

Audit of overseas provision, Malaysia

Overview report

September 2010

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Introduction

Many United Kingdom (UK) institutions offer their higher education programmes to students wishing to study them outside the UK, through collaborations with other organisations, overseas campuses or distance learning. This is a significant and growing area of activity: data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency shows that about 390,000 students were studying entirely overseas for higher education level awards during the 2008-09 academic year.

Institutions are responsible for the academic standards of their awards, whether delivered inside or outside the UK, or in partnership with other organisations. Through a process called Audit of overseas provision, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) reviews both the partnership arrangements that UK institutions' have made with organisations in other countries to deliver UK programmes, and programmes delivered on UK institutions overseas campuses. QAA reviews 'distance learning' programmes as part of our activities within the UK.

It is important to note that QAA does not review or accredit partner institutions outside the UK. We do, however, provide guidance for UK higher education institutions for selecting partners and agents through our *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*.

Audit of overseas provision is carried out according to the same principles and processes as Institutional audit. It is a peer-review, evidence-based process in four stages: the production, by the institution of a briefing paper; a two-day visit of an audit team to the institution to meet staff and students; a one-day visit of the same audit team to the partner institution or campus overseas; and the production by the team of an audit report on its findings.

We conduct Audit of overseas provision on a country by country basis. Some institutions with provision in the country in question may not be audited, but may take part in an information-gathering exercise which feeds into that country's overview report, or into case studies exploring particular aspects of overseas partnership provision.

Audit of overseas provision: partnerships

In 2009-10, QAA conducted an Audit of overseas provision in Malaysia. Ten partnerships were audited. These partnerships were:

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At the same time as conducting the 10 audits, QAA also researched and developed six case studies based on six other UK institutions' provision in Malaysia. The case studies concerned:

- Malaysia-Imperial Doctoral Programme
- Keele University and KDU College, Malaysia
- University of Lancaster and Sunway University College, Malaysia
- University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus
- Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia
- University of Strathclyde and International Medical University, Malaysia

The QAA team comprised six auditors and three QAA assistant directors. Visits to the UK institutions were made between November 2009 and February 2010. The visit to Malaysia took place between 12 and 24 March 2010. The team was based in Kuala Lumpur for the whole trip (reflecting the concentration of UK provision in and around the city), with the exception of a short visit to Kuching in East Malaysia by two auditors and one assistant director. The schedule included visits relating to both audits and case studies. The 10 audit reports and six case studies were published on the QAA website in September 2010.

This overview, as well as briefly introducing each of the audits and case studies, gives a short description of higher education in Malaysia at the time of the audit, so as to give a better understanding of the context within which the UK institutions are operating. It also provides some analysis of the extent of activity by UK institutions in Malaysia, based on survey results obtained before the audit. The general themes emerging from the audit are highlighted and the report ends with some conclusions about the effective management of overseas provision.

Higher education in Malaysia

According to UNESCO's *Global Education Digest 2009*, there are about 750,000 students enrolled in higher education institutions in Malaysia. The institutions can be broadly divided into two types: public and private. Public institutions, which comprise 20 public universities, 27 polytechnics and 59 community colleges, are government-funded; private institutions, which include universities, university colleges and colleges, receive no public funding. The UNESCO Digest states that two-thirds of students in Malaysia are enrolled in public institutions.

Executive responsibility for higher education in Malaysia resides with the Ministry of Higher Education, which was separated from the Ministry of Education and established as a full ministry under a Federal Government Minister in 2004. Among the various departments and agencies under the purview of the Ministry of Higher Education is the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). The MQA is the single higher education quality assurance agency in the country, whose scope covers both public and private higher education providers. The MQA is responsible for accrediting higher education programmes and for maintaining a definitive list of accredited

mechanisms. To achieve self-accrediting status, the institution must undergo an institutional audit. If it is successful, all qualifications it offers are automatically recorded on the MQR. At the time of the audit, the MQA was conducting its first round of institutional audits.

