Mahratta Chamber of Commerce,
Industries and Agriculture

EDU FEST 2025

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Mahratta Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture
H.O: 5th Floor, MCCIA Trade Tower,
S. L. Kirloskar International Convention Centre
Near JW Marriott, Senapati Bapat Road, Pune 411016
Tel: 91-20-25709000 Fax : 91-20-25709021
Website: www.mcciapune.com

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Executive Summary

Edu-Fest 2025 convened more than 200 participants, 26 distinguished speakers, and representatives from over 10 leading universities for a dynamic two-day event centred on the evolving intersections of talent, technology, and transformation. Designed as a collaborative platform, the event brought together stakeholders from academia, industry, policymaking, and the student community to initiate meaningful dialogue and actionable strategies addressing the shifting landscape of education and employment in a digitally driven world.

The keynote address, delivered by Dr. Sathya Menon, underscored the critical yet underleveraged role of supply chain management in shaping India's economic trajectory. Dr. Menon emphasized the need for structured, globally benchmarked skilling programs and advocated for deeper collaboration between academic institutions and industry partners to equip students with the competencies required to navigate real-world challenges.

A notable highlight of the event was a panel discussion on AI-driven talent dynamics, featuring senior experts from organisations such as Google, L&T, Tata Advanced Systems, and Tech Mahindra. The panel explored the transformative impact of artificial intelligence on recruitment models, workplace design, and skill expectations. Panellists highlighted the growing imperative for agility, creativity, and ethical judgment as the workplace transitions from traditional roles to project-based, skill-oriented engagements driven by automation.

Across various sessions, the Fest consistently addressed the persistent gap between education and industry. Discussions emphasized that future professionals must be developed through academic degrees, adaptive thinking, multi-

disciplinary competencies, and a commitment to lifelong learning. Speakers called for urgent reform in institutional pedagogy, integrating digital learning tools, and closer alignment with evolving industry needs to ensure continued relevance in the current and future employment landscape.

Edu-Fest 2025 distinguished itself through insightful keynotes, thought-provoking panels, and strong student engagement, successfully establishing a platform where innovative ideas were exchanged and translated into actionable outcomes.

Far beyond a conventional conference, Edu-Fest 2025 represented a forward-looking initiative dedicated to imagining and shaping the future of talent development, technological integration, and systemic transformation in India's academic and professional ecosystems.

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Welcome Address

Mr. Prashant Girbane, Director General – MCCIA
"Inclusive Growth and Educational Empowerment"

The Mahratta Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture (MCCIA) has been a vital link between Maharashtra's business community and various government, civil society, and academia stakeholders. The chamber firmly believes that for progress to be sustainable and inclusive, it must be collaborative. This principle underpins the vision behind Edu-Fest—an initiative to strengthen the partnership between those shaping academic thought and those steering industrial advancement.

Edu-Fest 2025, in particular, represents a concerted effort to create convergence, not merely in ideas, but in action. The objective extends beyond dialogue and takes steps toward tangible, long-term collaboration between educational institutions and industry. The world is evolving rapidly, and unless our systems evolve with it, we risk falling behind. The time to rethink and redesign how we prepare our young minds is now.

A recent initiative that exemplifies MCCIA's commitment to innovation and grassroots engagement is the MSME Helpline. Launched only a few months prior, this multilingual platform is now operational across 26 districts in Maharashtra. It delivers real-time, expert guidance to entrepreneurs in Marathi, Hindi, and English. What distinguishes this initiative is its operational model—"completely without advertisements, driven solely by word-of-mouth and digital channels like WhatsApp." The Helpline is entirely funded by MCCIA, with no reliance on external support. Currently serving over 300 enterprises per

month, the Chamber has set a goal to expand its reach to 1,000 MSMEs monthly by year-end. This platform is not merely a helpline, but a manifestation of MCCIA's philosophy: simple, direct, and deeply committed to impact. The Government of India has acknowledged it as a potential model for nationwide replication, a recognition that underscores its significance and effectiveness.

Beyond such initiatives, MCCIA continues to play a proactive role in shaping policy and strategic dialogue. Contributions include inputs on electric vehicle (EV) policies and consultations with key figures such as the CEO of NITI Aayog and representatives from international diplomatic missions. Pune, as the Chamber's base of operations, has increasingly emerged as a pivotal hub in Maharashtra's economic framework, accounting for over 30% of the state's total industrial investments.

Edu-Fest 2025 has been conceived within this context of dynamic growth and collective responsibility. Its purpose is to forge stronger connections between the academic and industrial sectors, ensuring that the youth are equipped not only for today's employment landscape but also for the complex challenges of the future. As this multi-day engagement unfolds, it is important to reaffirm a shared belief: "true transformation happens when relevance meets responsiveness." In that spirit, the Chamber encourages all stakeholders to embrace bold thinking, engage in honest dialogue, and above all, commit to genuine collaboration.

Opening Remark

Mr. Bharat Agarwal, Chairman, MCCIA - Higher Education and Skill Development Centre

"Reimagining Industry-Academia Collaboration: A Call for Scaled Engagement"

Industry-academia collaboration has remained a topic of sustained discussion for several years. Numerous dialogues have been held, various pilot initiatives have been introduced, and isolated experiments have been conducted. However, upon assessing the overall scale and impact of these efforts, it becomes evident that the level of progress remains inadequate. For a nation as vast and ambitious as India—or even for a city like Pune—the existing engagement between industry and academia continues to be limited in both scope and depth.

