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## **UK collaboration in India: institutional thematic studies**

Student exposure to the workplace

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## Student exposure to the workplace

1 This thematic study is based upon information provided through briefing papers from 25 United Kingdom (UK) universities with partnership links involving the delivery of collaborative programmes in India and on supplementary information gathered during the audit visit to India. The programmes all lead to qualifications from the relevant UK university which is the awarding institution. This study considers the methods adopted by the UK universities and their partner organisations in India to expose students to the workplace and thus enhance their employability.

2 Exposure to the workplace can take many forms: work-based learning, placements, sandwich programmes, internships, live projects or industrial visits. This paper examines student exposure to the workplace in collaborative programmes with reference to three concepts commonly associated with student engagement with the workplace:

- employability, which can cover getting a graduate job, possession of a vocational degree, formal work experience, possession of key skills or skilful career planning
- work-based learning, which can be defined as learning for work, learning at work or learning from work
- placement learning, which is defined as a planned period of learning, normally outside the institution at which the student is enrolled, where learning outcomes are an intended part of the programme of study.

It should be noted that there is a significant difference in the use of the term 'placement' between the UK and India where placement usually refers to the securing of a job after graduation; placement learning in the UK sense is virtually unknown in India.

3 The majority of the collaborative programmes considered here could be categorised as vocational and the importance of employability and career opportunity is evident in all the links. The aim of the partners in entering into a collaboration was to provide programmes that were industry relevant and met industry benchmarks, and which produced graduates who met the needs of industry. An additional attraction was the international dimension provided by a degree from a UK university which could lead to career progression in India.

4 Several of the links offer students a choice between completing a degree in India and articulating at some point to the UK university. This choice requires the student to balance the lower cost of studying at home with the enhanced employability afforded by the possibility of work experience in the UK, either before or after graduation. One articulation arrangement failed to attract students, possibly because the employment opportunities open to students in India as the result of campus placements during their third year of study outweighed the international experience of studying overseas.

5 Placements on the UK pattern are, however, still rare in India and few of the collaborative programmes incorporate formal periods of assessed work experience, even though the same programmes delivered in the UK include placement years. At least two of the collaborative programmes offer the option of a fourth placement year in the UK and, in one case, those students who choose this option are awarded both a BA (Hons) Business Studies (Sandwich) degree and a Certificate of Work-Based Learning. In another case, students who took advantage of the opportunity for an informal period of work experience in the UK expressed their appreciation of the international exposure this afforded. One UK university, operating a programme where students complete the third year of their degree in the UK (2+1 programme), has recently added an optional fourth placement year to make the programme more attractive to the Indian market; another university is considering the expansion and enhancement of its collaborative 2+1 programme through work placements in the UK. For two universities in Scotland, the Fresh Talent initiative, offering international students the opportunity of working

for two years following graduation on extended visas, has encouraged considerable numbers of Indian students to transfer to these universities for the final year of their degree programmes.

6 The collaborative partnerships providing the greatest exposure to the workplace are those that offer taught postgraduate programmes related specifically to qualifications for graduates already working, or intending to work, in India. These programmes have very close links with industry, business or the professions, enjoy a high level of employer involvement and can boast excellent results in 'placing' their graduates in employment. Many of the students enrolled on these programmes are already in full-time employment and are studying part-time in the interests of personal and career development.

7 On one such MSc programme, half the course consists of an industry orientated project carried out in the workplace with joint academic and industrial supervisors, the latter provided by the company employing the student. In another MSc programme, a project associated with a four-month placement in an industrial, hospital or academic setting accounts for half the final assessment.

8 There is evidence from these postgraduate programmes of students benefiting in various ways from the Indian partner's close links with industry. Employers not only support student projects and placements but also provide speakers for seminars, case studies, workshops and conferences. Employers are involved in curriculum development through membership of industrial liaison committees. In one link, funding from the UK-India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI) has enabled students from the partner organisation in India to visit employers in the UK, and staff to visit the UK university to gain insights into its industrial links and to meet its industrial partners; it is hoped that the funding will also enable students from the UK university to undertake projects in India.

9 For the most part, the undergraduate collaborative programmes do not have such direct industrial connections, but the majority can, however, be categorised as vocational in character. They aim to meet the needs of the Indian economy by producing graduates qualified to embark on careers in business, nursing, the merchant navy, and the hospitality and fashion industries. In the case of those programmes concerned with business and hospitality, in particular, the opportunity to obtain a degree from a UK university and, in some cases, to be exposed to UK workplaces adds an international dimension to a vocational degree. There is some evidence for the adaptation of teaching materials and assignments, where appropriate, to an Indian context. In one business programme, for example, a project on hiring motorcycles was substituted for a project on renting bicycles that was not considered applicable to a marketing context in India. In one hospitality programme, however, an attempt to contextualise an assessment on the wine industry had not been entirely successful as the available literature on wine growing in India was insufficient.

10 Where close links exist between Indian partner organisations and the relevant sectors of business and industry they can add considerable value to collaborative programmes in the form of employer involvement in the updating of curricula to meet the changing needs of the employment market. There is evidence of employers providing students with scholarships, sponsorships, internships and graduate employment opportunities, as well as access to business networks.

11 A considerable amount of work-based experience is incorporated into the structure of collaborative programmes associated with the hospitality industry. These programmes involve the attachment of credit to the first two years of industry-focused diplomas which provide students with extensive work experience, often in kitchens, restaurants, hotels or even entire leisure complexes attached to the partner institutions, before they undertake more academic study, either in India or the UK. In offering a third-year, top-up degree programme, one partnership's declared aim is to provide a coherent and vocationally relevant academic curriculum building upon knowledge and skills gained in studies of operational aspects of hospitality management.

Another similar programme provides two routes to a top-up degree in the UK: students with two years study on a diploma and 1,600 hours of recorded work experience can complete a BA Hospitality Management in one academic year, while those without work experience can complete the degree after three semesters' study and a 12-month work placement.

12 Although work placements on the UK pattern are currently rarely found in India, collaborative partnerships provide other opportunities to enhance the employability of their graduates. Some offer internships with local companies during vacations, while others make courses of practical training mandatory, or provide opportunities for problem solving to develop graduate skills appropriate for the market place. Others organise visits to local companies so that students can look at real-life business scenarios and meet potential employers. An 'industry interface cell' in another link gives students the opportunity to study the strategies, functions and operations of local companies. One Indian partner has pioneered the use of food festivals as extra-curricular projects to engage students in a series of work-related tasks in order to develop their managerial skills and maintain their practical skills.

13 As with placements, live, industry-based projects, common on UK programmes, are rare in India, except where the Indian partner has long-standing and well-developed links with local industry. In one collaborative programme, a 30-credit 'Live Project' module on the UK university's in-house programme was replaced by two 15-credit modules offering similar learning outcomes, but considered more appropriate to the industry context in India. The first was an individual project, as opposed to a group one, and did not rely as heavily on an input from local industry. The second module, Hospitality Supervision and Training, was designed to equip students for their future line-management position supervising the large number of unskilled or semi-skilled staff, characteristic of the Indian hospitality industry.

14 In order to attract students, partnerships delivering collaborative programmes need to be responsive to the concerns of Indian students and their families about employability and the relevance of their studies to the world of work. The most successful programmes appear to be those that provide opportunities for work-based learning, either in India or the UK, and which build on the industrial links of the Indian partner organisation.

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