Provision in Malaysia by UK higher education institutions

In spring 2009, QAA conducted a survey of all UK higher education institutions to establish the nature and extent of their provision in Malaysia. For this purpose, 'provision in Malaysia' was defined as educational provision leading to an award (or to specific credit toward an award) delivered and/or supported and/or assessed either on campuses owned by UK institutions or through collaboration with a partner organisation. Thus, provision deemed to be within the scope of the survey included:

- programmes studied on a campus owned and run by a UK institution (campus)
- programmes studied entirely in Malaysia with a partner institution (in-country)
- programmes studied partially with a partner institution in Malaysia and partially in the UK (twinning)
- programmes studied with a partner institution in Malaysia that lead to a qualification from the Malaysian institution, giving entry with advanced standing to a programme offered by the UK institution (articulation)
- distance-learning (including e-learning) programmes, offered by the UK institution to students in Malaysia with learning support provided by a Malaysian partner (distance learning).

Provision involving non award-bearing programmes, such as contribution by a UK institution to the design or teaching, or training or continuing professional development courses, fell outside the scope of the survey, as did collaborations solely involving research, without leading to the award of any associated qualification.

Results of the survey

Scale of activity

171 UK institutions responded to our survey of provision in Malaysia. 72 of these institutions had provision within the scope outlined above. They reported 260 separate collaborative links with 107 different Malaysian partner organisations.¹

In addition, two of the 72 institutions confirmed that they had, or were developing, campuses in Malaysia. One of the campuses is a multi-faculty campus currently providing programmes across a broad range of subjects; the other is a single faculty medical campus due to open in 2011. Neither of these institutions had collaborative links with partners in Malaysia.

25 UK institutions (or 15 per cent of respondents) had links with only one partner in Malaysia, but others had multiple partners, with one university having partnerships with 19 separate Malaysian organisations.

¹ In Malaysia there are several private educational conglomerates. The exact number of partners depends on whether one regards these conglomerates as a single organisation or counts each of their subsidiaries separately. For the purposes of this survey we have tended to regard conglomerates as single organisations.

129 of the 260 collaborative links concerned just one programme, 95 of the links concerned two to five programmes, and 36 covered more than five.

Figure 1: links per HEI

We analysed the 260 collaborative links to determine the subjects being taught. Most of the links were within a single subject area, even where there was more than one programme involved. Where a single link covered more than one subject, we tried to ascertain the subjects involved.

The survey showed that most of the collaborations were with partners in and around Malaysia's capital and largest city, Kuala Lumpur. Kuala Lumpur itself accounted for 50 of the partner organisations reported, and the neighbouring state of Selangor for a further 26 partners. The only state without a partner organisation was Kedah, in the north-west of the country.

Figure 5: location of partner institutions

The audits in brief

Abertay University

Abertay University's partnership with the Systematic Educational Group International (SEGi) dates from the late 1980s and remains the University's most significant link in terms of student numbers and the range of programmes. It provides for the delivery of the whole of the University's BA (Hons) Accounting with Finance, BA (Hons) Business Administration and the BA (Hons) Marketing and Business. The audit identified several strengths in the link, including the use of the virtual learning environment to promote a common learning experience between students in the UK and Malaysia, and the staff development activities at SEGi. It also suggested that the University could improve the provision of feedback to, and the gathering of feedback from, students.

Anglia Ruskin University

Anglia Ruskin University has several partnerships in Malaysia. The audit focused on its links with two subsidiaries of the Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, in Cyberjaya (near Kuala Lumpur) and Kuching in East Malaysia. The links allow for the provision in Malaysia of the whole of several undergraduate pathways in the areas of business and management, computing, and art and design, leading to the award of bachelor degrees by Anglia Ruskin. As of June 2010, there were 181 students enrolled on these pathways. The audit identified as strengths the clarity and comprehensiveness of Anglia Ruskin's policies and procedures on collaborative provision and the conscientious and thorough application of these. It also suggested that Anglia Ruskin might allow teaching staff in Malaysia to make greater use of local examples in assignments and that all students should receive written feedback on work sent to the UK for moderation and assessment.

University of Bolton

The University of Bolton's link with the Supply Chain Management Professional Centre is one of several 'flying faculty' partnerships in Malaysia, wherein university programmes are delivered by staff visiting from the UK. This particular link provides for the delivery of the whole of the MSc Supply Chain Management and the final year of the BSc Logistics and Supply Chain Management at the Centre's premises in Kuala Lumpur. Both programmes are part-time and aimed primarily at mature professionals working full-time in related occupations. The Centre provides some learning support from local tutors. The audit identified several strengths, including the due diligence process for selecting the partner and Bolton's oversight of admissions. It also suggested a number of points for further consideration, including the development of formal arrangements for inducting and reviewing local tutors and facilitating the greater involvement of students in programme management.

