



Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi at an informal meeting of heads of state and government of the BRICS countries, Hamburg 2017. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.



# Modi's Third Term and the Internalisation of Indian Higher Education

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If, or indeed, when the world's largest democracy re-elects its current leader, Shri Narendra Modi, for a third term as India's Prime Minister on the 4th June 2024, the world's most populous country will be at a public policy crossroads. With between six and seven million young people entering the workforce every year[1], the Indian Government needs to find jobs or education for all of its youth if it is to reap the benefits of the country's so-called demographic dividend[2].

The Modi Government's ambition, indeed, the 'Modi ki guarantee' for its putative third term, is to make India a developed nation and the world's third largest economy by 2047; a hundred years after independence[3].

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) sits at the heart of these twin goals of managing the 'Youth Bulge' and delivering Modi's 'Viksit Bharat 2047' vision of becoming a \$30tn USD economy supported by social progress, environmental sustainability, and good governance, among others. The NEP aims to raise educational attainment across India's vast population and skill India's youth for the world's economy.

The NEP's proposed reform and improvement of the entire educational eco-system, and especially the internationalisation of its Higher Education system, are fundamental to everything that Modi's third term will seek to achieve. Get it right, and India's economy can be propelled forward, creating employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for India's youth and an ongoing expansion of GDP. But, get it wrong, and social and political unrest and economic retrenchment will follow in the world's most populous nation.

The BJP manifesto[4] for the 2024 election promises, among other guarantees, to enhance youth employment underpinned by the ongoing implementation of its educational reform package. So what can we expect from Modi's likely third term in relation to higher education, especially as it relates to the opportunities for foreign universities and other education providers?

[1] <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2018/May/22/only-475-million-join-workforce-annually-in-india-not-12-million-as-claimed-1817846.html>

[2] The Times of India (2nd February 2023) Is India's rapidly growing youth population a dividend or disaster? [http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/9754522.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/9754522.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

[3] Deccan Herald (4th March 2024) Explained: What is 'Viksit Bharat 2047' and what does it aim to achieve? <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/explained-what-is-viksit-bharat-2047-and-what-does-it-aim-to-achieve-2920441>

[4] Modi Ki Guarantee (BJP, 2024) <https://www.bjp.org/bjp-manifesto-2024>

Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons

## The NEP 2020

The NEP explicitly addresses a range of perceived shortcomings in the Indian Higher Education system (Table 1).

**Table 1: Issues that NEP 2020 seeks to address**

- Poor quality education, especially at the undergraduate level, that is largely didactic and does not develop critical thinking, compounded by poor pedagogy and outdated curriculum,
- A complex and fragmented regulatory system which has hampered progress, coupled with large affiliations of colleges to major universities where oversight and quality assurance is weak,
- A weak research culture outside of the key academic institutions (most notably IITs, IIMs, IISERs and a few national universities and specialized institutions),
- A restrictive disciplinary focus that forces students into early choice and does not allow any transfer between courses or institutions,
- Poor governance structures and an absence of autonomy which constrains innovation,
- Limited participation, particularly among disadvantaged socio-economic groups, and the need to extend participation.