While some advancements have been observed—such as an increase in internships, student-led projects, and occasional joint research ventures—these represent incremental progress. What is required is deep, consistent, and systemic collaboration that has the potential to drive innovation and generate employment at scale.

A crucial aspect often overlooked is the increasing autonomy now granted to higher education institutions. Private universities and autonomous colleges across Maharashtra possess the flexibility to design their own curricula, introduce industry-relevant programs, and adopt innovative teaching methodologies. The academic sector, by and large, has demonstrated readiness. What is now needed is a more robust and sustained engagement from industry. This engagement must be approached with the same seriousness and long-term perspective as traditional R&D efforts. Trial and error is to be expected, and initial results may vary;

however, lasting outcomes—similar to those seen in countries such as China, Germany, or the United States—can only emerge through committed, long-term partnerships between academic institutions and enterprises.

Government policy is also playing an enabling role. The All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) is actively promoting funded faculty development programmes. Centralised internship platforms have been introduced, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) provisions now permit up to 2% of contributions to be allocated toward educational initiatives. The institutional and regulatory frameworks are already in place. There is no longer a dependency on permissions or approvals as a barrier to action.

What now becomes essential is intentional, purpose-driven participation from the industry. Such engagement must move beyond compliance and avoid becoming a mere procedural obligation. The intent and preparedness of the academic community are evident. The support mechanisms from the government are firmly established. The onus now lies with industry to assume a leadership role—meaningfully, strategically, and with a long-term vision.

Special Address 1

Prof. (Dr.) Suresh Gosavi, Vice Chancellor, SPPU
"Building Future-Ready Graduates: The Need for Agile, Purpose-Driven Academia"
"If we want to prepare our students for the world they're about to enter, we need a much stronger and more responsive connection between academia and industry."

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presents a significant opportunity to foster collaboration, adaptability, and responsiveness to contemporary demands. The urgency to act stems from the pace of global transformation, which continues to accelerate rapidly. Within this context, institutions such as Savitribai Phule Pune University carry an immense responsibility. With over 1,200 affiliated institutions and a student base exceeding 7.5 lakh, the task extends beyond shaping individual careers; it involves preparing the future workforce of the nation.

Key sectors such as digital transformation, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and energy are evolving at unprecedented speeds. Pune, already recognised as a hub for education, information technology, and the automotive industry, is now expanding its footprint into emerging domains such as bio design and bioengineering. While this expansion is promising, it also highlights the critical need for corresponding reforms in training systems. Presently, technology lifecycles span merely 18 to 24 months, whereas university degree programs continue to follow traditional four-year structures. This incongruity creates a significant lag between industry requirements and academic preparation.

Given this context, academic institutions must assume a proactive role in ensuring curriculum relevance and agility. Waiting for policy revisions or administrative circulars is no

longer a viable strategy. Institutions must lead the way in aligning academic structures with the fast-evolving needs of the industry, lest they risk preparing students for a reality that no longer exists.

However, the discourse on industry-academia collaboration must extend beyond issues of technological readiness to encompass the broader philosophical dimensions of technological development. It is imperative to critically examine not only what technologies are being created, but also why they are being developed, for whom, and to what end. As contemporary narratives frequently emphasise speed, efficiency, and innovation, a fundamental consideration emerges: what is the true value of accelerated progress if it is not anchored in clear direction and meaningful purpose?

In physics, the concept of velocity is defined as speed with direction. A similar principle must apply to education—there is a need for progress that is not only fast, but also ethical, purposeful, and socially responsible. Thus, the emphasis should not merely be on responsive measures or superficial collaborations. Rather, the objective must be to cultivate industry-academia partnerships that are intentional, human-centric, and guided by shared values. These collaborations should not only focus on what is feasible, but more importantly, on what is necessary and meaningful for society at large.

Special Address 2

Prof. T.G. Sitharam, Chairman, AICTE (Chief Guest)
"Transforming India's Higher Education: A Call for Skilling, Scale, and Strategic AI Adoption"

In the current educational landscape, the focus has shifted significantly beyond the traditional dissemination of knowledge. Educational institutions are increasingly being evaluated based on student employability and placement outcomes. Given the rapid evolution of the job market, conventional approaches to education are no longer sufficient. The emphasis now lies on skilling, reskilling, and upskilling—a triad that forms the cornerstone of workforce readiness.

Within this context, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is regarded as a transformative framework. Far from being a routine policy document, the NEP is flexible, student-centric, and aligned with real-world needs. Its emphasis on experiential learning, digital education, peer-to-peer collaboration, and the development of critical thinking marks a timely and necessary shift in approach.

The urgency is further underscored by the national objective of increasing the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education from the current 29% to 50% by the year 2035. Given the constraints on physical infrastructure and resources, establishing thousands of new educational institutions is not a viable solution. Instead, leveraging technology becomes the pathway forward through hybrid and digital learning models that enable scalable, inclusive, and quality education.

In terms of technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has already become an integral component of the present, not a distant

prospect. Increasingly referred to as augmented or crowd intelligence, AI today performs inconceivable functions that were unimaginable only a few years ago, ranging from composing poetry in multiple Indian languages to solving complex academic problems and enabling highly personalised learning experiences. However, this transformative power also brings significant ethical challenges, including the proliferation of deepfakes, misinformation, and content misuse.

In this light, the integration of ethics, integrity, and human responsibility into the educational process becomes essential. Students must be equipped to distinguish between original content and machine-generated outputs, and must be empowered to actively steer their own learning journeys with discernment and accountability.

