

ATTRACTING & RETAINING INDIAN EXPATRIATE TALENT IN ACADEMICS



ODGERS BERNDTSON

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Introduction

The pandemic has given organizations and individuals a chance to implicitly re-assess their personal and professional paths. The academic sector, too, has been part of this shift, with universities attracting talent from diverse geographic markets. This has been augmented by the introduction of technology and expansion of online course offerings.

The Graded Autonomy Regulations of the University Grants Commission (UGC) now allows the highest performing universities to hire up to 20% of foreign faculty over and above the total sanctioned faculty strength on a tenure basis. The Government has allowed 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the education sector through the automatic route since 2002. Despite regulatory support, there is a significant gap in hiring expatriate talent in academics in India. As of 2021,

the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) had just approximately 65 foreign faculties/researchers approximately - 1% of the total faculty of 5,700 - despite the Government's goal to attract a minimum of 20% international faculty to the IITs.

There is a gap in the expectations concerning attracting & retaining expatriate talent for the academic sector in India. Whether that be remuneration aspects, legacy systems, infrastructure gaps, or cultural fitment, the Indian education sector demands quick adaption to match global standards.

This white paper attempts to reflect the roundtable conversation by leaders from the academic field invited by Odgers Berndtson for a roundtable on how to attract & retain expatriate talent for the education sector in India.

“ In the past decade, India has become a critical market for executive searches conducted in the corporate sector, and now we are seeing a similar trend in the academic sector too. Clients often ask us to look at expatriates, as they question the quantity and quality of leadership talent available in India. There is a pool of suitable talent in India, but that pool is limited. If one wants to have options, then one must expand one's horizons. ”

Dr. Prasad Medury, Managing Director India, Odgers Berndtson

Do we need an expat & why does an expat want to come to India?

To set the context, leadership roles such as the Vice-Chancellor, and the Dean, the existing talent pool in India is limited. Universities are looking at individuals who can bring a fresh perspective along with global experience. Such talent is expected to implement best practices & re-vamp existing or create new structures, to attract best-in-class faculty and students.

For faculty roles that require subject matter expertise & experience, individuals with academic stature & research credentials have an edge. They are considered to have better corporate credibility & network.

On the aspects of why an Indian expat would want

to relocate to India, it was agreed by the leaders that the culture piece offered by the homeland acts as a big attraction.

However, the primary drive to return is not always for professionally-backed reasons. There is a strong sense of giving back to the nation and connecting back to one's roots. At times, the drive is to be with elderly family members back in the homeland or inculcate certain cultural values while raising a family.

When the motivation to return back to India is not restricted to professional reasons alone, price parity does not come into play. It was agreed that Culture is a magnet that attracts Indian expats back to the country.



“ Speaking from the experience of business schools, very few faculty who are expats that are shifting back to India, are doing so for strictly professional or academic reasons. Culture is a huge magnet that attracts talent back to India ”

Dr. Rajesh Chakrabarti, Director, MDI Gurgaon

What are Universities doing to attract expat talent & address concerns

The Global Talent Competitive Index (GTCI) gauges a country's current ability to grow and attract talent. India ranks 88th position among 132 countries in the latest Global Talent Competitive Index 2021 with a GTCI score of 39. China has a GTCI score of 57 & ranked at 37th position breaking into the Top 40.

When looking at Indian and Chinese universities, public universities in China have succeeded in attracting senior talent from the United States of America. This stems from the fact that senior talent often has the advantage of attracting talent to the university. Faculty are inspired by other recognized faculty colleagues working alongside them within the university ecosystem. Public universities in China have found innovative ways to attract & retain global talent. This includes providing generous bonuses for published research articles, speaking opportunities etc. India is still behind when compared to its Asian counterparts in attracting global talent

though there are some positive examples set forth by the IITs, IIMs and some leading private educational institutes as well.

Once the talent comes on-board there are certain elements that need to be taken care of to manage expectations better for a smooth transition.

- Is the faculty getting the right number of teaching hours? Is there a balance in the number of courses the faculty must teach?
- Does the faculty have a balanced work schedule to conduct research initiatives?
- Does the faculty have the necessary support for industry introductions & publishing research findings?
- Is there a support system in place to make the transition smooth including support for the family of the expat?

“ Aligning the aspiration of the university and the aspiration of the faculty works well to attract and retain talent in the long run. It is essential to handhold and provide assurance to the faculty that aspects related to compensation and other benefits, are competitive with the rest of the world. Here at Plaksha, we have dedicated systems and processes in place to quickly resolve any concerns relating to such matters ”

Dr. Rudra Pratap, Founding Vice-Chancellor, Plaksha University

Investment in Infrastructure v/s People

Indian universities spend a majority of their capital on infrastructure rather than on its faculty as compared to the universities in the west. The investment is mostly to attract students. There are innovative cost sharing models being adopted by global universities, wherein the infrastructure is taken on buy back

lease agreements from real estate developers for long time periods such as 30-40 years. The aim is to lessen the focus on infrastructure & improve investment in attracting & retaining talent which ultimately attracts students globally.

“ Most Indian universities end up spending 80% of their total budget on the university’s infrastructure, and only 20% is invested in the faculty. A conscious effort needs to be taken up by Indian universities to invest more in its people to attract the best global talent ”

Dr. Soumitra Dutta, Dean, Saïd Business School.



The Role of Compensation in Attracting Expat Talent

Compensation is an important factor when it comes to attracting talent. But there are various facets that are involved when it comes to attracting talent from outside India, e.g., a sense of nation building or solving a complex issue at grass root level.

Moreover, compensation is no longer a restricting factor for new age universities as they are open, flexible & have competitive compensation & benefits packages designed for attracting new talent.

