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Cialfo raises pre-Series A funding; plans to enter China, India

Edutech firm, Cialfo will be using the funds for product development, recruitment and expansion outside Singapore



Cialfo, a Singapore-based education technology (edtech) [startup](#), has raised an undisclosed amount in pre-Series A funding. The investment was led by

Singapore-based Govin Capital, who partnered and encouraged former Chairman of Singtel — Koh Boon Hwee, DBS Bank and Singapore Airlines to co-invest in Cialfo.

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The startup plans to use the funding for product development, recruitment and expansion into high-priority growth markets China, India, and Southeast Asia.

Co-founded by Rohan Pasari and Stanley Chia in 2012, Cialfo aims at making tertiary education more accessible to students. It does this by streamlining the US and UK university application process with a unique combination of an online platform, together with expert mentoring. With a current team strength of 15, the company is aiming to grow to about 30 in the next three to six months.

Anand Govindaluri, Founder and CEO of Govin Capital & Board Director, Cialfo, observes an increasing trend in the number of Singaporeans and students in Asia vying for overseas ivy-league universities. Having worked with thousands of students in Singapore, and across Asia, he feels that Cialfo understands the pain points faced by educational institutes, consultancies, and students. These all have helped Cialfo to “build innovative platforms and tools that are seeing rapid uptake within the education ecosystem.”

“We are delighted to partner with veteran investor Koh Boon Hwee to make Cialfo a world-class local brand in EdTech. I also thank The FundedHere, Singapore for introducing Cialfo to us,” said Govindaluri.

The startup claims to have placed over 500 students into their “dream colleges” including Harvard, Stanford, LSE and Kings College London, and has had over 10,000 students using its platform over the last three and a half years for their college applications. Cialfo says that 97 percent of the students were admitted to top 50 US universities; and 91 percent into top 30 UK universities.

New cities, better product



Rohan Pasari, Co-founder & CEO,
Cialfo

With its pre-Series A funding, Cialfo is now looking to expand its Asia footprint and “accelerate through strategic partnerships” beyond Singapore and Southeast Asia. So which cities are on the radar? According to Pasari, who also is the CEO of the company, Cialfo is a B2B SaaS solution and is not limited by its reach of certain cities, and does not make investments on any specific city.

“However, we are concentrating our efforts in Shanghai and Beijing in China, New Delhi and Mumbai in India, and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam,” he said.

Cialfo's solutions are currently available across web and mobile (iOS, Android), and claims to be working with some of the leading private college counselors and high schools across Singapore, China, Vietnam, and India. “We will now reach more

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students, tapping into the multi-billion dollar a year opportunity of helping Asian students find their ideal university,” Pasari added.

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Moving beyond US and UK, Cialfo is planning to include universities from Singapore, Canada, Europe, Australia, and Hong Kong in its Phase 2 plan. Institutes from India and China are planned for Phase 3.

Let's talk on FB and WeChat

The company is also working on a [Facebook messenger bot](#) that gives user information about college applications and helps users shortlist colleges based on their profile. The feature, according to the company is already there and is being tested before it decides to make it live.

Cialfo is also working on integrating its platform through [WeChat](#) for users in China.

Besides, it is also integrating a discovery portal for skill development and learning opportunities into the platform by connecting supplemental education providers across the region.

Brexit slaying opportunities in UK?

Cialfo stated that the annual market for Asian students enrolling into US and UK universities is pegged at US\$4 billion. With Brexit leading to the depreciation of the Pound, the startup believes that this is good news for the prospective Asian students at UK universities as they might be looking at a “5-10% discount on higher education” in the UK.

Furthermore, the company explains that university admissions is a very competitive process where one has to prove his/her caliber over other applicants. However, there are a few ways that Brexit could influence this dynamic too.

“Fewer EU students will probably apply from continental countries. Many students in countries like Holland and Germany are already expressing serious concern over Brexit, and the resulting decline in EU applicants will probably leave more room for Asian ones,” the company said in a blogpost.

Cialfo also believes that the quality of job placements might deteriorate. This undoubtedly will lead to a

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“Big international firms might vacate London to retain access to the single market, damaging the many courses that include a “sandwich year” – a year of practical exposure. Moreover, research grants from the EU will not outlive Brexit negotiations, dealing a blow to courses and universities enriched them,” read the blogpost.

US getting Trump-ed?

The situation in US universities might also quiver considering that US is up for elections and is in a scenario where Trump becomes the President. Trump, in his campaigns, has not been extremely clear in his change in policies for higher education and/or international enrollments. But Cialfo believes that US will still remain the No 1 choice for most families in Asia to send their children to study. So waiting remains to be the only option!

“If he does follow his rhetoric on being anti-immigration, it may become more difficult for foreigners to find jobs, which may lead to a drop in applications to the US. However, he is an acute businessman and he understands to stay competitive. The US has to continue attracting the best talent globally. In my opinion, it is unlikely that he will adopt policies that lead to the best global talent going elsewhere,” Pasari told **Techseen**.

Given the current scenario, it might seem that the non-EU citizens have a better edge to work in UK, since the privilege of being in the EU no longer gives you automatic access to the British labor market. Also there are chances of tighter immigration laws by a more native UK and US government. Clearly, a lot of companies might well try their hands outside the two countries, soaking them dry of good jobs for foreigners. And if the jobs go down, education would suffer too!

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