

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Govt plans ₹100 cr ad campaign to promote vocational education

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The government is expected to launch a ₹100 crore advertising campaign to popularize vocational education, which is considered less prestigious, and prepare candidates for jobs in industries that are facing a shortage of skilled workers.

Ads would be placed in print, television and on the internet—particularly social networking websites—to encourage youngsters to train to become plumbers and automobile technicians, among other things, said Dilip Chenoy, managing director at National Skill Development Corp. (NSDC). The government aims to impart such skills to around 500 million people by 2020.

India's automobile sector alone faces a shortage of 300,000 skilled workers, according to a KPMG survey released last year.

Vocational education would bring significant change in the job market by increasing employment and raising productivity, said Narayanan Ramaswamy, executive director (education) at KPMG.

Another NSDC official said people assume vocational education is for poor students and may not be rewarding enough. This attitude needs to change, he said, requesting anonymity because he is not authorized to speak to the media.

NSDC is a public-private partnership between the Central government and industry lobbies such as the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham) and

National Association of Software and Service Companies (Nasscom).

"Our partners have indicated the need to adopt a communication medium to improve the acceptability (of vocational education)," Chenoy said.

The ad campaign is likely to start by September, said the anonymous NSDC official mentioned above. NSDC is yet to award the contract for the campaign, but has met at least three advertising agencies. Their presentations have been forwarded to the Prime Minister's Skill Development Council, he said.

He said youngsters spend a lot of time on social media, or websites such as Facebook, Orkut and Twitter, and advertising on these websites would be particularly useful in catching their attention.

"Any effort to reach out to the masses needs a sustained campaign," said Sudhir Sahni, president, advertisement at the agency Ogilvy and Mather. He said his company has given a presentation on the subject.

"Now the number of institutes offering vocational education is more than students going there. So it's a supply-demand issue—maybe because people don't think skill education is exciting or fruitful," said Sahni, who declined to give details of the proposal.

A campaign can change the attitude and tell people that vocational education can provide them better employment than the usual academic line, he said.

Though NSDC has signed agreements with at least 23 organizations to promote skill development across India, less than 25,000 students have received training in the last one year, according to government data.