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A VERY SHORT POLICY BRIEF

Engaging with India's Higher Education Sector:
Pathways to Improved Market Access

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The Australia India Institute's A VERY SHORT POLICY BRIEF series examines key questions facing contemporary India and the Australia-India relationship. It combines in-depth academic analysis with clarity and policy relevance.



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Engaging with India's Higher Education Sector: Pathways to Improved Market Access

Australia urgently requires new strategies to profit from the Indian market for higher education. This Very Short Policy Brief offers a seven-point programme of recommendations that will, together, serve as a game changer in the Indian and Australian Higher Education relationship. In order to access the Indian market for higher education, the Australian Government and Australian universities must (1) develop showcase projects of collaboration; (2) establish a set of faculty champions across the India-Australia boundary; (3) develop a faculty teaching initiative programme on India in Australia; (4) propagate a philosophy of reciprocity and respect to underpin concrete initiatives; (5) send a delegation to India to foster collaboration; (6) develop a new system of qualifications recognition paralleling the UK example; (7) intensively investigate opportunities for Australian universities to develop campuses in India. Unless Australia acts quickly in these and related spheres, it will lose ground to competitor countries such as the UK and USA.

India provides a huge and growing market for international students worldwide. Yet, despite being a major provider of international education, Australia only has a 5 per cent share in India's market for international students. This compares unfavourably with our share of the market within other major countries within our region, including China (for which we have an 11 per cent share), Indonesia (23 per cent) and Malaysia (27 per cent).¹

The number of Indian students enrolled in Australian Universities surged in 2008 and 2009, but numbers plummeted from 2010, after a series of violent attacks on Indian students living in Australia, and have only just begun to recover.² In this context, this report investigates the potential for Australia to gain better access to the market for Indian international students.

Australia stands to benefit from deepening its relations with India's education sector. Australian universities are often dependent upon recurrent recruitment drives in order to access India's student market. Developing more long-term partnerships between Australian and Indian universities may facilitate a more sustainable approach to increasing the flow of students. There are a number of existing, positive initiatives in Australia that are enhancing the reputation of Australian tertiary education in India and facilitating student exchange. Most of these developments have been in the fields of science, technology and engineering and build on existing research partnerships. We outline some of the most prominent examples in Section 2, below. Looking forward, it may be useful to consider whether similar collaborations could be established in the arts and social sciences, given the extensive and growing network of scholars in these disciplines in Australia with an interest in India and the South Asian region. As Indian universities do not have the same history of strength in the

1. <https://www.austrade.gov.au/Australian/Education/Countries/India/Market-profile>

2. Based on AusTrade figures, <http://www.austrade.gov.au/Australian/Education/education-data>

arts and social sciences that they do in science and technology, there may be great potential for Australian universities to play a positive and engaged role.

Despite the immense potential for fruitful collaboration, there have been a number of obstacles to positive developments to date. In a report for the Australia India Education Council, Rizvi *et al* (2013) suggest that despite a pervasive recognition in both Australian and Indian universities that greater collaboration was both desirable and necessary, progress has been slow and mired in uncertainty. Interviews with university delegates from both countries indicated that, in many cases, meetings between universities intended to foster greater cooperation and exchange often ended without any clear commitments to action. Despite a plethora of MoUs being signed between various Australian universities and Indian institutions, most of these have not led to follow-up action. Part of this, Rizvi *et al* suggest, is that sufficient trust has not yet been fostered to allow for positive relations to flourish. Indian universities often hold Australia with suspicion, considering their motives to be purely economic. In this context, they suggest it is important to highlight Australia's interest in fostering a more robust set of relations within the university space, including research collaborations, sharing access to resources and working on global challenges.

The policy environment has also not been entirely hospitable to collaboration. Rizvi *et al* (2013) found that the repeated delay of the Foreign Educational Institutions Bill in India was a major issue. The bill sought to allow and regulate the entry of certain foreign educational institutions in India to provide education, which might allow for the establishment of remote courses and campuses for Australian universities in India. The bill has lapsed since its initial proposal in 2010, however, partly due to fears that it would further commercialise the sector and lead to the entry of poor quality foreign providers.³ Subsequent bills put forward with similar intent have also not been passed through parliament. The stall of this legislation has created a great deal of uncertainty amongst Australian universities, leading to hesitations in initiating dialogue for collaboration. As will be discussed in Section 4, below, accreditation was also an issue. Credits earned in Australia are not capable of being recognised within Indian universities within the current system, and credits earned in Indian universities are not subject to rigorous quality controls, making Australian universities uncertain as to which can be recognised as valid.

