

INDIAN APPLICANTS:

Ambition, Competition & Fight for Employment



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INTRODUCTION: A UNIQUE CONTEXT

International higher education (HE) is continuing to expand its reach and engagement, with each decade witnessing enormous growth in participation and diversity. The latest figures from the OECD predict eight million students will study abroad by 2025. Indian students are likely to account for a large proportion of this figure. Changes in the size of tertiary aged populations (18-22) have a direct causal relationship with the volume of foreign tertiary enrollments and in just 20 years, over 0.5 billion Indians are expected to reach university age. India's population growth will even overtake China's in the coming decades.

QS is able to identify the preoccupations and perceptions of this growing body of knowledge seekers, with unparalleled access to undergraduate, master's and PhD applicants worldwide. The research for this report was collected in India during the QS World Grad School Tour 2017, and encompasses 32 focus groups, 50+ individual interviews and 600+ survey responses. The cities covered include Mumbai, Pune, New Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Chennai, providing an extensive overview of the motivations, ambitions and expectations of Indian applicants.

The only thing that matters more to prospective Indian students than cost is career support. This suggests that, excluding the significant expense of higher education (HE), made even higher by currency exchange, Indian applicants prioritize

graduate employability above any other benefit of obtaining a higher-level qualification. 41% cited career support as the most important factor when selecting a university, above teaching quality, academic reputation, student experience, the quality of research at an institution and the location of the university.

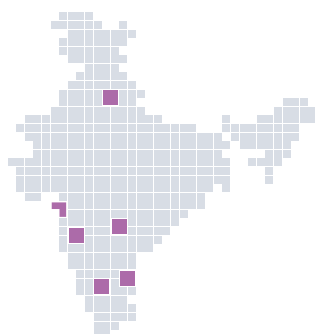
This report consequently explores what graduate employability means to Indian applicants, delving into how it intersects with a unique set of push and pull factors, university reputation and the value of the international study experience itself. Examining the narratives of Indian applicants allows the authors to not only identify why career services are important to them, but also to suggest how they should feature in their university experience. This will allow universities to adopt targeted recruitment strategies and to develop their careers services to meet student expectations.

Indian applicants display an array of distinguishing features: a thirst for international education, entrepreneurship, prosperity and new experiences, alongside frustrations about an expanding population, and lack of equal opportunities. Many students were able to outline exactly what careers service they wanted to receive, thus drawing a picture of a determined group of prospective students. These features are highlighted throughout this report.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Location:

Mumbai
Pune
New Delhi
Bangalore
Hyderabad
Chennai



Participants:

646
survey responses

32
focus groups

50+
individual interviews

GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY FOR INDIAN APPLICANTS: PUSH & PULL FACTORS

Lack of opportunities in India

The international study motivations of prospective Indian students are often driven by a shared ambition for improving their employment prospects. However, for many students in the region, this study motivation is also linked to a widespread feeling that there is an entrenched lack of equal opportunities in India, particularly in relation to employment. For this reason, participants across the country claim they are seeking international higher education (HE) to access the labor market of study destinations elsewhere.

“My main aim and inspiration going into international study is that we will be getting better job opportunities and global recognition.”

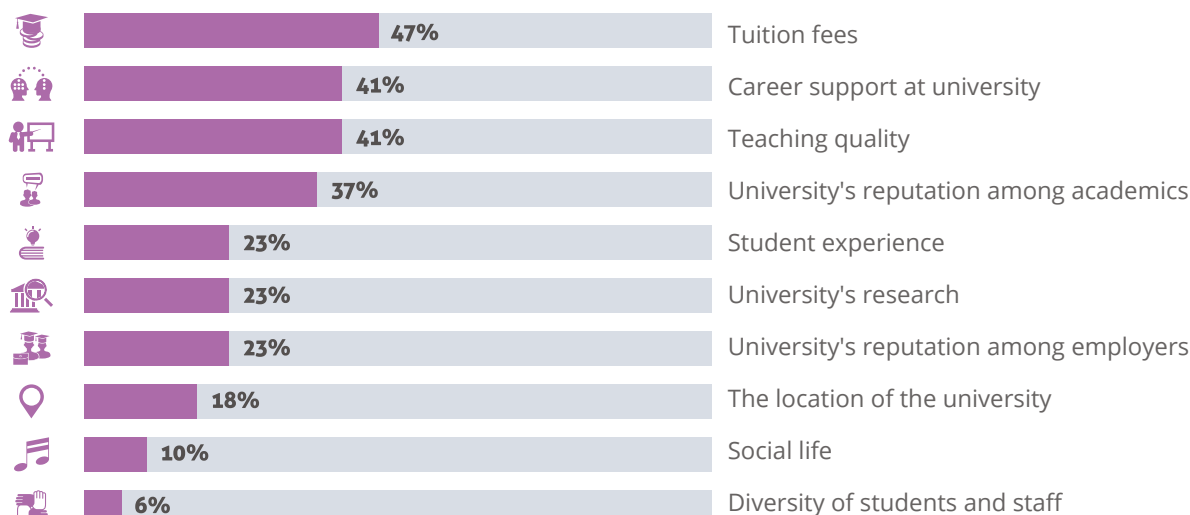
Virish, Delhi

For some students, this means settling permanently in a new country, whilst others believe gaining an international qualification will give them a competitive edge in India upon return. Master’s in finance applicant, Virish, expresses this view in Delhi: *“My main aim and inspiration going into international study is that we will be getting better job opportunities and global recognition. In India there exist hierarchies in terms of employment opportunities and a degree from abroad will help to push these boundaries as we will get more recognized.”*

The interplay between employment opportunities, subject choices and study destinations arises in a number of contexts. Headlines such as **‘60% of Engineering Graduates Unemployed’** in the Indian media are likely to be exacerbating concerns about graduate roles. Moreover, given engineering and technology is the second most popular subject area, chosen by 33% of our survey participants, this is likely to ring alarm bells.

This is reflected in the statement of master’s in mechanical engineering applicant, Sakshi, in Mumbai: *“Companies over here in India do not pay as*

MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS WHEN SELECTING A UNIVERSITY



much as what you deserve... I have heard that they do not have demand over here in India... I have no idea why? It is one of the reasons why I do not want to work here.” Sakshi is not alone in feeling graduates are underpaid. This issue was raised repeatedly in each city visited, ensuring this frustration was clearly heard.

Population strain, work politics and ageism

Many students attribute the lack of opportunities to overpopulation, believing this creates intense competition for jobs. MBA applicant Souish, in Pune, expresses this succinctly: *“India has a population of 1.2 billion people, so there is huge competition for each and every (job) post out there. So, it would be easier to move abroad where the population is thinner, and the jobs are more, and you have more opportunities to*

prove yourself and get a better quality of education.” Alongside the population strain, concerns about attitudes towards mature workers, work politics and unequal hierarchical structures are raised.

