

Diversity and inclusivity

IIM Bangalore's policies offer key insights into providing equitable opportunities to all

RISHIKESHA T. KRISHNAN

India has a diverse population. Unfortunately, certain social structures have prevented thousands of individuals from realising their potential, and the country from benefiting from their skills and talent. The government has tried to remedy this situation through constitutional and statutory provisions for reservation quotas, but as organisations the world over have realised, such efforts to enhance equity and diversity need to be matched by a steely resolve to facilitate genuine inclusion.

The experience at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB) with respect to students with disability is instructive in this regard. The institute admitted students with disabilities even before the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 was introduced. But it soon realised that there is much more to inclusivity.

In a push towards greater inclusivity, in 2009, with generous support from Mphasis, IIMB set up a dedicated Office of Disability Services to act as a nodal support point for students with disability, in an effort to study the individual needs of each student and provide the required accommodations proactively.

Modified approach

Inclusivity also means rethinking the conventional notions of fairness in examinations. Giving a student with serious visual impairment an examination paper based on graphs is an unfair evaluation of her understanding of the fundamental concepts an institute may wish to impart. To that extent, sensitisation workshops with faculty (now a regular feature) have changed the approach to the entire evaluation process.

The IIMB's efforts have been recognised by the prestigious NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Award for pioneering work in promoting accessibility and universal design and ensuring a life of equality and dignity for students with disabilities.

But apart from just disability, the institute is committed to all forms of diversity and inclusivity – IIM Banga-

lore has a good record in both complying with government-mandated admission quotas for SC, ST, and OBC candidates to the flagship two-year postgraduate programme in management leading to an MBA degree, and in facilitating the placement of all graduates in good roles.

Other dimensions

Today, IIMB is applying the same integrated approach that it followed for students with disability to other dimensions of diversity. One such challenge – the recruitment of faculty within certain categories – was identified in recent reports of *The Hindu*. To this effect, the institute is balancing the addressal of two laws – the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act 2019 and the Indian Institutes of Management Act, 2017. The latter recognises IIMs as Institutions of National Importance which must aspire for global standards.

While the institute has been successful in hiring four excellent faculty members from the SC and ST categories over the last year, there is a serious shortage of qualified candidates from reserved categories in certain areas and disciplines, which impedes hiring efforts. While an obvious step is to focus on the admission of high-potential students from reserved categories to doctoral programmes, alumni discussions reveal that doctoral studies are often not the first preference for students of merit from these communities. Their priority is to rapidly ascend the ladder of economic stability, for which a reliable pathway is the MBA degree.

Given this insight, IIMB launched the N.S. Ramaswamy Pre-doctoral Programme in 2019. This internally-funded academic and mentoring initiative selects around 10 candidates from under-privileged categories every year and helps them prepare for admission to doctoral studies.

As a globally-ranked institution committed to excellence in management and entrepreneurship, IIMB continues to strive for a multi-dimensional and integrated approach to diversity and inclusion.

—————
The author is the Director of IIM Bangalore