There is room for optimism on these policy matters. In 2016, the NITI Aayog, the Government of India's key policy think tank, has recommended the passage of legislation to allow the entry of foreign universities.⁴ This was soon followed by a similar recommendation from the Subramanian Committee which, in a report aiming to guide education reforms for the

3. <http://www.prsindia.org/billtrack/the-foreign-educational-institutions-regulation-of-entry-and-operations-bill-2010-1139/>

4. <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/allow-foreign-university-campuses-niti-aayog-2755773/>

government, recommended that the world's top 200 universities should be allowed to establish campuses in India.⁵ This should be welcome news for Australian's 'Group of Eight' universities, all of which are ranked in the top 200 of global rankings. There is widespread recognition in India that passing such legislation will help India meet local demand for quality international education and provide competition in the education sector. Nonetheless, the political barriers remain and Australia cannot bank on India implementing legislative change in the short term. Rather, Australian universities need to take advantage of the opportunities that already exist to engage with India's higher education sector. We suggest some ways in which this may be achieved in this report. Such engagements will lead to some improvement in our market access in the short term (and hence greater revenue for Australian universities), and will lay a foundation for much stronger market access when legislation does change in India. In addition, the engagements we suggest will also lead to greater opportunities for research collaborations with Indian scholars, improved access to India's best research students for our Masters and PhD programs and greater social and cultural exchange between our two countries.

5. <http://www.livemint.com/Education/UtNYdM0Ng8EZS-FGa511cXP/10-recommendations-of-Subramanian-Committee-on-new-education.html>

New Forms of Cooperation

In recent years, several Australian universities have established relations with Indian universities to establish joint degrees and encourage student exchange. Deakin University, which has a long history of involvement in India, has been involved in Higher Degree Research linkages with India since 2006. These linkages not only promote research collaborations, but also a greater flow of both scholarship and full-fee paying students from India. The Deakin India Research Initiative has seen Indian doctoral students link with a Deakin supervisor and undertake 6 months of intensive study at Deakin as part of their degree.⁶ This program involves innovative collaborations with Indian industry, with PhD students working in conjunction with industry, such that their studies in Australia are most aligned with their career ambitions.⁷ Deakin also has an MoU with The Energy and Resources Institute of India (TERI), which, in addition to research collaborations, has a target of seeing 50 PhD students enrolled at Deakin, with co-supervisors at TERI.⁸

Monash University has recently initiated a very promising research partnership with IIT-Bombay, one of India's premier research centres, which has been ranked as India's top university. The partnership features a joint PhD project, which aims to see between 200-300 students co-supervised by Monash and IIT researchers within five years.⁹

RMIT has advanced collaborations with India in the research space, with implications for the provision of higher degrees. The Australia-India Research Centre for Automation Software Engineering, based at RMIT, is conducting innovative research in collaboration with several Indian institutions. The collaboration involves a number of PhD students who are rotated between Australia and India.¹⁰ RMIT's Centre for Advanced Materials and Industrial Chemistry is collaborating with the Indian Institute for Chemical Technologies on joint research projects, which are supported by PhD students from India studying at RMIT.¹¹

In May of 2016, the University of Melbourne launched a new 'Blended Bachelor of Science' program, in collaboration with the Indian Institute for Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune, and the Savitribhai Phule Pune University (SPPU). The degree has been designed for students wishing to undertake postgraduate research in science after completing their undergraduate degree. The program will begin with a trial cohort of 45 students, who will be enrolled at an SPPU affiliated college. The curriculum for the degree has been developed in collaboration between the three institutions and students will also receive ongoing academic support from them. Collaboration between the universities ensures consistency in benchmarking and quality assurance, such that the degree will be recognised by the University of Melbourne as equivalent to its own Bachelor of

6. https://www.deakin.edu.au/research/story?story_id=2011/08/08/deakin-india-research-initiative

7. http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/story?story_id=2015/02/10/indian-oil-partnership

8. https://www.deakin.edu.au/research/story?story_id=2010/04/13/deakin-university-and-teri-join-forces

9. <http://www.iitbmonash.org/about-us/>

10. <http://www.rmit.edu.au/research/research-institutes-centres-and-groups/multi-partner-collaborations/aicause/>

11. <https://www.rmit.edu.au/research/phds-and-other-research-degrees/school-of-graduate-research/international-partners/rmit-hdr-delivery-partners/>