There is nowhere, in each of the cities visited, that debates about inequality are expressed more ardently than in Delhi. Virish, who is looking for a master’s in finance, highlights issues with politics in the workplace: *“Chances of getting recognized (abroad) will increase significantly, this is not possible in India. India is much more political, and nepotism exists. Internationally, it is much more meritocratic, these barriers will not exist as much.”*

His words are echoed by another participant in Delhi, Suhaj: *“There is a lot of politicking in India, if you have no connections your career will be affected.*

CASE STUDY

Nishant, 37



Nishant is an executive MBA applicant with a considerable amount of work experience under his belt. Having studied in the UK, he went on to open a successful mortgage business in the US. He returned to India with big ambitions, but soon discovered his experience was not valued. He describes feeling like he hit a wall in India’s labor market: *“At my age, 37... they treat me as dirt. I can’t even get a job as a call center guy because they want young kids. Coming back to India was my biggest mistake. Internationally, everyone gets a chance, they’re treated equally. That’s why everyone over 30 just wants to leave, because there’s no opportunity for us. I have 16 years of international work experience; my salary should be up there, but I get nothing.”*

Nishant vocalizes a feeling of humiliation since returning to his homeland: *“I left everything in the US to come to India, but that was a mistake. First, they do not treat you equally here. They do not accept anything coming from outside. You come back to help and next thing you know, you’re the one being made fun of.”*

Nishant also believes he is unable to get into a good college in India because of his age. As a result, he is seeking studies in Russia, for which he credits QS World University Rankings for helping him discover more affordable alternatives: *“It’s like a hamster in a circle which keeps on running, it looks nice while it’s running. As soon as it stops, that’s it, it’s broken, it can’t work. That’s what people here think, if you have a gap, you have no interest.”*

Self-development becomes difficult. This is especially true for the government and public sector.”

Fears about ageism are also prevalent in Delhi, especially among mature workers. Master’s in chemistry applicant, Bhaugar, explains: *“If any person comes for a job, and if you’re senior and are getting paid well, there’s a chance you might be losing your job because a junior comes who is able to work cheaper. Age is therefore important.”*

“When it comes to women, it’s even more of a big stigma. That is [a] major concern, whereas when you go abroad it’s normal, they don’t judge [you] according to your gender.”

Shavanthi, Chennai

Gender inequality

Some participants feel gender imposes a glass ceiling in the workplace. Shavanthi graduated in psychiatric social work and describes a sense that degrees are not recognized, resulting in talent being wasted on administrative work. She is intending to pursue a PhD in psychology abroad and spoke poignantly about wanting to break free from the bonds of a patriarchal system: *“We can become bold, because a lot of societal things make us oppressed in India. When it comes to women, it’s even more of a big stigma. That is [a] major concern, whereas when you go abroad it’s normal, they don’t judge [you] according to your gender. So maybe when I go abroad I can be free, I don’t need to think ‘I’m a woman I shouldn’t do this’, which makes me feel even more confident.”*

In recent years, female participation in India’s labor force has declined, hitting a staggering low of 22.5%. This could further explain why women like Shavanthi are keen to settle abroad.

The impact of politics: Post-study work visas

Concerns about post-study work visas arose in each of the six Indian cities surveyed. There are a number of intertwining themes related to this issue, that tie into geopolitical events, the corporate sector and ROI. Students were asked to rank a list of priorities in order of importance. Post-study work prospects (23%) is cited as the second most important factor when choosing a study destination, behind cost of living (33%).

Thus, countries that have introduced stricter work visa rules are likely to appear less attractive to Indian students. This is vocalized by master’s in management applicant, Raghav in Delhi: *“If the rules and regulations for permanent residency and work permit are too stringent, then I would likely avoid going to that university. If you go to HEC Paris, they allow only two months work permit. So, even if the college is good, curriculum is good, if there are no future possibilities to stay in the country - that is all that matters.”*

“Political events matter because even the company recruiters will be thinking they’ll be better off if they’re recruiting more domestic students rather than international students.”

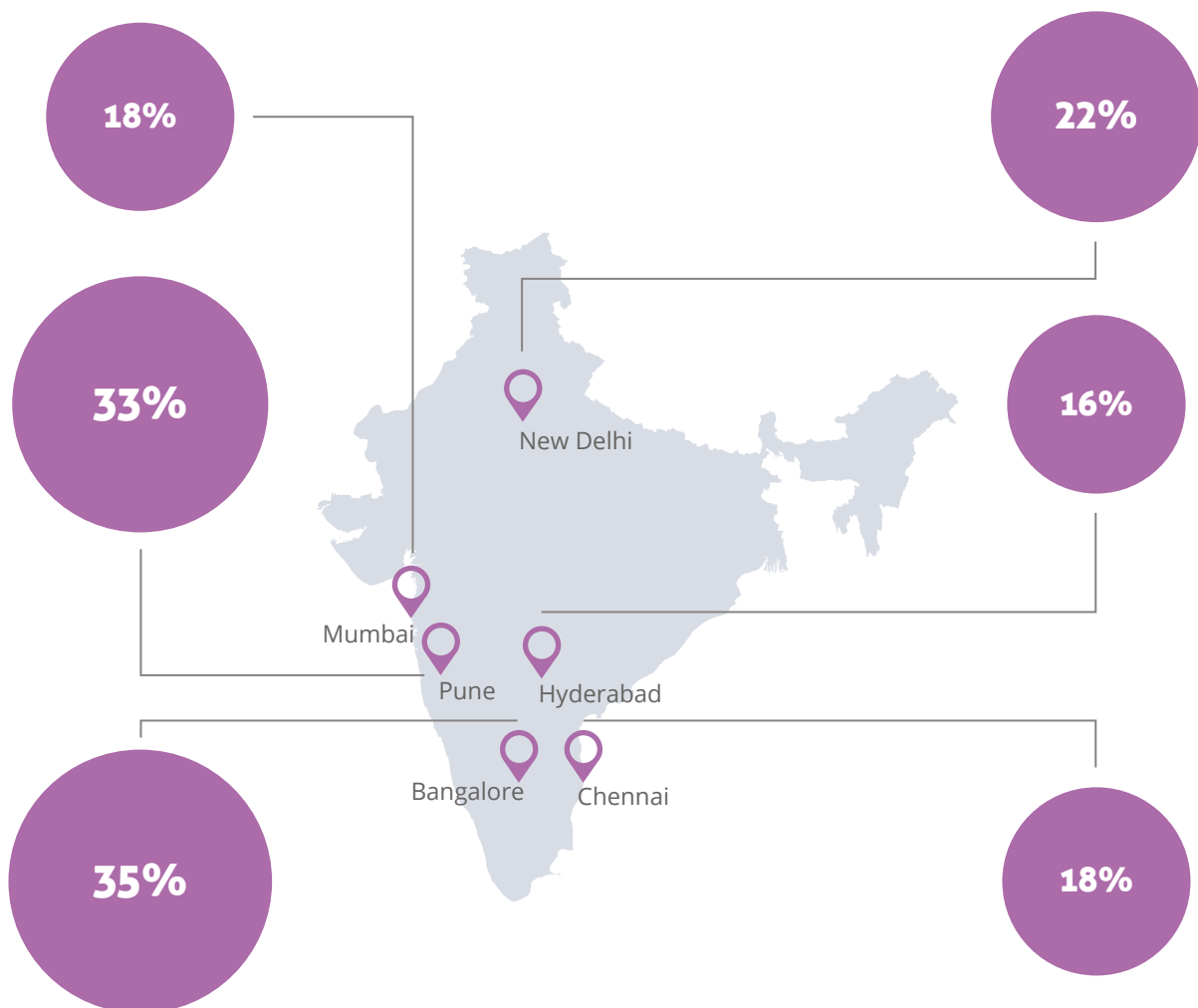
Prashanth, Bangalore

For many applicants wanting to access the two most popular host markets, uncertainty about immigration policy in the US and Britain has emerged, particularly in relation to post-study work prospects. Some students fear they will experience further exclusion from job opportunities, thus causing a deeper reinforcement of existing inequalities between India and the West.