The All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) currently governs over 14,000 institutions and approximately 1.4 lakh academic programs. Nevertheless, systemic change is not solely top-down; it must also be rooted in grassroots action, beginning with students themselves. Educational curricula must, therefore, be shaped not only by theoretical constructs but by practical, real-world demands.

A noteworthy example of India's digital leadership is its Digital Public Infrastructure, exemplified by platforms such as Aadhaar and Unified Payments Interface (UPI). These platforms have significantly enhanced accessibility and efficiency in daily life. Currently, over 6 crore Aadhaar authentications are conducted daily, and India is responsible for 45% of global UPI transactions. These innovations have enabled even individuals without formal education to

execute digital payments through QR codes—an impactful step towards widespread digital empowerment.

In conclusion, while the future of education is undeniably digital, it must also remain fundamentally human. Striking the right balance between skills, technology, and values will not only prepare students for employment but will equip them for life. India has already demonstrated its capability in fields such as vaccine diplomacy and world-class infrastructure. The time has now come to extend that same visionary leadership to the education sector.

Keynote Address

Dr. Sathya Menon, Group CEO, Blue Ocean Corporation
"Encouraging Skill Development in India"

Supply chain management, though often underrepresented in mainstream discourse, plays an essential role in daily economic functioning and is pivotal to India's future as a global economic power. With over 27 years of experience across diverse industries and academic environments worldwide, one insight stands out prominently: if India aspires to compete on the global stage, it must prioritise supply chain transformation. Currently, the country remains at least two decades behind global leaders such as China and advanced Western economies in this domain. India possesses the intellectual capital and manufacturing infrastructure necessary to scale; however, without robust, integrated supply chains, this potential remains largely untapped.

To understand the significance of modern supply chains, it is important to recognise their evolution. Originating from military logistics—concerned with the movement of troops, food, and equipment—supply chain management has since evolved into a complex industrial function encompassing procurement, warehousing, transportation, distribution, and ultimately, the end-user experience. In the post-COVID-19 era, the relevance of supply chains has become more pronounced in everyday life, influencing the availability of vaccines, groceries, and e-commerce products alike.

Despite this growing relevance, the prevailing approach to supply chain management within Indian businesses remains fragmented. Many firms isolate functions such as procurement or warehousing without acknowledging that supply chain effectiveness depends on system-wide

optimisation. As with any chain, the overall strength is determined by its weakest link. Failure to address the supply chain holistically leads to inefficiencies, resulting in financial losses, operational delays, and missed business opportunities.

The impact of an efficient supply chain on business performance is quantifiable. A mere 5% reduction in logistics costs can translate into up to a 30% increase in profits. More than simply a profitability lever, supply chain efficiency also enhances economic resilience—a necessary condition for reducing the trade deficit, scaling exports, and empowering MSMEs.

Several government-led initiatives—such as PM Gati Shakti, Sagarmala, and the establishment of Bharat Mart in the UAE—are commendable steps in this direction. These programs aim to strengthen India's logistics ecosystem and global distribution networks. A case in point is that of a small air cooler manufacturer based in Vapi who produces export-quality goods surpassing Chinese equivalents, yet remains unable to access international markets due to inadequate distribution support. Scaling solutions for such enterprises could have a far-reaching impact. As articulated in the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India), no such goal can be fully realised without resilient and efficient supply chains at its core.

A key aspect of this transformation is the development of relevant skills. While more than five lakh professionals have been trained globally, there is now a need for deeper efforts focused on students and entry-level professionals. Supply chain management should be recognised as a core discipline, rather than being offered only as an elective in MBA

programmes. This requires well-structured courses, internationally recognised certifications, and strong alignment with industry demands. Similar to how Chief Financial Officers are expected to hold qualifications such as Chartered Accountancy, future leaders in supply chain management should be equipped with specialised and formal training, rather than relying solely on general business education.

The call to action is clear. Policymakers, educators, and industry leaders must collaborate to develop a robust talent pipeline capable of designing and managing the supply chains of the future. India has already demonstrated its ability to manufacture world-class products. The next step is to ensure these products reach global markets on time, efficiently, and competitively. This is how India will not only meet its domestic objectives but also position itself as a key player in the global economy.

Panel Discussion 1

“AI-Driven Talent Dynamics in the Digital Era”

The panel highlighted that AI is rapidly transforming the workplace, shifting focus from experience to skills, and making talent acquisition more precise through tools like passive sourcing. Experts stressed that AI is a co-pilot, automating routine tasks while amplifying the need for creativity, adaptability, and ethical oversight. With flexible, gig-based work models on the rise, professionals must embrace AI tools to stay relevant in a dynamic, tech-driven economy.

Dr. Sandeep Pachpande, Chairman, ASM Group of Institute (Moderator)

AI is not just a tool but a teammate—reshaping how organisations operate, and how we must prepare students for an AI-integrated future that is intelligent, ethical, and profoundly human.

Dr. Sandeep opened the panel by emphasizing that we are living in an era of unpredictable transformation, where AI is revolutionizing the way organizations train, engage, and lead talent. Citing Satya Nadella, he highlighted AI’s role in empowering human potential. He noted that HR stands at the forefront of this evolution, making recruitment more

predictive, enhancing employee experiences through personalization, and enabling data-driven leadership. However, he stressed the pressing challenge of bridging the education-industry gap, especially as most future jobs do not even exist today. He called for a shift in focus from mere degree-based learning to nurturing adaptability, critical thinking, and agility among students, co-creating a future of work that remains both technologically advanced and deeply human.

