

Review of UK Transnational Education in Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China)

Case Study: Coventry University, Sheffield Hallam University, and the School for Higher and Professional Education (SHAPE)

May 2018

Introduction

1 This case study examines the strengths and challenges in a transnational education partnership in which both sides of the agreement have multiple other partners. The case study is based on the partnerships of two UK universities with the School for Higher and Professional Education (SHAPE) in Hong Kong. The UK universities are Coventry University and Sheffield Hallam University.

2 With its origins dating back to the Coventry School of Design, which opened in 1843, Coventry University (CU) was formed from Coventry Polytechnic in 1992. It has four faculties that are made up of schools and departments and collectively run around 300 undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Across the University there are 11 research centres which specialise in different fields, from transport to peace studies. There are currently collaborative agreements in place allowing students to study for a Coventry award in 32 different countries.

3 Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) can also trace its history back to 1843, when the Sheffield School of Design was founded. Subsequently called Sheffield City Training College, then Sheffield City College of Education, and Sheffield College of Technology, it became Sheffield Polytechnic in 1969. Like Coventry University, Sheffield Hallam gained full university status in 1992. It now has four faculties and 18 academic departments. It has educational partners in a number of countries around the world, including China, Hong Kong, Germany, India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

4 The School for Higher and Professional Education (SHAPE) was established in Hong Kong in September 2003, as one of 13 member institutions of the Vocational Training Council (VTC) group, and was subsequently incorporated in 2006 as a limited company under the Companies Ordinance (Cap. 32). It operates top-up degree programmes through collaboration with overseas and local universities to provide VTC's Higher Diploma graduates with articulation routes to bachelor's and master's awards. SHAPE offers degree programmes in the areas of accounting and finance, applied science, business and management, computing and information technology, design, engineering, hospitality,

tourism and leisure, and childcare, elderly and community services. It currently lists 11 UK universities as collaborative partners, including the University of the West of England, Bristol, Birmingham City University, Sheffield Hallam University and Coventry University. In addition, SHAPE is also in partnership with Australian and Chinese universities.

5 CU first entered into a collaborative partnership arrangement with the Institute of Professional Education And Knowledge (PEAK), a member institution of VTC, in 2005. In 2006 SHAPE became part of VTC and subsequently supported VTC's expansion of top-up degree programmes. Following an Institutional Review, CU reaffirmed its relationship with SHAPE.

6 All four faculties at CU, Health and Life Sciences, Business and Law, Engineering, Environment and Computing, and Arts and Humanities, have a range of courses delivered at SHAPE, including full three-year degree programmes and top-ups. The programmes under consideration in this review are as follows:

- BA Business Administration (approved March 2006)
- BSc Construction Management (approved November 2009)
- BSc Computing (approved January 2013)
- BA Media (approved December 2015)
- BSc Human Bioscience (approved April 2016)
- BSc Public Health Studies (approved April 2016).

7 CU provision at SHAPE is overseen by the Academic Partnership Unit (APU), which supports and manages the delivery of CU awards in collaborations across the world. The University's quality assurance processes are managed by the Group Quality Unit (GQU). These processes have evolved as the number and complexity of partnerships has increased, in order to provide greater oversight at strategic level.

8 CU's arrangement with SHAPE takes the form of an autonomous franchise, in which SHAPE is authorised to deliver Coventry programmes, following the University's standard programme curriculum, with minor adjustments to contextualise the provision for the local environment. Students mainly enter the CU programmes directly from a selected group of VTC Higher Diplomas.

9 CU retains responsibility for the award, including the academic regulations and the programme content. SHAPE adheres to CU's institutional strategies for the CU courses its staff deliver, including Coventry University's Corporate Plan. University staff and external examiners attend examination boards. SHAPE is responsible for recruiting students, administration, teaching and assessment. There is also substantial input into the delivery by flying CU faculty. The Collaborative Framework Document describes the operational-level information about the collaboration.

10 Hong Kong is a key strategic market for CU, and it highly values its relationship with VTC SHAPE, which aligns with its stated aim of preparing students for global careers and the generation of knowledge relevant to global issues, underpinned by high quality execution and partnership. The partnership covers 10 different awards and includes all four faculties and encompasses other shared activities including summer schools in Coventry, and shared online international learning projects.

11 Like CU, SHU also offers top-up award programmes through SHAPE. After several years of direct entry by VTC Higher Diploma graduates into the BSc (Hons) Hospitality Management Distance Learning top-up degree, SHU entered into an agreement with VTC SHAPE in 2005 for the collaborative provision of three top-up honours degree courses. Currently, these include:

- BSc (Hons) Events and Leisure Management (ELM, from 2006) (Sheffield Business School)
- BSc (Hons) International Hospitality Business Management (IHBM, from 2007) (Sheffield Business School)
- BSc (Hons) Sport Business Management (SBM, from 2006) (Academy of Sport and Physical Activity)
- BA (Hons) Jewellery and Metalwork (JaM, from 2014) (Sheffield Institute of Arts)
- BEng (Hons) Electronic Engineering (EE, from 2015) (Engineering and Maths)
- BSc (Hons) Sport Coaching (SC, from 2015) (Academy of Sport and Physical Activity).

12 These programmes span four academic departments at SHU, namely Service Sector Management, the Academy of Sport and Physical Activity, Art and Design, and Engineering and Mathematics. There are other SHU programmes offered at SHAPE, including master's. In total there are 12 programmes validated for delivery with SHAPE, including two master's programmes.