The reputation of universities in the US and UK makes them highly desirable study destinations; however, this demand could be compromised by harsh visa rules, as Nishant in Delhi explains: “Visas are very important, and in the US, they are not giving those right now. If they were a little lenient, no Indian would be going to Europe. UK is already dead because there’s no employment for us with all the policies. What do international students need? They need jobs. UK cut this off, they’re not giving work. No stable visa. Why would I invest such a high amount, if they want me to get out as soon as I’m finished?”

Institutions situated in countries undergoing political change should consider the importance of reassurance, transparency and communication in this context. For instance, Indian applicants who spoke directly with university representatives at QS education fairs, particularly from America and Britain, communicate that they feel reassured.

POST-STUDY WORK PROSPECTS AS THE #1 FACTOR WHEN SELECTING STUDY DESTINATIONS



“Even though I have cousins in the US, I’m not interested. In the US they don’t encourage students to settle, they just want them to study and go back, [so] getting a visa is difficult.”

Geric, Chennai

Companies favoring domestic students

Many students believe changes to visa laws could lead employers in the US and UK to favor domestic students and subsequently feel there is no point going to study in a country where they would be second choice. Prashanth in Bangalore expresses this view: *“At the end of the day, after I complete my master’s I’m looking for a job and based on what [US President] Trump has been saying, especially related to visas, I would actually reconsider going to the US right now. Political events matter because even the company recruiters will be thinking they’ll be better off if they’re recruiting more domestic students rather than international students.”*

India is one of the fastest growing emerging economies and over the coming decades the tables may begin to turn in its favor. However, the population is expected to continue to expand, overtaking even China, and the work economy will need to also extend its reach in order to keep up with the greater demand for jobs. If freedom of movement continues to be restricted in popular study destinations worldwide, this could result in further economic exclusion of Indian graduates.

The rise of alternative study destinations: Canada

The **QS Applicant Survey Report 2018: What Drives an International Student Today** exposes the fact that Canada is rising in the ranks of popular study destinations among applicants worldwide. The research in India provides further support to

these findings and, in particular, to the mounting popularity of Canada in response to perceived anti-immigrant views in the US and the UK.

MBA applicant Geric in Chennai, explains why he is drawn to study there: *“In Canada they’re actually welcoming students because the population is very low, so the working class in Canada is very less, they want more Indian people to be there, and there won’t be many issues regarding political events. Even though I have cousins in the US, I’m not interested. In the US they don’t encourage students to settle, they just want them to study and go back, [so] getting a visa is difficult.”* Geric shows that applicants also critically consider life, and the opportunities available, after university when they look at international study destinations. Alternative destinations, such as Canada, therefore stand to gain from policy changes in popular host-markets.

“Political events are not affecting me as I won’t need a work permit or visa after finishing my studies, because I definitely want to come back to India and work over here.”

Kadambaei, Hyderabad

Gopalakishnan in Chennai, who is looking to study a PhD in aerospace engineering, describes political change as an experience characterized by a loss of control: *“The UK... only gives a stay back period of four months and, after Brexit, rumors are spreading that international candidates will not be getting opportunities like home students. It’s not in your hand, once you choose and you go there, the next day visa rules change again. So, I would rather choose a country that is safe, with good stay-back options, for example Canada, where they are welcoming immigrants.”*

The determined and unfazed

Not all applicants are concerned about work visas. The ones that aren't worried often intend to return to India, like Kadambaei in Hyderabad: *"Political events are not affecting me as I won't need a work permit or visa after finishing my studies, because I definitely want to come back to India and work over here."*

Others are confident in their ability to succeed, believing this will allow them to overcome any barriers they face. PhD applicant, Salman, displays this determined spirit in Hyderabad: *"Trump won because [Americans] got tired of Democrats' lenient immigration policies, so people got mad and they wanted change. If you want success you have to be resourceful, so it shouldn't matter much about all these political events. If you want to go just go, no matter how hard it is."*

"It's not in your hand, once you choose and you go there [the UK], the next day visa rules change again. So, I would rather choose a country that is safe, with good stay-back options, for example Canada, where they are welcoming immigrants."

Gopalakishnan, Chennai

An entrepreneurial mindset

"I don't want to work under some people. I want to give employment and don't want to be an employee. So, I am into entrepreneurship and I have already got my own startup." - prospective entrepreneurship and marketing student, Aryan, in Mumbai.

One key push factor determining the actions of Indian students is a strong and considerably

widespread entrepreneurial spirit. In all six cities, business & management is chosen more frequently than any other subject surveyed, with 41% of participants choosing this option.

India's growing economy holds a lot of promise, attracting global players like Facebook and Amazon, and conceivably strengthening its appeal to prospective Indian students looking to tap into this potential. Moreover, many students express a philanthropic desire to improve the social and economic conditions of their homeland. This kind of ambition is likely to make a business degree attractive.

Starting a business is the third most commonly cited aim to achieve after graduation, at 18%, while 4% plan to work in their family business. Respondents in Hyderabad are particularly incentivized by entrepreneurial goals after graduation, with 23% saying they want to launch a business. Chennai saw the next biggest percentage of respondents answer this way, with 20%.

In recent years, the Indian government established India's biggest business incubator in Hyderabad to nurture an entrepreneurial culture, which could account for this heightened interest. Students in Mumbai are the most likely to want to enter a family business after leaving university, at 7%. The city with the least inclination towards entrepreneurial goals is Pune, at 14%. Although this percentage is lower than other regions, starting a business is still the third most commonly cited motivation after graduation.

Entrepreneurship and international study

For many students with entrepreneurial goals, studying internationally offers a route to broaden their minds, learn about business from a global perspective and develop key skills that will allow their venture to take off.

This can be seen in the words of Garesh in Chennai, who is looking to pursue a master's in management abroad specifically for this reason: *"I'll be starting*

my own business anywhere, all around the world, if possible, and I'll be coming back after it succeeds. I want to study abroad because the field is very big over there, India is just developing now, but in developed countries the start-ups are booming at such a high rate."

