



EMPLOYABILITY
IS NOT ONLY ABOUT
GETTING THAT FIRST JOB,

IT'S BEYOND THAT
SIMPLE MEASUREMENT
OF EMPLOYMENT

Embedding Employability in
Higher Education for Student Success

A WHITEPAPER

A Schoolguru Eduserve Initiative

The section on Higher Education, in the draft National Education Policy 2019 drafted by the Kasturirangan Committee, starts with the following lines 'Higher education is a critical contributor to sustainable livelihoods and economic development of the nation'. The recommendations point towards the fact that the future of work, powered by digitalisation, automation, machine learning and artificial intelligence, shall require professionals with creative and multi-disciplinary skills – which necessitates that the current higher education system be reimagined, revamped and re-energised to fulfil the aspirations of the students.

The purpose of universities has been debated globally (since the first ones came up 800 years ago) and India (since our first three came up in 1857) for long but becomes important because the world has produced more graduates in the last 35 years than the 800 years before that. A useful framework comes from the great book 'Building Universities that Matter' by Pankaj Chandra; he suggests the first purpose of education is to create good citizens; an

educated society usually has higher rule of law, diversity tolerance, and peace. The second purpose of education is to prepare youth for livelihoods and incomes. The third purpose is to help find one's life-long passion for learning and one's own meaning in that life. Higher education institutions must reflect on how successful they have been in the first and third – they are very hard to measure – but on the second, employers are clear that the system often does not work for them.

All Universities face the difficult trade-offs between cost, quality and quantity and therefore must think harder about purpose. University 1.0 was driven by religions; University 2.0 was driven by the State; University 3.0 was driven by Philanthropy. All three versions of Universities will continue but will need to accommodate some attributes of University 4.0 that will recognize employability as an important objective (not necessary meaning narrow specializations, but higher education at a cost that can justify third party financing which can be paid back from work after graduation).





While no university can be reduced to a single mission or role, the primary extrinsic motivation for attending university, as expressed by students, is to further one's career goals. Research by Canadian academics Kennett, Reed, and Lam suggests that few students prioritise the intrinsic value of the learning they receive when considering their motivations for university attendance. Universities that perceive themselves as having a responsibility to their students should accordingly place the nurturing of employability towards the top of their agenda.

If HEIs optimised the link between their teaching practices and student employability, one would expect to see three things: first, that recent graduates, ever-more conscious of the fee they paid for higher education, would express high levels of confidence in the value of their education; second, that employers would express high levels of satisfaction in the skills held by their new employees (the perceived skills gap would be either non-existent, or minimal); third, that there would be a correlation between student perceptions about how ready they were for the workplace upon graduation, and employer perceptions about how work-ready their graduates are.

The draft National Education Policy places a very strong emphasis on career readiness and employability threaded throughout. However, it is apparent that the language and discourse remains one of 'skills'. While higher and softer skills are identified, Schoolguru Eduserve advocates the need for this language to be broadened beyond that of skills - as it is typically recognised that employability, outside of academic papers, has been either ill-defined or not defined at all. If we want students who not only have the necessary knowledge and 'skills', but who are well-rounded, confident, resilient, self-aware and capable of critical thinking, we perhaps need to reconsider our approach to employability, and that starts with the adoption of the necessary discourse.

Employability is not only about getting that first job. It's beyond that simple measurement of employment. It needs to be about the capacity to have numerous jobs, build a career, for some to start their own business - and certainly to continue to develop as successful individuals in whatever areas students decide to pursue.

***Education is not
just filling of a
pail but the
lighting of a fire***

-Darab Imteyaz

Workplaces are transforming themselves rapidly in the 21st century. The number of jobs that require routine skills – both physical and cognitive – are reducing at an alarming pace. Artificial Intelligence technologies including machine learning and computer vision are completely eliminating high skill jobs in several offices. According to a report by the World Economic Forum, 65% of the children entering primary schools now will be employed in jobs that do not exist today. Employment is shifting from being a lifetime commitment to being a taxi-cab relationship – intimate, engaging, intense and short term. Soon, students will want to take a variety of courses from different universities, choosing each class and school for its particular merits and benefits. Courses will become shared experiences for online learning communities. Credentialing will be important but now they shall be more data oriented, trust based and portable.

