

Gearing up for BPO work

WHEN the BPO industry took off about 10 years ago and offered jobs to graduates, many young people treated it as a stopgap career opportunity, working with them for a few months or years and then moving on to more aspirational careers.

This has changed as noted in the words of PG Raghuraman, lead executive for Accenture's Delivery Centres for BPO in India: "Having seen this industry mature over the past eight to 10 years, today there is a focus given to the BPO sector and it is not just seen as an alternate opportunity but as a first option for young people."

Recognising this change in mindset, both Accenture and Genpact decided to give back to the industry in the form of training & education alliances with Indira Gandhi National Open University (Ignou) and NIIT respectively. These alliances will aid all young people interested in BPO as a career and not just those

BPO employees.

The Genpact-NIIT programme has a slightly different format and runs for about three months. NIIT brings an IT-training platform & distribution and Genpact provides the subject matter expertise and the context of the environment as it stands today. Says Anju Talwar, senior vice-president & business leader at Genpact, "The training in the form of a bridge course will focus on voice, soft skills, professional skills, business etiquette, and also build IT awareness in MS Office and so forth.

The three main areas are soft skills, finance & accounting and voice communications. Students can also choose a mix in courses and combine areas such as communication and finance & accounting. To enrol for the Genpact endorsed course called NIIT Uniqua, one has to be a graduate and it is available to students in smaller cities. In addition to BPO technology services, functional and sec-



pursuing careers with Accenture's and Genpact's BPOs.

The Ignou tie-up offers students a six-month diploma through a central university under the ministry of human resource development, government of India. Either 12th graders or college graduates can avail this option. The programme is expected to be especially popular in Tier 2, 3, and 4 cities. This programme will be available in approximately 44 centres spread over 27 cities with 90 faculty members especially trained to roll out the programme. The first batch is scheduled to start in February 2009. The idea is to make these young people readily employable at BPOs. The course will use classroom learning, self learning and eLearning tools, paying attention to both process and industry specialisation.

According to Accenture, the vision is to grow this programme to encompass technology, management and leadership training for

toral classes in supply chain, and insurance & banking will also be offered. As of December 2008, 12 centres offering the NIIT Uniqua are up and running across Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities. The plan for the next 2 to 3 years is to offer this programme in 250 NIIT centres. Currently 30 batches are being run and the first batch graduates by the end of January.

Talwar adds, "The alliance with NIIT will help prepare a critical mass of people for a BPO career. Our experience found that out of all the non-engineering graduates we interview, only 10-15% were hireable for our needs. Hopefully this bridge course will increase that number significantly. Our employees are deeply involved in that they oversee the training and ensure quality control." Interested and admitted students will need to pay about Rs 20,000 to attend this course. The next phase of the roll-out will be to offer the course in the Philippines and China at NIIT centres.