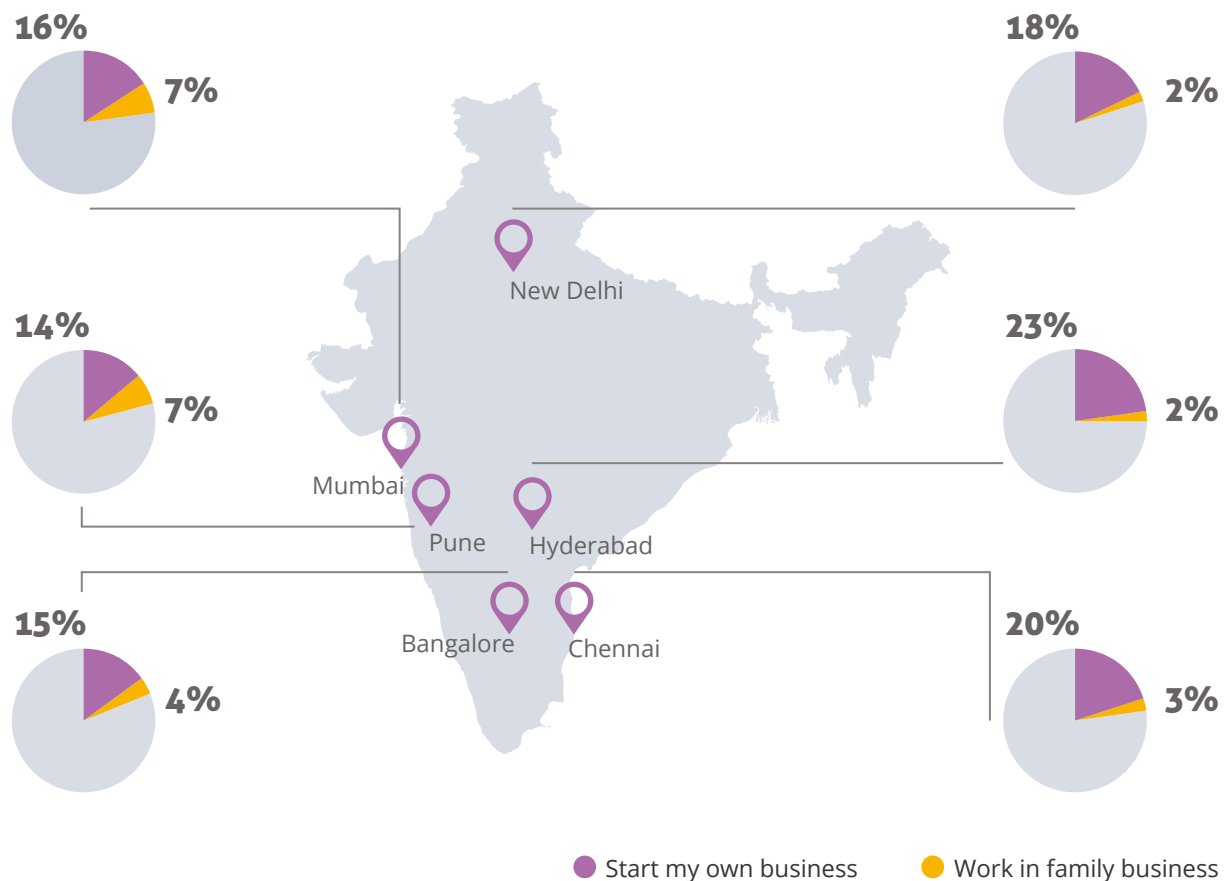
Barriers to business in India

Some students vocalize the view that it is difficult to be a successful young entrepreneur in India due to barriers to business. For one prospective MBA and entrepreneur, this is down to a lack of opportunities and the imbalanced domination of big business: "I think I need some international exposure to increase my capabilities and get a good team. In India, apart from the internet, the rest of the businesses are done

in a very traditional way, there's a lack of technology, there's a lack of investment opportunities... Big businessmen are covering a large proportion of the market, new businessmen cannot enter very easily, and it takes 10-20 years to get settled."

Such a view illuminates why entrepreneurship is such a powerful push factor for Indian students. International study allows Indian students to access markets with greater business opportunities and entrepreneurial cultures, allowing them to develop on a global scale – and for some, this ties into ambitions to bring this international experience back to India, where there are promising gaps in the market.

APPLICANTS WITH ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS POST-GRADUATION



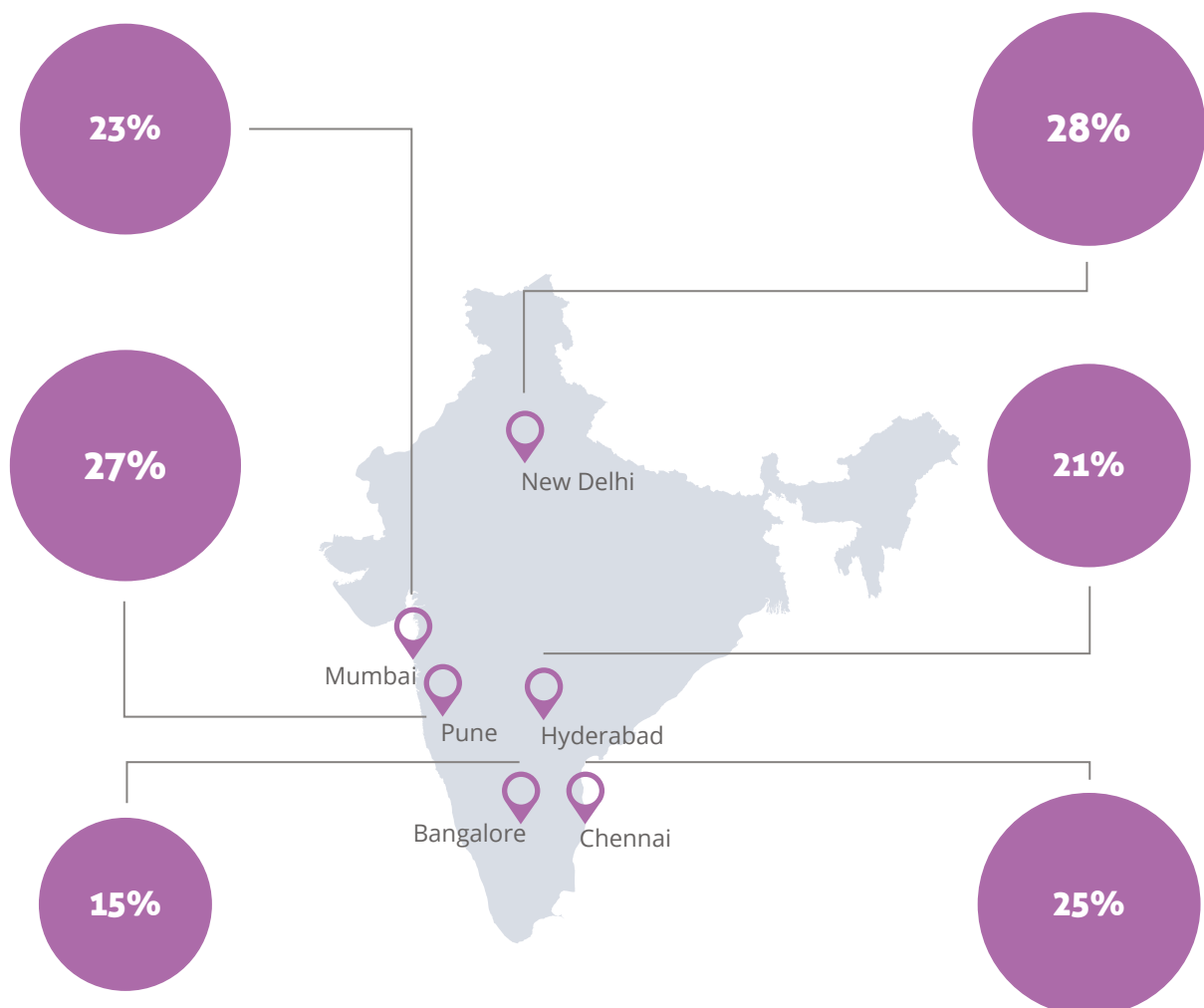
GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY AND UNIVERSITY REPUTATION