However, when it comes to attracting talent at the faculty level, who are still in their mid-career, are the ones that evaluate an opportunity from multiple perspectives. For such individuals, the excitement of research and support for the movement is important. Hence, compensation is one of the key deciding factors in taking up the opportunity.

For public funded universities, higher compensation cannot be awarded as a blanket approach for expats as there are regulatory mechanisms in place which require transparent reporting of bonuses, and other compensation related aspects.

“ Attracting foreign faculty is an eclectic mix. This involves developing research partnerships both at an individual level as well as the university level. Compensation can only be a part of this mix that serves to attract expat talent, but it can’t be the only aspect. If one looks at compensation only as an instrument to attract talent, then one is on a slippery slope ”

Dr. Rajat Kathuria, Dean - School of Humanities & Social Sciences, Shiv Nadar University.

“ Indian expats are Indian in thought but western in experience. What they want is a certain degree of autonomy and certain degree of facility. ”

N. Ravi Shanker, Chancellor, DIT University

Industry & Academia Collaboration

“ Industry and Academia collaboration can be a little different in India compared to western regions. Companies in India do value international expertise. The private industry in India is keen to interact with faculty with international experience, and also engage with them for consulting and other kinds of advisory services. ”

Dr. Rishikesha Krishnan, Director and Professor of Strategy, IIM Bangalore.

Having strong alliances with the industry is an important link when it comes to attracting talent for universities. Universities that are weak in industry collaborations fail to attract the right set of faculty as well as students. Executive education programs play an important role in establishing network with the industry. Often identifying potential collaborators & ensuring continuous

touchpoints with the industry are part of leadership roles at universities.

In 2018, the University of Queensland & IIT Delhi launched a joint research academy called UQIDAR. In a short span of time, it has enrolled PhD students that are focused on conducting research to solve issues faced by the industry.



“ I envisage that in the next few years, approximately 30% of the PhD students will be fully funded by the Industry. ”

Dr. Rajeev Shorey, CEO, The University of Queensland-IIT Delhi Academy of Research (UQIDAR).

When it comes to traditional industries in India, the approach to business development is mostly through the Mergers & Acquisition, rather than Research & Development (R&D). The private sector, though they have dedicated R&D divisions, mostly are conservative in their approach when it comes to R&D projects in collaboration with academia. These projects often entail a long time frame. The leaders

agreed that collaboration between Academia and Industry, should be looked like a business partnership. Grants received by the university for R&D projects, should be based on constant feedback from the industry. An effective way for the collaboration to work would be for the industry to define the problem statement, and for the academic fraternity to develop solutions through their best minds.

“ For meaningful R&D engagement between Academia and Industry, a longer runway in terms of timeline is often required. Private industry abroad, in my opinion, tends to be more forgiving of a longer runway primarily because they tend to have a dedicated resource pool allocated for R&D, where RoI is not an immediate concern. Academia-Industry collaborations are at a more nascent stage in India; there is a significant potential for growth in this domain, with many exciting opportunities waiting to be explored. ”

Dr. Vijay Ramani, Vice Provost for Graduate Education, Washington University in St Louis.

CONCLUSION

“ In my experience, foreign nationals who work for a short term of 2-3 years do provide valuable insights to the university through their experience. We need to look at the individual nuances involved, such as the amount of teaching, the scope of research work, administration duties involved, etc. With the opening up of the Indian education system, there are many opportunities to tap the right talent at the right level. ”

Dr. Anil Kashyap, Director General & CEO, NICMAR

Organizations re-assessing their talent management strategy must consider how to best leverage new and non-traditional approaches to recruit diverse talent. Foreign nationals bring global knowledge & experience to the table but require initial handholding for a smooth and successful transition. On the other hand, Indian expatriates are attracted to

contributing back to their country and drive transformation.

As the requisite talent pool in India is limited, the pragmatic approach is to expand one's horizons to explore talent from outside of India. The challenge remains to incorporate best practices so Indian Universities' too can attract & retain the best talent.



Roundtable participants

We thank the following for joining us at the Odgers Berndtson roundtable

Dr. Anil Kashyap, Director General & CEO, NICMAR

Dr. Rajat Kathuria, Dean - School of Humanities & Social Sciences, Shiv Nadar University.

Dr. Rajesh Chakrabarti, Director, MDI Gurgaon

Dr. Rajeev Shorey, CEO, The University of Queensland-IIT Delhi Academy of Research (UQIDAR)

N. Ravi Shanker, Chancellor, DIT University

Dr. Rishiksha Krishnan, Director and Professor of Strategy, IIM Bangalore.

Dr. Rudra Pratap, Founding Vice-Chancellor, Plaksha University

Dr. Soumitra Dutta, Dean, Saïd Business School.

Dr. Vijay Ramani, Vice Provost for Graduate Education, Washington University in St Louis.

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ABOUT ODGERS BERNDTSON

Organisations of every size and sector depend on talented individuals, teams and leaders to realise their success. Odgers Berndtson's strength lies in the partnerships we develop to address that need. We form strong relationships with the most talented people, with those seeking them and between our own teams globally to bring both sides together. It is because of our deep, non-transactional and lasting partnerships, that our clients can acquire, develop and retain their strongest leaders.

We combine deep sectoral insight with an analysis of the specific context in which the organisation is operating. This entails evaluating existing board and management dynamics to ensure we consider every brief from all

perspectives. We use our understanding to support clients to secure innovative leadership and board appointments capable of leading their businesses through disruptive times and towards success. With offices in 33 countries, and through global collaboration between them, our consultants combine their industry and functional expertise with cultural and geographic knowledge to ensure clients have a strong and diverse selection of candidates to choose from. We guide organisations towards appointments that will transform their business and secure its future. And we stay with our clients, and those we place, beyond each successful search, to support their continued joint future success.



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