Heriot-Watt University

The link between Heriot-Watt University and Imperia Institute of Technology was established in 2002 when the University appointed the Institute as a centre for delivery of a postgraduate programme by distance learning offered by the University's School of the Built Environment. It is one of about 70 partnerships the University has with other institutions in the UK and overseas. The agreement has been renewed twice since 2002 and now covers four undergraduate and four postgraduate programmes in the areas of building and planning. In 2009-10 there were 135 undergraduates and 30 postgraduates. The audit identified several strengths, including the University's virtual learning environment, and the arrangements for programme monitoring, admissions and aH



Themes from the audits

Procedures for managing collaborative provision and written agreements

The security of academic standards and quality in collaborative provision relies heavily on clear and comprehensive procedures for quality assurance and a signed written agreement between the partners which makes it clear who is responsible for what. Many of the institutions involved in this audit attracted praise for the clarity and comprehensiveness of both their quality assurance procedures and written agreements, but not all were able to demonstrate complete adherence to these documents. There were two examples of rigorous programme approval processes being negated by the institutions allowing the programmes to begin without the conditions of approval having been met. In another case, a clear and comprehensive written agreement was drawn up at the start of the link, but the institution concerned then failed to maintain and update the agreement as the link developed, contrary to its own procedures, and it became outdated. Two other institutions allowed courses to begin before the written agreement underpinning the links were signed. These examples demonstrated that clear and comprehensive procedures and written agreements are necessary but not sufficient in themselves to guarantee the security of academic standards and quality. Proactive and ongoing adherence to procedures and agreements is also required.

Virtual learning environments

Virtual learning environments (VLEs) clearly come into their own when the partners are physically so distant from one another. Four of the links audited were praised for making effective use of VLEs in supporting students' learning. Some students also highlighted a secondary, though perhaps no less important, benefit of a common VLE: promoting a sense of belonging to the home institution. Where the functionality of VLEs extended to gathering student feedback or enabling local lecturers to see student marks, it also attracted praise from the students and staff met by the audit teams.

However, not all of the links had managed to provide access to electronic resources in Malaysia on the same basis as in the UK. For example, one institution was unable to give teaching staff at the partner access to the VLE owing to licensing restrictions. Another institution had tackled the same problem by appointing local staff as its honorary lecturers.

Partner relations

The value of a good relationship between the partners to the security of academic standards and quality can hardly be overstated. Many of the links demonstrated good relations and the audits identified a number of areas of good practice. These often centred on the relationship between the link tutor (or similar) in the UK institution and his or her counterpart in Malaysia; but there were other examples at other levels too, such as the representation of the partner on the home institution's Senate. In another example, the consequences of a weak relationship were seen in the partner's failure to fulfil many of the UK institution's requirements.

Professional accreditation

About half of the links audited encompassed provision eligible for accreditation by professional,

delivered overseas, did not explicitly do so. In another similar example, the UK institution and its partner offered conflicting views about whether, and to what extent, awards given to students studying in Malaysia enjoyed the same exemptions from professional examinations as the home provision. Given the potential implications of professional accreditation for students' career prospects, in both cases the auditors encouraged the institutions to clarify the status of their provision in Malaysia.

Providing feedback

Providing timely and effective feedback to students on their assessment is a challenge well-known by UK institutions. The evidence from the Malaysia audit suggests that the same challenge applies to collaborative provision. Indeed, in some cases, it is compounded by the institutions' need, as they see it, to safeguard standards in assessment by marking and moderating most, if not all, work in the UK. If marking and moderation takes a long time (for example because the institution is waiting for scripts from a cohort of students in the UK which is being taught to a slightly different schedule), and lecturers in Malaysia are not involved in that process, then students can be without feedback for several months - a period which may include more summative assessments. However, this was not always the case; the audit teams also encountered links where students reported timely and effective feedback, often provided through the VLE in written form.

Problems in the provision of feedback to partners in some cases also extended to staff. For instance, in one link where partner staff were responsible for first marking, they received little or no feedback on their performance despite the marks sometimes being changed in moderation. Another example concerned the UK institution's inability to provide any information to partner staff about the feedback the institution had received directly from its students in Malaysia. In these examples it was difficult to see how the partner staff could be expected to evaluate their own performance effectively.