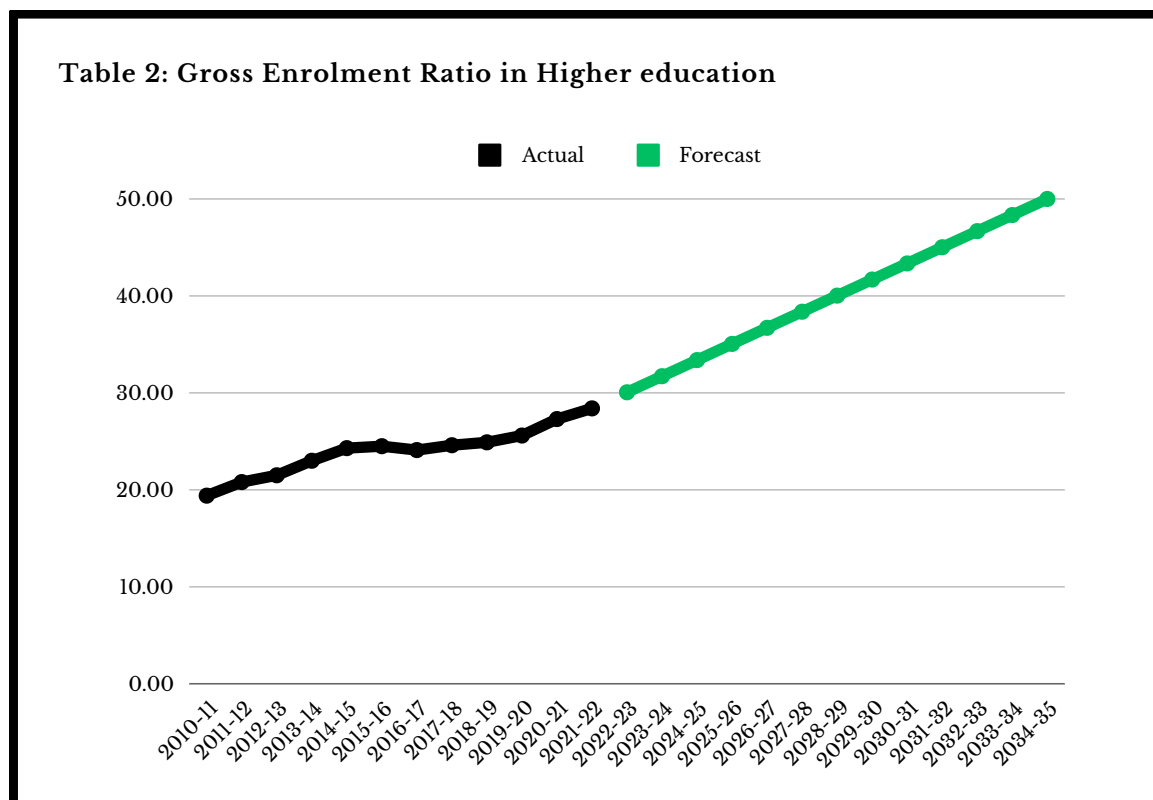
In response to these concerns, the NEP has promised ambitious reforms, including an enormous increase in participation (increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education, including vocational education, from 26.3% to 50% by 2035) and facilitating the internationalisation of higher education in a range of ways; from attracting international students through to allowing the establishment of International Branch Campuses (IBCs).

## The Internationalisation Agenda

The internationalisation of higher education is an important component of the NEP for two main reasons.

First, and arguably most importantly, if India is to meet its 50 per cent Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) by 2034-35, it will need more providers and not just an expansion of existing universities. Expanding GER to 50 per cent (Table 2) from 28.40 per cent in 2021-22 will require finding nearly 40 million more university seats for students by 2035, in addition to the 43 million seats that were occupied in 2021-22. Allowing a range of high quality overseas universities to operate in India will increase the capacity of the system, especially if those universities operate at scale and in innovative ways.

Second, the NEP (and indeed the Prime Minister himself) implicitly supports the disruption that international education will bring to the perceived complacency existing in the current Indian HE eco-system. The hope is that competition from overseas universities will drive up educational standards, bring new and cutting edge curriculum, enhance research partnerships (especially beyond the already strong but small elite Indian university sector) and place Indian Higher Education in the global rankings.



More broadly, opening India up to international universities fits with Modi's vision of making India a Vishwa Guru (world educator and leader) in which India takes its place as the leader of the Global South and a major research and innovation power that will drive its long term economic ambitions. Internationalisation, therefore, is not an addendum to the NEP but, rather, a fundamental component that will drive many of the other reforms that Modi's government wishes to achieve. In this context, understanding what the opportunities for overseas universities will be in Modi's third term gain even greater salience.

### Progress to date

The NEP was a product of Modi's first term of Government and was launched shortly after his second electoral triumph in 2019. While his first term from 2014 was about developing a deep understanding of the public policy challenges facing India, and building policies to address them, the second term from 2019 was one of policy implementation, putting in place much of the legislation and regulatory frameworks that enables the roll out of policy. The NEP is very much a feature of this second term built upon reforms from the first term (e.g. graded autonomy, institutes of eminence, online delivery), with first the policy itself being published and promulgated and then, subsequently, a long list of regulations being developed, refined and issued.

The University Grants Committee (UGC) has led the charge on the NEP, and especially the internationalisation opportunity. It has issued a plethora of separate guidelines, advice documents and regulations pertaining to higher education over the last five years. Table 3 summarises the most pertinent regulations.

