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# Can India be the Philosopher's Stone for the UK's education market?

From Oxford to Hogwarts, the UK is undoubtedly home to some of the most iconic schools, colleges and universities in the world. Naturally, it attracts students from across the globe, who make a bee-line to get admission into the UK's top-notch institutes. However, just like getting across platform 9¾ requires 'special' skill, admission to UK institutes is not a small feat. The brick and mortar model of education is the front and centre of its success. This means that students have to personally come to the UK to study. However, recent events such as 'Brexit', a reduction in the number of scholarships and grants, tightening of visa norms and the like have made UK education a distant reality for non-UK students. This, coupled with the advent of Ed-tech (much like a modern day 'Portkey'), is literally transporting the classrooms of non-UK universities to students' houses. This means that even if the issues of grants, scholarships, visa et al. are resolved, the number of students who can get access to UK education in the UK would be far less than those who can enrol if the institutes, instead of waiting for students to come to them, venture outside the UK.

This raises some very critical questions – does it make sense for UK institutes to look at setting up bases outside the UK? If yes, when? If now, where? If where, how? The magic mirror's answer to all these questions lies within "India". Much like the 'room of requirement', it has something to offer to those who seek to find!

India and the UK have, since as long ago as the 'time-turner' could tell, shared excellent educational and cultural ties. With the world's largest young population and its ambition to become a truly global economic superpower, India today is in dire need of high quality higher

education to get her people future ready. Unfortunately, the present education system in India is far from meeting this urgent need. Barring a few institutes, schools, especially higher education institutes, are scarce, curriculum is dated, infrastructure is poor and teachers don't have the skills to do justice to their job. This is in contrast with the availability of leading education institutes and skilled academicians in the UK. If only the UK and India join hands, India may potentially be able to meet its education needs, and the UK will be able to provide education to many more students, benefitting its education system and economy. While there is no wrong time, the imminent need of India demands that the time for UK institutes to enter India is now! The requirement exists primarily in the higher education and skills sector. Further, the Indian government is also receptive to private and foreign participation in higher education and skill development projects. This is an added benefit for foreign institutes.

Therefore, the only question to be answered is how should UK higher education institutes enter the Indian market?

The Indian education sector appears to be a 'chamber of secrets' for those who see it from the outside, but is actually quite navigable once on the inside. One just needs to know the right spell to enter!

To put it simply, the higher education and skills sector in India can be broadly categorised under two heads: regulated and unregulated. Degree and diploma programmes are regulated, whilst test preps, certificate courses, skill development programmes and tutorials are largely unregulated. The regulated sector operates through not-for-profit entities. For-profit entities are permitted and prevalent in the unregulated space.

Foreign universities are currently not allowed to set up an independent campus in the country to offer a degree or diploma programme. However, this does not mean that there are no options for foreign institutes at all! On the contrary, and much against popular belief and perception, there are many models which work well for foreign institutes looking at India.

One such model is collaborations or twinning arrangements with Indian institutes. Collaboration in the field of technical and non-technical education is regulated. The laws require that students of the Indian institute spend a certain duration of the tenure of their programme in the foreign institute, to ensure the legitimacy of intent of the collaboration. The degree granted on completion of programme is that of an Indian university. While joint degrees are not permitted, the credits earned by the students in the programme are recognised by the foreign institute. This could be used by foreign universities for granting degrees to such students from abroad.

To reduce the regulatory bottleneck, the process of seeking approvals for collaborations is also being eased (and in some cases removed) by Indian education regulators, for world-ranking institutes. As per recent policy changes, the soon to be set up 'Institute of Eminence' in India (i.e. 20 world class institutes

of international standing) will be able to academically collaborate with top-ranking foreign higher education institutions without the need to obtain approval from the Indian education regulators. An Institute of Eminence will have complete flexibility in fixing curriculum and syllabus, and can also offer inter-disciplinary courses in emerging areas. These institutes are also required to develop teaching and research collaborations with a reasonable number of global universities featuring in the global rankings.

Similarly, universities which are graded as Category-I Universities in India (the standards for which are extremely high) can also engage in academic collaborations with top ranking foreign education institutions without the approval of the education regulatory bodies in India. They may also open research parks, incubation centers and university society linkage centers, in self-financing mode, either on their own or in partnership with private partners, without the approval of education regulatory bodies.

These policy changes open a plethora of opportunities for UK institutes, for whom their own brand reputation and the reputation of their collaborating partners is of prime importance. UK institutes can therefore associate with Indian institutes which are designated the best in the country by regulators, without regulatory issues.

This is not all.

1 - University Grants Commission (Categorization of Universities (only) for Grant of Graded Autonomy) Regulations, 2018.

2 - Featuring in top 500 of Times Higher Education World University Rankings or QS Rankings or top 200 of discipline specific ranking in Times Higher Education World University Rankings or QS Rankings.

The unregulated sector in India has way more to offer. To begin with, because these courses are not regulated, it is possible to decide the course structure, duration, fee etc. as per the requirements of the foreign institute. Secondly, the brand name of the foreign institute attracts students, and student enrolment is easy.

Further, it is possible to find a local partner to facilitate marketing, admissions, buildings and other support functions to make the process of implementation in India stress-free.

A common model used in this space is that the foreign institute grants a license of its brand, curriculum and know-how to the Indian institute/service provider. The programme is controlled by the foreign institute, which enrolls students as per its policy. Courses are taught by the teachers of the foreign institute from outside India (using technology), or on the ground through their teachers being present in India. Sometimes, teachers in India are trained to provide education through Indian institute, using licensed curriculum. The foreign institute grants a degree, diploma or certificate to the student only after being satisfied of the results. This model not only helps the foreign institute earn royalties and service fees from the Indian institute, but also helps the foreign institute establish its brand and presence in India. The Indian institute benefits from the use of the brand name and curriculum of the foreign institute, thus resulting in a win-win situation for both.

In addition, independent research centers, executive education programmes and specialised training sessions conducted by well-known foreign institutes are also very popular in India and see good enrolments. Since this also falls within the ambit of the unregulated sector, it gives foreign institutes the freedom to offer these programmes in the way they want and to exercise control over them.

To sum up, India can definitely be the charm for UK institutes looking at cross border expansion. With correct market analysis, and sound legal and regulatory advice, the UK may find a Philosopher's Stone in India, which can infuse new life in its dynamic education market.

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