Strategies for Enhancing Global Employability of Indian Graduates under NEP Initiatives

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Abstract

India stands at a pivotal juncture in higher education reform. With the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 providing an ambitious blueprint for internationalization, and recent regulatory frameworks enabling unprecedented foreign university engagement, the potential to transform Indian graduates into globally competitive talent has never been greater. Yet, significant gaps persist between policy vision and ground-level implementation.

This white paper examines the strategic pathways available under NEP 2020 for enhancing the global employability of Indian graduates, with particular focus on three interconnected domains: twinning and joint degree programs, foreign university collaborations and branch campuses, and academic mobility mechanisms including the Academic Bank of Credits. Drawing on recent data indicating that only 42-55% of Indian graduates are currently deemed employable by industry standards, and that approximately 70% lack job-relevant skills according to FICCI and NASSCOM assessments, the paper argues that internationalization is not merely an aspirational goal but an urgent necessity.

The analysis encompasses the regulatory evolution from the 2022 UGC Regulations on twinning programs to the 2023 regulations permitting foreign university campuses, the emerging landscape of institutions establishing presence in India (including the University of Southampton in Gurugram and multiple universities in GIFT City), and the infrastructure being built through programs such as SPARC, GIAN, and VAIBHAV. The paper concludes with actionable recommendations for policymakers, institutions, and industry stakeholders seeking to bridge the gap between India's demographic dividend and global workforce demands.

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1. Introduction: The Imperative for Global Employability

India's higher education sector has witnessed unprecedented expansion over the past two decades, with gross enrollment ratios climbing steadily and the number of higher education institutions exceeding 1,000 universities and 45,000 colleges. Yet, this quantitative growth has not translated proportionally into qualitative outcomes, particularly when measured against the benchmark of global employability.

The India Skills Report 2025 presents a somewhat optimistic picture, projecting graduate employability at approximately 55%—a 20-percentage-point improvement over the preceding decade. However, this figure masks significant sectoral and regional disparities. The Mercer-Mettl India Graduate Skill Index 2025 offers a more sobering assessment, finding overall employability at 42.6%, with non-technical roles such as human resources (39.9%) and digital marketing (41%) experiencing the sharpest declines. Technical roles in artificial intelligence and machine learning show improvement at 46.1%, reflecting growing proficiency in high-demand fields, but this represents a minority of the graduating population.

The fundamental challenge is structural. Studies conducted prior to NEP 2020 consistently found that Indian higher education did not meet employment needs despite successive rounds of regulatory reform. FICCI and NASSCOM reported that 70% of graduates lacked job-relevant skills, indicating systemic failure in aligning curricula with industry requirements. The reforms undertaken by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) expanded institutional capacity but did not substantially improve vocational training, interdisciplinary learning, or industry linkages.

1.1 The Global Context

The global economy is undergoing rapid transformation driven by technological disruption, demographic shifts, and evolving work patterns. Sectors such as information technology, healthcare, and green energy could collectively add $500 billion to the global economy by 2030—if countries can secure sufficiently skilled talent. India, with its young workforce and demographic profile, is uniquely positioned to fill this gap as developed economies face aging populations and labor shortages.

However, realizing this potential requires Indian graduates to possess not merely technical competencies but also the soft skills, cross-cultural communication abilities, and adaptability that global employers increasingly value on par with domain expertise. The green economy—encompassing solar energy, wind power, sustainable farming, waste management, biofuels, and circular economy practices—represents an emerging growth driver that requires alignment between workforce capabilities and climate imperatives.

1.2 The NEP 2020 Response

The National Education Policy 2020 represents India's most comprehensive attempt to address these challenges through systemic reform. Released after extensive consultation and deliberation, NEP 2020 articulates a clear vision for internationalization, stating that "top universities in the world will be facilitated to operate in India" and that a "legislative framework facilitating such entry will be put in place." The policy envisions India as both an attractive global study destination and a producer of graduates capable of contributing to knowledge economies worldwide.

NEP 2020's approach to employability is multidimensional, emphasizing transdisciplinary learning, vocational integration, digital literacy, and research innovation. The policy explicitly recognizes that the transition from education to employment requires smoothing mechanisms that existing frameworks have failed to provide. It draws on international models—Germany's dual system combining classroom learning with occupational apprenticeships, Finland's phenomenon-based transdisciplinary learning, and Singapore's SkillsFuture program promoting lifetime learning—while adapting them to Indian institutional contexts.

The internationalization agenda under NEP 2020 operates through multiple channels: facilitating research and teaching collaborations with high-quality foreign higher education institutions, encouraging Indian universities to establish campuses abroad, permitting selected foreign universities (particularly those from the top 100 globally) to operate in India, establishing International Student Offices at institutions, recognizing credits acquired at foreign universities, and developing courses in subjects with distinctive Indian knowledge contributions such as Indology, AYUSH systems of medicine, and yoga.

1.3 Scope and Objectives of This White Paper

This white paper undertakes a comprehensive examination of the strategies available under NEP 2020 for enhancing global employability, with particular attention to three interconnected mechanisms:

Twinning Programs and Joint/Dual Degrees: These collaborative arrangements between Indian and foreign institutions enable students to gain exposure to international curricula, pedagogies, and academic environments while completing part or all of their education domestically. The UGC Regulations of 2022 established the framework for such collaborations, and their implementation experience provides crucial lessons.

Foreign University Collaborations and Branch Campuses: The UGC Regulations of 2023 permit foreign higher education institutions ranked in the top 500 globally to establish independent campuses in India with full autonomy over curriculum, fees, and admissions. The emerging landscape—with the University of Southampton operational in Gurugram and multiple institutions establishing presence in GIFT City—represents a new paradigm in Indian higher education.

Academic Mobility Mechanisms: The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), modeled on global credit systems, provides the infrastructure for recognizing, storing, and transferring credits across institutions, facilitating both domestic and international mobility. Programs such as SPARC and GIAN complement this by enabling faculty and researcher exchanges.

The paper proceeds in subsequent sections to examine each of these mechanisms in detail, analyzing regulatory frameworks, implementation challenges, emerging outcomes, and strategic recommendations for maximizing their contribution to graduate employability.

2. The NEP 2020 Framework for Internationalization

The National Education Policy 2020 establishes internationalization not as a peripheral concern but as a core pillar of higher education reform. The policy's approach to "internationalization at home" represents a paradigm shift from earlier frameworks that treated foreign engagement as exceptional rather than systemic.

2.1 Policy Vision and Articulation

NEP 2020 articulates several interconnected objectives for internationalization:

Attracting Global Talent to India: The policy envisions transforming India into a global study destination, attracting foreign students across disciplines. This requires not merely regulatory permission but active infrastructure development, including International Student Offices at each institution, dedicated support systems for arriving students, and course offerings that appeal to international audiences.

Enabling Domestic Students to Gain Global Exposure: Rather than relying solely on outbound mobility (which creates brain drain concerns and involves substantial costs for families), NEP 2020 emphasizes mechanisms that bring international quality and exposure to students within India. Twinning programs, joint degrees, and foreign university campuses all serve this objective.

Facilitating Research Collaboration: The policy recognizes that research excellence requires international networks. Faculty exchange, joint research projects, and access to global laboratories and datasets are essential for elevating Indian research output to internationally competitive standards.