**Table 3: Key Internationalisation Regulations since 2020**

- **UGC Guidelines for Internationalisation of Higher Education (July 2021)** – these guidelines exhort universities to establish an international office and start the drive towards engaging internationally and recruiting international students. [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/upload\\_document/int\\_he.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/int_he.pdf)
- **The Regulation on Academic Bank of Credit (2021)** which supports credit accumulation and recognition across registered HE institutions and to which, in principle at least, international universities can contribute. <https://www.education.gov.in/university-grants-commission-establishment-and-operation-academic-bank-credits-higher-education>
- **Academic Collaboration between Indian and Foreign Higher Educational Institutions to offer Twinning, Joint Degree and Dual Degree Programmes (2022)** which, for the first time, allows domestic Indian universities various forms of collaboration with international universities. [https://www.ugc.gov.in/pdfnews/4555806\\_UGC-Acad-Collab-Regulations.pdf](https://www.ugc.gov.in/pdfnews/4555806_UGC-Acad-Collab-Regulations.pdf)
- **Guidelines for admission and supernumerary seats of international students in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in higher educational institutions in India (2022)** which allows universities to exceed their sanctioned enrolment numbers by 25% if those students are from outside of India. [https://www.ugc.gov.in/pdfnews/2145333\\_Guidelines-for-Admssion-and-Supernumerary-seats-of-International\\_001.pdf](https://www.ugc.gov.in/pdfnews/2145333_Guidelines-for-Admssion-and-Supernumerary-seats-of-International_001.pdf)
- **University Grants Commission (Setting up and Operation of Campuses of Foreign Higher Educational Institutions in India) Regulations (2023)** which provides for high quality foreign universities to establish international branch campuses (IBC) across India. <https://www.ugc.gov.in/pdfnews/Setting%20up%20and%20Operation%20of%20Campuses%20of%20Foreign%20Higher%20Educational%20Institutions%20in%20India.pdf>

Prior to this Regulation, of course, GIFT City in Gujarat has already enabled the first branch campuses to be established in its Special Economic Zone, with Deakin University expected to commence its first cohort in July 2024 and the University of Wollongong following closely behind. There are also several other Australian and UK universities examining the opportunities in GIFT City. This new regulation, however, is not limited to specific locations, with the potential to open up the whole country to IBCs; an opportunity that several overseas universities are exploring actively.

As a result, the enabling framework for the NEP is now in place to allow internationalisation of Higher Education; from bringing international students to India through to the establishment of full international branch campuses. But, at the same time, implementation is limited. Most of the international engagement that has taken place in India in recent years has been through innovative models operating within the existing regulations, rather than being developed in response to the more permissive regulations developed under the auspices of the NEP 2020[5].

With a few exceptions, (i.e. a small number of internationally focused private universities), Indian Higher Education Institutions are yet to fully operationalise the internationalisation agenda. At the same time, while many overseas universities have expressed interest, very few have taken the plunge towards IBCs; although that position does seem likely to change in the next couple of years.

## India's transformation under the Modi era

To understand the scale of the reforms being undertaken under the NEP, it is worth pausing for a moment and reflecting on some of the other major achievements of Modi's first two terms in Government (see Table 4). As well as demonstrating the capacity for action, these achievements also speak to the scale and speed of implementation that foreign collaborators, whether they are universities or commercial entities, need to expect. While some are critical of what these reforms have really delivered[6] the absolute scale of what has been achieved in other spheres is a clear demonstration of what Modi's government is capable of delivering in the education space.

Looking from outside into India, many find it difficult to appreciate or comprehend the pace of change. Although the Indian economy and its systems have seen an upward trajectory since the early 1990s and the cessation of the so-called Licence Raj[7] and the rise of India's IT sector, the country has been on an accelerated trajectory since 2014. The pace of reforms in the delivery of services to people and organizations, and in a few instances the creation of a new system from scratch, reflects the speed at which Modi's Government can effect change. Table 4 summarises the main advancements under Modi's first two terms.

[5] For example, University of Queensland's joint PhD programme with IIT Delhi, and University of Melbourne's MIPA (Melbourne India Postgraduate Academy)

[6] See, for example, Christophe Jaffrelot (2021) Modi's India Princeton University Press

[7] Licence Raj refers to the highly bureaucratic regulations that restricted foreign companies from operating in India until they started to be lifted in the early 1990s.

