

QS 2026 rankings: Reputation of Indian graduates among employers, faculty citations boost Indian HEIs

India's higher education system sees significant growth in QS rankings, with IITs leading the charge and private institutions rising.

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A total of three institutions ranked among the top 200, which include IIT Delhi, IIT Bombay, and IIT Madras. | Photo: Official website of IIT Delhi

In the QS 2026 edition, 54 Indian institutions were listed, a significant increase from 46 in 2025 and 45 in 2024. This represents a substantial 390% increase from just 11 ranked universities in 2014, positioning India as the fastest-growing higher education system

among G20 countries. India is now the fourth most represented nation globally, trailing only the United States (192), the United Kingdom (90), and Mainland China (72).

The inclusion of eight new Indian universities in the 2026 edition, more than any other country, further underscores a broader institutional momentum within the nation's higher education sector. While the total number of ranked institutions has increased, number of Indian universities in the global top 500 in 2026 dropped marginally from 12 in 2025 to 11 in 2026.

India demonstrated unique strengths in areas such as Employer Reputation and Citations per Faculty, where its average scores surpass those of several established higher education systems like the U.K. and U.S. Despite these strengths, India lags significantly in attracting international students, a critical component of global competitiveness.

QS Ranking methodology

QS 2026 ranking framework assesses universities across five broad lenses: Research and Discovery (50%), Employability and Outcomes (20%), Learning Experience (10%), Global Engagement (15%), and Sustainability (5%). Academic Reputation and Citations per Faculty constitute the indicators of Research and Discovery, whereas Employer Reputation and Employment Outcomes i.e. employability of the graduates are the indicators for Employability and Outcomes.

Learning Experience reflects the overall learning environment and support provided to students. Global Engagement captures the internationalisation efforts of higher education institutions, including their global outlook in terms of foreign students, staff, and research collaborations. Sustainability was introduced in 2024, which provides insight into institutions' commitment to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors, including the impact of academic research on Sustainable Development Goals.

Top performers in 2026

A total of three institutions ranked among the top 200, which include IIT Delhi, IIT Bombay, and IIT Madras. About 10 institutions ranked among the top 500, which include nine centrally funded institutions and one state government institution, Anna University

IIT Delhi achieved its best-ever showing at a joint 123rd position globally, marking a consistent climb from 150th in 2025 and 197th in 2024. This steady rise is attributed to strong scores in key indicators, including Employer Reputation (50th globally), Citations per Faculty (86th), Academic Reputation (142nd), and Sustainability (172nd).

While IIT Bombay experienced a slight slip to 129th this year from its all-time best rank of 118 in 2025. IIT Madras recorded one of the most dramatic improvements, leaping 47 places to reach the 180th spot, marking its first entry into the global top 200. Other institutions demonstrating strong performance include IIT Kharagpur (215), IISc Bangalore (219), and IIT Kanpur (222). Non-IITs in top 500 include Delhi University (328) and Anna University (465).

Break-up of the institutions ranked in 2026

Central government-funded institutions, particularly the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), consistently serve as the primary drivers of India's performance in the QS top 500 rankings, with the lion's share of 12 out of 13. However, share of private institutions is substantial, with about 40% in 2026. Not only that, seven out of eight new entrants in 2026 are the private ones. The increasing number of private institutions not only participating but also significantly improving their positions in the QS rankings points to a fundamental and dynamic shift in India's higher education landscape.

Analysis of the Indian institutions ranked in QS 2026					
Category	Ranked	Better than 2025	Worse than 2025	Same as 2025	New entrant
Centre	24	8	7	8	1
State	7	5	0	1	0
Private	23	9	2	5	7
Total	54	22	9	14	8

Break-up of Indian institutions QS 2026-rank wise				
Category	Ranked	Top 200	Top 500	501 and beyond
Centre	24	3	9	15
State	7	0	1	6
Private	23	0	0	23
Total	54	3	10	44

Comparative Strengths of Indian Institutions

India demonstrated a commendable performance in Employer Reputation, with an average score of 24.9, ahead of China (23.7), Finland (23.1), and France (21.5). This suggests that Indian graduates are highly regarded by employers. India also exhibited a strong showing in research impact. Its average Citations per Faculty score of 43.7 places it ahead of Germany (41.6), the U.K. (39.2), the U.S. (38.1), and Ireland (36.8). This highlights the increasing quality and recognition of research originating from Indian institutions.

Areas of relative weaknesses

A substantial 78% of Indian universities experienced a decline with regard to International Students Ratio, and no Indian institution ranks within the global top 500 for attracting international students. India faces a structural challenge with regard to Faculty-Student Ratio, with only 0. P. Jindal Global University, being an outlier in the global top 350.

The U.K., with an average score of 26.7, also lags behind top performers like Norway (73.7), Switzerland (63.8), and Sweden (61.8), suggesting that resource allocation for teaching staff remains a challenge for many nations. India is showing promising performance in sustainability, outperforming China and Brazil in Knowledge Exchange, Environmental Sustainability, and Environmental Research. However, it lags behind South Africa in overall sustainability impact.

Conclusion

An analysis of Indian institutions' performance in the QS World University Rankings in the last three years reveals significant growth in their global engagement, marked by a substantial increase in the number of ranked institutions and notable improvements in key performance indicators, particularly in research and employer reputation.

The evolving landscape, characterised by the continued dominance of central institutions and the dynamic emergence of private players, underscores a diversifying and maturing higher education ecosystem. However, in order to improve its global standing, it has to enhance internationalisation initiatives to attract more foreign students, while continuing to leverage its existing strengths in research output, impact, and employer reputation.

(Dr. O R S Rao is the Chancellor of the ICFAI University, Sikkim). Views are personal

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