

As India celebrates 60 years of independence, *Blueprint* explores

As a new term begins in Oxford, in India applicants for next year's undergraduate courses are being interviewed in Delhi and Bangalore. The University is keen to attract students from the subcontinent, who have traditionally looked to the US and Australia for overseas study, and Oxford tutors travel to India (and, indeed, to some other parts of the world) to interview applicants who cannot reasonably be expected to come to Oxford for the purpose.

The University's interest in things Indian goes back five centuries (see timeline). The number of Indian nationals studying at Oxford has steadily increased and today stands at 257. In addition, research collaboration between Oxford and India is flourishing in a number of areas across the University.

One such area is theoretical physics. 'India has built up a strong position in theoretical sciences since independence, so as to be arguably the most influential in Asia today – leading Indian research centres now attract back young physicists from prestigious institutions abroad,' says Oxford-based Professor Subir Sarkar, who is one of the drivers of a research network between Oxford physicists and several high-profile Indian institutions. 'When we started our collaboration, our philosophy was to work from the ground up and establish links on an individual level, so that we ensure that mutual interest is maintained.'

What started as personal research links

Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, in conversation with the Chancellor after receiving his Honorary Degree of Doctor of Civil Law in July 2005



Rob Judges

has now developed into an Oxford-India network in theoretical physics which includes the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics in Kolkata and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Mumbai. The network has been funded by the John Fell OUP Research Fund, which was set up specifically to foster creativity and a proactive approach to research opportunities.

'We could shoot neutrinos through the Earth from the proposed UK Neutrino Factory in Oxfordshire to the India-based Neutrino Observatory'

'Both sides benefit from the collaboration,' Professor Sarkar says. 'We have now created the momentum which allows us to exchange graduate students and the possibilities for cooperation are endless. In the long term, we may even benefit from the physical distance between India and Oxford because we could, for example, shoot neutrinos through the Earth from the proposed UK Neutrino Factory in Oxfordshire to the India-based Neutrino Observatory. One of the amazing discoveries of recent years is that neutrinos change from one kind into another as they travel through space and it turns out that 7,000 km is a "magic baseline" for testing certain fundamental laws of Nature in these ghostly transmutations.'

Another recently established research network focuses on a pressing health problem. 'It's estimated that by 2020, India will see about three million cancer cases a year – that's 17.5 per cent of all cancer cases worldwide,' says Professor David Kerr, Rhodes Professor of Cancer Therapeutics and Clinical Pharmacology at Oxford, who leads the India-Oxford Cancer Network. Established in 2005 with initial infrastructure support from GlaxoSmithKline, the network includes leading senior oncologists at six Indian cancer centres and is the first collaboration of its kind. It works closely with other collaborators in running feasible and appropriate trials within India.

The network evaluates new treatments for a range of cancer types including gall bladder, liver and cervical cancers, which are more prevalent in India than in Europe or North America. It aims to help move novel anti-cancer therapeutics from the laboratory into the clinic and to test their promise in



The India connection

each stage of clinical trials. It also helps Indian colleagues to better utilise their skills and expertise in research areas that were once dominated by their pharmaceutical colleagues in the west.

According to Professor Kerr, 'The network has achieved its initial goals and has also developed a successful training programme for its members. Dedicated trial coordinators have been introduced at each site and the network has succeeded in earning the respect of both the Indian regulatory authority and the Indian government. The success has been encouraging and we are now looking to increase the current six sites to approximately ten.'

In the world of business, March 2006 saw the launch of the annual Oxford-India Business Forum, organised by the Saïd Business School to debate current economic issues. Alongside Oxford's Chancellor, Lord Patten, speakers at the inaugural event in New Delhi included Montek Singh, Deputy Chairman of the Indian Planning Commission, and Mr Naresh Chandra, former Indian Ambassador to the USA. The second meeting, held in Mumbai earlier this

some current collaborations with the University of Oxford



year and again attended by the Chancellor, concentrated on new approaches to development in India.

The complex world of India today is also set to become an area of graduate study with the creation of an Oxford MSc in Contemporary India. The course, which the School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies will launch next academic year, is aimed mainly at those with a good first degree in social sciences (though others with relevant qualifications and experience will be considered).

'I want to do everything in my power to dynamise the study of contemporary India' says Professor Barbara Harriss-White,

- ▶ Oxford is one of the leading centres in the west for the study of India
- ▶ Famous Oxford alumni from India include two Prime Ministers (Dr Manmohan Singh and Indira Gandhi), one President (Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan) and two Nobel Prize winners (Amartya Sen and V S Naipaul)
- ▶ The Rhodes Trust offers four Rhodes scholarships to Indian nationals per year
- ▶ 2007 marks the 60th year of Indian Rhodes Scholars coming to Oxford
- ▶ Oxford houses the largest collection of Sanskrit manuscripts outside India

Professor of Development Studies, who has been instrumental in creating the course. 'I think this degree is unique. Our students will learn about India's achievements in parallel to learning about the country's persistent problems: it's the largest democracy, a regional superpower and has had great IT business success on the one hand, but there is political violence, widespread environmental degradation and human development failure on the other.' She adds: 'We will teach the students "real knowledge" about contemporary India but also the social sciences skills necessary to analyse the theoretical foundations of that knowledge.'

Dr Heather Bell, Director of International Strategy at Oxford, is excited about the array of activities: 'It's terrific to see such momentum being built in our engagement with India across the University. There is so much going on: we also have a new MPhil in Modern South Asian Studies, which enrolls its first students in October; Vinay Menon and our colleagues at the Business School are currently working hard to create an India Business Research Centre; Maria Misra, who leads the overseas interviewing effort, has a new book out on the history of India; and Stephen Kennedy continues his longstanding collaboration with southern Indian academics on the causes of endometriosis...It's an exciting time.'

In a Radio 4 interview a little while ago, Chancellor Chris Patten summed up Oxford's

Oxford-India timeline

- 1579** Father Thomas Stephens, from New College, is the first recorded Englishman to arrive in India. The letters he sent his family from India lay the foundation of the Anglo-Indian literature
- 1630** William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury and graduate of St John's College, Oxford, presents an album of Mughal paintings to the Bodleian Library. They are the first Indian paintings given to any Western library
- 1681** The East India Company supports four scholars per year at the University
- 1832** The Boden Chair of Sanskrit is endowed by Colonel Joseph Boden of the East India Company
- 1871** The first Indian students come to Oxford when entry is no longer confined to members of the Church of England
- 1883** The Indian Institute at Oxford University is founded. The Indian Institute Library, part of the Bodleian Library, is founded three years later
- 1908** The number of Indian students rises sharply as they are exempted from examinations in Latin and Greek
- 1912** Oxford University Press India is established
- 1936** The first Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics is appointed
- 1961** The Indian Institute's teaching facilities move to the new Oriental Institute and its art holdings go to the newly created Department of Eastern Art in the Ashmolean a year later
- 1982** The Asian Studies Centre is founded at St Antony's College
- 2002** Oxford's first Professor of Indian History and Culture is appointed

attraction to India and vice versa: 'We do have to invest if we want to be a significant player in India's future, and if we want India to be a significant player in our future. We both stand to gain from this. We stand to gain in investment, in high-tech R&D, and we stand to gain by attracting a lot of very bright young people – as bright as they come.'

The visit this month by Oxford tutors to India should help achieve these aims.