

## EDUCATION



## EDU VENTURES

## Global linkages

The UK is considering options for at least one new IIT, IISER and a 'world class' central university in India

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**'Mentoring'** links are envisaged between UK universities and one each of India's new IITs, IISERs and 'world class' central universities.

"It is proposed that the IITs will be significantly expanded. The UK will particularly be focused on the new ones and hopes to have an increased involvement with the expanding ones. Time and expertise will be an important ingredient of the new programme," said Professor Rick Trainor, President, Universities UK, who was in the capital recently with a delegation of UK's university Vice Chancellors to discuss collaborations on the massive expansion in India's higher education institutions under the XI Five Year Plan.

The delegation's discussions with senior officials in the Ministry of Human Resources Development, the University Grants Commission and leading Indian universities centred on envisaged 'mentoring' links between British universities and one each of the new Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs) and a central university.

"No specific areas have been agreed though in the case of partnering with an IIT and IISER one might expect some focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects," said Professor Trainor adding, "A consortium of UK universities will partner with a new IIT. However, we do not yet know



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which one and we do not know the modalities."

"Three of the new IISERs are already up and running, however. The UK considers that each of the new Indian institutions should form links with a consortium of UK universities. It is likely that links with a 'world-class' central university will be determined after those with the IIT and IISER. This reflects the fact that planning for the new universities is at an early stage," he said. (Indian planning for new central universities is still in its infancy. The legislation has not yet been drafted for 'world class' universities.)

UK participation in faculty development in Indian universities constitutes another envisaged activity. Mutual benefit can arise from possible activities such as faculty mobili-

ty, split-site Ph.Ds, and longer-term research collaboration, the visiting professor said, adding that staff exchanges could also be a possible outcome of the new initiative.

Themes of mutual interest also include widening participation, curriculum development and the design of library and info technology services. All of these themes and activities have 'possible' status: there have not yet been formal or informal agreements, said Dr. William Lawton, Policy Advisor, UK Higher Education International Unit, who accompanied the UK delegation during the visit.

The role of the industry also arose during the meetings but was outside the core themes. "We are pleased with how industry links are working through UKIERI and agree that these are an important part of any long-term and deepening partnership," Lawton said.

The delegation's visit follows the bilateral summit between the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown and Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh in January this year. At the summit, the two leaders had agreed to promote links between British universities and premier educational institutions in India.

Both governments will be meeting at an official level, probably in London and probably in June, Professor Trainor added.

Asked about the cuts to a government funded scholarship scheme that helped Indian students study in the UK, Lawton said that the Chevening fellowships were unaffected.

The Foreign Office announced cuts to the Chevening and Commonwealth scholarships but other UK government departments are increasing their funding of the Chevening and Commonwealth scholarships - DIUS for Chevening and DfID (which funds scholarships for the developing world) for the Commonwealth scholarships. "You may draw your own conclusions but one interpretation of this is that students in countries such as China and India will benefit from this reallocation of funds," Lawton said, adding that the changes have only recently been announced and it is too early for the effects to be seen.

Besides, the number of Indian students in the UK has increased 10 times in the last 10 years from 2,302 in 1996/97 to 23,835 in 2006/07.

According to the European Network of Contemporary Academic Research, the three most popular subject areas that Indian students pursue in the UK are Business and Administration Studies, Engineering and Technology and Computer Science. At the postgraduate research level the most popular subjects are Biological Sciences, Medicine and Dentistry.