Credit Recognition and Transfer: NEP 2020 calls for counting credits acquired at foreign universities "wherever appropriate as per requirement for each HEI," establishing the principle of credit portability that underpins academic mobility.

Leveraging Indian Knowledge Systems: The policy identifies distinctive Indian contributions—including Indology, Indian languages, AYUSH systems of medicine, yoga, and arts—as subjects that can attract international interest while preserving cultural heritage.

2.2 The Internationalization Architecture

The implementation of NEP 2020's internationalization vision proceeds through several regulatory and institutional mechanisms:

University Grants Commission Regulations: The UGC has issued multiple regulations operationalizing NEP 2020's internationalization provisions. The 2022 regulations on

academic collaboration enable twinning, joint degree, and dual degree programs. The 2023 regulations permit foreign university campuses. The 2025 equivalence regulations streamline the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Institutional Mandates: NEP 2020 and subsequent UGC guidelines require higher education institutions to establish dedicated International Affairs offices. By 2025, over 700 Indian HEIs had established such offices, though their capacity and effectiveness vary significantly.

Digital Infrastructure: The Academic Bank of Credits, integrated with DigiLocker and the National Academic Depository, provides the digital backbone for credit accumulation, transfer, and verification.

Collaborative Programs: Government-funded initiatives including SPARC, GIAN, and VAIBHAV provide resources and frameworks for international academic collaboration, targeting faculty exchange, research partnerships, and short-term courses by international experts.

2.3 Progress and Challenges

A 2025 survey of 117 higher education institutions found that 40% had 1-5 years of international collaboration experience, with partnerships led predominantly by professors (50%) and administrators (35%). However, several structural challenges persist:

Skewed Disciplinary Focus: Collaborations remain disproportionately concentrated in STEM fields, limiting interdisciplinary engagement and excluding significant portions of the student population in humanities, social sciences, and commerce.

Institutional Capacity Gaps: Many institutions, particularly those in rural areas and with limited resources, lack the administrative capacity, faculty expertise, and infrastructure to pursue meaningful international collaborations.

Regulatory Complexity: Despite liberalization, navigating the regulatory landscape for international partnerships remains challenging, with multiple approvals required from UGC, AICTE (for technical programs), and other bodies.

Resource Constraints: Establishing international partnerships requires financial investment in faculty development, infrastructure, and student support systems that many institutions cannot easily mobilize.

Quality Assurance: Ensuring that international collaborations deliver genuine academic value rather than merely conferring prestige requires robust quality assurance mechanisms that are still evolving.

2.4 The Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Proposal

NEP 2020 proposes the establishment of a Higher Education Commission of India to replace the UGC and AICTE, consolidating regulatory authority under a single umbrella. The HECI is intended to provide more streamlined regulation, separating standard-setting, accreditation, and funding functions. While the HECI legislation remains pending, its eventual implementation

could significantly impact internationalization by reducing regulatory fragmentation and creating clearer pathways for foreign engagement.

3. Regulatory Architecture: UGC Regulations 2022 and 2023

The operationalization of NEP 2020's internationalization vision has proceeded primarily through two sets of UGC regulations that establish the framework for academic collaborations and foreign university presence in India.

3.1 UGC Regulations 2022: Twinning, Joint, and Dual Degrees

The University Grants Commission (Academic Collaboration between Indian and Foreign Higher Educational Institutions to offer Twinning, Joint Degree and Dual Degree Programmes) Regulations, 2022, notified on May 2, 2022, established the regulatory framework for collaborative academic programs between Indian and foreign institutions.

Key Provisions:

The regulations define three distinct collaboration models:

Twinning Programmes: Arrangements where Indian students enroll at an Indian institution and complete a portion of their study (up to 30% of credits) at a partnering foreign institution, receiving a degree from the Indian institution. The credit transfer mechanism allows students to gain foreign exposure while obtaining a domestic qualification.

Joint Degree Programmes: Collaborative programs where students receive a single degree jointly awarded by both the Indian and foreign partner institutions. This model requires deeper integration of curricula and assessment systems between partners.

Dual Degree Programmes: Arrangements where students complete requirements for two separate degrees—one from the Indian institution and one from the foreign institution—simultaneously or sequentially. This model was not previously permitted under Indian regulations, making its introduction significant.

Eligibility Criteria:

For Indian institutions, eligibility requires accreditation with a minimum 'A' grade from NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) or equivalent recognition. Foreign institutions must rank within the top 1000 globally according to recognized ranking systems (QS, THE, ARWU) or within the top 500 in subject-specific rankings.

Operational Framework:

The regulations permit credit transfer between institutions, with mechanisms for recognizing coursework completed abroad. Joint programs must specify credit distribution, assessment

methods, and the basis for degree conferral. Regulatory oversight ensures quality while allowing institutional autonomy in program design.

3.2 UGC Regulations 2023: Foreign University Campuses

The UGC (Setting Up and Operation of Campuses of Foreign Higher Educational Institutions in India) Regulations, 2023, notified in November 2023, represent the most significant regulatory liberalization in Indian higher education internationalization. These regulations permit foreign universities to establish independent campuses in India, a provision that had been attempted unsuccessfully through the Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operations) Bill, 2010, which lapsed without passage.

Key Provisions:

Eligibility: Foreign Higher Educational Institutions (FHEIs) must rank within the top 500 globally in either overall or subject-wise rankings according to QS, THE, or ARWU methodologies. This threshold ensures that only institutions with established reputations can establish Indian campuses.

Autonomy: Approved FHEIs receive full autonomy over curriculum design, admission processes, and fee structures. This autonomy represents a significant departure from the regulated fee structures and standardized curricula that govern domestic Indian institutions.

Degree Recognition: Degrees awarded by approved FHEI campuses in India are recognized as equivalent to degrees from the institution's home country. Students graduating from these campuses receive the same qualification as students attending the main campus abroad.

Regulatory Oversight: All FHEIs must obtain UGC approval before commencing operations. The regulations establish compliance requirements, reporting obligations, and quality assurance mechanisms.

GIFT City Special Zone: The regulations include special provisions for foreign universities establishing campuses in Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City), which operates under the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA). IFSCA's 2022 regulations provide an additional pathway for foreign universities, with somewhat different eligibility criteria and operational frameworks.

3.3 Implementation Status as of 2026

As of mid-2026, the UGC has issued Letters of Intent to seven foreign institutions for establishing campuses in India:

University of Southampton (UK): The first foreign university to establish a campus under the new regulations, operational in Gurugram offering undergraduate and postgraduate programs. This represents the flagship implementation of the 2023 regulations outside GIFT City.

Deakin University (Australia): Established an initial presence in India in 1994 and set up a branch campus in GIFT City in early 2024, becoming one of the first institutions operational under the IFSCA pathway.

University of Wollongong (Australia): Launched campus in GIFT City in 2024, offering programs in business, technology, and related fields.

Additional Approvals: Letters of Intent have been issued to the University of York, University of Aberdeen, University of Liverpool, and others, with campuses at various stages of development.

Queen's University Belfast: Announced plans for a 2026 campus launch, signaling continued momentum in foreign university entry.