Employability is often bound to university reputation in the narratives of prospective Indian students. Given career services are regarded as the most important aspect of an institution among almost half of survey participants (41%), it is likely this will also feature high within their perceptions about university reputation. Moreover, 23% of students assert that university reputation among employers is their primary driver for selecting a

university. This consideration is particularly high for students in Pune (31%) and New Delhi (28%).

This link between university reputation and employment is vocalized by master's in finance applicant, Virish, in Delhi: *"The university brand I will be working with will, for me, be the most significant factor. This is especially true since I want to work for the big, major companies. As a person you will be a*

REPUTATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AS THE #1 FACTOR WHEN SELECTING STUDY DESTINATIONS



better candidate globally. Thus, it is clear that for some students, the reputation of universities and graduate employability are not mutually exclusive but are, rather, interconnected and tied to the same goal.

Rankings and employability: academic and employer reputation

University rankings are one of the main sources Indian applicants use to form their ideas about university reputation. The way in which this intersects with graduate employability is clear in the narratives of many participants, such as Nitya, in Bangalore: *“The most important measure and first thing I look at will be the university’s employability rankings and the median salary of the alumni. Good rankings will lead to good employability rates for students at those universities. Rankings is a major factor for me and it does influence me.”*

For some participants, academic reputation is also linked to employment opportunities, as a separate measure of standards to employability rankings. Prospective MBA student, Varad in Pune, expresses this sentiment: *“I look at the employability ranking and also the academic reputation as well. Personally, I think the academic reputation would trump because if a college has a good academic reputation, there are chances that you get employed.”*

Similarly, this link is identified by prospective master’s in management student, Viren, in Pune: *“I think the most important part of any university is academic reputation...because with academic reputation the employability rates go high.”* 37% of participants cited academic reputation as the most important factor when choosing an institution and this priority is particularly high for respondents from Pune, where it was chosen by 44%.

We asked prospective international students to identify which was more important - their country of choice, or the reputation of a university. While some students favor specific destinations, many students responded saying reputation is the main

priority, as this will lead to enhanced employment prospects. Such a view is highlighted in an exchange between two students in Hyderabad:

Amkit: *“The reputation of the university is more important than the country because if it’s a good university then you can get any job and you can work in other countries also.”*

Salman: *“Reputation is more important than the country, it matters when trying to find a better job after you graduate, and it provides opportunities.”*

The reputational value of affluent alumni

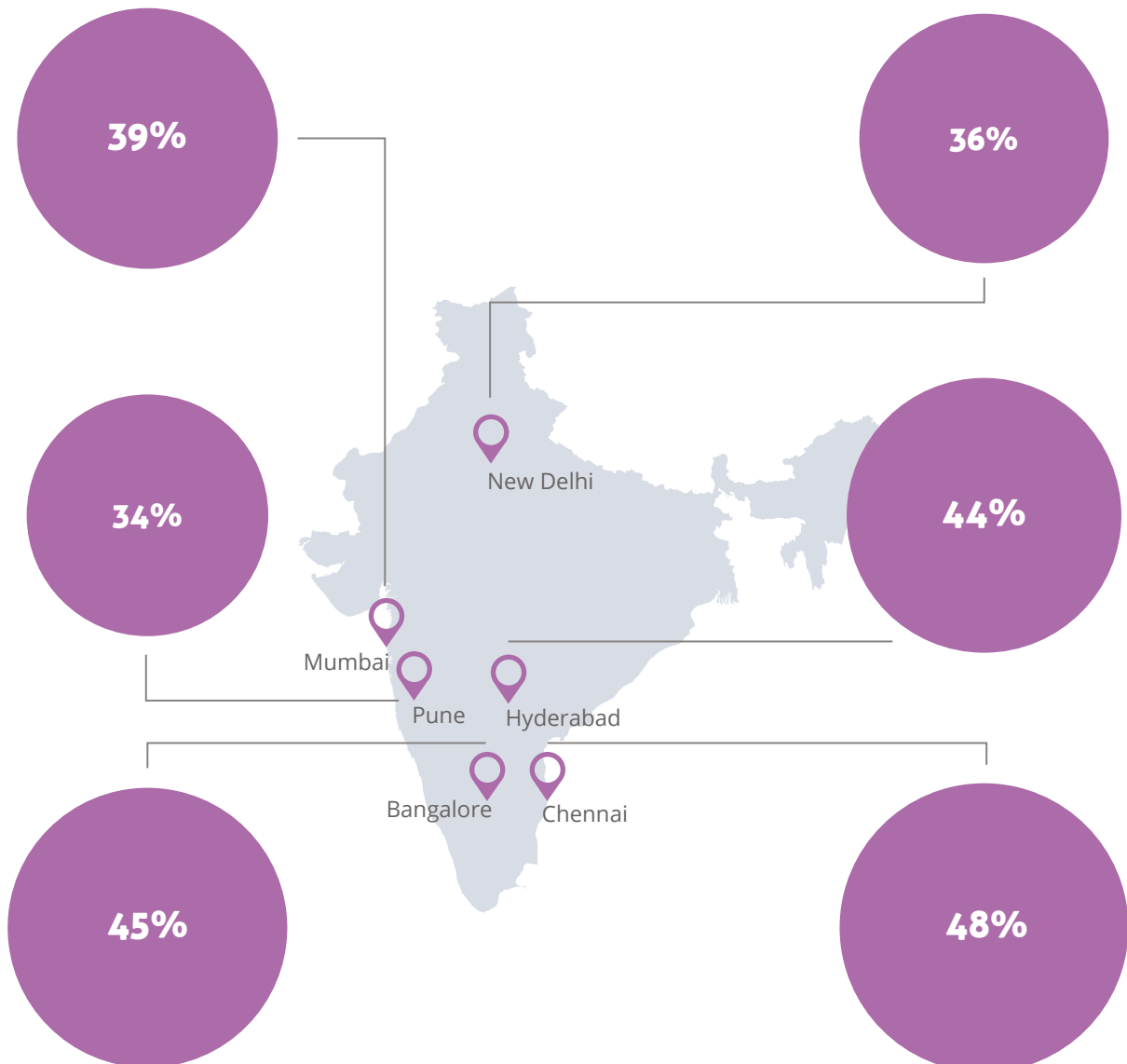
A substantial number of prospective international students in India tie university reputation to the profile of graduate alumni. Many students feel that a university can be measured based on their output of successful graduates, so they go to great depths to research what alumni are doing, the companies they work for and the salaries they’ve obtained. They’ll even go so far as to message alumni for feedback about universities and the employment opportunities they offer. This finding was also apparent in our 2016 QS report, **What Matters to International Students: Focus on India**, which further supports the evidence that this is a particularly relevant and ongoing trend.