Dr. Bhushan Garware, AI Consultant, Google

AI-driven passive sourcing is revolutionizing recruitment by identifying and engaging top talent who haven't actively applied for jobs.

Dr. Bhushan Garware shed light on the emerging concept of passive sourcing in recruitment, marking a significant shift from traditional methods. Historically, hiring has focused on active candidates—those who apply through portals or are referred. Yet, studies show that only 2% of these applicants are truly a fit for the roles. In contrast, 73% of ideal candidates are passive—they haven't expressed job-seeking intent but may be open to the right opportunity. Platforms like LinkedIn and Kaggle host millions of such hidden talent. Dr. Garware emphasized the need for AI-enabled tools to analyze large-scale behavioral data from these platforms, understand candidates' potential, and engage with them meaningfully. This shift, he argued, makes AI a true game-changer in modern recruitment, allowing organizations to tap into a vastly underutilized talent pool with greater precision and timing.

Mr. Akash Mavle, Corp Group Head AI, L&T

AI is disrupting the traditional employee-employer model, shifting work from long-term roles to gig-based, skill-driven engagements.

Mr. Akash Mavle offered a candid and insightful view into how AI is transforming not only the talent acquisition but also the very fabric of the workplace. Reflecting on his 20+ year journey in AI, he noted that lifetime employment—once a norm in companies like L&T—is becoming obsolete. Today, professionals join firms to acquire skills and then migrate to the gig economy, pursuing multiple incomes, freelancing, or entrepreneurship. AI is accelerating this shift by making rule-based, repetitive jobs obsolete—everything that can be asked to ChatGPT is no longer considered specialized knowledge. Instead, the value now lies in creative thinking, lateral problem-solving, and human insight. AI is automating the mundane, but human workers remain essential as ethical checkers, especially in sensitive areas like healthcare, where AI-driven decisions can have grave consequences. As work becomes more flexible and short-term, AI will play a pivotal role in managing and matching this dynamic talent pool to ever-changing business needs.

Mr. Rajendra Kembhavi, Head Employee Relations, Tech Mahindra

In today's industry, skills are more important than experience, and employees are increasingly focused on learning and developing high-end skills rather than staying in one organization for a long time.

Mr. Rajendra Kembhavi, with three decades of experience in the industry, highlights the shift from valuing experience to prioritizing skill in the workplace. He notes that employees are more eager to acquire new skills and are less interested in staying with an organization long-term. The COVID era has further influenced this change, with employees now seeking roles that provide opportunities for continuous learning. He

also discusses the impact of AI on repetitive jobs, which will no longer exist, and the challenges it creates for employers and employees alike. Mr. Kembhavi points out the shift in the mindset of younger employees, who value skills and flexibility, such as work-from-home options, over traditional job security. Furthermore, he observes that the service industry's focus has shifted from development and support roles to high-end skills like machine learning and AI. The younger generation is less concerned about job insecurity and more about the opportunities to grow and work in roles that align with their aspirations. Mr. Kembhavi also notes the importance of industry initiatives like internships and apprenticeship programs that help bridge the skills gap, and he is optimistic about India's potential to produce a talent pool eager to learn and innovate

Mr. Sachin Mathew, Head HR, Tata Advance Systems Ltd
In manufacturing, AI serves as a co-pilot rather than a driver, helping organizations streamline processes, optimize workforce planning, and assist in reskilling employees, but the actual work must still be done on the ground.

Mr. Sachin Mathew, Head HR at Tata Advanced Systems Ltd, emphasizes the importance of AI as a supportive tool in the manufacturing sector rather than the driving force. AI, in this context, acts as a "co-pilot" by streamlining processes such as workforce planning, skill migration, and cost optimization. He highlights how AI can enhance workforce planning by bringing together different functions like supply chain, HR, and finance to forecast demand accurately and align the right skills with specific manufacturing needs. For example, an automobile company transitioning from internal combustion engine technology to electric vehicle production can leverage AI to facilitate the reskilling and cross-skilling of

its employees.

Additionally, AI tools help in sourcing talent through platforms like LinkedIn, conducting interviews, assessing behavioral fit using psychometric tools, and easing the onboarding process. Mathew also touches on how AI is used in areas such as customer care and augmented reality/virtual reality to support remote teams, especially in sectors like defense, where AI tools assist in product validation and skill development. He concludes by reaffirming that AI's role in manufacturing is to assist, not replace, human expertise, ensuring both organizational efficiency and employee growth.

Mr. Amit Jadhav, Director, Modelcam Technologies Pvt. Ltd

AI adoption is accelerating rapidly across industries and government, and within the next six months, every professional will likely be using at least three AI tools in their daily work to stay relevant and efficient.