3.4 UGC Regulations 2025: Equivalence and Recognition

The UGC (Recognition of Qualifications from Foreign Institutions) Regulations, 2025, address a critical downstream requirement: the recognition of foreign qualifications for employment and further study in India. These regulations streamline the equivalence process and establish clear criteria for validation.

Key Provisions:

Automatic Equivalence: Qualifications obtained under UGC-approved frameworks—including joint, dual, or twinning degree programs, and degrees from foreign institutions operating approved Indian campuses—are automatically considered equivalent without requiring separate application.

Exemptions: Students participating in government-nominated exchange programs or graduating from recognized foreign campuses in India do not require separate equivalence certificates.

Streamlined Process: For qualifications not covered by automatic equivalence, the regulations establish a transparent, predictable process for assessment, addressing long-standing complaints about bureaucratic delays and inconsistent decisions.

The 2025 regulations represent a critical enabling condition for internationalization, ensuring that students who pursue globally-oriented education pathways do not face barriers when seeking employment or further study in India.

4. Twinning Programs: Structure, Benefits, and Implementation Challenges

Twinning programs represent the most accessible entry point for internationalization, enabling Indian institutions to offer global exposure without requiring students to undertake complete overseas education. Under the UGC 2022 regulations, twinning arrangements allow students to earn up to 30% of their credits at a partner foreign institution while receiving a degree from the Indian institution.

4.1 Operational Models

Twinning programs typically operate through one of several models:

Semester Exchange Model: Students spend one or two semesters at the foreign partner institution, typically in the third or final year of their program. This model provides concentrated international exposure while maintaining continuity of the overall program at the home institution.

Split Program Model: Credits are distributed across multiple visits to the partner institution, potentially including summer schools, intensive courses, or project-based collaborations. This model offers greater flexibility but requires more complex coordination.

Virtual Twinning: Leveraging digital platforms, students participate in courses delivered by foreign faculty while remaining physically in India. This model, which gained significant traction during the COVID-19 pandemic, reduces costs but provides limited exposure to the partner institution's academic environment.

4.2 Benefits for Global Employability

Twinning programs contribute to employability through several mechanisms:

Cross-Cultural Competence: Exposure to international academic environments, diverse student cohorts, and different pedagogical approaches develops the cross-cultural communication and adaptability skills that global employers value.

Curriculum Enrichment: Partner institutions often offer specialized courses, laboratory facilities, or industry connections not available at the home institution, enabling students to develop distinctive competencies.

Credential Enhancement: While students receive degrees from Indian institutions, transcripts reflecting coursework at reputable foreign universities signal quality and international exposure to employers.

Network Building: Students who study abroad, even for short periods, develop professional networks that can facilitate career opportunities in global organizations.

Language and Communication Skills: Immersion in English-medium instruction at international institutions typically improves communication proficiency, a critical employability factor.

4.3 Implementation Challenges

Despite their potential, twinning programs face several implementation challenges:

Cost Barriers: Even with reduced duration compared to full overseas education, twinning programs involve significant expenses including tuition differential, travel, accommodation, and living costs abroad. These costs limit accessibility for students from modest economic backgrounds.

Visa and Regulatory Complexities: Students participating in twinning programs must navigate visa processes that vary by destination country. Delays or rejections can disrupt academic timelines.

Credit Transfer Difficulties: Despite UGC regulations, practical credit transfer between institutions remains complex. Differences in grading systems, course structures, and learning outcomes require careful articulation agreements.

Quality Variation: The quality of twinning partnerships varies significantly. Some represent genuine academic collaboration; others are primarily commercial arrangements with limited academic substance.

Institutional Capacity: Many Indian institutions lack the administrative infrastructure to manage twinning programs effectively, including international student advisors, partnership coordination offices, and student support systems.

4.4 Best Practices for Effective Twinning

Successful twinning programs share several characteristics:

Deep Institutional Partnership: Programs work best when they emerge from genuine academic collaboration between institutions, not merely commercial agreements. Joint research, faculty exchange, and curriculum development strengthen twinning arrangements.

Clear Learning Outcomes: Effective programs specify what competencies students will gain through international exposure, ensuring that the experience contributes substantively to employability rather than merely adding a line to the resume.

Student Support Systems: Pre-departure orientation, on-site support, and reintegration assistance help students maximize the value of international experiences.

Financial Aid Integration: Scholarships, grants, and loan programs that specifically support twinning participation can address cost barriers and expand access.

Employer Engagement: Programs that involve employers in design and delivery—through internship placements, industry projects, or recruitment partnerships—directly connect international exposure to employment outcomes.

5. Joint and Dual Degree Programs: Creating Global Credentials

Joint and dual degree programs represent deeper forms of international collaboration than twinning, resulting in credentials that formally carry the imprimatur of both Indian and foreign partner institutions.

5.1 Distinguishing Joint and Dual Degrees

Joint Degrees: Students complete an integrated program and receive a single degree jointly awarded by both partner institutions. The degree certificate and transcript reflect the collaboration, signaling that the student's education was genuinely international throughout.

Dual Degrees: Students complete requirements for two separate degrees—one from each institution—either simultaneously or sequentially. This typically requires additional coursework beyond what a single degree would demand, but results in two independent credentials.

Both models require substantially more integration between partner institutions than twinning programs, including aligned curricula, compatible academic calendars, joint examination systems, and coordinated quality assurance.

5.2 Advantages for Global Employability

Joint and dual degrees offer distinctive employability advantages:

Credential Portability: Degrees formally awarded by foreign institutions are recognized in those institutions' home countries and globally, facilitating international career mobility.

Depth of Exposure: The extended engagement required for joint and dual degrees—typically involving substantial time at the foreign institution—provides deeper cultural and academic immersion than semester exchanges.

Signaling Quality: Joint and dual degree partnerships are selective, typically limited to institutions with complementary strengths and established reputations. Participation signals high academic achievement.

Access to Foreign Job Markets: Graduates with degrees from foreign institutions may have easier access to employment in those institutions' home countries, where their degrees are directly recognized.

Research and Graduate Study Pathways: Joint degrees, particularly at the master's level, can facilitate admission to doctoral programs at partner institutions, creating pathways for students pursuing academic or research careers.

5.3 Structural Challenges

Joint and dual degrees face significant structural challenges:

Regulatory Asymmetry: Indian and foreign regulatory frameworks differ in their requirements for degree programs. Harmonizing these requirements while maintaining compliance with both systems requires substantial negotiation.

Duration and Structure: Indian bachelor's programs are typically three years, while many countries (including the US and UK for some programs) use four-year models. Joint programs must address these structural differences.

Accreditation Requirements: Professional programs (engineering, medicine, law) face additional accreditation requirements that may limit joint degree feasibility.

Faculty Commitment: Joint programs require significant faculty investment in curriculum design, teaching collaboration, and assessment. This commitment must be sustained over the program duration.

Cost Recovery: Joint and dual degrees are expensive to establish and operate. Tuition structures must enable cost recovery while remaining accessible to students.

5.4 The Over 100 HEI Implementation Milestone

By 2025, over 100 Indian higher education institutions had implemented some form of joint, dual, or twinning program under the UGC 2022 regulations. While this represents significant progress, implementation remains concentrated among premier institutions with established international relationships. Expanding access to a broader range of institutions requires addressing capacity gaps and resource constraints.

