

Education

EXPERT VIEW

To enrol in Kinderuniversity a child doesn't need to be fluent in German. The goal is to introduce children to the world of science. Learning a few words in German is a bonus.

—Kinderuniversity spokesperson

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2021

● INTERVIEW: ANJU SETH, Director, Indian Institute of Management Calcutta

'The reason we exist is our students'

A great business school is the one that is known for its thought leadership, and its ability to assist students to realise their full potential, says Prof Anju Seth, director, IIM Calcutta. She is only the second woman to lead an IIM (after Prof Neetu Rohmetra, director of IIM Sirmaur). In an interview with FE's Vikram Chaudhary, she shares how IIM Calcutta supported students during the lockdown, how it is building its international presence, and what qualities does a woman leader bring to the table, be it an institute or a country. Excerpts:

While IIM Calcutta has managed 100% summer placements, are there apprehensions some students may not be able to find jobs during final placements, as the economy has not fully recovered?

Although the pandemic posed unforeseen challenges, students and the placement team rose to the occasion to change our systems and processes, enabling all stakeholders to participate virtually, creating multi-layered coordination, and maintaining positivity. I'm confident our students have the right aptitude to be leaders in their chosen area of work.

The pandemic has created several opportunities as well. The past year witnessed changes in many business and management practices like consumer behaviour and marketing, production and supply chains, people management and organisational capability, leading to the need to innovate new business models. Learners must understand that agility and

adaptability command a premium and should be a part of lifelong learning.

At the same time, there is always a demand for talent and strong skills, and education at IIM Calcutta imparts those competencies.

How do you foresee the job scenario— which sectors may see more demand, and which may see fewer jobs?

Hiring trends for our summer placements were well distributed across sectors. Consulting, finance and BFSI accounted for 40% of internship offers; 32% of students would be doing internships in general management and sales & marketing roles; and the remaining 28% in operations, product management, e-commerce and start-ups.

The Covid-19 pandemic has taught us the importance of resilience and capability to respond effectively to a change, and we have always encouraged our students to be ready for any change.

Has the lockdown, and the consequent successful online delivery of classes, permanently changed how classes will be held at business schools?

Business schools will have to innovate to create curriculum and pedagogy for a changing world, and to proactively address the lifelong learning

needs of individuals. There are real opportunities for partnerships with creative use of technology for customised programme creation using blended learning models to

meet these needs, and we expect business leaders of tomorrow will capitalise on these opportunities. At the same time, it is important to preserve the enormous value of the business school 'experience'. An MBA residential programme offers students a special type of connection; for instance, the student community at the Joka campus proudly address themselves as 'Jokars', with powerful bonds within batches that are the foundation of a strong alumni network. Campus housing builds social development and a secular attitude towards neighbouring residents. At IIM Calcutta, our students participate in numerous extra co-curricular activities through clubs and teams. Whether it is debating or drama, fitness or finance, these interactions shape interpersonal skills.

How did IIM Calcutta support students who lacked hardware (laptops, internet connectivity, etc) for studying online?

Our Dean (Academic), Computer Committee Chair, Programme Chairs and Committees, Programme Administrators and staff and many faculty members worked to plan, develop and deliver online courses, while ensuring students' learning is not compromised. Our online classes for MBA commenced last year in August with students distributed across six sections of class strength of 80 per section. We delivered books and learning

material to students at their home locations and arranged an average of 4-5 hours of total classroom live contact hours every day. We also assisted students facing connectivity issues by providing recordings of a missed class, opportunity to interact with instructors after the class, additional tutorials, and other possible help in academic activities.

What can be done to make Indian business school campuses more 'global' in terms of foreign students and faculty participation? Are MOOCs an answer?

Indian business schools must keep up with the changing dynamics of the global education ecosystem by creating curricula that embed the learning needs of the future with requisite customisation, technological interventions in the learning process, increased focus on cutting-edge research that is both locally-relevant and globally-renowned, stronger capability to realise the benefits of demographic and cultural diversity, and inculcating more experiential learning. The ability to attract renowned foreign faculty participation primarily rests on building the host school's capacity to offer the benefits of interaction with an engaged student body and talented faculty colleagues, with some degree of parity with international pay scales also relevant.

As far as foreign students on the campus are concerned, we have such a high demand for a limited number of seats that we have to think carefully about how to

expand without compromising the capability of our Indian students.

IIM Calcutta also recently partnered with Coursera—the global online learning platform—to launch two MasterTrack certificate programmes on Management Science and Supply Chain Analytics. We are embedded in the world market and an important aspect of our strategy, going forward, is to reach audiences beyond India by virtue of online presence.

Do IIMs A, B and C (Ahmedabad, Bangalore and Calcutta) constantly try to better each other in specific areas/rankings?

Rankings are one of the parameters that judge the quality of a business school. A great business school is known for its thought leadership, its vibrant connectivity, its capability to assist students by helping them realise their potential to become powerful managers and world-class leaders. The reason we exist is our students. There is definitely a healthy competition amongst IIMs, and not rivalry. We all would like to become excellent business schools in the global context.

Management education is a male-dominated area, as are corporate boardrooms. What qualities does a woman leader bring to the table, which could be missing under male leadership?

Women may have a little bit of an edge in certain areas, such as empathy for the marginalised. As women progress up the career ladder, they will typically encounter some kind of unconscious bias or stereotyping. In the process of learning to overcome such biases, they often acquire empathy in being able to understand the source of that bias towards encouraging a culture of empowering all and decision making on the basis of structured processes.



PORTRAIT: SHYAM KUMAR PRASAD