Universities that harness the success of their alumni and use it as an instrument to promote their employment opportunities and drive recruitment are likely to enhance their reputation and make a bigger impact among prospective international students.

This attitude is perfectly exemplified by master's in management consulting applicant, Mohan, from Chennai: "First and foremost, I look at the location, networking and the alumni of the university, as it adds up to the industry relations that it has. The students are the representatives of the university and what they're doing, what positions they're in, which company they're working for – it's important.

"I'm very specific about the course of my career line, so alumni play an important role. I look at the achievements of those reputable alumni, what research and coursework they have done and what the university has offered."

CAREER SUPPORT AS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR WHEN SELECTING A UNIVERSITY



What are Indian students looking for in a university's careers service?

The question of how a university can enhance its reputation among Indian students is not simply answered by rankings performance. The perceived quality of careers services at a university is likely to boost reputation in the eyes of prospective Indian students. Institutions that promote this service, offering a clear breakdown of what students will experience once they enroll, are more likely to attract applicants from this region of the world.

According to participants, word of mouth is a powerful tool, enabling students to make informed decisions about universities based on the recommendations of friends and family. Many prospective Indian students said they gathered information about careers services in this way, highlighting the importance of student satisfaction.

"I would love to see an integration between the course you are studying and its practical use in the market [...] Universities should give compulsory internships."

Varad, Pune

Internships

The value of internships in the eyes of many Indian students is not to be underestimated. Some participants go as far as to suggest that internships provide more knowledge and experience than universities themselves, as MBA applicant, Varad, in Pune shares: *"I would love to see an integration between the course you are studying and its practical use in the market because when there's integration of work force you end up learning much more about the industry than you can in a classroom. Universities should give compulsory internships."*

This prioritization of internships over traditional teaching methods highlights the considerable regard Indian students have for practical learning.

The idea that internships facilitate a door to industry is often expressed among participants in India, as can be seen in the words of master's in civil engineering applicant, Rahul, in Delhi: *"The university can act as a bridge between the corporation and the student. Universities can do this by connecting the student with these industries via placements and internships. Careers services are very important."*

Others are very specific about how universities can equip them with the right tools to enter the job market: *"Universities should offer students profile-based internships and opportunities where the student can enhance their existing skill set and specialize it. The university should offer career guidance in the field the student would like to opt for,"* said business master's applicant, Preeti, in Pune. Accordingly, universities which promote the internship opportunities that are provided to students as individual learners are likely to attract more applicants from India.

Industry relations bridging the graduate skills gap

The graduate skills gap is considered one of the great failings of HE in the modern era. The 2017 QS white paper, **The Global Skills Gap: Student Misperceptions and Institutional Solutions**, demonstrates the alarming findings from a 2016 PayScale Survey, in which 90% of surveyed graduates believed themselves "well-prepared" for their new jobs, while only 50% of hiring managers shared that opinion.

"I think they should bring more companies to campus and have a collaboration between university and companies..."

Minimol, Bangalore

Our research in India has uncovered that one method of tackling this could be the facilitation of a more direct relationship between employers and students. Sylvia, in Delhi, points towards this more collaborative relationship. When asked to identify the most important aspect of a university, she indicated a number of conditions that relate primarily to industry relations and career services: *“The support the university provides in terms of networking and career services is important. Also, if they offer mentors from the industries we want to enter and the programs and workshops for careers that the university holds.”*

“The university should have a career counselor or career services department which will understand the student profile and help them find further opportunities. This is lacking in Indian universities as students only have access to the professor for any [careers] information. Instead, a career counselor should be a part of the universities.”

Sanjana, Pune

According to applicants, the strength of a university’s industry relations is further evidence of a strong careers service, thus conceivably boosting reputation and offering a key tool for recruitment. Some students, like Minimol in Bangalore, argue that if institutions were more closely associated with employers this would impact positively on their employment prospects and allow them to develop a more nuanced skillset: *“I think they should bring more companies to campus and have a collaboration between university and companies where we can get a better idea of what kind of students and skill sets these companies are looking for. They can then train these students accordingly.”*

Prospective master’s in economics student, Ann, agreed: *“I think bringing more companies/firms on campus will help. Then these employers will know what to expect from us and we can develop ourselves accordingly.”* Both Minimol and Ann were responding to the question about what role a university should play in preparing them for employment. Their responses, echoed by many other Indian students, indicate that this role should not be the sole responsibility of educators but of relevant employers too. Universities are seen as key enablers of this relationship and a strong careers service, as highlighted by Indian applicants, should reflect this bond and outline exactly how industry will tie into student progression.

Guidance counselors

Another important aspect of a university’s careers service, in the eyes of Indian students, is the availability of guidance counselors. Some students found this kind of mentorship to be lacking in Indian universities and cited it as one of the benefits of studying abroad, alongside the enhancement of their employment prospects.

*While guidance counselors can and should be an essential part of an effective careers service, **breakthroughs in AL can further identify the strengths and weaknesses of students** and offer a personalized response. Thus, an **institution’s ability to employ new modes of technology**, alongside more people-centered approaches, such as with mentors, will conceivably enhance both reputation and desirability among prospective Indian students.*

This is evident in the words of prospective master's student Sanjana, in Pune: *"The university should have a career counselor or career services department which will understand the student profile and help them find further opportunities. This is lacking in Indian universities as students only have access to the professor for any [careers] information. Instead, a career counselor should be a part of the universities."*

This once again points to a need for a more personalized learning environment that adapts to student needs, particularly in relation to employment. When students are asked what skills universities should help them develop for employment, many claim they want their skills to be guided by this more personal approach, as is evidenced by master's in biological sciences applicant, Reysham in Bangalore: *"If universities could see my flaws and make me more employable for companies that would be great. It would be better if universities could prepare me better for the opportunities ahead by guiding me and suggesting what I could do better."*

University reputation + graduate employability = ROI

Cost is a major concern for Indian applicants. Given the low currency exchange for the Indian rupee in a number of key study destinations such as the US, the UK and Canada, it's likely that return on investment (ROI) will be a priority for most. In fact, when asked to rank a list of priorities, cost of living was the most frequently selected option, at 30%. Moreover, in a separate question 47% of participants cite tuition fees as the most important factor when choosing an institution, above all other choices.