Education, world over, is going through a revolution, the transformations are extraordinary in scope and diversity. The chronic neglect of undergraduate education is morally untenable and economically unsupportable and is a detriment to society. As we look into the future, we see a fundamental reconfiguration of the concept of a University; University 4.0 shall keep the Learner at the Center and will be more accountable so as to deliver, amongst other things, Employability (connectivity to the world of work), Reimagine the University brand (positioning, communication and marketing), Focus on Digitalization (improving efficiencies through technology), Develop Human Capital (building performance driven organization through faculty and leadership development), Invest in Products (multi-modal, degree modularity, gamified, always-on), Reimagine Financing (sources of revenue, fees, debt, endowment, grants), Improve on Governance (structuring for autonomy and accountability, effective boards etc), and Set new Student Services standards. Universities will, soon, need to think harder about purpose, deliver on their commitments and balance access, equity and employability while building resilience.

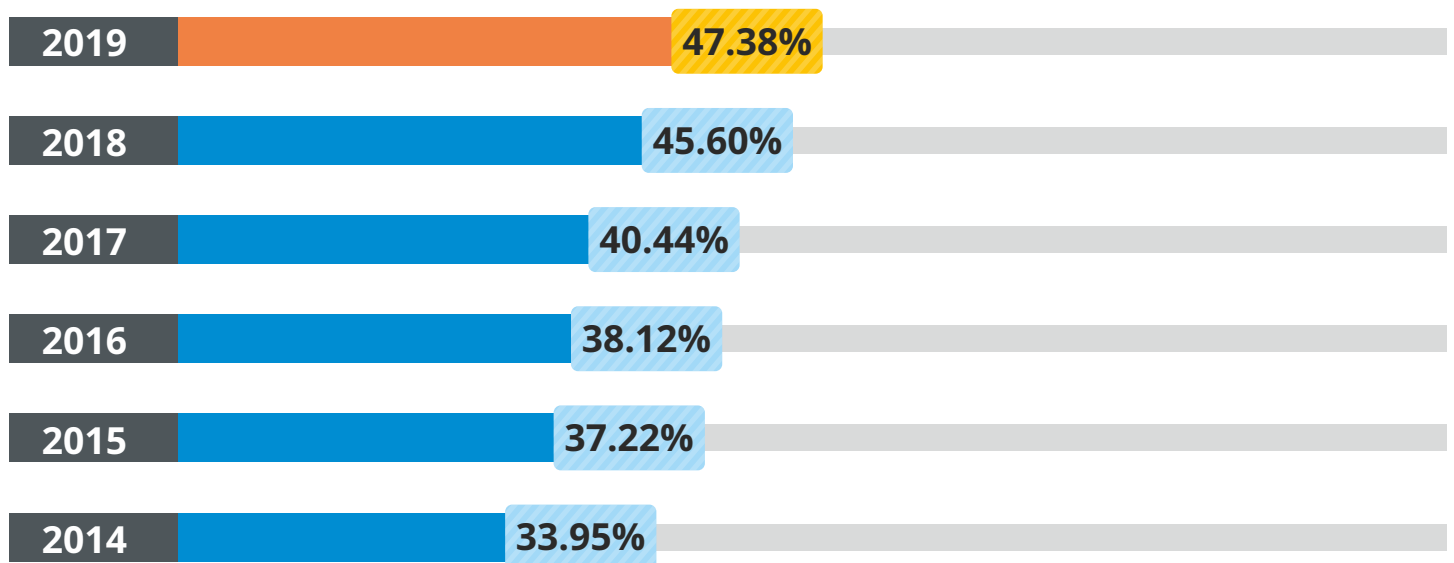
For Higher Education to succeed, sustain and remain relevant, there is a need for the universities to be future ready and incorporate some aspects of University 4.0. The future of education looks promising guided by the framework of University 4.0; Universities will need to improve upon their adaptability and agility and charter their own paths towards this transformation! But the thought world of traditional universities is under challenge because both economy and society demand more of them. The choices are going to be difficult, exciting and existential. Only those who manage the change will stay relevant.

Universities are perceived as institutions designed to develop critical thinking abilities, places where students take ownership - both academic and co-curricular. One conclusion that emerges from examining the list of most-in-demand hard and soft skills is that the ideal graduate will be - as employers are acknowledging - an interdisciplinary one. Writing and communication skills are typically perceived as most likely to be possessed by Humanities graduates - yet the various surveys we looked at found these to cross academic sector boundaries. Others, like teamwork, adaptability, and resilience are not the preserve of any one discipline, but are desirable irrespective of one's intended career path.

If interdisciplinarity is conducive to better acquisition of soft skills, the Indian higher education system starts at a disadvantage. It is based on early specialisation, with students often encouraged to select - if not a subject - a 'track' (Humanities, Arts, STEM) at the age of sixteen, when career decisions are made. However, the American HE system, is nominally somewhat more interdisciplinary, insofar as undergraduates are encouraged - often obliged - to take 'minor' course-bearing classes in fields different from their major.