Mr. Amit Jadhav, Director at Modelcam Technologies, shares his insights on the growing influence of AI, highlighting its rapid acceptance even at high levels of government, with IAS officers and principal secretaries now reaching out for guidance on optimizing systems. He recounts the success of a previous AI masterclass he conducted for the chamber, where attendees reported a 15–38% improvement in their processes through AI adoption. Emphasizing his experience and the predictive insights in his recently published book AI Unzip, he reiterates how institutions—especially universities—must develop their own AI strategies or risk becoming obsolete. He makes a bold prediction: every individual, regardless of role or industry, will soon rely on at least three AI tools regularly, underscoring the urgency to

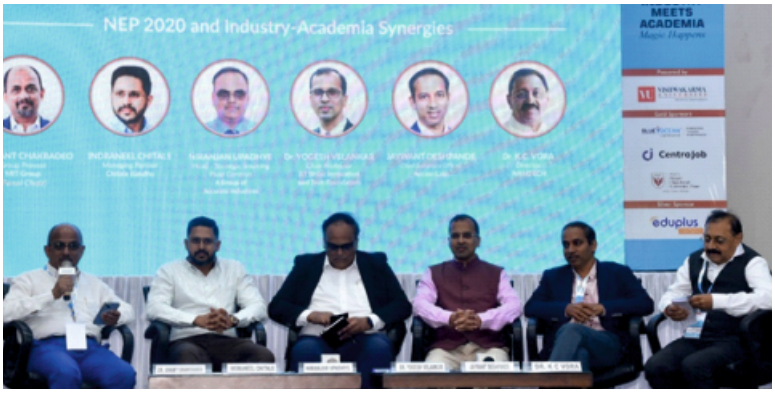
embrace AI to remain competitive and effective in the evolving professional landscape.**Dr. K.C. Vora, Director, NAMTECH**

NEP 2020 emphasizes a holistic learning model centered on Knowledge, Skills, and Attitude (KSA), calling for greater industry-academia collaboration to enable hands-on, experiential education.

Panel Discussion 2

“NEP 2020 and Industry-Academia Synergies”

The panel Discussion on "NEP 2020 and Industry-Academia Synergies" highlighted the policy's potential to bridge the gap between academia and industry through multidisciplinary education, experiential learning, and project-based approaches. Speakers emphasized the need for genuine collaboration, with academia leading in innovation and skill development, while stressing that NEP's success relies on sincere implementation and active industry involvement.



Dr. Anant Chakradeo, Group Provost, MIT Group (Moderator)

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is the most transformative reform in Indian higher education in the last 70 years, with strong potential to enhance industry-academia collaboration through its focus on flexibility, multidisciplinarity, and experiential learning.

Dr. Anant Chakradeo, Group Provost of MIT Group, introduces the panel discussion on NEP 2020 and industry-academia synergies by emphasizing the critical pillars of the policy that directly impact and encourage industry participation. He refrains from reiterating the entire policy,

assuming the academic audience is already familiar with it, but highlights key features such as multidisciplinary education, choice-based credit systems, multiple entry and exit points, and internationalization. Most significantly, he focuses on project-based learning, 360-degree student development, experiential and collaborative learning—elements that align closely with industry needs. He asserts that NEP 2020 is the most significant advancement in Indian higher education since independence, setting the stage for a more industry-relevant and globally aligned education system.

Mr. Indraneel Chitale, Managing Partner, Chitale Bandhu
NEP 2020 is expected to significantly reduce the industry's training burden by producing a more versatile, tech-savvy, and job-ready talent pool aligned with evolving business needs.

Mr. Indraneel Chitale, Managing Partner at Chitale Bandhu, emphasizes the employer's perspective on NEP 2020, focusing on its potential to streamline the talent acquisition process. He points out the current gap between fresh talent and industry expectations, particularly the time and effort companies spend training new hires to become productive. He appreciates how NEP's structure is geared toward producing versatile, generalist individuals who are supported by technological proficiency, especially through AI. This shift, he believes, will prepare future employees to handle diverse roles with a solid technical foundation, and he foresees the real impact of these reforms becoming evident over the next five years.

Mr. Niranjan Upadhye, Head, Strategies Sourcing, Fluid Controls Ltd
NEP 2020 must be implemented in a way that places academia at the forefront of innovation, skill development,

and sustainability through strong industry collaboration.

Mr. Niranjan Upadhye, Head of Strategies Sourcing at Fluid Controls Ltd, highlights that even partial implementation of NEP 2020 could significantly shift academia into a leading role within the industry ecosystem. Drawing from his experience in Germany, he emphasizes how academic institutions there are deeply integrated into industry-led initiatives. He believes Indian academia should similarly lead in research, skill enhancement, entrepreneurship, and technological advancement. Stressing the inseparable role of industry in this transformation, he notes that since industry connects directly with society, the successful execution of NEP with industry support can pave the way for a more sustainable and future-ready nation.

Dr. Yogesh Velankar, Chair Professor, IIT Bhilai Innovation and Tech. Foundation
NEP 2020 holds transformative potential, but its true success depends on sincere and spirit-driven implementation, particularly through empowered faculty and real collaboration with industry and society.

Dr. Yogesh Velankar, Chair Professor at IIT Bhilai Innovation and Technology Foundation, emphasized his involvement in crafting the NEP's implementation roadmap, specifically regarding faculty development. Drawing on his academic experience in the U.S., he praised NEP's focus on multidisciplinary learning, critical thinking, and innovation. He underscored the importance of moving away from rote learning and engaging students in hands-on, real-world challenges in collaboration with industry and society. However, he cautioned against treating NEP as a mere compliance exercise and stressed the need for genuine,

values-based execution that reflects the policy's true intent.

Mr. Jaywant Deshpande, Chief Solutions Officer, Accion Labs
NEP 2020 is enabling meaningful industry-academia collaboration by fostering project-based learning, innovation, and greater flexibility, ultimately benefiting both students and employers.

