



Australia India  
Institute

# Exploring the Ramifications of India's National Education Policy 2020 for Engagement

Brigid Freeman  
June 2021





## SUMMARY

The *National Education Policy 2020* was approved in July 2020, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi declaring that it will “lay [the] foundation of the new India of the 21st century” and “make India future ready” (Outlook Web Bureau, 2020). The NEP aims to embed access, equity, affordability, accountability and quality in school and higher education systems. Culturally, the Government of India’s education policies are typically aspirational, and the NEP illustrates this well. It elaborates ambitious objectives, transformational structural, pedagogical and curriculum reforms, and bold participation targets. The NEP acknowledges India’s rich heritage of ancient knowledge, historical Indian world-class institutions (such as Takshashila and Nalanda), and important legacies of Indian culture and philosophy.

The transformations imagined in the NEP are intended to be implemented over the next 20 years, to 2040, notwithstanding disruptions since early 2020 from the COVID-19 pandemic. The aspirations require major legislative and regulatory reform, the establishment of new statutory bodies, and considerably increased public and private investment. As education is a concurrent responsibility, successful implementation will require co-ordination from central and state governments. Implementation challenges observed in relation to previous iterations of India’s national education policies suggest ongoing intelligence about NEP implementation progress will be vitally important to calibrate Australia’s response.

Recognising the growing importance of Australia’s education engagements with India, this policy report examines key elements of the NEP relating to schools, higher education (teaching), research, and vocational education and training (VET). It draws heavily on the Australia India Institute report, *India’s National Education Policy 2020 and Australia’s Education Engagement: Key Findings from Roundtables* (Freeman, 2021). That report proposed priority action areas that Australia’s education system and institutions can take now to respond to the NEP reform agenda and maximise the impact on Australia-India education engagement. The recommendations are mutually reinforcing, symbiotic, and potentially beneficial for both Australian and Indian education stakeholders.

## Priority action areas and recommendations

Priority action areas		Recommendations
1	Joint Education PhD programs	That Australian universities with established Australia-India academies introduce a joint Education PhD program.
2	Education-discipline focused international research collaboration	That Australian universities support Australia-India international research collaborations focused on education (schools, VET, higher education) and education policy.
3	Australia-India academies	That Australian universities with established Australia-India joint PhD academies mentor other Australian universities interested in investing in such partnerships.
4	Higher education teaching collaborations	That Universities Australia and the Australia India Institute convene a series of forums to examine opportunities to increase higher education teaching collaborations, including offshore and online coursework transnational education.
5	International office connections	That Australian university international offices establish connections with established and emerging Indian HEI international offices to share good practices and promote professional exchanges.
6	Applied higher education	That (dual sector and other) Australian universities and other degree-accredited providers (including TAFE colleges) engage with Indian HEIs offering applied higher education programs to explore opportunities for engagement.
7	School/university/ researcher networks	That Australian schools experienced in India engagement, pre-service education student placements and/or education research partner with Australian universities delivering Education PhDs to Indian international students through Australia-India academies.

## INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) was approved by India’s Union Cabinet on 29th July 2020. It reflects the Government of India’s bold ambition to “have an education system by 2040 that is second to none” (2020, p. 3). It also reflects India’s complexities, scale and extensive array of central and state government policy actors, and education stakeholders.

The NEP builds on previous education policy committee reports, draft policy statements, and national education policies dating from 1968.<sup>1</sup> It foreshadows the universalisation of school education, extending the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.

The NEP announces that a new apparatus will be established for school and higher education in India, with the new Higher Education Commission of India subsuming the University Grants Commission and All India Council for Technical Education. The commission will have four sub-authorities: the National Higher Education Regulatory

1. The NEP builds on the 2016 *Report of the Committee for Evolution of the New Education Policy* prepared by a committee led by former Cabinet Secretary, T.S.R. Subramanian, as well as the 2019 *Draft National Education Policy (DNEP)*, developed by a committee led by Professor K. Kasturirangan, former Chair of the Indian Space Research Organisation. It replaces the 1986 *National Education Policy*, modified in 1992 (NPE 1986/92), and the previous *National Policy on Education (NPE)* of 1968.

Council, the National Accreditation Authority (subsuming the National Assessment and Accreditation Council and National Board of Accreditation), the Higher Education Grants Council, and the General Education Council.

These changes will progressively be introduced as Australia pivots further towards India. Building on opportunities envisaged in An India Economic Strategy to 2035 prepared by University of Queensland Chancellor, Peter Varghese AO, the 2020 Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between [the] Republic of India and Australia formalised government-to-government dialogues and affirmed the importance of science, technology and research collaboration, along with education and people-to-people ties.