**Table 4: Major Modi projects since 2014**

- **Jal Jeevan Mission** which has increased tap water provision to 89 million households in 2023 – up from just 32 million households covered in 2019.
- 110 million toilets built in individual houses as part of the **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan**, sharply reducing the widespread practice of open defecation and was of immense help especially for women in rural areas.
- The creation of 400 million **Jan Dhan** bank accounts for India's unbanked poor. From just 17 per cent of women who had a bank account when the scheme started, the figure is well over 80 per cent today. By linking Jan Dhan accounts with Aadhaar cards (Unique identification Number) as identity proofs and providing mobile connectivity, India was able to facilitate speedy digital transfer of money for welfare programmes under a direct benefit transfer scheme.
- Through free **LPG connections** for the poor, India shifted from traditional fuels to LPG for over 80 million women between 2016 to 2019.
- When the **Digital India movement** started in 2016, India was 123rd in the world in terms of data consumption as measured in Gigabytes. By 2024 it is the biggest consumer of data, thanks to the low cost of data packages. It has also created a force-multiplier for many initiatives and is the single largest contributor for Indian companies' confidence to pursue scale in delivery of services.
- In terms of **digital transactions**, India now undertakes 11 times more than what the US and Europe combined, and 4 times more than China. Moreover, in FY 2021-22, India transacted 32% of its GDP digitally.
- **Infrastructure**, particularly road construction, too, saw a major push, 50,000 km of highways were constructed in the first term. The number of operational airports in the country has doubled to 148 in 2023 from 74 in 2014.
- Despite some implementation challenges, during the COVID19 pandemic, over 950 million people in India get inoculated against the virus, and the country supplied **Covid vaccines** to other nations who were in dire need of it, especially on Global South.

## Operationalising the internationalisation regulations

Taking into account the speed and scale at which India, and especially Modi's government, can implement policy, there are two related features of the new regulations that shape directly how the roll-out and take up of opportunities will emerge.

First, despite their apparently permissive nature, the regulations fit very squarely within India's command and control[8] approach to regulation. As well as having to comply with a range of long standing legal and financial requirements, the new regulations make it very clear that foreign universities wishing to establish operations in India must apply and gain permission for their activities. The regulations, therefore, do not permit internationalisation. Rather, they require government permission to undertake activities. Moreover, the regulations allow the regulator (in most instances, the UGC) to impose specific requirements to be met during and after implementation.

Second, the regulations are written in deliberately vague and ambiguous terms which allow those implementing them to have a high degree of discretion to shape the outcome. So, for example, regulations on establishing IBCs require universities to be world ranked or have outstanding expertise, but the specific rankings, the extent to which subject rather than institution wide rankings can be used and the other metrics of outstanding expertise, remain open to interpretation and at the discretion of the regulatory decision maker.

The outcome of the internationalisation agenda, therefore, is very much beholden to the specific vision that the regulator wishes to implement. Consequently, while the internationalisation agenda does appear to support the disruption that high quality foreign universities can bring to the Indian Higher Education eco-system, its disruptive capacity will also be shaped and constrained by the regulator; for the time being at least, that regulator being the UGC and the powerful committee members it appoints to make specific decisions.

To understand how the regulations will be operationalised over the next few years, therefore, it is necessary to look beyond the specific detail of the regulations (the rules-in-form) and examine the way in which those responsible for implementing them are likely to apply them; that is, the rules-in-use[9]. While there remain uncertainties it is necessary to understand the informal intimations being issued as well as the formal regulations.

[8] Pritchett, W (2016) Types of Regulation The Regulatory Review <https://www.theregreview.org/2016/04/05/pritchett-types-of-regulation/>

[9] Ostrom, E (1999) 'Institutional Rational Choice: an Assessment of the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework', in P. Sabatier (ed), Theories of the Policy Process Boulder, CO: Westview Press, pp35 -72  
Lowndes, V, Pratchett, L and Stoker, G (2006) 'Local Political Participation: the Impact of Rule in Use Public Administration \*4:3 pp 539-61.



## The next five years

Over the next five years, the internationalisation agenda will be operationalised, both through the decisions of the UGC and its interplay with other regulatory bodies. To some extent, the UGC's success or otherwise in implementing its new regulations will determine its future; the alternative being the proposed unified regulator, the Higher Education Commission of India. Consequently, there is a significant incentive for UGC to move quickly on some initiatives rather than find reasons for delay.

Regardless of whether the UGC survives or is usurped, there are a number of clear outcomes that the NEP's internationalisation agenda will focus on; and a few areas where it will not.

