

# 'Job readiness of engineering graduates has improved'

Education-software sector collaboration on curriculum paying off, say tech biggies

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Are six lakh fresh engineers passing out this year better prepared for employment in the Indian IT industry than the batches of the last few years? Bellwethers Infosys and Cognizant — who together employ over 2.3 lakh workers globally — say 'job readiness' of engineering graduates has definitely improved. However, this is more visible among students passing out of engineering colleges that have actively collaborated with software companies on the curriculum front.

"Today IT companies are doing high levels of investment in fresh graduates even before they join the rolls...and hence, if one out of 10 fresh recruits were 'industry ready' earlier, then the number is more like about three out of ten now", said Mr Lakshmi Narayanan, Vice-Chairman of Nasdaq-listed Cognizant Technology Solutions. Since the IT industry operates a model where every manpower resource brings in additional revenues, software

companies comb campuses each year in search of fresher hiring. And they recruit in large numbers. Infosys, for instance, has made 26,000 offers in campuses for fiscal 2012 alone.

In the last one year, Infosys has conducted around 600 programmes (with technical colleges) such as guest lectures, technical training programmes, workshops and company visits with more than 100 colleges that it recruits from, said Ms Nandita Gurjar, HR head of Infosys Technologies.

"As part of our 'Campus Connect' programme, Infosys also provides assistance to faculty in order to introduce industry-oriented courses. Students who go through our programmes are ahead of the curve as they acquire a good understanding of the skillsets required in the IT industry", added Ms Gurjar.

Mr Ganesh Natarajan, Chief Executive Officer and Vice Chairman of Zensar Technologies, believes students from 'industry-ready' institutions can become billable faster and need not sit through the entire duration



of the three-month training.

"We have had several students who have been put on software projects after just three weeks of training because they already had significant exposure from the educational institution itself," said Mr Natarajan, adding that his company has formed collaborations with about 15 colleges across the country.

## POCKETS OF GOOD WORK

But while corporates are doing their bit in building skillsets for the future, several industry officials, especially from smaller companies, rue that the improvement is not across the board. Nasscom estimates that 25 per cent of overall graduates are employable in the IT-BPO sector. The sector is investing \$1.4

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billion to convert 'trainable talent' to becoming 'industry ready'.

"There are pockets of good work done, but overall there has been little progress on employability front," Mr Jaswinder Ahuja, Managing Director of Cadence Design Systems pointed out.

Cadence inducts interns from nearly half a dozen engineering institutes and after their six-month stint, assesses their performance to decide whether a candidate should be converted into a regular employee.

According to Nasscom President, Mr Som Mittal, while the quality of enrolment at engineering colleges is good, it is the lack of faculty and old curriculum (due to the rapid technological changes) that pose a challenge.

"Our industry will have to pick up the best and the brightest, and train them. But to say that we are short of resources is wrong, given the large output from engineering colleges. Yes, the quality can be improved in coming years through steps like including foundation skills as part of curriculum, creation of 3-9 months specialisation programmes, and early exposure to industry domains," Mr Mittal said.

Mr Vishnu Dusad, CEO of Nucleus Software, feels that colleges are still unable to attract quality faculty because of their unwillingness to offer attractive remunerations. Mr Dusad laments that "even summer internships are not taken too seriously, either by students or by companies in many cases".