Against this backdrop, Australia-India education engagement is increasing, encouraged by the Council for International Education's report, Positioning for Deeper Engagement: A Plan of Action in India and policies developed by state governments, individual universities, and peak bodies. The recommendations contained in this policy report complement existing strategies, respond directly to reforms announced in the NEP, and can be actioned now.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

The NEP announces far-reaching reforms to restructure, reorient, and re-energise India's higher education system by 2040. The NEP would see India's 50,000 higher education institutions – nearly 1,000 universities, 40,000 colleges and 10,750 stand-alone institutions in 2018-2019 (MHRD, 2019) – rationalised in number through amalgamation and clustering processes, by 2040. With new requirements regarding minimum student numbers (i.e., 3,000 students per institution), and the abolition of college affiliation requirements (by 2035) in most instances, the NEP forecasts a smaller number of larger autonomous universities/colleges, including many students studying in flexible mode.

The NEP announces that, in time, all universities and colleges will be required to establish a Board of Governors, with enabling legislation introduced to reflect the NEP's broad governance and leadership reforms. Over time, all higher education institutions would be better equipped:

As the most basic step, all [higher education institutions] will be equipped with the basic infrastructure and facilities, including clean drinking water, clean working toilets, blackboards, offices, teaching supplies, libraries, labs, and pleasant classroom spaces and campuses. Every classroom shall have access to the latest educational technology that enables better learning experiences. (2020, p. 40)

As the NEP's structural reforms are progressively implemented, India's higher education institutions will be allocated to one of three categories: *research-intensive universities* largely focused on research; *teaching universities* largely focused on teaching while also conducting research; and *autonomous colleges*, largely focused on teaching undergraduate programs. Universities and colleges may formalise inter-institutional connections as higher education clusters ("knowledge hubs"). In 2021, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that higher education clusters will initially be established in nine cities (including Hyderabad, and possibly Delhi, Bangalore and Pune). These higher education clusters will complement science and technology clusters being supported by the Principal Scientific Adviser in Hyderabad, Delhi, Bangalore, Pune,

Bhubaneswar and Jodhpur (Niazi, 2021a). In a major departure from current practice, all universities and colleges, or higher education clusters will offer programs across a comprehensive breadth of disciplines by 2040.

These structural reforms – coupled with increased public and private investment – will underpin student growth in both public and private universities and colleges. The NEP establishes a target gross enrolment ratio of 50% in higher education by 2035 (up from 26% in 2018), importantly, including higher education institution-provided vocational education. With some 37.4 million higher education students participating in 2018-2019, this growth target anticipates the creation of approximately 35 million additional student places by 2035.

For the first time, the NEP gives priority to the internationalisation of Indian higher education (Varghese & Mathews, 2021). Reactivating the intention of the stalled *Foreign Educational Institution Bill*, legislative reforms will be enacted to allow the top 100 foreign universities to operate branch campuses in India. This reform will increase onshore higher education capacity and encourage ‘internationalisation at home’. Some commentators suggest that allowing elite foreign universities to operate onshore in India will reduce the cost of accessing foreign higher education (Sharma & Yarlagadda, 2021). However, foreign higher education is already available onshore through MOOC platforms and university-specific technologies (Freeman, 2020). Supporting this shift to foreign onshore providers, the 2020-21 Union Budget introduced reforms enabling foreign direct investment and external commercial borrowings (Shukla, 2020). Complementing these onshore initiatives, the NEP foreshadows elite Indian institutions setting up branch campuses overseas. To this effect, the University Grants Commission’s (UGC) new regulations permit Institutions of Eminence Deemed to be Universities to establish new off-campus centres overseas (UGC, 2021).

In addition to increasing seats for domestic students, the NEP supports India’s emerging export education sector, primarily for students from South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation nations. The University Grants Commission has already introduced reforms to support this growth agenda, requiring universities and colleges to establish Offices for International Affairs.

The NEP provides some details regarding mechanisms to support student participation growth. In terms of tuition fees and financial support for disadvantaged or unrepresented students, the NEP commits to establishing “transparent mechanisms for fixing of [public sector] fees with an upper limit for different types of institutions depending on their accreditation, ... so that individual institutions are not adversely affected” (2020, p. 49). Commentators have cautioned that the reforms represent a marked shift towards marketisation and inter-institutional competition (Chattopadhyay, 2020a). Further, Srivastava (2020) argues that “the Covid-19 pandemic has heavily exposed the weaknesses of the financial model promoted by the NEP. With philanthropic contributions negligible and fee collections grinding to a halt, many institutions are now in a crisis and are unable to pay their faculty, service their loans or meet the routine day-to-day expenses” (p. 109).