- **TNE and IBCs**

Encouraging various forms of trans-national education (TNE), and especially facilitating the establishment of IBCs, will be a central feature of the next five years. While all forms of TNE will be supported (including twinning arrangements, dual degrees, study abroad arrangements and so on), it is those which show a clear investment in the Indian Higher Education ecosystem, and which help to disrupt the system as well as address the NEP's key goals, that will achieve the greatest support. In other words, those investments that help to increase GER, enhance the research and innovation capacity of India, and which bring new ideas and educational opportunities to India, will gain the greatest traction with the regulator. International Branch Campuses will be the 'jewel in the crown', especially those which bring cutting edge curriculum, world-leading faculty and/or research opportunities that support India's broader economic focus (see below). Light touch TNE activities, such as twinning arrangements, will not be discouraged but will be much more welcome where they are seen to be leading to larger collaborations.

- **Skills and employability**

As with many countries, the development of skills that support economic growth, is a central feature of the education policy landscape. However, for India, the skills agenda is even more pressing than in most countries as it seeks to close the employability gap and reap the demographic dividend while also providing a trained workforce to the rest of the world. According to the Wheebox India Skills Report 2024[10] (produced in collaboration with a number of India's regulatory bodies), just over half of formally educated 18-25 year olds (51.25 per cent) possess the requisite skills for employment. While the 2024 number is an improvement on previous years, the shortfall in skills is significant, especially given the scale of the population lacking the requisite skills. Consequently, the BJP 2024 manifesto makes a significant commitment to enhancing skills among young people[11].

The skills agenda will focus on a number of economic areas (see Table 5). Engagement from overseas universities will be most successful where education and research activities can contribute to India's ambitions in these areas.

[10] [https://wheebox.com/assets/pdf/ISR\\_Report\\_2024.pdf](https://wheebox.com/assets/pdf/ISR_Report_2024.pdf)

[11] Modi ki Guarantee ibid p60

**Table 5: India's key economic areas for growth**

- **Infrastructure**, including the built environment, high speed rail, information technology and waterways. Beyond traditional engineering qualifications, the infrastructure agenda requires the full range of planning, financing and project management capacity (among other skills) to transform India's physical and virtual environment and move it towards the developed economy.
- **Digital technologies** that will drive innovation and development across a range of sectors, with a special focus on cutting edge skills that support and enhance India's pre-eminence in machine learning and artificial intelligence, data science, robotics and related and emerging digital areas.
- **High-tech manufacturing** across all sectors but especially in relation to semiconductors, electric vehicles and defence equipment, where India aims to become a world leader, and where it lags behind other competitor nations, most notably China.
- **Space exploration** that will build on India's successful Chandrayaan 3 moon landing in 2023, and which supports India's nascent space policy, including the development of end to end commercial space operations.
- **Net Zero** and the drive towards new technologies that can create sustainable energy, most notably, in India's context, solar and hydrogen energy.
- **Industry 5.0** putting research and innovation at the centre of the transition to a sustainable, human-centric and resilient industry.

- **EdTech and Online**

Despite a downturn in valuations in the last year or so, EdTech remains an important and distinct feature of the Indian education landscape. As Alexander Zheltov notes for the Forbes Business Council:

"India's edtech industry is growing tremendously and is estimated to reach \$10.4 billion by 2025 with 37 million paid edtech users. I've noticed this rise is fueled by the growing request for non-academic courses in second- and third-tier cities and the demand for customization in the edtech industry". [12]

Some of India's major EdTech platforms, such as UpGrad, Unacademy, Cuemath and Physics Wallah have gone from strength to strength over recent years, alongside new market entrants such as OpenLearning Bharat (a spin out from the successful Australian OpenLearning platform). During the COVID19 pandemic these and other EdTech providers were encouraged and supported in delivering online education.

[12] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/10/20/the-indian-edtech-market-what-founders-need-to-know-to-attract-investment/?sh=27df2ef83695>

While India has returned to a more hybrid model of learning since the pandemic receded, EdTech remains an important feature of the Indian economic landscape. Consequently, while funding in China's EdTech market decreased by nearly 75% from 2020 to 2021, funding in India's EdTech market in the same time period increased by around 60%<sup>[13]</sup>. In May 2022 PM Modi further endorsed and encouraged providers to embrace hybrid forms of delivery as the new model to develop equity, inclusivity and quality<sup>[14]</sup>.

However, for foreign providers the opportunity is, arguably, more limited (see below), with the biggest opportunity existing in micro-credentials for university students and upskilling for working professionals.