Mr. Jaywant Deshpande, Chief Solutions Officer at Accion Labs, emphasized how recent changes like IT services—especially with the rise of AI—have increased the need for experimentation and pilot projects. This has led to more active partnerships with academic institutions, which are now far more collaborative and innovation-driven than before. With students gaining the freedom to engage in product-based learning and hands-on projects, the speaker observed a clear alignment between academic output and industry needs. These developments point to the real-world impact of NEP 2020 in creating a skilled, adaptable talent pool and fostering a culture of co-creation between academia and industry.

Dr. K.C. Vora, Director, NAMTECH
NEP 2020 emphasizes a holistic learning model centered on Knowledge, Skills, and Attitude (KSA), calling for greater industry-academia collaboration to enable hands-on, experiential education.

Dr. K.C. Vora highlighted that while traditional education focused heavily on rote learning and knowledge acquisition, NEP 2020 brings a paradigm shift by integrating skills and attitude into the core of learning. He stressed the importance of practical, hands-on experiences through

projects, mini-factories, and real-world exposure. To implement this vision, he urged the industry to actively collaborate with academia, providing support and infrastructure that allows students to engage deeply with practical learning. Despite five years since its announcement, he noted that significant progress remains to be made, and urged a more committed push toward implementation.

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Fireside Chat

“Demand Driven Skill Development with Active Industry and Alumni Participation”

Mr. Dinanath Kholkar, Professor of Practice, CoEP Tech University and VJTI & Former SVP, TCS
Mr. Prashant Girbane, Director General, MCCIA
In an engaging fireside chat, Mr. Dinanath Kholkar and Mr. Prashant Girbane discussed the critical need for aligning academic curricula with industry expectations. At the heart of the discussion was the evolving role of the Professor of Practice (PoP) and the importance of alumni and industry engagement in shaping a more employable and skilled workforce.

Over the past three decades, professional experience spanning both academia and industry has demonstrated that limited engagement, such as serving as a visiting faculty member, is often insufficient to drive meaningful change. It is only through a full-time commitment to academia that substantial contributions can be realised. While national attention frequently centres on premier institutions such as the IITs and NITs, there exists significant untapped potential within other colleges that often remain under-recognised. In response, close collaboration has been established with institutions such as VJTI, the alma mater of the contributor, to bridge this gap effectively.

The emerging role of the “Professor of Practice”—a concept inspired by models in countries such as Germany—holds considerable promise for transforming the academic-industry interface in India. This role, which integrates extensive industry experience into academia, is still in its early stages of adoption, with many corporations expressing uncertainty regarding implementation and talent identification.

The scope of a Professor of Practice extends well beyond conducting workshops or delivering guest lectures. It entails a sustained engagement in curriculum development, research mentorship, and institutional advancement. While the framework is still evolving, its potential impact is significant. A key challenge, however, lies in enabling industry to identify suitable professionals for such roles. This necessitates a flexible approach toward recognising varied and non-traditional professional backgrounds, which can offer unique and valuable contributions to the academic environment.

In terms of sectoral focus, particular attention has been directed toward the semiconductor and electronics industries, areas with substantial growth potential in India but historically limited student interest. Through awareness initiatives and by involving students in industry-related discussions, a measurable increase in engagement has been observed. The shift must not be limited to students alone; faculty members must also adapt by actively participating in industry projects, thereby enriching their classroom instruction with practical, applied insights.

Effectively bridging the gap between academia and industry has the potential to significantly enhance graduate employability and ensure that educational programmes are aligned with evolving market and technological demands.

Panel Discussion 3

“Driving Inclusivity in Campus & Corporate World”

The panel on "Driving Inclusivity in Campus & Corporate World" focused on creating real opportunities for women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and the specially-abled through merit-based policies and academia-industry collaboration. Key points included promoting intergenerational inclusivity, gender diversity, and the need for hands-on training and internships to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and industry needs. The discussion emphasized building an inclusive, meritocratic system that nurtures diverse talent across sectors.

Dr. Tarita Shankar, President-Designate Indira University and Chairperson and Chief Mentor-Indira Group of Institutes (Moderator)

Inclusivity must go beyond token representation to create real opportunities—especially in academia—by actively including women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and the specially-abled through merit-based policies and structured support systems.

Drawing from over three decades in education, Dr. Tarita Shankar reflected on how the meaning of inclusivity has evolved significantly—from a narrow focus on gender to a broader embrace of all forms of diversity, including caste,

religion, disability, and gender. She highlighted that inclusivity is not only a social ideal but also a strategic imperative for both academia and industry, especially when shaping young minds who will become future leaders. At Indira Group, which recently attained university status, she has prioritized building deep academia-industry partnerships and ensuring that inclusivity is embedded structurally, through policies like compulsory reservations for women, specially-abled individuals, and the LGBTQ+ community. These measures are designed not as concessions but as platforms to bring everyone to the same level of opportunity and merit. She also shared her pride in leading a women-driven institution, where over 60% of the workforce is female, including the top leadership. Beyond institutional efforts, she emphasized the need for systemic incentives, targeted scholarships, and mentorship programs to uplift the women of India and give them meaningful participation in both educational and professional spaces. Dr. Shankar concluded with a firm commitment to continue building an inclusive educational ecosystem that not only empowers marginalized communities but also prepares them to be accepted, respected, and valued in the corporate world.

Ms. Rutuja Jagtap, Executive Director, SAJ Test Plant Pvt. Ltd

Organizational progress lies in intergenerational inclusivity—tandeming the wisdom and tacit knowledge of experienced professionals with the fresh ideas and passion of younger generations.