In terms of courses, the NEP celebrates the rich heritage of Indian knowledge, supports higher education providing students “knowledge of many arts”, and foretells a shift

whereby students would study “one or more specialized areas of interest at a deep level”, while also developing “21st century capabilities across a range of disciplines ... as well as professional, technical and vocational subjects” (NEP, 2020, p. 33). In addition to emphasising program breadth and increased choice for students through “imaginative and flexible curricular structures [that] will enable creative combinations of disciplines for study” (2020, p. 37), the NEP anticipates improved curriculum, pedagogy, formative assessment and student support, over time. However, no attention is given to existing faculty shortages, casualisation of the academic labour market, or employment practices in the private sector (Urvashi, 2020).

In a major departure from existing practice, the NEP foreshadows simplifying complex undergraduate and postgraduate course length mandates, shifting to 1-year certificates, 2-year diplomas, 3- and 4-year undergraduate degrees with multiple entry and exit points. Similarly, the NEP proposes simplifying course length requirements for masters (1- or 2-years), and controversially, discontinuing Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) programs. Admission to a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) will require completion of a master’s degree or 4-year bachelor’s degree with research. In a related development, the University Grants Commission has introduced regulations to establish an Academic Bank of Credits,<sup>2</sup> extending the existing choice-based credit system. These developments, once implemented, may prompt foreign universities to review admissions policies for Indian international students.

In terms of qualifications, the NEP states that “credits acquired in foreign universities will be permitted, where appropriate as per the requirements of each [higher education institution], to be counted for the award of a degree” (2020, p. 39). Also supporting qualification recognition, intra- and inter-sectoral mobility, the new General Education Council will progress the National Higher Education Qualification Framework, aligned to the (existing) National Skills Qualifications Framework governing VET sector qualifications. There are no timeframes flagged for these important developments, nor indications that the Government of India will sign onto the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education 2019*, or the 2011 *Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education* (Tokyo Convention) (see Freeman, 2018).

The NEP anticipates a greater role for online learning, and within the context of the COVID-19 induced campus closures, significant progress has been made in this area. This is notwithstanding difficulties associated with students’ access (smartphone, laptop), teacher’s capacity, wi-fi availability, and subject availability for urban/rural HEIs (Bhushan, 2020). The University Grants Commission has authorised the delivery of full online programs (i.e., full certificates, as well as full undergraduate or postgraduate coursework degrees) by India’s top 100 institutions (ranked against the National Institutional Ranking Framework) (The Gazette of India, 2020). Further, in January 2021, Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal announced that virtual universities will be established (Agrawal, 2021). These significant developments complement India’s existing flexible learning offerings through open and distance learning institutions, Indian online learning

---

2. See the draft UGC [Establishment and Operationalization of Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) Scheme in Higher Education] Regulations, 2021.



platforms (e.g., SWAYAM, NPTEL, mooKIT, IITBombayX) and other global platforms (Coursera, edX, FutureLearn) (see Freeman, 2020). They also reflect reforms made to accommodate COVID-19 campus closures (e.g., the multi-mode PM e-Vidya Programme using television and radio channels).

The NEP's support for online learning will, in time, legitimise technology-enabled learning (including online learning and proctored assessment), increase student participation and affirm areas requiring urgent attention (e.g., the digital divide). To progress these advances, the Minister of Education and Chair of the All India Council for Technical Education, Professor Anil D Sahasrabudhe, together launched the National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT 2.0) in February 2021. This initiative will provide a platform supporting technology-enabled learning, assessment, planning and administration for schools and higher education.

Consistent with earlier reports (including the S Radhakrishnan Commission report of 1948–49; the Kothari Education Commission report of 1964–66; and the Yashpal Committee report of 2009), the NEP commits to enhancing institutional autonomy and academic freedom, particularly in relation to curriculum, pedagogy and research. This is welcome given concerns regarding the devaluing of such freedom in the face of privatisation, centralisation, and employment precariousness in Indian higher education (Sundar, 2018). At the same time, the NEP aims to increase accountability, performativity and higher education quality. Mechanisms will be established to manage institutional performance against Institutional Development Plans. These plans will play an important role in the allocation of public funds, accountability reporting, target-setting (e.g., research, publications, teaching), and institutional and faculty autonomy (Chattopadhyay, 2020b). Faculty will be provided increased in-service professional development through India's MOOC platform (SWAYAM) and the Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA).