New and adaptive learning (AL) methods can achieve this scale and may well address the concerns of Indian students. AL uses computers and technology to enable greater comprehension according to a learner's unique and individual needs.

ROI is indisputably linked to both graduate employability and university reputation. For many, a reputed university is viewed as a pathway to a job with a good salary and therefore a worthwhile investment. Such a view is expressed by MBA applicant Keval, in Mumbai: *"Tuition fees matter a lot, but it's not just the tuition fee, it's also the name related to the tuition fee because, for example, you go to Oxford or Stanford it goes up to £50,000, but what you get out of it is much more. There is no money involved in this when it comes to education in such places."* This suggests that, for some students, ROI can justify high tuition fees.

"Tuition fees matter a lot, but it's not just the tuition fee, it's also the name related to the tuition fee..."

Keval, Mumbai

The significance of ROI to Indian students means it also has the potential to hurt the reputation of a university. Some students said they had witnessed friends or relatives not receive a good ROI once graduating, and this had led to altered views of study destinations.

Prospective management student Viren in Pune, raises this issue: *"If you go to the university and it doesn't reverberate back the same investment which you have put in, it does matter. You're pouring in so much money for your master's and I have seen a lot of students these days come back to the country after their master's and they face this struggle about how to repay the loan."* This is indicative of the significant role graduate employability plays in enhancing the reputation of higher education institutions.

GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY AND THE VALUE OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDY EXPERIENCE

Many prospective Indian students in our study communicate a clear connection between studying abroad and improving their employment prospects. Participants share the view that leaving India will provide opportunities to network, build professional relationships and make connections with people from other cultures, which will, in turn, enhance their careers. Such opportunities are often linked with the perceived reputation of a university among employers. This is also indicative of the emphasis Indian students place on the intrinsic value of international study beyond academic outcomes.

There is a perception that, despite its huge population of 1.3 billion people, there is little international exposure available to students in India. Therefore, there is a consensus that a broader range of opportunities and perspectives is to be gained from studying abroad, which will in turn help graduates to stand out in the competitive graduate job market.

This sentiment was echoed by students such as Debaditya, from Bangalore, who is seeking a master's in business management. When asked what universities can do to further improve his employment prospects, he said: *"For me international exposure from meeting and blending with people from different cultures and diverse backgrounds is important along with the job criteria because there is little exposure in India. Studying abroad will allow us to become more competitive in the job market."*

"For me international exposure from meeting and blending with people from different cultures and diverse backgrounds is important along with the job criteria..."

Debaditya, Bangalore

Global exposure

Indian students frequently relay the importance of gaining 'global exposure' from studying abroad, which can have differing meanings in the wider context of employability. For example, some students feel the bachelor's degree they obtained in India does not quite satisfy their learning interests, so they're seeking further study abroad to gain exposure to new ideas and ways of thinking which they may not otherwise encounter. Global exposure is thus cited as an opportunity to develop an open, inquisitive mindset and build a network, which will aid them in a globalized working world.

For example, Sylvia, who is from Delhi and wants to study a master's in computer science, believes that she can gain vital skills for employment from studying abroad, enabling her to, in her words: *"Evolve as an individual, as I will gain cultural skills and experience"* as *"the set-up we have had until now is studying with just Indians. Meeting people from different cultures and ethnicities will be a learning skill. We will improve our soft skills such as communication skills and learn to network more and become much more social."* She sees this as particularly useful for her chosen industry, consultancy, in which communication skills are crucial. Sylvia feels Indian colleges do not enable her to network with alumni and considers the US a much better choice for this reason.

Similarly, computer science applicant Prashanth, from Bangalore, stresses this value for cultural exchange opportunities abroad: *"I want to go to another country because I want to get to know the culture, and get to know more about how people from different countries think and gain exposure, not particularly to the place or industry but the way of thinking, but to how people take up new challenges. That's why I specifically want to go to either France or Germany because they're innovation hubs."*

There is a shared feeling, which was also highlighted in our previous regional report, What Matters to

International Students: India, that there is a lack of diversity in approaches to business, leading Indian students to consider universities elsewhere. This was noted by MBA applicant Souish, from Pune: *“The one thing Indian institutions lack is the strength in their curriculums and they don’t have an exposure to the outside world. Plus, there are so many accreditations which help an MBA graduate along the way, which I don’t think Indian universities have. You can get a boost by having a network, a huge network of alumni all across the world.”*

Location, location, industry location

As touched on by Prashant, there are also many Indian students who are attracted to particular study destinations due to their perceived strengths in certain industries, or reputations as innovation hubs. As well as the countries themselves, some students have particular cities in mind. Swaphil, who is from Hyderabad and is pursuing a master’s in aeronautical engineering in Germany, and particularly Hamburg, said: *“The biggest aeronautical engineering industry is there, and many of the universities in or near Hamburg are connected to the first defense division directly. You can take part in an internship there and we don’t need to pay anything extra for admission.”*

Some students also place importance on studying in a city as opposed to somewhere more rural,

with Amkit, also from Hyderabad, interested in a master’s in accounting in North America, saying: *“A city would be more important to me, because in cities there are more opportunities, it will help you in your job after your study and I can meet more people over there of different origin.”*

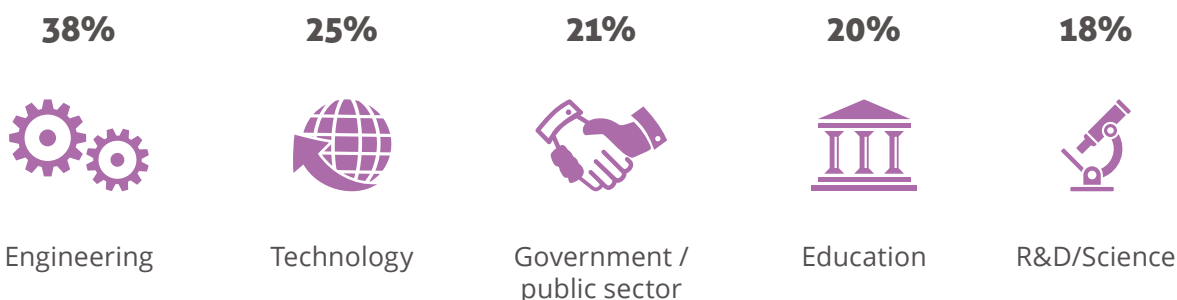
According to the results of the survey, a university’s location was slightly more important among business & management students, potentially demonstrating that business students place value on being in a particularly eminent area for the industry, by studying in a large financial center like London or Hong Kong for example.