Ms. Jagtap shared that her organization, with over five decades in manufacturing, has benefited immensely from intergenerational teamwork, combining the expertise of baby boomers with the innovation of Gen Z and millennials.

She highlighted the shift from pre-NEP to post-NEP dynamics, where industry-academia collaboration has deepened, especially through revised curricula, greater involvement of industry professionals on academic boards, and flexible, multidisciplinary learning. She noted the rise in collaborative research, real-world industry projects for faculty and students, and the growing role of incubation centers supported by industry mentorship and funding assessments. One standout initiative she mentioned was hands-on faculty training programs at her company to bridge the gap between academic theory and industrial practice. She also reflected on her journey in manufacturing—initially one of the few women in functional roles—and how incentives and societal shifts have increased gender diversity, especially on the shop floor. Praising the Tata Motors all-women plant as a milestone, she urged broader adoption of similar inclusive models. In conclusion, she stressed the need for industries to set up EV, IC engine, and automation labs in institutions to give students hands-on experience that aligns with industry needs.

Ms. Swati Ghaisas, Executive Director - Yashprabha Group
Inclusivity should be based on merit rather than mandates, and that creating an enabling environment is essential to ensure that talent receives the necessary opportunities and resources.

Ms. Ghaisas shared her active engagement with academia through collaborations with colleges such as Garware College's electronics department, where her company contributes to curriculum design in niche areas like PCB manufacturing. She noted the importance of exposing students and faculty to real-world processes—over 2,000 students from 20 colleges visited their electronics

manufacturing facilities, gaining insights beyond textbook theory. Faculty participation in these visits, she said, has fostered trust and made future collaborations smoother. She expressed willingness to host technically qualified professors for deeper academic-industry synergies and suggested that industries would gladly support such efforts. Reflecting on gender roles, she remarked that her generation has seen a significant rise in confident, working women across leadership and technical domains, highlighting that capability—not gender—defines roles today. In closing, she emphasized the need to bridge the mindset gap between industry expectations and student perceptions, noting that although today's students appear informed, much of their knowledge remains surface-level and needs grounding through practical exposure.

Ms. Priya Damle, CHRO, Neilsoft
Inclusivity should be rooted in meritocracy without excluding any group, and highlighted the importance of stronger academic-industry collaboration—particularly through faculty involvement, effective training and placement officers (TPOs), and meaningful internships.

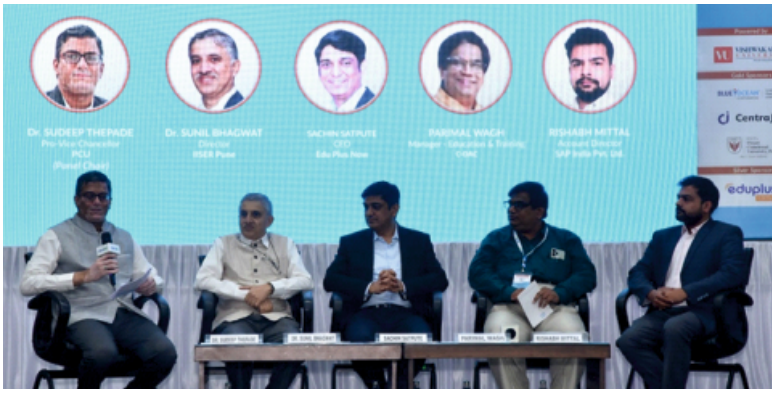
Ms. Damle began by defining inclusivity as a system that rewards merit while ensuring no group—whether defined by gender, caste, religion, or identity—is excluded. Speaking about Neilsoft, she highlighted their initiatives, including sponsoring a lab equipped with proprietary software for electrical engineering students, which has started yielding promising results. She shared that the company benefits by getting trained, job-ready students after one year of exposure. She also discussed successful internship models where students contribute to commercial risk analysis, making the experience valuable for both sides. Ms. Damle

expressed strong interest in expanding such collaborations in Pune and beyond. However, she raised concerns about the declining involvement and commitment of today's Training and Placement Officers (TPOs) compared to earlier years. She stressed the TPO's pivotal role as the face of the institution for industry interactions, noting that inconsistent student engagement and a lack of clarity from TPOs have become challenges—potentially linked to generational shifts and digital distractions. Finally, she acknowledged the evolving confidence among younger generations and praised the growing participation of women in the workforce.

Panel Discussion 4

“Skill Development in Formal Education”

The panel on "Skill Development in Formal Education" stressed integrating practical skills into education, blending theory with hands-on learning. It emphasized the importance of soft skills, adaptability, and early skilling, along with better collaboration between academia, industry, and students to align education with industry needs and prepare students for the future workforce.



Dr. Sudeep Thepade, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Pimpari-Chinchwad University

Integrating skill into formal education is crucial for transforming theoretical knowledge into practical wisdom, enabling students to adapt, unlearn, and relearn in a rapidly evolving professional world.

Dr. Thepade highlights the importance of embedding skill development within the formal education system to enhance students' ability to apply knowledge practically and become industry-ready. At Pimpri-Chinchwad University, they have implemented a hybrid skilling model—part online, part guided—to offer flexibility and continuous support. The university has also allowed students to earn 10 open interdisciplinary skill credits at their own pace, which are

recorded semester-wise. He stresses that in an era of frequent technological disruptions, students must not only learn but also unlearn and adapt, and this can be cultivated through skill-based learning. He advocates for industry-academia collaboration to identify relevant skill sets and notes that skill development also nurtures life skills, teamwork, leadership, and a broader, altruistic mindset, ultimately aiding both personal growth and nation-building.