## RESEARCH AND RESEARCH TRAINING

The NEP acknowledges “lesser emphasis on research at most universities and colleges, and lack of competitive peer-reviewed research funding across disciplines” (2020, p. 33). This acknowledgement is consistent with longstanding concerns regarding India's research system, including the failure to place well in research-based, world university rankings. It is also consistent with calls to redress the inadequate focus on, and insufficient resources and facilities for research (Sheikh, 2017). In response, the NEP announces a series of major reforms aimed at establishing a robust research ecosystem, reflecting the fundamental principle that “outstanding research [is] a co-requisite for outstanding education and development” (NEP, 2020, p. 5).

In terms of research funding, a National Research Foundation will be formed and charged with establishing a competitive, peer-reviewed research funding system for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), humanities, arts and social science (HASS) and interdisciplinary research. The Union Budget 2021-22 included an allocation for the National Research Foundation (\$US6.9 billion over five years) for research on



national priority areas (Sharma, 2021a). National Research Foundation funding will complement existing schemes operated by governments (e.g., Department of Science and Technology, Department of Bio-Technology, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Indian Council of Historical Research).

Over time, the NEP anticipates that transforming India's research ecosystem will involve increased research activity and output at comprehensive, research-intensive universities and research and development centres. It also anticipates increased innovation through partnerships with industry. Strategies will be introduced to build research capability in both research-intensive universities and teaching-universities. The NEP anticipates that increased investment in research and other NEP reforms more broadly, will better position India's research ecosystem to address grand challenges (including water, sanitation, healthcare, air quality, energy and infrastructure) and deal with rapid environmental, technical and social changes (including climate change, population dynamics, biotechnology and artificial intelligence).

As is currently the case, India's research efforts will be complemented by collaborations with universities in research-intensive (North American, United Kingdom, Europe, East Asia) and emerging research (Africa, Middle East and other Asian) regions, along with a growing number of collaborations with Australian universities and research institutes (Freeman, 2017; Deuchar & Freeman, 2021). Aspirations for improving India's research ecosystem and strengthening international research collaboration require institutional autonomy and academic freedom. It is therefore concerning that the Ministry of Education attempted to more closely scrutinize online activities of public Indian higher education institutions, such as international conferences and seminars relating to 'internal matters' (Niazi, 2021b), before reversing the decision after public backlash (Sharma, 2021b).

The NEP also signals the transformation of India's doctoral education system, with "all fresh PhD entrants, irrespective of discipline, ... required to take credit-based courses in teaching/education/pedagogy/writing related to their chosen PhD subject during their doctoral training period" and "have a minimum number of hours of actual teaching experience gathered through teaching assistantships and other means" (2020, p. 43). This suggests reforms to PhDs in education (for potential faculty members proceeding to education departments), but also, PhDs in all other disciplines, on the basis that Indian PhD graduates frequently proceed to university or college employment. Timeframes have yet to be established for these reforms.

## SCHOOLS

The NEP announces major reforms to India's school education system for implementation over the years leading up to 2040. It anticipates the achievement of universal schooling from pre-school to Grade 12 (including school-based vocational education) by 2030. This achievement would involve resolution of persistent disparities in participation and progress for socio-economically disadvantaged groups (e.g., based on gender, socio-cultural and geographical identity, disability, socio-economic background) (see ASER

Centre, 2019; ASER Centre, 2021). As education is a concurrent responsibility, school education reform success relies on recasting the role of central and state-level governance and regulation authorities, negotiating public and private interests, and sufficient resourcing.

The NEP foreshadows structural reforms involving a shift from a “10+2” to a “5+3+3+4” model including stages referred to as foundational (3-8-year olds), preparatory (8-11-year olds), middle (11-14-year olds) and secondary (14-18-year olds) (Table 1). However, no timeframes have been announced for the restructure. The NEP aims to deliver improved foundational literacy and numeracy, curriculum and pedagogy, as well as improvements to the school environment and culture. Over time, changes will be made to student assessments, including Grade 10 and Grade 12 school and Board examinations; however, it remains unclear how issues associated with India’s “coaching culture” (2020, p. 5) will be resolved.