- **Research partnerships**

India has big ambitions to significantly increase its academic research for two reasons. First, it aims to place Indian higher education in the vanguard of global research, driving its universities and other higher education institutes up in the world rankings as part of its broader strategy of becoming a global force in education (Vishwa Guru). In line with this ambition the Anusandhan National Research Fund was established in February 2024, although many are critical of its limited finances<sup>[15]</sup>.

Second, India desperately needs cutting edge research to drive its industrial strategy in relation to digital technologies, high-tech manufacturing and so on.

Partnerships that will drive these dual features of the research dynamic, therefore, will be central to the next five years. More than simply trying to access India's new research funds, overseas universities will need to demonstrate how their participation can add value to these dual agendas. Research partnerships, therefore, will be encouraged and supported but their contribution to India's ambition, and the ways in which they augment it, will need to be emphasised.

- **Innovation and start-ups**

Alongside the skills and research agendas, a significant focus on start-ups has been a long standing feature of higher education policy in India; not least because it helps to address some of the employment challenge. The Modi Government claims that India is in the top 3 eco-systems in the world for launching and incubating start-ups.

Much of this eco-system is driven through the higher education sector. Indeed, many private universities in India advertise their industry links and incubators, and promote the number of patents that faculty and students have submitted. Moreover, the 'Modi Ki Guarantee' commits to additional funding and mentoring for start-ups, all focused on promoting entrepreneurship among India's youth.<sup>[16]</sup>

[13] [EdTech Landscape In India: What Changed In The Post Pandemic Years - Blume Ventures](#)

[14] <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/education/pm-modi-reviews-implementation-of-national-education-policy-calls-for-hybrid-learning/vidoeshow/91405147.cms?from=mdr>

[15] [Ruling party manifesto promises to tackle youth unemployment \(universityworldnews.com\)](#)

[16] Modi Ki Guarantee *ibid* p18.

In particular, it aims to strengthen connections between industry and universities to enhance the opportunities for start-ups to address local and regional challenges.

The opportunity for overseas education providers in this context is twofold. First, foreign universities can offer to bring particular expertise and mentorship to existing incubator schemes ran by Indian universities, thereby extending capacity and focus. Second, collaboration with overseas universities has the capacity to make such start-ups more international in their focus, providing new opportunities for these businesses and making them export ready.

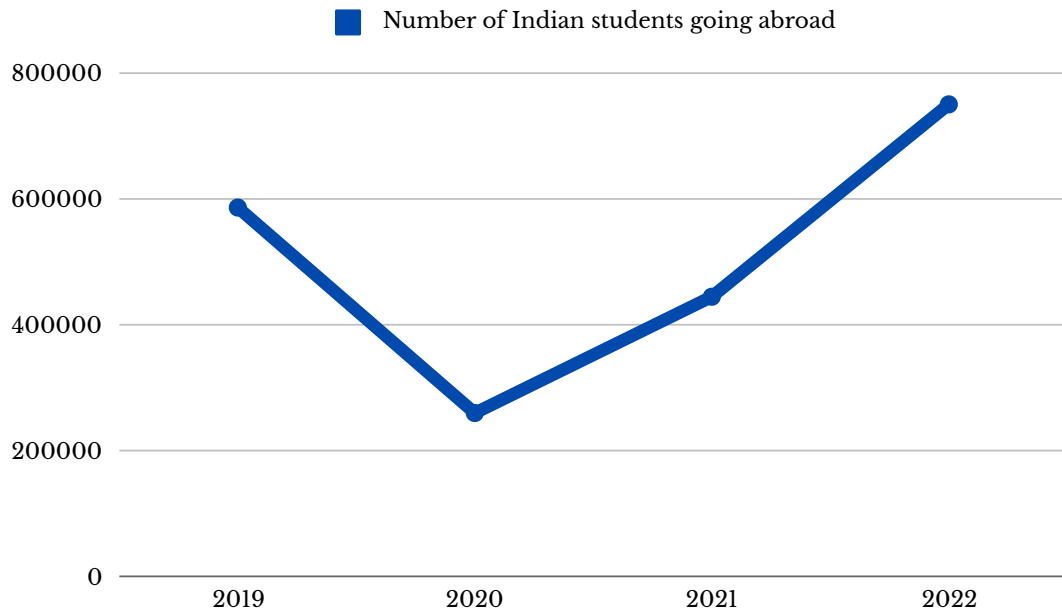
- **Outbound Students**

Conventionally, overseas universities have seen India primarily as a source market for students to come and study in their country. While much of what is discussed above, and indeed the NEP more generally, suggests that the Indian Government no longer supports such practices, the reality is that Modi's next term is likely to implicitly, if not explicitly, endorse the ongoing flow of students overseas.