Indian Centres of Excellence: Increasing Australian Participation

Science degree. The program provides a model for overcoming problems of qualification recognition between Australia and India and encouraging Indian students to enrol in Masters programs in Australia.¹²

Importantly, initiatives for student exchange often begin with substantive research involvement between faculty members from Australian and Indian universities. It is noteworthy that other countries that have a greater share of the market for Indian students have followed similar pathways to fostering enhanced student exchange. The University of Nottingham in the UK, for example, which now has a very established relationship with Panjab University, Chandigarh, had established a firm foundation in research collaborations, which subsequently led to increased investment in research and the establishment of student exchange programs.¹³ Attempts to foster relations to increase access to India's student market should, therefore, not be seen in isolation from the range of collaborative arrangements in which faculty are engaged.

There are now a number of centres of excellence in India that are emerging as hubs of international collaboration. To date, Australia has had limited engagement with these centres.

The Jindal Global University (JGU) was established as a non-profit venture in 2009 in the National Capital Region of Delhi. Its core objective is to foster a global perspective in students, as reflected in the structure of courses and curriculum and with global collaborations in research. Faculty at the university already has a number of international appointments. JGU actively promotes students going on international student exchange programs and taking part in international academic, sporting and cultural events. In addition to teacher exchanges and research collaborations, the JGU already has a number of advanced collaborations with international universities in providing joint degree programs, particularly with universities in the United States. They offer a 6 year Double Degree program in Law with Indiana University, which provides students with degrees from both universities' law schools. They also have dual degree and student exchange programs with the University of Arizona, the University of Texas, the University of California, Tilburg University and Rollins College. To date, however, only the law schools of Sydney University and the University of New England have signed MoUs with JGU to promote student exchanges. Other Australian universities are yet to engage.

There are a number of other innovative and globally-oriented universities emerging in India that pose great potential for collaboration. Shiv Nadar University in Uttar Pradesh, for example, has developed a reputation for its

12. <http://iro.unimelb.edu.au/news/launch-of-blended-bachelor-of-science-in-pune,-india>

13. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/news/pressreleases/2015/march/partnership-with-indian-university-opens-new-opportunities-for-nottingham.aspx>

modern curriculum and global perspective. It trains its students to be sensitive to global issues and to use knowledge to serve, both locally and globally. Student exchange is seen as an important modality for developing this global outlook. Ashoka University, in Haryana, has also developed a modern approach to course development, with a program involving a multidisciplinary degrees. The university has made efforts to attract some of the best minds from around the country and aims to become a research-focused university of global repute. Both Shiv Nadar and Ashoka Universities have been pro-active in developing partnerships with other universities throughout the world for student and faculty exchanges. These include partnerships with some of the world's most elite universities. Ashoka, for example, has partnerships with the University of California, Berkeley, King's College, London, Trinity College, Dublin, and Yale University. As yet, however, no Australian universities have developed official partnerships with either of these emerging players.

The experience of other foreign universities with these emerging players may have important lessons for Australia. Yale's substantive involvement with Ashoka University, for example, is said to have emerged from the initiative and interest of faculty members, who had established existing relations for research.¹⁴ Building on existing ties between faculty members across Australian and Indian universities and encouraging branching out into collaborations in teaching might be a positive strategy to facilitate new developments.

Alternative Strategies for Qualification Recognition

The mutual recognition of qualifications gained at Australian and Indian universities is a key factor that it is hoped might facilitate greater student mobility. Since 2010, Education Ministers from Australia and India have agreed for the need for a common framework for qualifications recognition and credit transfers and, since 2011, the Australia India Education Council (AIEC) has been working on this issue as a key priority. While there is common recognition of the value of developing a common framework and some tentative progress, there are also several barriers.

In a report commissioned by the AIEC, den Hollander and Ranganath (n.d.) suggest that the current Indian framework for qualification recognition creates barriers to progress. While the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) is tasked with providing equivalence to foreign degrees (for recognition in both Indian universities and in the workforce), it does so on the basis of the duration of degrees, eligibility requirements and equivalence in syllabus between the

14. <http://yaledailynews.com/blog/2015/10/26/yale-and-ashoka-engage-further/>

foreign degree and its Indian counterpart. The focus on duration is identified as a challenge, as this means that fast-tracked degrees offered in Australia are unable to be recognised. Furthermore, at the time of the report, there were no examples of any distance or online degrees being recognised by the AIU. Den Hollander and Ranganath also identify boundaries to the recognition of Indian students' prior learning and qualifications in Australia. Although it has been working towards a common framework for some time, India still has no national system for recognising credit and qualifications, and it is not compulsory for all Indian educational institutions to be accredited. Given the bewildering complexity of universities and colleges in India, this creates challenges for Australia in recognising students' prior learning. Den Hollander and Ranganath therefore recommend that India must develop these common frameworks if progress is to be made in developing greater collaboration and exchange with Australian universities.