**Table 1: NEP reforms for school education (5+3+3+4)**

Stage		Age ranges	Grades	Length of block
Foundational Stage	Play/activity-based learning and character development	3-8 years old	Phase 1: 3 years of <i>Anganwadi</i> /pre-school, and  Phase 2: Grades 1-2 of primary school	5 years
Preparatory Stage	Classroom learning: reading, writing, speaking, physical education, the arts, languages, science, mathematics	8-11 years old	Grades 3-5	3 years
Middle Stage	Classroom learning: sciences, mathematics, the arts, social sciences, humanities, languages, sports, vocational crafts	11-14 years old	Grades 6-8	3 years
Secondary Stage		14-18 years old	Grades 9-12, including  Phase 1: Grades 9-10, and  Phase 2: Grades 11-12	4 years

The NEP emphasises the place of school teachers in ensuring quality education and promotes radical changes to India’s teacher education system (but not career structure or remuneration) to underpin quality improvements. By 2030, the minimum degree qualification for registered schoolteachers will be the 4-year integrated Bachelor of Education, representing a rationalisation and redevelopment of existing pre-service programs. The new qualification will emphasise Indian knowledge, languages and values, and be delivered by faculty in education departments at accredited, comprehensive universities or colleges, rather than existing teacher training institutes.

The NEP places a strong emphasis on education faculty, anticipating that “as colleges and universities all move towards becoming multidisciplinary, they will also aim to house outstanding education departments that offer B.Ed., M.Ed., and Ph.D. degrees in education” (2020, p. 23). National Professional Standards for Teachers will be developed, along with a National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education, over the next few years. Building on existing professional development offerings, continuous professional development will be provided to teachers and school Principals/leaders.

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

India’s formal skills sector has been the subject of considerable reform over the last decade, notably including the *National Skill Development Policy 2009* and *2015 National Skill Development Policy* (see Mehrotra, 2021). Rather than focusing on India’s skills development sector, the NEP emphasises the integration of vocational education into school and higher education such that at least 50% of school and higher education students have “exposure to vocational education” by 2025 (2020, p. 44). While some commentators have decried the failure of the NEP to explicitly address India’s skills development sector, others have welcomed the integration of vocational education, suggesting the NEP “gives considerable attention to [tertiary] VET ... [as it] will bring in a little over 280,000 secondary and higher secondary schools ... and more than 40,000 higher education institutions into the fold of potential TVET providers” (Wadia, 2020, p. 35).

The NEP foreshadows reforms to embed vocational crafts in Grades 6-8 school education (e.g., carpentry, gardening, pottery), internships in Grades 6-12 with vocational experts (e.g., gardeners, artists), and skills courses for students in Grades 9-12. This agenda builds on India’s experience in recent years progressively introducing vocational education in schools. Indeed, ‘skill subjects’ are already available for students in Grades 9 and 10, and Grades 11 and 12 (for example, see Central Board of Secondary Education [CBSE], 2020a; CBSE 2020b). For senior secondary students, school-based vocational education already includes programs in retail, automotive, agriculture, food production, accounting, shorthand, textile design, yoga and information technology.

Further, the NEP aims to increase adult learner’s participation in vocational skills development, building on existing adult education provision through Adult Education Centres and other channels (e.g., apps, online modules and books, TV channels, and libraries). An adult education curriculum framework will be established, spanning foundational literacy and numeracy, critical life skills, vocational skills, as well as basic and continuing education.

The NEP also aims to integrate vocational education into higher education, building on the introduction of skills-based initiatives in higher education aiming to enhance young people’s employability (see Dogra, 2020) and valuing of VET. The NEP foreshadows universities and colleges becoming increasingly instrumentalist and interacting with industry (e.g., university/college-level apprenticeships<sup>3</sup> and incubation centres), as well

---

3. The Institute for Policy Research Studies briefing advises that “about 150 higher education institutions will start apprenticeship embedded degree and diploma courses in March 2021” (Mann, 2020, p. 1). Refer to the *UGC Guidelines for Higher Education Institutions to offer Apprenticeship/Internship embedded Degree Programme* (UGC, 2020)

as non-government organisations. In addition to Bachelor of Vocation (B.Voc) degrees introduced in 2013, students undertaking undergraduate programs will be eligible to enrol in “vocational courses” (2020, p. 44). In time, universities and colleges will be authorised to deliver “short-term certificate courses in various skills including soft skills” (2020, p. 44), and opportunities for open and distance vocational education will be explored. These reforms will be facilitated by a new National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education and involve implementation of the National Skills Qualifications Framework (including recognition of prior learning) and alignment with the International Labour Organisation’s International Standard Classification of Occupations.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The NEP is largely silent on policy implementation processes, timelines (other than broad targets for 2030-2040), public funding commitments for key elements, and expectations regarding alternative revenue raising options (i.e., tuition fees, borrowings, foreign direct investment). Policy implementation will be led by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the Central Advisory Board of Education, central and state governments, regulatory authorities, national and State Councils of Educational Research and Training and education institutions. In January 2021, the Minister for Education recommended the establishment of a task force to co-ordinate NEP implementation efforts of central government departments, as well as a review committee to monitor implementation of NEP’s 181 tasks (SNS Web, 2021). The NEP anticipates being fully operational in the 2030-2040 decade; however, this seems highly improbable based on previous education policy rollouts and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of both fiscal and human impact.