As recent numbers show (see Table 6), there remains not just a latent but also a growing demand for overseas education among both India's significant elite classes and its increasingly prosperous and rapidly expanding middle classes. Moreover, at a government level, India needs to export some of its student demand as it cannot meet its education, skill and employment agenda purely through in-country delivery. The long-term goal of India providing skills to the world also aligns with the ongoing support for offshore international education at a government level.

**Table 6: India’s Outbound Student Numbers**

India continues to be a major ‘source’ country for most ‘destination’ countries, with numbers going overseas growing every year, especially with the pent-up demand that was built during COVID19 travel restrictions. Between 2019-2022 approximately 400,000 - 750,000 new students travelled abroad every year [17] (to nearly 80 countries) for education, lowest in 2020 due to pandemic as shown in the graph below. In 2023, there were 1.5 million Indian students studying abroad [18]. According to ICEF direct spending on study abroad education from India (i.e. an outflow of money) was estimated to be US\$ 47 Bn in 2022 [19].



[17] <https://data.gov.in/resource/year-wise-details-number-indians-who-disclosed-their-purpose-visit-study-education-while>

[18]. <https://fsi.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/37419/QUESTION+NO1353+INDIAN+STUDENTS+STUDYING+ABROAD>

[19] e: <https://monitor.icef.com/2023/11/spending-by-indian-outbound-students-could-reach-us70-billion-by-2025/>



Inevitably, this demand for overseas education is leading to short-term visa recalibrations in most ‘destination’ countries, especially as other ‘source’ countries are also growing their demand[20]. However, where individual universities can navigate the restrictions that their own governments are imposing on international student visas, the opportunities for the ongoing recruitment of Indian students will remain strong.

For universities to remain competitive over the longer term in this international student market, however, they will also need to build brand through other engagement activities in India. Those who come to India with only an ‘extraction’ philosophy may well see short term benefits but will not create a sustainable pipeline. It is only those international universities which engage in a larger strategy with India that will gain the longer term benefits.

- **Inbound students**

Finally, it seems likely that those institutions that can bring international students to India will be particularly welcomed. Of course, the key prize will be bringing students from a foreign university’s own country to India (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK, USA and so on), either for short study periods or for longer forms of engagement. However, India’s (and Modi’s) ambition to become Vishwa Guru also extends to leading the Global South and becoming a world class education hub for students who cannot afford the high prices (and increasingly restrictive visa regimes) that countries in the Global North set. It seems likely, therefore, that foreign universities that are able to access alternative markets in the Global South and align them with India’s goals could also see significant support for their initiatives.

Over the next five years, therefore, considerable opportunities will emerge for international universities to engage in India. Universities should be building their strategies with a clear recognition of what the next Modi Government is likely to support; and also those areas that it is not likely to support.

[20] Australia is the most recent country to seek a major recalibration by introducing caps on temporary student visas (see: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/article/2024/may/13/australia-international-student-cap-impact-university-vet-enrolments>) following closely on the heels of the UK (see: [What went wrong with international education in the UK? \(universityworldnews.com\)](https://www.universityworldnews.com/what-went-wrong-with-international-education-in-the-uk/))  
Image Courtesy: Queen’s University:

## What's not likely to be supported?

While the case for internationalisation is evident, there are two specific areas where the Modi Government has also signalled that it will not be supportive of foreign universities seeking to push their own interests or agenda.

- **Arts, Humanities and the Social Sciences**

The demand for STEM courses, health and wellbeing, and associated business-related courses will rise unchecked, and indeed, will be supported unequivocally by the next government. However, the Modi Government is much more wary about overseas curriculum that promotes Arts, Humanities or Social Sciences.

Part of this wariness comes from a desire to move beyond a post-colonial discussion of arts and society and to focus much more on India's historical contribution to the world; one which celebrates India's 10,000 years of cultural and scientific endeavour. Implicitly, and in some instances explicitly, this approach rejects the post-colonial imperialism of western art and humanities and privileges historical Indian achievements as the pre-eminent cultural basis on which Indian education and society should be framed. The NEP's concept of promoting Indian Ways of Knowing also requires the cultural and religious philosophies of India to be privileged above those of western philosophies that have evolved from Judeo-Christian approaches.