5.5 Quality Assurance Framework

Ensuring that joint and dual degrees deliver genuine academic value requires robust quality assurance:

Partner Selection: Rigorous assessment of potential partner institutions, focusing on academic quality, pedagogical alignment, and institutional stability.

Curriculum Validation: Joint review processes ensuring that integrated curricula meet the learning outcome requirements of both partner institutions and relevant accreditation bodies.

Student Outcome Tracking: Systematic monitoring of graduate employment outcomes, further study placements, and career progression to assess program effectiveness.

Periodic Review: Regular evaluation of partnerships, with mechanisms for improvement or termination if quality standards are not maintained.

6. Foreign University Campuses in India: The Emerging Landscape

The establishment of foreign university campuses in India represents the most transformative development in Indian higher education internationalization. Unlike twinning or joint programs that require Indian institutions as partners, foreign campuses bring international education directly to Indian students.

6.1 The Regulatory Pathway

Foreign universities seeking to establish Indian campuses must navigate a multi-step approval process:

Eligibility Verification: Institutions must demonstrate ranking within the top 500 globally (QS, THE, or ARWU) and provide evidence of good standing with regulatory authorities in their home country.

Application and Review: Formal application to the UGC, including proposed academic programs, faculty recruitment plans, infrastructure arrangements, and financial projections.

Letter of Intent: Upon preliminary approval, the UGC issues a Letter of Intent permitting the institution to proceed with campus establishment.

Final Approval: After infrastructure development and compliance verification, final approval permits the institution to commence operations and enroll students.

GIFT City Alternative: Universities may alternatively seek approval through IFSCA for campuses in GIFT City, which operates under a distinct regulatory framework with different operational requirements.

6.2 The Emerging Campus Landscape

As of 2026, the foreign campus landscape includes:

University of Southampton (Gurugram): The flagship foreign campus outside GIFT City, offering undergraduate and postgraduate programs in business, engineering, and related fields. The Southampton campus represents the template for how the 2023 regulations can be operationalized in practice.

Deakin University (GIFT City): With a relationship with India dating to 1994, Deakin's GIFT City campus leverages its established brand recognition. The campus focuses on programs aligned with GIFT City's financial services orientation.

University of Wollongong (GIFT City): Another Australian institution, Wollongong brings its strength in engineering and technology to the GIFT City ecosystem.

Pipeline Institutions: Multiple universities—including York, Aberdeen, Liverpool, and Queen's Belfast—have received Letters of Intent and are at various stages of campus development.

6.3 Impact on Global Employability

Foreign campuses contribute to employability through distinctive mechanisms:

Direct Access to International Education: Students can obtain foreign university degrees without the costs, visa complexities, and disruption of studying abroad. This dramatically expands access to international credentials.

Foreign University Pedagogies: Campus operations bring international teaching methods, assessment systems, and academic cultures to India, exposing students to different approaches to learning.

Industry Connections: Foreign universities often bring established industry relationships to their Indian campuses, potentially facilitating internships and employment opportunities with multinational corporations.

Research Integration: Campuses connected to research-intensive foreign universities can provide students access to global research networks, laboratories, and faculty expertise.

Credential Portability: Degrees from foreign campus operations are recognized as equivalent to home campus degrees, facilitating international career mobility.

6.4 GIFT City as an International Education Hub

Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City) has emerged as India's premier location for foreign university campuses, offering several advantages:

Special Regulatory Zone: Operating under IFSCA, GIFT City provides a distinct regulatory environment with streamlined approvals and operational flexibility.

Financial Services Ecosystem: The concentration of financial institutions creates natural employment pathways for graduates in finance, business, and related fields.

Infrastructure: Purpose-built facilities designed to international standards reduce the infrastructure development burden for incoming universities.

Tax Advantages: GIFT City's special economic zone status provides tax benefits that can be reflected in program affordability.

Clustering Effects: As multiple universities establish presence, network effects create a vibrant academic community that enhances the value proposition for students.

6.5 Challenges and Concerns

Foreign campus establishment faces several challenges:

Cost Structures: International universities, particularly those from the UK and Australia, operate with cost structures significantly higher than Indian institutions. Ensuring affordability while maintaining quality requires careful program design.

Faculty Recruitment: Attracting qualified faculty to Indian campuses—whether international academics relocating or Indian academics with international credentials—remains challenging.

Student Demand Uncertainty: The long-term student demand for foreign campus education is uncertain, particularly as domestic institutions improve and other internationalization options expand.

Quality Consistency: Ensuring that Indian campuses deliver educational experiences comparable to home campuses requires sustained institutional commitment and quality assurance.

Brain Drain Concerns: Some observers worry that foreign campuses may recruit the best Indian students and prepare them for emigration, exacerbating rather than mitigating brain drain.

6.6 Outlook

The coming years will determine whether foreign campuses become a substantial feature of Indian higher education or remain a niche offering for elite students. Success depends on institutions' ability to establish compelling value propositions, achieve sustainable enrollment levels, and demonstrate superior employment outcomes for graduates. The experience of initial entrants will shape subsequent institutional decisions about Indian campus investment.

7. The Academic Bank of Credits: Enabling Mobility

The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) represents the digital infrastructure enabling the credit mobility that underlies internationalization. Launched as part of NEP 2020 implementation, ABC provides a national-level online facility for credit accumulation, transfer, and redemption.

7.1 Conceptual Foundation

ABC operates on several foundational principles:

Credits as Currency: Academic credits function as a standardized unit of educational achievement that can be accumulated, stored, and transferred like currency in a bank account.

Multi-Entry, Multi-Exit: Students can enter and exit higher education programs at multiple points, with credits preserved during interruptions and recognized upon return.

Institutional Portability: Credits earned at one institution can be recognized by another, subject to articulation agreements, enabling students to construct educational pathways across multiple institutions.

Shelf Life: Credits are stored for a minimum of seven years, providing extended flexibility for students to complete qualifications.

7.2 Operational Architecture

ABC operates through an integrated digital infrastructure:

APAAR ID (Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry): Each student receives a unique identifier linking their academic records across institutions and enabling lifelong tracking.

DigiLocker Integration: ABC connects with DigiLocker, the government's digital document repository, enabling secure storage and verification of academic credentials.

National Academic Depository (NAD): ABC interfaces with NAD, which stores verified academic qualifications, creating a comprehensive record of educational achievement.

Credit Calculation Standards: ABC implements standardized credit calculation methods (one credit equals one hour of theory or tutorial, or two hours of laboratory work, per week for a semester), enabling comparability across institutions.

7.3 Contribution to International Mobility

ABC supports international mobility in several ways:

Alignment with Global Credit Systems: ABC is modeled on international credit frameworks, facilitating recognition of Indian credits by foreign institutions and vice versa.

Transcript Standardization: Digital credit records in standardized formats simplify the verification processes that international institutions require for admission and credit transfer.

Twinning Support: ABC provides the infrastructure for recording credits earned at foreign partner institutions and integrating them into Indian degree programs.

International Student Records: Foreign students studying in India can accumulate credits through ABC, facilitating recognition when they return to their home countries or pursue further study elsewhere.