The NEP aspires to *increase* public investment from central and state governments to 6% Gross Domestic Product “at the earliest” (2020, p. 61). Cognisant of the dominant role private educational institutions already play in India’s school and higher education landscape, and the negligible role of philanthropy at this point, commentators have cautioned that the NEP fails to establish how participation growth, structural reforms, and quality improvements will be funded (Pillai, 2020). While increased public funding was clearly foreshadowed in the NEP, the Union Budget 2021 *reduced* central government funding for the education ministry by 6% (from Rs 99,310 to Rs 93,224), reduced the budget for *Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan*, and reduced the budget for the National Scheme for Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (Jain, 2021). Commentators suggest this decline is particularly problematic given the increased basic needs of education institutions impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ghosh, 2021), notwithstanding allocations for vaccine development, and India’s engagement in vaccine diplomacy (Sharma, 2021a).

From the late 1960s, the Government of India’s national education policies have been framed in aspirational terms, with implementation anticipated over several decades. However, studies have consistently reported “an unimpressive record in implementation” (Venkataraman, 2016, p. 47), and in more recent years, a failure to comprehensively evaluate “what worked, what did not, why, and possible key issues that require a policy response” (Dewan & Mehendale, 2015, p. 16). Commentators have raised concerns regarding the failure to commit sufficient government resources, co-ordinate a coherent

central-state response, and address vested interests, amongst other things. As Govinda cautions, “The [NEP] is copious in visionary statements reimagining a new education system for the future generation. This enthusiasm to build a new educational future is well justified. But it has to be tempered by the reality of the present” (2020, p. 607). Mehrotra concurs, suggesting, particularly in terms of VET, that “There is nothing new in all of this, nor is there any further explanation how this is to be done” (2021, p. 16).

What this means for Australian stakeholders is that, in welcoming India’s bold aims and observing some positive, immediate steps, expectations must be tempered, and responses must anticipate policy implementation lags.

## STRATEGIES TO RESPOND TO THE NEP AND INCREASE AUSTRALIA-INDIA EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT

Notwithstanding that many NEP reforms will be phased in over time, recommendations made by Freeman (2021) can be activated by Australian stakeholders now. They respond directly to NEP reforms and complement the many and varied ways that stakeholders already engage with Indian counterparts.

### **Joint Education PhD programs**

The NEP’s school education reforms rely on Indian university education departments delivering high quality pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development. Increasing the number of PhD-qualified Indian department of education faculty would contribute considerably to this objective. Some Australian universities have established Australia-India higher education academies that offer joint PhD programs, particularly with elite Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) (see below). While these academies are primarily STEM-focused, some are extending to HASS PhDs as elite Indian universities seek to diversify their disciplinary profiles.

Recommendation 1: That Australian universities with established Australia-India academies introduce a joint Education PhD program.

### **Education-discipline focused international research collaboration**

The NEP foreshadows radical reforms to India’s school and higher education systems. While vastly different in terms of scale, neoliberal and new public management reforms were introduced to Australia’s higher education system in the late 1980s, while the states incrementally shift school education policy settings over time. Faculty at Australian universities have experience in education fields of research including education policy, sociology and philosophy; education systems (early childhood education; primary and secondary education, higher education); and curriculum and pedagogy. Despite there being mutual areas of interest, Australia-India education research collaborations are very limited.

Recommendation 2: That Australian universities support Australia-India education- and education-policy focused international research collaborations.

## Australia-India academies

The NEP encourages increased international research collaboration and welcomes the top 100 ranked universities establishing operations in India. Some Australia-India research collaborations involve formal institutional structures, well-illustrated by the IITB-Monash Research Academy established in Mumbai in 2008, and TERI Deakin Nanobiotechnology Centre (TDNBC), established in Haryana in 2011. These early successes have spurred other formal partnerships, including the UQ-IITD Academy of Research (UQIDAR), IITH and Swinburne University of Technology (IITH-SUT) collaboration. The Asian Smart Cities Research Innovation Network (ASCRIN) involves La Trobe University, IIT Kanpur and Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani (BITS Pilani). Other Australian universities may be interested in replicating the Australia-India academy model.

