtual success of



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all efforts. For example, British higher education is admired across the globe for its high academic standards and the autonomy of its universities – autonomy which India is only just starting to recognise as crucial to high standards of scholarship. Good regulation can raise quality and encourage innovation, while also creating opportunities for Indian students to study for British degrees in India.

Allowing foreign universities to develop expertise and exchange knowledge in academic collaborations can be a great mutual advantage for Indian students, which will

certainly help expanding in-country provision and bringing in innovation, ideation and niche knowledge.

For example, Middlesex University London's academic partnership with KM Music Conservatory in Chennai, founded by A. R. Rahman, enables students to experiment with fusions of Indian and Western music techniques. Students who complete their diploma at the Conservatory can progress to a full honours degree at Middlesex in London, but that should not be their only option. With KR Mangalam University, Middlesex is planning mutual recognition of degree pro-

grammes, joint degrees, mentoring, student and staff exchanges, internships and summer courses.

Options

India should welcome discussing similar partnerships with other high quality institutions. While many Indian students want the incredible experience of studying and working in foreign countries, many others want a less expensive or more convenient option of achieving a prestigious, skills-based degree in India. Others will opt for a combination of local and overseas study.

Education is the key to economic and social progress, from high value-added industries to social justice and empowerment. While governments need to be vigilant of the practices that institutions are adopting, each institution must come up with a self assessment mechanism by unlocking the job market with the help of foreign universities. To develop and maintain the Indian education model, a working plan can metamorphose into an iconic programme that will last as a model to follow for years to come.

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