India produces nearly 3 crores fresh graduates every year; a large section of these graduates fails to match the industry expectations. The latest edition of the India Skill Report 2019 proclaims that employability in India has grown to 47.68 per cent (in 2018), a new high since 2014.

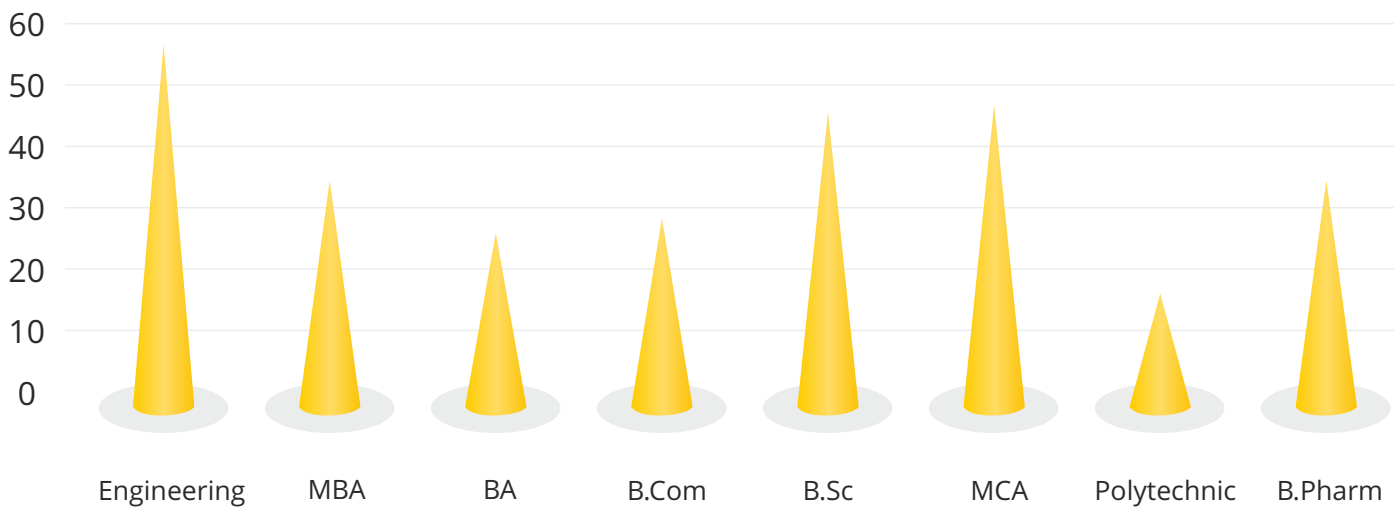
EMPLOYABILITY SINCE 2014



EMPLOYABILITY AS PER DOMAINS:

As per the India Skills Report, engineering graduates top the 2019 employability table with 57.09 per cent; they are termed as the most employable lot; contrasting this a few other studies state that 80 per cent of Indian engineering graduates do not qualify for the current jobs. With time, the MBA courses have also lost their shine; MBA pass outs hold the second spot on the employability table with 36.44 per cent. The trend of enrollment rate of engineering and MBA courses continues to be high, but the outcome of students and the quality of the curriculum is a matter of concern.

Domain wise Employability - 2019



Top 9 states with highest employability

- 1 Andhra Pradesh
- 2 West Bengal
- 3 Delhi
- 4 Rajasthan
- 5 Uttar Pradesh
- 6 Haryana
- 7 Karnataka
- 8 Telangana
- 9 Maharashtra

Top 9 cities with highest employability

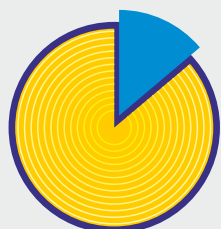
- 1 Bengaluru
- 2 Chennai
- 3 Guntur
- 4 Lucknow
- 5 Mumbai
- 6 New Delhi
- 7 Nasik
- 8 Pune
- 9 Vishakhapatnam

It is important for Higher Education Institutions to focus on Student Employability as one of the important focused outcomes. In today's time, with a plethora of options, students' choice of an institute is likely to be affected by the outcome the institution promises in terms of improving employability. There is also an increased focus on student employability and learner outcome by agencies willing to provide grants, endowments and subsidies to the HEIs.