7.4 Implementation Status

ABC implementation has proceeded rapidly:

Institutional Adoption: UGC and the Ministry of Education have mandated ABC integration for all higher education institutions under NEP guidelines.

Student Registration: Millions of students have registered for ABC accounts, with academic records being progressively digitized and uploaded.

Credit Transfer Protocols: Frameworks for inter-institutional credit transfer are being operationalized, though practical implementation varies by institution pair.

7.5 Limitations and Challenges

ABC faces several implementation challenges:

Institutional Readiness: Many institutions, particularly smaller and less-resourced ones, lack the digital infrastructure and administrative capacity for full ABC integration.

Quality Equivalence Questions: Credit transfer assumes that credits from different institutions represent comparable learning. Ensuring this equivalence in practice remains challenging.

International Recognition: While ABC aligns with international credit systems conceptually, practical recognition by foreign institutions requires ongoing bilateral negotiations and articulation agreements.

Complexity for Students: Navigating ABC systems, understanding credit transfer options, and optimizing educational pathways require guidance that many students lack access to.

7.6 The APAAR-ABC Ecosystem

The integration of APAAR ID with ABC creates a comprehensive ecosystem for tracking educational progress:

Continuous Records: From school through higher education, APAAR provides a unified identifier linking all academic achievements.

Transition Support: Recognition of prior learning and smooth transitions between educational levels are facilitated by comprehensive records.

Employment Verification: Employers can verify educational credentials directly through the system, reducing fraud and simplifying hiring processes.

Lifelong Learning: The ecosystem supports the NEP 2020 vision of lifelong learning, enabling adults to return to education with full recognition of prior achievements.

8. SPARC, GIAN, and Faculty Exchange Initiatives

Beyond student-focused programs, NEP 2020's internationalization agenda encompasses faculty and researcher mobility through dedicated government initiatives. These programs aim to strengthen India's research ecosystem by facilitating collaboration with global academic leaders.

8.1 Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)

SPARC aims to improve the research ecosystem of India's higher educational institutions by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian institutions and leading institutions from 28 selected partner nations.

Program Objectives:

SPARC seeks to build a globally connected and innovation-driven research ecosystem, addressing challenges of national and global significance through excellence in research and knowledge exchange for sustainable development. The program promotes collaborative research networks, faculty and student exchange, joint academic initiatives, and innovation-driven outcomes.

Key Components:

The scheme supports several activities that catalyze impactful research:

- Visits and long-term stays of leading international faculty and researchers at Indian institutions for teaching and research
- Visits by Indian students to premier international laboratories for training and experimentation
- Joint development of niche courses and world-class books
- Collaborative research projects addressing problems of national or international relevance

Eligibility Requirements:

Indian institutions ranked in the overall top-100 or category-wise top-100 in NIRF rankings are eligible to apply. Partner foreign institutions must rank in the top-500 QS World University Rankings or top-200 in subject-specific rankings. Project teams must include at least two international faculty members, two Indian faculty members, and two researchers (PhD or post-doctoral) from each side.

Impact Assessment:

SPARC is expected to provide the best international expertise to address major national problems, expose Indian academicians to leading global collaborators, enable international faculty to stay in India for longer durations, provide Indian students opportunities to work in world-class laboratories, develop strong bilateral research relationships, and improve international rankings of Indian institutions.

8.2 Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN)

Launched in November 2015, GIAN aims to enhance the quality of higher education in India through foreign collaboration. The program taps the global talent pool of scientists, entrepreneurs, and international faculty to augment the country's academic resources.

Program Scope:

GIAN initially targeted IITs, IIMs, Central Universities, IISc Bangalore, IISERs, NITs, and IIITs, with subsequent expansion to include well-performing state universities. The program enables foreign faculty participation as Distinguished, Adjunct, or Visiting faculty, or as Professors of Practice.

Course Delivery Models:

GIAN facilitates both short courses (typically one to two weeks of intensive instruction) and semester-long courses delivered by international faculty. This flexibility allows institutions to access global expertise for specialized topics without requiring permanent faculty appointments.

Student Benefits:

Students participating in GIAN courses gain exposure to international teaching methods, cutting-edge research areas, and global academic networks. For many students at institutions

outside the premier tier, GIAN provides their only direct interaction with leading international academics.

8.3 VAIBHAV (Vaishvik Bharatiya Vaigyanik) Fellowship

The VAIBHAV Fellowship, implemented by the Department of Science & Technology, targets collaboration between scientists of the Indian Diaspora and Indian higher education institutions.

Target Audience:

The program specifically emphasizes Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), and Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) working in scientific and academic positions abroad.

Collaboration Framework:

VAIBHAV enables diaspora scientists to work with Indian institutions on specific research projects, mentoring of students and early-career researchers, curriculum development in specialized areas, and institutional capacity building. By leveraging diaspora networks, VAIBHAV aims to create sustained relationships rather than one-time interactions.

8.4 Study in India Edu-Diplomatic Conclave

In March 2026, the Ministry of Education organized the Study in India Edu-Diplomatic Conclave, bringing together ambassadors, high commissioners, and representatives from over 50 countries. The event focused on strengthening international cooperation in higher education, with thematic sessions covering:

- Indian Knowledge Systems as a global academic offering
- Academic partnerships through SPARC and GIAN
- Artificial Intelligence and advanced technologies
- UGC Regulations 2023 for foreign university campuses
- International branch campuses and enabling frameworks

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan used the occasion to invite global universities to partner with India's NEP-driven education system, emphasizing India's desire to build strong knowledge bridges with partner countries.

8.5 Contribution to Employability

Faculty exchange programs contribute to graduate employability through indirect but significant channels:

Enhanced Curriculum Quality: International faculty bring current global perspectives on curriculum design, industry relevance, and pedagogical innovation.

Research Opportunities: Student involvement in internationally collaborative research develops advanced competencies valued by employers, particularly in research-intensive industries.

Network Effects: Faculty networks create pathways for student exchanges, internships, and employment opportunities in partnering institutions and their industry connections.

Institutional Reputation: Institutions with strong international collaboration profiles attract better students and enjoy enhanced employer recognition, benefiting graduates in the job market.

9. Student Mobility Trends: Inbound and Outbound Dynamics

Understanding student mobility patterns is essential for assessing the effectiveness of internationalization strategies and identifying areas requiring intervention.

9.1 Outbound Mobility: Indian Students Abroad

Indian students studying abroad represent one of the largest international student populations globally, with significant implications for brain drain, remittances, and knowledge transfer.

Recent Trends:

The number of Indian students abroad has shown substantial growth over the past decade, though recent years have seen some moderation:

- 2016: Approximately 370,000 students
- 2019: Approximately 586,000 students
- 2020: Approximately 260,000 students (pandemic-affected)
- 2023: Approximately 895,000 students (peak year)
- 2024: Approximately 770,000 students
- 2025: Approximately 626,000-760,000 students (estimates vary by source)

The decline from the 2023 peak reflects multiple factors including stricter visa regulations in key destination countries, higher costs of overseas education, increased availability of quality options domestically, and changing immigration policies particularly in Canada, Australia, and the UK.