Dr. Sunil Bhagwat, Director, IISER - Pune
While skill development is vital, true education must be driven by a student's intrinsic desire to learn, not just by institutional offerings or job-oriented goals.

Dr. Bhagwat begins by distinguishing between life skills and professional skills, noting that their relevance varies across disciplines—whether in arts, commerce, or engineering. He argues that university education should not be solely about employability, but rather about becoming a more knowledgeable and thoughtful individual. He points out that in today's world—with AI and digital media—a large part of learning can happen independently, without the need for a physical classroom. However, this makes the quality and intent of educators even more critical. If teachers themselves have entered the profession by default or as a last resort, they may lack the passion needed to truly inspire students. As a final point, he highlights a crucial barrier: lack of student motivation. Many students are pursuing degrees they are not interested in. Without the "fire in the belly," even the best educational and skilling initiatives will fall flat. He stresses that instilling a genuine desire to learn is fundamental to the success of both education and skill development.

Mr. Sachin Satpute, CEO Edu Plus Now
Skilling should begin early in education, particularly through hands-on learning. He highlighted that while online education is useful for information, practical, in-person experience is necessary for skill development, especially in technical fields.

Mr. Sachin Satpute agreed with the importance of skilling, stressing that it should start in childhood education. He pointed out that, in today's job market, skills are often valued as much as, or even more than, academic qualifications. Employers now frequently look for specific skills rather than solely relying on academic records. He highlighted the growing gap between the skills imparted in conventional education and the needs of the industry, noting that many graduates are not adequately prepared for the workforce. Satpute stressed the need for hands-on, practical experience, particularly in technical fields, where real-world application is essential. He also raised the challenge of upskilling professionals with years of experience to meet current industry standards. His solution lies in better collaboration between academia and industry, ensuring that educational systems provide both theoretical knowledge and practical skills that align with the real-world demands. He concluded by calling for a more cohesive effort between both sectors to improve the speed and effectiveness of skill development at all levels of education, from schooling to professional training.

Mr. Parimal Wagh, Manager, Edu. & Training, C-DAC
It is important to integrate soft skills and life skills into education, alongside technical skills, to prepare students for the challenges of the industry.
Mr. Parimal Wagh discussed the need for skilling, particularly

the gap between technical skills and soft skills in education. He highlighted the importance of soft skills like teamwork, crisis management, communication, and stress management, which are often lacking in students despite their technical abilities. He pointed out that industry demands individuals who can handle real-world pressure, and these scenarios need to be incorporated into educational programs. Additionally, he reflected on an initiative at C-DAC where they provide opportunities for individuals to obtain qualifications later in their careers, especially those who have dropped out but wish to return for career advancement. Mr. Wagh also emphasized the importance of integrating new disruptive technologies, such as AI, into educational curricula, suggesting that education systems should adapt to these innovations and consider incorporating skills training into academic credits. He concluded by stressing the need for education to align with the evolving business world, particularly through the adoption of emerging technologies.

Mr. Rishabh Mittal, Account Director, SAP India Pvt. Ltd
Skilling should be integrated across all stakeholders—institutes, students, and industry and traditional methods of learning should be replaced by the modern method, such as hybrid learning, to meet the demands of the future workforce.

Mr. Mittal shared his belief that skilling should not be limited to a single domain but should be an ongoing, embedded process throughout the learning cycle. He emphasized the need for educational institutions, students, and the industry to collaborate and build bridges to prepare students for the future workforce. He also called for the removal of bureaucracy and outdated educational methods, advocating

for a more flexible, technology-driven approach. Mittal highlighted an interesting example of a chauffeur who, despite having no formal education, had a deep understanding of complex scientific concepts due to his curiosity and self-driven learning. He defined skilling in three ways: learning new skills, upskilling within the same domain, and reskilling for a career change. Mr. Mittal also discussed SAP's approach to hybrid learning and self-paced modules, enabling students to ignite their interest in new technologies. He suggested that counseling sessions should be introduced to provide clarity to students, parents, and industry stakeholders about the realities of the workforce. In his closing remarks, he urged educational institutions to embrace the National Education Policy (NEP), which has been discussed for years but needs to be implemented more effectively.

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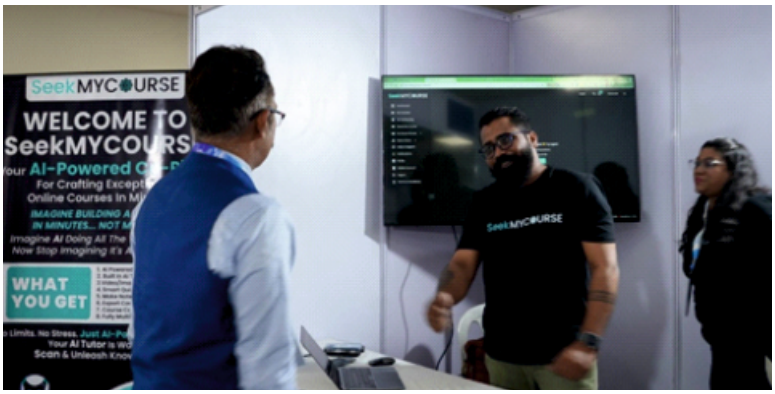

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505, A-Wing, MCCIA Trade Tower, 403, Senapati Bapat Road, Pune-411 016 INDIA.
Phone : +91 20 2570 9000 | Email : info@mcciapune.com

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