

India green-lights branch campuses for two Australian universities

While flurry of approvals raises concerns about the financial viability of offshore outposts, government policies leave ambitious universities with few other choices

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Australia is set to double its tally of university branch campuses in India, as the Anglosphere renews its interest in arguably the riskiest form of transnational education.

Victoria University

(<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/victoria-university>) (VU) and Western Sydney University

(<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/western-sydney-university>) (WSU) are among five foreign institutions whose applications to establish branch campuses have been greenlighted

by India's University Grants Commission (UGC). The others are (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/first-us-university-branch-campus-set-open-indias-mumbai>) Illinois Institute of Technology (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/illinois-institute-technology>) in Chicago, the Milan-based Istituto Europeo di Design and the University of Liverpool (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/university-liverpool>) in the UK.

The flurry of approvals confirms India as the epicentre of a rekindled push by universities in Australia, the UK (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/depth/could-indian-branch-campuses-bail-out-struggling-western-universities>) and the US (US%20universities eye branch campuses as way to 'survive Trump') to establish foreign outposts. Last July, Deakin and Wollongong (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/deakin-and->



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wollongong-are-first-open-indian-branch-campuses) universities opened the first foreign branch campuses in India – in a Gujarati special economic zone called Gift City – with the University of Southampton (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/university-southampton>) commencing operations on the outskirts of Delhi the following month (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/southampton-gets-go-ahead-first-british-campus-india>).

The University of Western Australia (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/university-western-australia>) has also applied for UGC permission (<https://indianexpress.com/article/education/study-abroad/university-of-western-australia-to-set-up-its-first-australian-campus-in-india-mumbai-study-abroad-undergraduate-courses-fee-details-9977349/>) to establish branch campuses in Mumbai and elsewhere in India. Vice-chancellor Amit Chakma called the plan (https://www.linkedin.com/posts/amit-chakma-3487374b_university-of-western-australia-to-set-up-activity-7324017787658477568-MwGi/) a “new chapter in our century-long illustrious journey”.

WSU flagged its ambition (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/western-sydney-university-plans-campus-delhi-outskirts>) to establish an Indian campus in January, having opened a branch in Indonesia’s second city of Surabaya the previous September. The university hopes to commence its Indian operation in early 2026, offering programmes in agriculture, food security, computer science, business and engineering in an industrial hub in Delhi’s interstate outskirts.



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Macquarie University leads the way for sustainability bonds in Australian dollars
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The demand for the Macquarie University sustainability bond is proof

A spokeswoman said WSU “welcomes the outcome” of the application to the UGC. “This is a significant milestone in our journey to establishing a presence in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh. The university continues with its planning towards establishing a campus which includes seeking approval by our board of trustees.”

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VU has released few details of its planned Indian campus, but senior deputy vice-chancellor John Germov said the university was expecting a “letter of intent” from the UGC. “[We are] looking forward to working alongside local partners to...create a thriving campus for students and collaborate on ways to make a tangible contribution to India’s National Education Policy,” he said.

With universities in Australia, the UK and North America increasingly stymied (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/how-west-fell-out-love-international-students>) from bringing foreign students on to home soil, offshore campuses seem a promising alternative. But experts warn against any expectation of quick returns.

Branch campuses “don’t deliver...a financial boon in the first three to five years, [and] frequently not in the first five to 10 years”, said independent adviser Justin Bokor, a former director of Monash University (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/monash-university>) and consultancy firm EY.

University annual reports support this. Monash’s outposts in Malaysia, China and Indonesia collectively provided just 4.3 per cent of the institution’s revenue last year – almost all of it from the 27-year-old Malaysia campus. The China and Indonesia campuses, established in 2012 and 2020 respectively, each delivered about 0.2 per cent of

institutional income.

Wollongong's Dubai campus, launched over 30 years ago, yielded about 7 per cent of the university's institutional revenue in 2023 while the six-year-old Malaysia operation delivered another 3 per cent. But Wollongong's campus in Hong Kong, which has been beset by declining enrolments and space underutilisation, recorded a A\$53 million (£25 million) deficit.

Wollongong, which can ill afford such losses – financial problems have necessitated around 275 job cuts (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/redundancy-tally-debt-struck-wollongong-set-triple>) – is nevertheless progressing plans to establish the first foreign university campus in Saudi Arabia (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/wollongong-eyes-saudi-first-plans-open-riyadh-campus>). New Zealand's Massey University (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/massey-university>), likewise, has been developing a presence in Singapore while making staff cuts at home (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/massey-pushes-ahead-singapore-branch-campus>).

WSU announced up to 400 job cuts (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/inflated-crisis-spurs-another-800-job-cuts-down-under>) in April, blaming continuing deficits. And its Uttar Pradesh campus is unlikely to enjoy the special deal enjoyed by Wollongong and Deakin, whose Gift City hosts allow partners to repatriate tax free profits to their home institutions for at least a decade.

Business consultant Alastair Dawson, a former vice-president for global development at Central Queensland University (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/central-queensland-university>) (CQU), said it was difficult to make foreign branch campuses deliver financially. "There's a lot of hidden costs that you don't really ever understand until you get there," said Dawson, who established CQU's Jakarta campus and tried to set up others (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/more-australian-universities-eye-indonesia>) in Sumatra and Sulawesi.

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He said most international students in Australia were drawn by the opportunities for work in the country's relatively lucrative labour market – a motivation that simply did not apply in foreign branch campuses. "You've got to tap into the scholarship market...but it's a lot more work, and it's a lot less profitable."

But Bokor said offshore campuses offered a "pathway to vibrancy" in an environment where domestic enrolments were flat and the key source of growth in recent decades – onshore international students – had been subjected to "major government-imposed constraints".

He said India had about 120 million people aged between 20 and 25, and the government wanted to double their participation rates in tertiary education. "Even without any population growth, that will supply a vast number of young people to be educated – and that's just India.

"If you can't access that onshore, and they have a need for extra supply offshore, then go to where the market is. If you can get that right, then it becomes a source of strength and vitality for your organisation over the next generation."

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