Recommendation 3: That Australian universities with established Australia-India joint PhD academies mentor other Australian universities interested in investing in such partnerships.

## Higher education teaching collaborations

To date, Government of India regulations governing transnational education have constrained opportunities for teaching-based collaborations other than twinning programs and technical education affiliations (e.g., joint PhD academies with IITs). However, some Australian universities have established coursework teaching collaborations (e.g., faculty lectures into Indian higher education institutions, innovative curriculum models/content), while some faculty access Government of India schemes (e.g., Global Initiative of Academic Networks, GIAN). Where the Government of India enacts regulatory mechanisms to allow dual (double) degrees, joint degrees and further twinning arrangements, opportunities for teaching-based collaborations will be increased (see Draft UGC (Academic Collaboration Between Indian and Foreign HEIs to Offer Joint Degree, Dual Degree and Twinning Programme) Regulations, 2021). There is interest in extending these coursework teaching-based collaborations to leverage India's interest in internationalisation.

Recommendation 4: That Universities Australia and the Australia India Institute convene a series of forums to examine opportunities to increase higher education teaching collaborations, including offshore and online coursework transnational education.

## International office connections

Australian universities have well established international offices, and many of these have connections with some Indian education institutions. Strengthening these connections would benefit both Australian and Indian institutions.

Recommendation 5: That Australian university international offices establish connections with established and emerging Indian HEI international offices to share good practices and promote professional exchanges.

## Applied higher education

Some Australian universities and other degree-granting providers (including TAFE colleges) offer applied higher education; however, Australia-India linkages and research in this area are limited.

Recommendation 6: That (dual sector and other) Australian universities and other degree-granting providers (including TAFE colleges) engage with Indian HEIs offering applied higher education programs to explore opportunities for engagement.

## School/university/researcher networks

A number of Australian schools operate sister school relationships, short-term cultural exchanges, twinning arrangements, and collaborative curriculum activities with Indian counterparts. Some teach Hindi and engage with the local Indian community. Many Australian schools have expertise providing placements for pre-service education students, while some Australian educators have participated in professional development programs in India. A number of Australian schools are involved in education research projects, frequently in partnership with faculty from Australian universities. There appears to be little coherence to these arrangements, and school-university India-related connections.

Recommendation 7: That Australian schools experienced in India engagement, pre-service education student placements and/or education research partner with Australian universities delivering Education PhDs to Indian international students through Australia-India Academies.



# REFERENCES

- Agrawal, P. (2021, January 30). 'Virtual university' to be set up to boost technology adoption in education sector: Govt. The Logical Indian. <https://thelogicalindian.com/uplifting/virtual-university-india-26514>
- ASER Centre. (2019). *Annual status of education report (rural) 2018 Provisional*. ASER Centre. <http://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202018/Release%20Material/aserreport2018.pdf>
- ASER Centre. (2021). *Annual status of education report (rural) 2020 Wave 1*. [http://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202021/ASER%202020%20wave%201%20-%20v2/aser2020wave1report\\_feb1.pdf](http://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202021/ASER%202020%20wave%201%20-%20v2/aser2020wave1report_feb1.pdf)
- Bhushan, S. (2020). *A survey report COVID 19 and higher education*. National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration.
- Central Board of Secondary Education. (2020a). *List of skill courses offered at secondary level (for IX & X)*. [http://cbseacademic.nic.in/web\\_material/Circulars/2020/25\\_Circular\\_2020ANX2.pdf](http://cbseacademic.nic.in/web_material/Circulars/2020/25_Circular_2020ANX2.pdf)
- Central Board of Secondary Education. (2020b). *List of skill electives offered at senior secondary level (for XI & XII)*. [http://cbseacademic.nic.in/web\\_material/Circulars/2020/25\\_Circular\\_2020ANX3.pdf](http://cbseacademic.nic.in/web_material/Circulars/2020/25_Circular_2020ANX3.pdf)
- Chattopadhyay, S. (2020a). National Education Policy, 2020: An uncertain future for Indian higher education. *Economic and Political Weekly*, November.
- Chattopadhyay, S. (2020b). Academic freedom, institutional autonomy and institutionalising accountability. A reflection on the National Education Policy 2020. *The JMC Review. An Interdisciplinary Social Science Journal of Criticism, Practice and Theory*, 4, pp. 2-23.
- Deuchar, A., & Freeman, B. (2021). *Deepening collaboration and strengthening opportunities for Australia-India research and engagement*. Australia India Institute.
- Dewan, N., & Mehendale, A. (2015): Towards a New Education Policy: Directions and considerations, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 50(48), 15–18.
- Dogra, B. (2020). Developing employability through skill-based higher education in India. *University News* 58(12), 9-14.
- Freeman, B. (2017). *The nature and extent of university engagement with Indian higher education institutions*. Australia India Institute.
- Freeman, B. (2018). *Barriers to higher education qualifications recognition in India*. Australia India Institute.

