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## UK: International branch campuses

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In October 2009, *The Hindu* newspaper reported that "nearly 50 foreign universities" were in a queue to open campuses in India, pending passage of the Foreign Education Providers Bill. This enthusiasm peaked at the time of Minister Sibal's visit to the US that same month but it was based on a misunderstanding of the intentions of the great majority of foreign universities and was bound to be deflated.

Ivy League presidents were subsequently quoted as saying that 'you can't replicate a 300-year-old university in a remote location', 'we don't want to set up...a weaker version of what exists in the US', and 'we have no plans for a campus in India'.

Similar quotes were more recently attributed by *The Hindu* to Oxford, Cambridge and Imperial College. The Indian press tried to pin this on Sibal by suggesting he had talked up expectations as a means of accelerating the bill's passage.

This is pretty unconvincing when you consider that underplaying the bill's impact is more likely to reassure the doubters in the Lok Sabha.

A compelling article in the Indian business press rejected the idea that foreign universities could make a meaningful dent in the supply requirements for Indian higher education. It also noted that since the FEP bill was approved by cabinet, 'all of six universities have shown an inclination to enter India': Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech, Schulich School of Business (part of York University in Toronto), and Boston, Duke and Middlesex universities.

Almost every university in the developed world has at least thought about doing business with India, so one assumes the authors mean an intent to set up branch campuses. The list is very short but four of the six are in the US.

Indeed, the most recent comprehensive tally of branch campuses, from the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education last September, listed 78 American campuses among the total of 162.

(The Observatory uses as its definition offshore operations in which full degree programmes are provided and degrees awarded on completion.)

The OBHE noted that India was 'widely considered' as the next place to establish international branch campuses. Maybe not so very widely. Although the number of such campuses in India is currently nil, they are less squeamish about exporting education: there were 11 Indian campuses abroad last autumn, offering business, engineering and IT programmes, all but one located in the UAE (which hosted 40 of the overall total).

Three Malaysian universities had four campuses, in China, Cambodia, Yemen and London. Looking the other way round, Singapore hosted 12 campuses and Qatar and China (excluding Hong Kong) nine each.

This 'south-south' spread of branch campuses would appear to be outpacing the 'north-south' spread, and the FEP bill may not interrupt that trend. It may therefore appear to reflect the more general tendency which the Chief Executive of the OBHE, Don Olcott, has called the 'new global regionalism'.

This refers to the rise of regional HE blocs, including the European Higher Education Area (and is presented by the media as a 'threat to anglo-American dominance' in international student recruitment).

But the steady spread of branch campuses is neither bloc-based nor regionally coordinated. It is country-based and competitive and governments use their HE sectors to jostle for economic advantage.

They also increasingly offer incentives to secure the establishment of branch campuses. Hong Kong had five of them last autumn (from the US, UK and Canada), according to the OBHE.

Its explicit intention to attain 'knowledge hub' status and to encourage more such operations (see IF52) is coupled with the huge potential for recruitment from the mainland. This suggests that Hong Kong could be the next branch-campus hotspot.

There are few Asian countries that do not say they aspire to be knowledge hubs in their regions. With the 'south-south' phenomenon, this can mean being either an exporter or importer of HE, or both.

Even the government of little Mauritius, off the east coast of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean, says it is realising this ambition with the establishment of a campus of Middlesex University.

** This article is based on an editorial in Issue 55 of Focus, published by the UK HE International Unit and is republished with the unit's kind permission.*

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