Destination Patterns:

Traditional destinations (US, UK, Canada, Australia) continue to dominate, but emerging destinations are gaining share:

- **United States**: Enrollments grew from 331,600 in 2023 to 363,020 in 2024, making the US an increasingly important destination as other options tighten.

- **Canada**: Study permit holders fell from 533,305 in 2023 to 510,235 in 2024, with dramatic further declines in 2025 due to policy changes. Between January and August 2025, only 9,955 new study permits were issued to Indian students, compared with 149,875 in the same period of 2023.
- **United Kingdom**: Gaining ground as other destinations become less accessible, though post-study work visa policies remain a consideration for students.
- **Australia**: Approximately 139,720 Indian students enrolled in Australian institutions in the January-September 2025 period.
- **Emerging Destinations**: Germany, Japan, Ireland, UAE, and Turkey are seeing increased interest due to lower costs, favorable visa policies, and post-study work opportunities.

Drivers of Outbound Mobility:

Students seek overseas education for multiple reasons:

- Perception of superior academic quality at leading global institutions
- Post-study work opportunities and pathways to immigration
- Limited seats in premier Indian institutions relative to demand
- Specific programs or specializations not available domestically
- Family networks and diaspora connections abroad
- Brand value of foreign degrees in certain employment sectors

9.2 Inbound Mobility: Foreign Students in India

Inbound student mobility remains substantially lower than outbound, creating an asymmetry that NEP 2020 seeks to address.

Current Scale:

The All-India Survey on Higher Education indicates approximately 46,800 foreign students enrolled in Indian higher education institutions in 2021-22, compared with 46,000 in 2017-18. This represents marginal growth over five years, significantly below the targets envisioned in NEP 2020.

Source Countries:

Foreign students in India predominantly come from neighboring countries and Africa, with limited representation from high-income countries. Key sources include Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, various African nations, and Middle Eastern countries.

Study in India Program:

Launched in 2018, the Study in India program aims to promote Indian higher education globally. The program website (studyinindia.gov.in) provides information for prospective foreign students on admission processes, scholarship opportunities, and institutional options.

Barriers to Inbound Mobility:

Several factors limit foreign student enrollment:

- Limited global recognition of Indian degree credentials
- Infrastructure and amenity gaps compared with competing destinations
- Language barriers for non-English instruction
- Visa and regulatory complexities
- Limited scholarship support for international students
- Safety and quality-of-life concerns in some locations

9.3 The Mobility Imbalance

The stark asymmetry between outbound (600,000+ annually) and inbound (fewer than 50,000) mobility reflects India's position in the global higher education hierarchy. While Indian students seek access to top-ranked global institutions, foreign students from high-income countries rarely view India as a preferred destination.

Implications:

This imbalance has several consequences:

- **Economic Impact**: Outbound students represent significant foreign exchange outflows estimated at billions of dollars annually.
- **Brain Drain**: Many students who study abroad remain in destination countries, representing human capital loss.
- **Reciprocity Challenges**: Asymmetric flows complicate bilateral educational agreements and partnership negotiations.

NEP 2020 Response:

The policy addresses this imbalance through multiple mechanisms: improving domestic educational quality to reduce outbound pressure, attracting foreign campuses to bring international education to India, developing distinctive offerings (Indian Knowledge Systems) that attract inbound students, and establishing India as a hub for students from developing countries in Africa and Asia.

9.4 The Role of Internationalization in Rebalancing

Effective internationalization can help rebalance mobility patterns:

Reducing Outbound Pressure: Foreign university campuses, quality joint programs, and improved domestic institutions reduce the need for students to go abroad for quality education.

Attracting Inbound Students: Distinctive programs, competitive costs, and improved facilities can attract students from countries where Indian education offers value advantages.

Circular Migration: Creating pathways for Indian graduates abroad to return and contribute to the domestic economy—through diaspora engagement programs and attractive career opportunities—can convert brain drain into brain circulation.

10. Skills Gap Analysis: Where Employability Falls Short

Understanding the specific competency gaps that limit graduate employability is essential for designing effective interventions. Multiple assessments reveal consistent patterns in where Indian graduates fall short of employer expectations.

10.1 The Employability Challenge

Multiple data sources paint a sobering picture of graduate employability:

Mercer-Mettl India Graduate Skill Index 2025: Based on data from 2,700 campuses and over one million students, this assessment found overall employability at 42.6%, a decline from 44.3% in 2023. Non-technical roles showed the sharpest drops, with HR employability at 39.9% and digital marketing at 41%.

India Skills Report 2025: This report projected a more optimistic 54.81% employability rate, reflecting government initiatives and industry partnerships. The discrepancy with Mercer-Mettl figures may reflect different methodologies and sample compositions.

FICCI-NASSCOM Assessment: Longer-term studies have consistently found that approximately 70% of Indian graduates lack job-relevant skills, indicating systemic failure rather than marginal gaps.

Regional Variations: Employability rates vary significantly by state, with Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh showing higher rates than the national average.

Gender Dynamics: Gender gaps in employability are relatively narrow (males at 43.4%, females at 41.7%), with parity in emerging fields like AI and data science.

10.2 Specific Competency Gaps

Research identifies several specific areas where graduates underperform:

Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking: Despite supportive teacher engagement in communication and self-management, significant gaps remain in problem-solving and analytical capabilities. Employers consistently cite inadequate critical thinking as a primary concern.

Creativity and Innovation: Traditional pedagogies emphasizing rote learning and standardized assessment do not cultivate the creative thinking that innovation-driven employers require.

ICT Proficiency: Despite the digital age, many graduates lack practical ICT skills beyond basic computer literacy. Advanced competencies in data analysis, digital tools, and technology application remain underdeveloped.

Communication Skills: While improving, communication competencies—particularly in English, which dominates corporate settings—remain insufficient for many graduates, limiting their effectiveness in professional environments.

Industry-Specific Knowledge: Curriculum lag means that graduates often lack current knowledge of industry practices, technologies, and standards. Rapidly evolving fields like AI, cloud computing, and cybersecurity present particular challenges.

Soft Skills: Adaptability, teamwork, emotional intelligence, and cross-cultural communication—increasingly valued in global workplaces—receive inadequate attention in traditional curricula.

10.3 The Technical-Non-Technical Divide

A notable pattern in recent data is the divergence between technical and non-technical employability:

Technical Roles Improving: Employability in AI and machine learning roles reached 46.1%, reflecting growing proficiency in high-demand technical fields. Cloud computing, data science, software development, cybersecurity, and automation show similar trends.

Non-Technical Roles Declining: HR, digital marketing, and general management roles show declining employability, suggesting that the emphasis on STEM education has come at the cost of competencies required for broader business functions.

This divergence has implications for curriculum design: while technical skills education shows positive results, equal attention must be given to the communication, management, and analytical skills required for non-technical roles that employ the majority of graduates.

10.4 The Internationalization-Employability Connection

International exposure can address employability gaps through several mechanisms:

Curriculum Alignment: Foreign university programs and international collaborations bring curricula that reflect global industry requirements and current best practices.

Pedagogical Innovation: International academic environments often employ pedagogies—case studies, project-based learning, industry integration—that better develop the competencies employers seek.

Soft Skill Development: Cross-cultural exposure inherent in international programs develops adaptability, communication, and interpersonal skills.