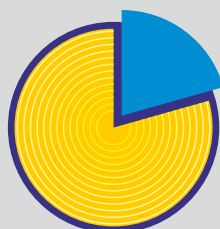
● NAAC has made it mandatory for HEIs to focus on Student Employability ●

For academic institutions, various initiatives undertaken by a HEI under the head of student employability help them garner significantly higher scores during National Assessment and Accreditation Committee (NAAC) assessments. Industry connect programs, internships, on-job trainings, apprenticeships, soft-skill training, contextual up-dation of the curriculum, academic flexibility – all contribute towards significantly higher scores under NAAC. UGC has also, now, made it mandatory for all HEIs to get accredited by NAAC by 2022 – the matter is now existential!

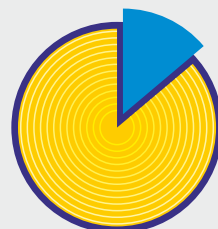
The NAAC score is acquired based on multiple factors, out of which one of the important factors is focus on Student Employability. Of the total scores for Universities, Open Universities, Autonomous Colleges and Affiliated/Constituents Colleges, student employability and related parameters factor for 17.7%, 25.5%, 19.5% and 26.5% of the total weightage respectively.



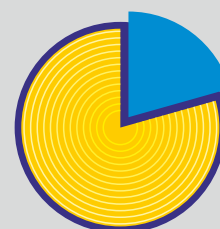
Universities



Open Universities



Autonomous Clgs



Affi./Const. Clgs

● UGC Quality Mandate and NIRF: Grants and Funds ●

The quality mandate of UGC, as unveiled by the Chairman states that “Every higher education institution must ensure that at-least 50 percent of those graduating have access to a job, self-employment or gets to pursue higher education and two-thirds of the students are engaged in 'socially-productive activities' while studying”. The mandate further requires HEIs to ensure that “75 percent of the students are to be compulsorily trained by the institute in professional skills like teamwork, communication, leadership and time management, besides being primed on the need for inculcating the spirit of innovation, entrepreneurship and critical thinking”. As two important primary objectives of the UGC mandate, Higher Education Institutions need to focus on Student Employability in order to remain relevant.

The National Institutional Ranking Framework of the MoHRD also highlights the importance of student employability. As per UGC's Quality Mandate, the issue of student employability is of highest concern for the regulator. UGC has instructed HEIs to ensure that by 2022, at least 50% of those graduating get access to a job, self-employment or get to pursue higher education. The five-point objectives, referred to as the UGC quality mandate, are focused on ensuring that students are more employable, have essential skills and are better engaged with society and industry. It will be mandatory for HEIs to acquire a minimum score of 2.5 from NAAC by 2022; a focus on student employability shall be an important enabler.

STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY

NAAC RANKING

NIRF RANKING

● Competition amongst HEIs has become intense and international ●

Higher education in India is considered as an investment, where an individual dedicates time, resources and money to improve their professional skills and earn a lucrative career. Getting a college degree is a very important investment for both students and parents. People generally measure this by checking the amount invested, i.e. fees against the package that they get after completing their education. The threat of global economic downfall is growing and the student's debts are increasing at a higher rate. Selecting the right higher education is important! Focusing on employability provides the right recipe and signalling value for HEIs to attract and retain high quality students.

● Brand Image and Recognition ●

The increased focus on student employability and graduate outcome metrics has the potential to have a positive impact on the brand of the HEI and pave a way about how careers professionals, academics and employers can work in partnership to positively impact students' career success. HEIs that keep student employability high up on their list of priorities are seen favourably by employers too and that creates the vicious effect, critical to create the right image and brand!

● Improved Revenue ●

An institute with unambiguous focus on student employability attracts adequate number of students to keep the fee register ringing. Such HEIs attract a lion's share of endowments, donations, sponsorships, grants and other sources of funding that helps them improve their revenues.

Producing employable graduates forms part of the process of educating. It encompasses the full educational spectrum of values from imparting knowledge and understanding to developing skills and attributes. The 'student employability agenda' is of crucial significance to any promising university, and there is little doubt that it impinges upon student recruitment, retention and satisfaction. Prospective students (and parents) carefully weigh up their future employment prospects when selecting degrees and universities. They consult university track records, rankings and ratings and sources which publish graduate destination data and starting salaries. With the rise of tuition fees, students will look more carefully for a return on their investment.