There is also a political dimension to the dismissal of overseas education in the social sciences. It is no secret that India, especially since Modi came to power in 2014, has resented international criticism of its political and democratic practices. Such resentment argues that a biased western media (especially outlets such as the BBC and the New York Times) operates in a neo-imperialistic manner, seeking to diminish India's historic and emerging role in the world.



Whether western criticisms are valid or are another feature of post-colonial imperialism is not for debate here. What is clear, however, is that the Modi Government will not welcome foreign universities where they are likely to introduce courses that encourage what they perceive as a neo-imperialist informed criticism of Indian languages, arts and culture, the government or its policies. Such restrictions are explicitly stated in the UGC regulation that facilitates the establishment of IBCs.[21] Any attempt by overseas universities to introduce Arts, Humanities and the Social Sciences, therefore, will be treated with a significant amount of scepticism, if not outright hostility in some circumstances.

- **Online delivery**

The NEP, and the 'Modi Ki Guarantee', places considerable emphasis on the use of technology in education, including the development of online education. Indeed, a central plank of the NEP roll out has been an investment in a range of central online resources (e.g. SWAYAM[22]) and a putative National Digital University due to start in 2024. Much of this infrastructure is providing free or low cost education to students who are unable to attend either India's public universities or its growing private education sector (two thirds of India's population still lives in rural areas [23]) or keen to attain credits from multiple institutions. It is supplemented by a growing private sector provision of online resources and courses.

On paper, therefore, the opportunity for foreign universities to engage with their digital resources and promote online education seems positive. However, the reality is that there is little appetite in India, especially from within the Government, for foreign universities to deliver such courses. Online education is seen as a way of providing low cost opportunities to a large volume of students in relatively remote locations rather than being just an alternative and more efficient channel for delivery. Moreover, UGC keeps a tight control over who in India can offer online degrees, with only a small number of NAAC A+ and A++[24] accredited institutions allowed to offer online degrees. Most qualifications gained online outside of this accreditation framework are not recognised for government jobs or similar opportunities.

The opportunity for foreign universities in the online space, therefore, is extremely limited. Foreign universities which establish IBCs will be able to offer some of the learning through online delivery (up to 10 percent of a course)but the bulk of the learning in a degree will be required to take place face to face.

Micro-credentials and other short course forms are not regulated by UGC or other bodies in India (e.g. AICTE), providing more opportunity for foreign universities. However, the market for micro-credentials is not well developed and does not, as yet, have high unmet demand. In addition, foreign providers of such courses who do not have a permanent establishment in India may also be liable to pay an equalization levy as well as GST on all online services offered.

[21] *ibid* Paragraph 7 (11).

[22] SWAYAM – Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring - <https://swayam.gov.in/>

[23] <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=IN>

[24] The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) assesses and accredits Higher Education Institutions in India – NAAC A+ and NAAC A++ is reserved for the highest graded institutions.



## Industry Peer Comment

*With India's thriving economy and technological advancements, rich cultural heritage and history, quality education will play a critical role in its further advancement. There is an abundant student pool for global institutions, as well as opportunities for international students and faculty to visit India for research and other programs. India's new National Education Policy (NEP) prescribes reforms to address challenges of capacity, equity, access to resources, quality, and bureaucratic obstacles. It places emphasis on internationalization - increasing the small number of international students in India, as well as building links and programs with top-ranking foreign universities, setting up international student offices in institutions and attracting foreign branch campuses.*

**Vivek Mansukhani, Head, Institute of International Education, India and South Asia**

## Conclusion

The next five years will shape the Indian HE landscape and the way the rest of the world will be able to engage with it. That shaping will be given life not only through the regulations that have been put in place but also in the way in which these deliberately ambiguous regulations are interpreted and operationalised. That operationalisation will, in turn, also be a feature of the ways in which foreign education providers engage with the opportunity and shape the agenda.

Those overseas universities (and countries) that move early are likely to help set the agenda and have more freedom to explore opportunities than those that follow later. However, what is clear is that over the next five years there will be significant internationalisation of Indian Higher Education, with a number of IBCs being approved across the country, and a range of other education and research partnerships being supported.

There is significant opportunity for foreign universities being promised in Modi's third term but, to achieve success, providers will need to have a sophisticated and nuanced perspective on the opportunity, a willingness to work with regulators such as the UGC to understand the underlying and implicit priorities of the government, and an eye on long-term outcomes as well as short-term returns.



# PROSPECTUS

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