It is noteworthy that in the UK, the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) has managed to establish a database of international academic qualifications and provides a service to inform students and workers of the comparability of their existing qualifications with similar qualifications in the UK. Indian students are the most frequent users of this service.¹⁵ NARIC also offers courses for university and college staff to familiarise them with the educational landscape in India.¹⁶ NARIC has managed to establish such services even in the absence of a homogenous national system for qualification recognition within India. Australia could look to NARIC as an example to establish a more efficient system to recognise qualifications, not only for India but for all international students, as currently we have no such centralised system for qualifications recognition. It is currently left to universities make their own assessments of students' prior qualifications.¹⁷ A centralised system such as NARIC could help reduce the burden on universities in evaluating qualifications and create transparency for international students and ease their transition to enrolment in Australia.

15. <https://uknaric.org/2012/01/16/how-a-uk-naric-statement-of-comparability-can-help/>

16. <https://www.naric.org.uk/naric/organisations/training/Specialised/India%20Pakistan%20Bangladesh.aspx>

17. <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/services-and-resources/pages/qualifications-recognition.aspx>

Recommendations

Many of the positive developments that have emerged so far have been driven by the initiative of faculty. Collaborations in research have had flow-on effects for the provision of teaching, with the establishment of joint PhD programs and other forms of student exchange. In the absence of progress on the Foreign Educational Institutions Bill in India or a national scheme for qualifications recognition and accreditation, it may be more useful in the short-term for Australian universities build on existing relations of trust and research collaboration and incentivise faculty to expand on their existing research collaborations and create opportunities for collaboration in teaching as well. Indeed, a recent report by the British Council gave very similar advice to British universities, suggesting that waiting for legislative change in India will not be a fruitful strategy.¹⁸ Building on such relations in the short-term will lay a foundation that can be built upon further if/when positive policy developments in India eventuate. In light of this, we would make seven key recommendations:

1. The Government should work with the Australia India Institute, Universities Australia and the GO8 to develop a series of 'What Works' case studies, building on the recent successful experience of Deakin, Monash, RMIT, Sydney and the University of Melbourne, for example, in different spheres. These case studies could be written documents but also have a multi-media dimension, being developed as short films, for example, that could be circulated to university administrators and academics as inspiration.
2. In tandem with the first strategy, the Government should identify five 'India champions' from within Australia and five 'Australia champions' within India. These ten individuals could work alone and together to publicise the value of collaborating across the Australia-India space in terms of higher education. These champions could be 'bought out' at 0.2 FTE from their regular employment to work intensively over 12 months to promote linkages.
3. The Government of Australia should develop a faculty teaching initiative programme across universities to incentivize the development of joint degrees or blended degrees with Indian universities. Faculty would be bought out with the specific goal of developing joint initiatives. Particular attention could be given to areas where Indian institutions are not historically strong – notably the Arts and Social Sciences – and to partnering with effective global institutions emerging inside India, such as Shiv Nadar University.
4. The Government must develop in its emerging efforts to link with India – and in association with other peak bodies such as Universities Australia – a distinctive message about the value of cooperation beyond mutual gain, presented in terms of advancing human capital formation in India and Australia, building links between youth, improving access to higher education, and developing new curricula.
5. The Government should organise, in association with the Australian High Commission and others, a delegation to visit India with the specific aim of publicising and developing a set of 'spark projects' that would have the potential of being up-scaled, and building also on the 'What Works case studies' identified in Recommendation 1. This Delegation would target new elite private universities in India as well as historically-strong public universities such as Delhi University.
6. To improve our system of qualifications recognition and thereby improve international student mobility, the Government must fund the establishment of a centralised database of international qualifications, similar to NARIC in the UK.
7. The government must undertake a scoping project on the potential for establishing Australian university campuses in India, given the momentum building in India to allow this.

18. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/uk-sector-urged-not-to-wait-for-india-to-pass-foreign-campus-bill/2011257.article>

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