RECOMMENDATIONS

We would like to make the case that meaningful metrics and indicators around how institutions are embedding aspects of employability should be considered and should be used as part of a narrative, supported by relevant figures, to provide a clear account of their commitment to improving employability. As a starter, here's a list, though not exhaustive but a catalyst for discussions, indicating what areas should be considered within a broader view of measuring input and output activities, as well as access of opportunity, for improving employability. We should consider measuring the percentage of students:

- ▶ that have access of opportunity to placements
- ▶ that can access a range of work related learning opportunities, for example: on-job trainings, apprenticeships, placements, internships, simulations and case studies
- ▶ accessing soft skills training, career guidance and advice
- ▶ who are engaged in institutional employability-related tasks or institutionally endorsed extra and co-curricular activities

There is no panacea to improve employability scores instantaneously. Any changes to curriculum and initiatives will invariably have a two or three year cycle, particularly if initiatives are truly embedded within the curriculum through all levels. Therefore, a bespoke evidenced narrative offers an avenue for higher education providers to clearly inform their initiatives. This not only provides an opportunity for an improved offering for students, but will highlight the direction of travel by the HEIs. This is essential in order to approach the intricacies of embedding employability throughout learning and teaching practices. Only a qualitative narrative can provide the context for the additional metrics and indicators and shall allow for this individualisation as well as ownership of the initiative and student trajectory.





SCHOOLGURU'S APPROACH TO EMPLOYABILITY

Based on research and extensive experience, Schoolguru, in consultation with the industry, has developed an approach to employability designed to help HEIs engage all staff and stakeholders more effectively through a common process. The Embedding Employability in Higher Education Framework highlights the process, principles and premises underpinning employability and the elements which contribute to and support it. The inner circle of the framework highlights the ten areas of focus that are integral for student employability. The areas of focus are encircled by a four-stage cyclical process that is key to embedding employability across an institution and at a program level. The outer circle of the framework contains the three principles that underpin employability. It is intended to support practitioners, managers, and planners in their thinking and discussions, enabling decisions to be made in an informed way. Empowering institute staff to truly own their approach to employability is critical. All staff should be encouraged and supported to apply an innovative, responsive and student-centred approach to embedding employability and incorporating techniques that foster independence as well as lifelong learning. Collaboration with stakeholders is essential to design, develop content and delivery of programmes that support and enhance employability.

It is clear that HEIs seeking to actively enhance student employability must do more than just adjust curricular content. Rather, the higher education experience must change in two ways:

- first, undergraduates must be given opportunities to acquire a range of skills that run across disciplinary boundaries;
- second, students must be given the chance to apply, evaluate, and create in ways that signal to employers that relevant, actionable learning has taken place that can improve the productivity of new hires.

One pedagogical framework that meets both of these imperatives is Work Integrated Learning based on the principles of learning-by-doing and earning-while-learning. Work Integrated Learning does more than offer students the opportunity to achieve higher order of learning; it helps students acquire highly-desired competencies, builds soft-skills, help them build ownership and leadership when students are asked to take charge of long-term projects with accountability that goes beyond their own personal academic performance. Such students get to practice and hone their skills through the on-job training while learning the principles behind them through an online platform.

A few practical recommendations for HEIs, educators and educational administrators seeking to ensure gainful, fulfilling employment for their graduates might include:

- ▶ Emphasising employability throughout the student journey
- ▶ Seeking ways of integrating employability-focused moments into curricula
- ▶ Liaising with employers (local, regional, and global) to create work experience opportunities for as many current students as possible
- ▶ Engaging with businesses to facilitate closer correspondence between the skills HEIs teach and the skills businesses want - a definition that acknowledges that soft skills are often in shorter supply than hard ones

Few policy wonks are willing to predict what the government would do if a university still did not care for their students and did not come up the national rankings. Many institutions oblivious to students' problems will struggle under the new regime as students will now pick from many choices available to them. Institutes that do not improve will face the existential risks; we need to decide if their decline is a price worth paying for more efficient, effective and competitive universities. It's the time to think of a different recipe; its' time for a change!

ABOUT SCHOOLGURU

Schoolguru is India's leading Online Learning Services company: we help Universities launch, run and manage their own Online Programs, help HEIs improve employability of their students through our blended on-job skilling program and help Corporates build talent supply chain and improve employee productivity. Through our cloud hosted, mobile first, managed services platform, we provide a wide range of services - enrolment, learning, upskilling, student support and assessment - helping our customers improve access, learning outcome. Work x , our Employment Linked Skilling Program, helps HEIs provide experiential learning to their students through a fine blend of online, onsite, on-campus and on-the-job training, helping students become employable. Schoolguru has exclusive partnership with 25 of India's largest Universities across 16 Indian states, trains 2 Lakh students on its platform through 9 Indian languages and manages over 200 degree, diploma, certificate programs.

Schoolguru

Making India Employable

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