Industry Connections: Foreign universities often maintain closer industry relationships than Indian institutions, providing internship opportunities, industry projects, and employment pathways.

Global Benchmarking: Exposure to international academic standards helps students understand and meet global competency expectations.

10.5 Sectoral Opportunities

Certain sectors present particular opportunities for globally-oriented Indian graduates:

Technology: Cloud computing, data science, software development, cybersecurity, robotics, drones, IoT, and automation continue to create new employment avenues globally.

Healthcare: Aging populations in developed countries create demand for healthcare professionals that Indian graduates can help address.

Green Economy: Solar, wind, sustainable farming, waste management, biofuels, and circular economy practices represent emerging growth drivers aligned with global climate imperatives.

Financial Services: As India develops its financial infrastructure (including GIFT City), opportunities emerge for graduates with global financial services competencies.

These sectoral opportunities underscore the importance of aligning internationalization strategies with labor market demands, ensuring that global exposure translates into employment outcomes.

11. Case Studies: Successful Models and Lessons Learned

Examining successful internationalization models—both from India and comparable countries—provides actionable insights for institutions and policymakers seeking to enhance graduate employability through global engagement.

11.1 International Benchmarks

Germany's Dual System: Germany's approach to combining classroom learning with occupational apprenticeships offers a model for integrating academic and practical education. Students divide their time between theoretical instruction at vocational schools and hands-on training at companies. This system produces graduates with both knowledge and demonstrable workplace competence.

Relevance for India: NEP 2020's emphasis on vocational integration draws conceptually from this model. Twinning programs with German institutions could incorporate apprenticeship elements, and domestic vocational education could adopt dual-system principles.

Singapore's SkillsFuture: Singapore's comprehensive approach to lifetime learning provides citizens with credits for skills development throughout their careers. The program recognizes that initial education cannot prepare workers for careers spanning decades of technological change.

Relevance for India: The Academic Bank of Credits creates infrastructure for similar lifetime learning recognition. Extending ABC principles beyond initial degrees to include professional certifications and skills training could enhance India's workforce adaptability.

Finland's Phenomenon-Based Learning: Finnish education emphasizes transdisciplinary learning organized around real-world phenomena rather than traditional subject boundaries. This approach develops problem-solving and integrative thinking capabilities.

Relevance for India: NEP 2020's multidisciplinary emphasis aligns with Finnish principles. Joint programs with Finnish institutions could demonstrate phenomenon-based approaches in Indian contexts.

11.2 Emerging Indian Success Stories

GIFT City Education Hub: The concentration of foreign universities (Deakin, Wollongong) alongside financial services institutions in GIFT City represents an emerging model for internationalization. The combination of quality education, industry proximity, and special regulatory status creates a distinctive value proposition.

Early indicators suggest strong student interest, though long-term outcomes will depend on graduate employment success and institutional sustainability. The GIFT City model could potentially be replicated in other special economic zones.

IIT International Collaborations: The Indian Institutes of Technology have extensive international collaboration portfolios, including joint degree programs, research partnerships, and faculty exchanges with leading global institutions. IIT Kharagpur's role as national coordinator for SPARC and GIAN demonstrates how premier institutions can anchor broader internationalization efforts.

These collaborations provide models that other institutions can adapt, though the resource and reputation advantages of IITs limit direct replicability.

Private University Initiatives: Several private universities have developed substantial international programs:

- Partnerships with ranked foreign institutions for joint degrees
- International faculty recruitment and exchange programs
- Student mobility programs incorporating semester exchanges
- Industry-integrated curricula developed with multinational corporations

These private sector innovations demonstrate market demand for internationalized education and provide competitive pressure for public institutions to improve.

11.3 Lessons from Less Successful Initiatives

Not all internationalization attempts succeed, and failures offer equally valuable lessons:

Superficial Partnerships: Some Indian institutions have entered international collaborations that amount to little more than branding arrangements, with minimal academic substance or student benefit. These partnerships damage institutional credibility and student outcomes when the gap between promise and delivery becomes apparent.

Lesson: Quality must precede quantity in partnership development. Rigorous due diligence and clear outcome expectations are essential.

Cost-Benefit Misalignment: Programs where student costs substantially exceed the value delivered—through high fees without commensurate quality or career benefits—undermine trust in internationalization generally.

Lesson: Sustainable programs must demonstrate value through employment outcomes that justify investment.

Regulatory Arbitrage: Some arrangements have exploited regulatory gaps rather than delivering genuine educational value, including diploma mills and credential factories that damage the reputation of legitimate internationalization.

Lesson: Robust regulatory oversight and accreditation remain essential even as liberalization proceeds.

11.4 Success Factors for Employability-Oriented Internationalization

Synthesizing lessons from successful and unsuccessful cases reveals several factors that distinguish effective internationalization:

Strategic Alignment: Successful programs align international partnerships with institutional strengths, regional industry needs, and student career aspirations. Ad hoc or prestige-driven partnerships without strategic rationale often underperform.

Industry Integration: Programs that incorporate industry engagement—through internships, projects, guest lectures, and employer advisory boards—more effectively translate international exposure into employment outcomes.

Student Support Systems: Comprehensive support for students navigating international programs—including financial aid, visa assistance, cultural preparation, and career services—significantly impacts completion rates and satisfaction.

Faculty Development: Faculty capacity building, including international exposure for Indian faculty and integration of visiting international faculty, ensures that internationalization extends beyond student programs to institutional culture.

Quality Assurance: Rigorous quality assurance mechanisms—including outcome tracking, periodic review, and continuous improvement—maintain program integrity and identify problems before they become systemic.

Affordability: Creative approaches to financing—scholarships, employer sponsorship, loan programs, phased payment options—expand access beyond elite students who can afford premium international programs.

12. Recommendations and Strategic Framework

Based on the analysis presented in preceding sections, this white paper offers recommendations for policymakers, institutions, industry stakeholders, and students seeking to enhance global employability through NEP 2020's internationalization mechanisms.

12.1 Recommendations for Policymakers

Accelerate Regulatory Implementation: While the UGC has issued foundational regulations, implementation support remains incomplete. Priority actions include:

- Issuing detailed operational guidelines for institutions implementing twinning and joint programs
- Streamlining approval processes to reduce time from application to operational permission
- Establishing dedicated support cells for institutions navigating international partnership requirements
- Harmonizing requirements across UGC, AICTE, and professional councils

Expand Institutional Eligibility: Current eligibility criteria (NAAC 'A' grade, top-1000 ranking requirements) exclude many institutions that could benefit from international partnerships. Consider:

- Tiered eligibility with appropriate safeguards for institutions at different development stages
- Pilot programs for institutions below current thresholds with enhanced monitoring
- Consortium models allowing smaller institutions to participate through partnerships with eligible anchor institutions

Strengthen Financial Support: Cost remains the primary barrier to internationalization access. Recommendations include:

- Dedicated scholarship programs for students in international collaborative programs
- Subsidized loans for study abroad components of twinning programs
- Institutional grants for establishing international partnership infrastructure
- Tax incentives for corporations sponsoring student international mobility

Enhance Quality Assurance: As internationalization expands, quality assurance becomes critical:

- Establish outcome-based assessment frameworks tracking graduate employment
- Create public reporting requirements for international programs
- Develop accreditation pathways for new program models (joint degrees, foreign campuses)
- Build enforcement capacity for addressing substandard programs

Promote Inbound Mobility: Rebalancing student flows requires attention to inbound mobility:

- Increase scholarship support for international students
- Streamline visa processes for foreign students and faculty
- Develop marketing campaigns promoting Indian higher education globally

- Create distinctive program offerings leveraging Indian Knowledge Systems

12.2 Recommendations for Institutions

Strategic Partnership Development: Institutions should approach internationalization strategically:

- Identify institutional strengths that can attract quality partners
- Focus on deep partnerships with selected institutions rather than numerous superficial arrangements
- Align international programs with regional industry needs and employment opportunities
- Develop partnership evaluation frameworks assessing academic fit, operational feasibility, and expected outcomes

Build Implementation Capacity: Successful internationalization requires institutional capacity:

- Establish dedicated International Affairs offices with qualified staff
- Invest in faculty development including international exposure and language training
- Develop student support systems covering pre-departure, in-country, and reintegration phases
- Create administrative processes for credit transfer, transcript management, and degree conferral

Integrate Industry Engagement: Employment outcomes require industry connections:

- Involve employers in international program design and curriculum review
- Create internship and project opportunities with multinational corporations
- Establish employer advisory boards including companies operating internationally
- Track and publicize graduate employment outcomes

Ensure Affordability and Access: Internationalization should not remain elite-only:

- Develop financial aid packages combining scholarships, grants, and loans
- Create work-study options where feasible
- Consider virtual and hybrid models that reduce costs while maintaining international exposure
- Partner with employers willing to sponsor student international experiences

12.3 Recommendations for Industry

Engage in Program Design: Industry input improves curriculum relevance:

- Participate in advisory boards for international programs
- Provide input on competency requirements and skill gaps
- Share information on global workforce trends and emerging needs

Support Student Mobility: Corporate support can expand access:

- Establish scholarship programs for students in international programs
- Offer internships integrated with international study components
- Consider loan assistance or tuition reimbursement for employee education

Recognize International Credentials: Hiring practices should value international exposure:

- Incorporate international experience into candidate evaluation criteria
- Recognize joint and dual degrees in qualification assessments
- Value cross-cultural competencies in selection processes

Partner with Academic Institutions: Deep partnerships benefit all parties:

- Collaborate on curriculum development reflecting industry needs
- Provide guest lectures, mentorship, and project supervision
- Create pathways from international programs to employment

12.4 Recommendations for Students

Evaluate Options Carefully: Students should approach international opportunities strategically:

- Assess program quality, institutional reputation, and accreditation status
- Consider total costs including hidden expenses and opportunity costs
- Research employment outcomes for program graduates
- Evaluate fit with personal career goals and circumstances

Maximize Learning Opportunities: International exposure requires active engagement:

- Participate fully in academic and co-curricular activities
- Build relationships with faculty, peers, and industry contacts
- Develop language and cross-cultural communication skills
- Document learning experiences for future employment applications

Leverage Networks: International experiences create valuable connections:

- Maintain relationships with international contacts after returning
- Participate in alumni networks of partner institutions
- Connect with diaspora professionals in fields of interest

Plan for Career Transitions: International exposure should connect to employment:

- Identify employers who value international experience
- Develop competency narratives linking international learning to job requirements
- Consider both domestic and international employment opportunities

12.5 A Strategic Framework for Global Employability

Integrating these recommendations, a comprehensive strategic framework for enhancing global employability through NEP 2020 initiatives encompasses:

Policy Layer: Regulatory enablement, quality assurance, financial support, and strategic direction from government agencies including UGC, AICTE, and the Ministry of Education.

Institutional Layer: Strategic partnership development, capacity building, industry integration, and student support from higher education institutions.

Industry Layer: Program engagement, financial support, credential recognition, and hiring practices from employers and industry associations.

Individual Layer: Strategic choice, active engagement, network development, and career planning by students and graduates.

Success requires alignment across all layers, with each stakeholder group fulfilling its responsibilities while coordinating with others. The framework is iterative, with outcome data informing continuous improvement at each layer.

13. Conclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 establishes an ambitious framework for internationalizing Indian higher education, with explicit linkage to graduate employability outcomes. The regulatory architecture—including the UGC 2022 regulations on twinning and joint programs, the 2023 regulations permitting foreign university campuses, and the 2025 equivalence regulations—provides the legal foundation for transformative change. The Academic Bank of Credits offers digital infrastructure for credit mobility, while programs like SPARC, GIAN, and VAIBHAV create channels for faculty and researcher exchange.

Yet policy vision and regulatory enablement are necessary but insufficient conditions. The analysis presented in this white paper reveals significant gaps between framework and implementation:

- Only 42-55% of Indian graduates are currently deemed employable by various measures, with approximately 70% lacking job-relevant skills.
- International collaborations remain concentrated among premier institutions and STEM fields, leaving large portions of the higher education sector and student population underserved.
- The imbalance between outbound mobility (600,000+ students annually) and inbound mobility (under 50,000) reflects India's continuing position as a net exporter of human capital rather than a global education destination.
- Cost barriers, institutional capacity gaps, and regulatory complexity limit access to internationalization benefits.

Addressing these gaps requires sustained effort across multiple fronts. Policymakers must accelerate implementation support, expand institutional eligibility, strengthen financial assistance, and enhance quality assurance. Institutions must approach internationalization strategically, build implementation capacity, integrate industry engagement, and ensure affordability. Industry must engage in program design, support student mobility, recognize international credentials, and partner with academic institutions. Students must evaluate

options carefully, maximize learning opportunities, leverage networks, and plan for career transitions.

The stakes are substantial. India's demographic dividend—a young population entering the workforce as developed economies face aging and labor shortages—represents a limited-time opportunity. Sectors such as IT, healthcare, and green energy could add $500 billion to the global economy by 2030 if countries can secure skilled talent. India is uniquely positioned to fill this gap, but only if its higher education system can produce graduates with the technical competencies, soft skills, cross-cultural communication abilities, and adaptability that global employers require.

The internationalization mechanisms enabled by NEP 2020—twinning programs, joint and dual degrees, foreign university campuses, the Academic Bank of Credits, and faculty exchange initiatives—represent powerful tools for this transformation. Their effectiveness, however, depends on implementation quality, institutional commitment, industry partnership, and student engagement.

India's higher education sector stands at an inflection point. The policy framework is in place. The regulatory architecture is established. The early movers—the University of Southampton in Gurugram, Deakin and Wollongong in GIFT City, and the growing roster of institutions with international partnerships—demonstrate that implementation is feasible. The question now is whether the broader higher education ecosystem can mobilize to convert policy potential into employment reality for the millions of Indian graduates who will enter the workforce in the coming decade.

The global employability of Indian graduates is not merely an educational concern but an economic imperative, a social priority, and a national strategic interest. The strategies examined in this white paper—pursued with rigor, resourced adequately, and executed with commitment—can position India not just as a consumer of global education but as a contributor to the global knowledge economy.

References and Sources

This white paper draws on multiple sources including:

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