- Freeman, B. (2020). *Very short policy brief: Increasing the online learning footprint of Victorian universities in India*. Australia India Institute.
- Freeman, B. (2021). *India's National Education Policy 2020 and Australia's education engagement: Key findings from roundtables*. Australia India Institute.
- Ghosh, A. K. (2021, February 5). *Education today needs more funds, not less*. The Statesman.
- Govinda, R. (2020). NEP 2020: A critical examination. *Social Change*, 50(4), 603-607.
- Jain, P. (2021, February 1). Union budget 2021. What's good and what's not for the education sector. *The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/union-budget-2021-whats-good-and-whats-not-for-the-education-sector/articleshow/80636342.cms>
- Mehrotra, S. (2021). *Technical and vocational education and training in India: Lacking vision, strategy and coherence*. CSE Working Paper #37. Asim Premji University.
- Ministry of Human Resource Development. (2019). *All India survey of higher education 2018-19*. Government of India. [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/AISHE%20Final%20Report%202018-19.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/AISHE%20Final%20Report%202018-19.pdf)
- Niazi, S. (2021a, February 12). *Government proposes nine higher education hub cities*. University World News.
- Niazi, S. (2021b, February 3). *New ministry rules set curbs on academic freedom online*. University World News.
- Outlook Web Bureau. (2020, August 7). *New education policy lays foundation of new India of 21st century: PM Modi*. <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-new-education-policy-lays-foundation-of-new-india-of-21st-century-pm-modi/358153>
- Pillai, P. (2020, August 2). A fundamental question about National Education Policy 2020: How to finance higher education? *Outlook*. <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/opinion-a-fundamental-question-about-national-education-policy-2020-how-to-finance-higher-education/357844>
- Sharma, Y. (2021a, February 12). *COVID-19 budget sees big increases for research, vaccines*. University World News. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210212093315728>
- Sharma, Y. (2021b, February 26). *Curbs on 'sensitive' webinar topics reversed after outcry*. University World News. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210226134059716>
- Sharma, J., & Yarlagadda, P. K. (2021). National Education Policy 2020: Education opportunities after school completion. *Teacher*, 15(1), 7-9.
- Sheikh, Y. A. (2017). Higher education in India: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(1), 39-42.

- Shukla, A. (2020, February 1). Budget 2020: Top 100 institutions to offer full time online degree courses. *Hindustan Times*. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/budget-2020-top-100-institutions-to-offer-full-time-online-degree-courses/story-ES0uhT1buPvyF5TGsiW0ml.html>
- SNS Web. (2021, January 13). Union education Minister reviews implementation of New Education Policy 2020. *The Statesman*. <https://www.thestatesman.com/education/union-education-minister-reviews-implementation-new-education-policy-2020-1502946251.html>
- Srivastava, S. (2020). Relevance of National Education Policy - 2020 in present scenario. *Iconic Research and Engineering Journals*, 4(3), 107-111.
- Sundar, Sundar, N. (2018). Academic freedom and Indian universities. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 53(24), 48-57.
- The Gazette of India (2020). *University Grants Commission (Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020*. <https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/221580.pdf>
- University Grants Commission. (2021). UCC (Institutions of Eminence Deemed to be Universities) (Amendments) Regulations 2021. [https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/1789815\\_loE-Regulation\(Deemed\)-Jan2021.pdf](https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/1789815_loE-Regulation(Deemed)-Jan2021.pdf)
- Urvashi, S. (2020). Reimagining crises in the Indian university. *Human Arenas*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-020-00160-4>
- Varghese, N. V., & Mathews, E. (2021). Internationalisation and India's New Education Policy. *International Higher Education*, 106. <https://doi.org/10.36197/IHE.2021.106.09>
- Venkataraman, L. N. (2016). New education policy and the continuing contentions. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 35, 47-50.
- Wadia, L. C. (2020). *Vocational education first: State of the education report for India 2020*. UNESCO New Delhi. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374969/PDF/374969eng.pdf.multi>





Australia India  
Institute

147-149 Barry Street

Carlton VIC 3053

▼ : [aii.unimelb.edu.au](http://aii.unimelb.edu.au)

✉ : [aii-melbourne@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:aii-melbourne@unimelb.edu.au)