Timing of examinations

Most of the links audited involved separate groups of students in the UK and Malaysia taking identical examinations on the same day as one another. However, of these links, only one held examinations simultaneously; the others held examinations at the same time, which, allowing for the time difference, meant that the UK students began their examinations several hours after their Malaysian counterparts had finished. Although there was no evidence of collusion between students in the separate countries, the potential remained and the auditors recommended to the institutions concerned that they reconsider their examination arrangements accordingly.

English language requirements

All of the provision encompassed by the audit was taught and assessed in English. In most cases this was manifest in strict language admissions requirements, which were rigorously applied; in others the requirements were less explicit, perhaps reflecting an assumption that applicants to these courses would be competent by virtue of holding entry awards also taught and assessed in English. However, many of the courses recruited students widely, including from outside Malaysia, and variances in student achievement between cohorts in the UK and Malaysia suggested that English language competence could not be assumed from prior qualifications. In this context, some institutions were encouraged to consider giving more explicit guidance to applicants about language requirements and provide support for the development of English once courses had begun.

External examining

The links tended to use the same external examiners for awards or modules with the same titles delivered in the UK, with the aim of maintaining consistency in academic standards. With one exception, there were no significant concerns about the external examining arrangements in any of the audits and one of the links was praised for the role of the external examiner in visiting Malaysia and talking to staff and students. Criticisms of external examining included ineffective measures to share external examiner reports with the partner's staff and students and not obliging the external examiner to comment separately on the provision at the partner and/or compare student achievement in the UK and Malaysia.

Involving partner staff in programme management

Many of the links audited had succeeded in establishing themselves as secure and viable partnerships and were now considering developing the relationship further. A common barrier to these aspirations appeared to be a reluctance or inability on the part of the UK institutions to involve staff and students in programme management; quality assurance procedures were applied diligently for the most part, but they were often seen by the partner as being done to them rather than with them. Examples included reports on student feedback not being shared by the UK institution and partner staff being neglected in the development of responses to external examiner reports and the compilation of annual monitoring and periodic review documentation. One of the links showed the benefits to the maturation of the relationship of promoting more of a dialogue between the partners around these issues.

The case studies in brief

Malaysia-Imperial Doctoral Programme

The Malaysia-Imperial Doctoral Programme involves Imperial College London and five of the leading research universities in Malaysia: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia; Universiti Malaya; Universiti Putra Malaysia; Universiti Sains Malaysia; and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. The

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whereby students are awarded two separate degrees or diplomas from the two partners for a single programme of study. The partnership has grown rapidly since its inception in 2006 and there are now around 1,000 students enrolled. In the UK there has been considerable debate on dual awards. This case study examines how Lancaster has responded to some of the complexities which a dual award arrangement creates, including the obligations of both partners to satisfy their responsibilities for quality assurance in their home jurisdictions.

University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus

University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus (UNMC) is the first campus of a British university in Malaysia. Founded in Kuala Lumpur in 2000, the campus moved to a purpose-built site on the outskirts of the capital in 2005, and today provides a broad range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in engineering, arts, education, social science and law. Student numbers have expanded rapidly from 650 in 2003 to 3,520 in 2009. The University regards UNMC, along with its other campuses in the UK and China, as an integral part of a single institution. Thus, programmes in Malaysia are provided and managed under a single quality assurance system. This has the great benefit of providing a consistent learning experience for students wherever they study. The University has also faced challenges in achieving accreditation from UK and Malaysian professional bodies where the requirements of these bodies differ. UNMC has recently achieved self-accrediting status from the Malaysian Qualifications Agency.

Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia (NUMED)

Newcastle University is establishing an international branch campus in Malaysia called Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia, or NUMed. NUMed will provide a range of biomedical and medical degree programmes beginning with the undergraduate medical degree programme, Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery. It is due to open in May 2011. The experience of creating NUMed has taught the University several important lessons in establishing a branch campus, including that expert professional guidance from outside the University, for instance on international law, is crucial, and that political support does not obviate the need to invest much time and effort in understanding and working through local quality assurance, approval and/or accreditation procedures.

University of Strathclyde

This case study focuses on the University of Strathclyde's partnership with the International Medical University in an integrated master's degree in pharmacy. The form of the degree has changed considerably since the mid-1990s. Currently, students spend two years studying in Malaysia and then transfer to the UK for two years. Approximately 100 students enrol annually. Pharmacy and pharmacy education are closely regulated both in the UK and Malaysia, and this case study looks at the challenges of developing collaborative links in subjects which are subject to such external scrutiny.

Reference

UNESCO, 2009, *Global Education Digest 2009*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics

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