The language barrier

There is also concern from some Indian students that there may be a language barrier if they study in a more rural location in a non-English speaking country, as Abhishek, from Bangalore, says: *“If it is a non-English speaking country then I have to look at a metropolitan city. If I go to a smaller city in the non-English speaking country then I won’t find anyone who speaks English there. This is what I have heard, and this is going to concern me when [trying to] find part-time jobs as well.”*

However, other students perceived the language difference as a positive aspect of gaining international exposure, and they were happy to learn the local language in order to study and

TOP 5 TARGET INDUSTRIES



Source: 2018 QS Applicant Survey

possibly work abroad in countries such as Germany. This was the case with Bijoy, who is from Delhi and has a particular interest in studying in the mechanical engineering hub of Germany. He's found from his research that learning German would strengthen his employment prospects in the country: "So I have already started learning the language and my seniors in Germany have advised me to take the German-taught courses because everyone around will be German and the networking will be great. I think networking is an investment with compound interest. In Germany, the employment depends on how good you are with the language and your technical skills."

International study and planned graduate paths

The 2018 QS Applicant Survey, which received 2,482 responses from Indian applicants, reveals that the thirst for international opportunities extends beyond the academic realm. 'International opportunities' is the second most popular motivation when selecting an employer, at 26%, whilst career progression comes first, at 43%. This indicates that the motivations of many Indian applicants are rooted in the desire to gain global experience, from education to career.

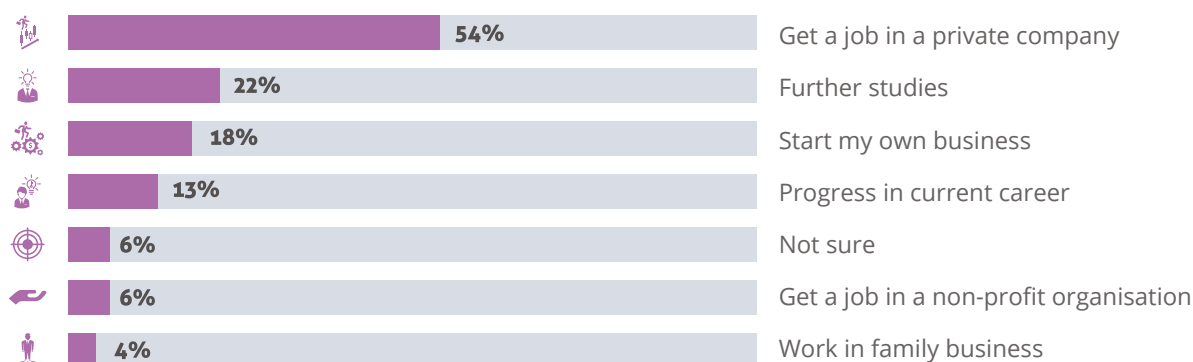
Many students also place importance on the availability of part-time work during their studies,

as a means to supplement their income and gain work experience while studying abroad. Dipak in Mumbai is particularly interested in learning and earning in the UK or the US, and thinks the flexibility to do so is crucial, as: "In India either you learn or you earn, as [universities offer] a full-time education and you cannot do a part-time job."

Another Mumbai-based student, Shubham, has a particular interest in Australia: "You can have part-time jobs while you study, and in the vacations you can even work full-time. Then they also provide you with work permits after you have completed education." Australia also has a considerably lower population density, which could be another reason it appeals to Indian students who want to work during their studies, as there will in theory be less competition for jobs.

Many students recognize the advantages of studying abroad. For some, this equates to gaining a deeper perspective on their chosen course or industry, while others feel they will be able to network, build contacts and utilize career services to find part-time work or internships during their studies. These benefits of international study, according to prospective Indian students, represent a platform that will set them apart even more in the competitive graduate job market.

PLANS AFTER GRADUATION



FINAL THOUGHTS

Indian students seek opportunities abroad

- **A widespread feeling that there is a lack of opportunities in India**, particularly in relation to employment, is pushing many Indian applicants to study internationally. Students cite intense competition for jobs, ageism, sexism, work politics and unequal power structures as key barriers to graduate employment.
- **Fears about post-study work visas**, political change and companies favoring domestic graduates, have a negative impact on some Indian applicants' destination choices. Changes to foreign policy can harm perceptions about study destinations and have the potential to embed economic exclusion. In this context, reassurance, transparency and communication is key. Students who get a chance to speak directly with university representatives at education fairs often say they are reassured, for instance.
- **The rising popularity of Canada** as an alternative English-speaking study destination is evident in the narratives of participants. Many students claimed they now favor Canada over the two most popular host markets, the US and the UK, following political change.

The significance of a university's reputation among employers

- **Applicants perceive university reputation and graduate employability through the same lens**, believing one will lead to the other. For this reason, many value university reputation simply for the brand it will provide them when they apply for jobs.
- **Famous alumni are key to boosting a university's reputation**, with numerous Indian applicants expressing their commitment to researching alumni and their experience at the university, their career and even contacting

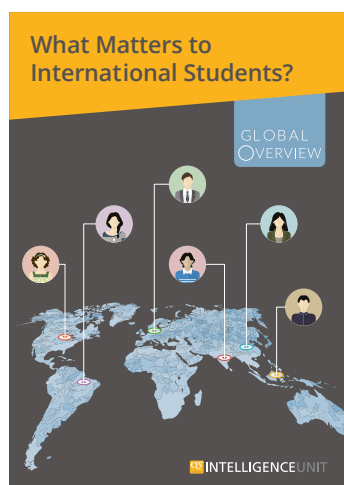
them on LinkedIn. Universities which harness successful alumni as a tool to attract Indian applicants are likely to succeed.

- **Careers services are a fundamental pillar of university reputation**, according to Indian applicants. Participants call for greater internship opportunities, evidence of strong industry relations and a more personalized and collaborative relationship with both guidance counselors and employers. This highlights the utility of pedagogical innovation. Adaptive learning models can identify students' weaknesses on an individual basis, and thus may have wide appeal to Indian applicants.

The intrinsic value of international study for graduate employability

- **International study, alone, is viewed as a path to graduate employability**. Indian applicants place particular value on the international experience, aside from all the other associated benefits.
- **Global exposure is cited as one of the main benefits of international study**. Indian applicants believe they will develop their careers by gaining a global cohort of contacts and through receiving a culturally diverse experience that will aid them in a globalized world.
- **Location is often tied to industry**. For instance, many prospective engineering students are seeking study in Germany as they feel they will access better post-study work opportunities there, while Silicon Valley is coveted as a key innovation hub for technology applicants.

See the full range of insight reports on student motivations and trends on <http://www.qs.com/qs-industry-reports/>



If you are interested in first-hand access to insights, want to explore a particular topic or region, or would like to partner with us on future research projects, please do not hesitate to get in touch, on dasha@qs.com.

ABOUT QS

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In response to growing public demand for comparative data on universities and other higher education providers, and for institutions to develop deeper insight into their competitive environment, the QS Intelligence Unit was formed in 2008. Committed to the key values of rigorous integrity, undeniable value, unique insight and charismatic presentation, QSIU strives to be the most trusted independent source of global intelligence on the higher education sector.

In addition to the research and insights provided by QSIU, the company offers a range of services to help prospective international students find the right institution – and vice versa. This includes a global series of higher education fairs; an annual publication cycle of guides, reports and e-papers; and a dynamic range of online platforms.



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