13 SHU describes its provision at SHAPE as 'collaborative delivery' model. The arrangements are similar to those of CU, with the teaching provided by local staff. There are contributions to the teaching from SHU staff, including the SHU Collaborative Course Leader (CCL), who typically makes four visits to SHAPE per year for teaching and other activities, such as attendance at graduation. As with CU, most students enter directly from a group of VTC sub-degree programmes.

14 SHU considers VTC SHAPE to be a very important partner. The vocational approach of VTC SHAPE fits with the University's portfolio of programmes and its aim to produce graduates that are world-ready, with skills and knowledge that can be used to solve practical problems.

Managing partners with multiple partners

15 A key consideration in the choice of partners for CU is the potential for multiple programmes across all faculties and the potential for staff and student mobility. For SHU, the student experience is paramount, as well as the opportunities for student mobility. Outward mobility from Sheffield is supported by a Go Global fund, and there is departmental funding to support inbound students. There are also scholarships to allow Hong Kong students to study the final year in Sheffield. For VTC, the academic quality of the partner is paramount, together with financial security and student experience.

16 Both UK universities reported that the Hong Kong higher education sector is highly regulated, and that developing new programmes is therefore challenging. This is particularly true if HKCAAVQ accreditation is sought, though VTC SHAPE have considerable experience and were able to support each university through the process. Both universities admitted that the experience had been difficult but had benefited the programmes.

17 The UK universities reported that the student articulation arrangements with SHAPE worked well. SHAPE's feeder subdegree programmes are carefully selected to ensure alignment with the individual top-up programmes, an arrangement that works well and ensures a smooth transition for students.

18 The strong reputations of all three institutions helped with recruitment. Each of the UK universities brought their own particular strengths to the partnership, including CU's multi-touch approach that combines a close connection to SHAPE, co-development of

pedagogical approaches, and student engagement between delivery sites through international projects. SHU staff had worked hard to align their top-up awards with the feeder programmes and had a unique offering, including jewellery and metalwork.

19 There is a requirement that programmes delivered in Hong Kong are the same as those delivered at the home institution. This could be a problem for vocational programmes such as those offered by both UK partners. However, there is sufficient flexibility to allow the curriculum to be contextualised with contemporary topics that are relevant to Hong Kong. As long as the learning objectives remain the same, the context may be changed; input is provided by local employers, and the case studies are based on Hong Kong examples.

20 Both universities reported that lessons learnt from the collaboration with VTC SHAPE had informed the development at other delivery sites. SHU staff reported that the detail and robustness of the regulatory environment of Hong Kong had informed the development of other partnerships. For the last four years, CU has formalised this exchange of experience and good practice through an annual workshop held at one or other of its international delivery sites. The 2018 event would be held in Hong Kong, in conjunction with VTC SHAPE and around 90 delegates from across the University's portfolio of international partners were expected. SHAPE offers around 60 programmes and has structures that formalise the exchange of good practice across the portfolio.

21 SHAPE has well-established procedures for the appointment of teaching staff. Applications are sent for approval to the relevant partner university. The requirements are essentially the same as for staff appointed at the home universities. The Collaborative Course Leader, in the case of SHU, or the Link Tutor, in the case of CU, plays an important role in the appointment process, and then in induction and continuing professional development of the newly-appointed staff. Staff at Coventry are able to take a PG Certificate in Higher Education. There is little uptake from SHAPE staff, but some other partners of CU do participate in this programme. SHU encourages its academic staff to become fellows of the Higher Education Academy. Teaching staff from some of SHU's partners have won teaching excellence awards in the University's annual staff awards.

22 Both universities ensure a comparable experience for students studying at VTC SHAPE and those based at the home campus by using the same teachers across the different delivery sites. Student support is provided by VTC SHAPE and is, therefore, different to that given to UK-based students, but it is comparable, and tailored to the requirements of the local students. Both universities work closely with the local teachers to ensure they understand the expectations for the student experience.

23 HKCAAVQ compares the outputs of each Hong Kong programme with the equivalent programme delivered in the UK. This acts as an important monitor of student experience and attainment.

24 SHU students enrolled on the programmes at VTC SHAPE are told they are part of the global SHU community. They receive newsletters and email news updates, and are able to attend their degree ceremony in Sheffield.

25 Coventry runs multi-site student projects, with students studying with different delivery partners working together on the same assignment.

26 Students enrolled on SHU programmes at VTC SHAPE have access to SHU resources through a specially designed partner website page, providing specific access to a range of learning resources. They are also entitled to associate member status of the University's learning centres. As associate members, they are entitled to access the learning centres in Sheffield, use the support services via staffed helpdesks, telephone, and email

support, and borrow up to five books. Student use of some electronic resources is provided within the learning centres on a 'walk-in' access basis where licences permit this. Students are able to use media resources, study spaces, and print, and online guides to support skills development in areas such as information literacy, and the University's referencing guidelines.

27 CU students can access the University's library through a portal that also allows them to check their assignment results. Since both CU and SHAPE use Moodle, it proves straightforward to share lecture notes between the VLEs. CU also has an open Moodle that is used for the multi-site collaborative projects.

28 Students also have access to SHAPE's learning resources which both universities considered to be very good.

29 Both universities provide opportunities for student exchange and mobility. Examples of SHU activities include study and cultural visits to Sheffield, inspirational student awards and joint research activities. At CU, outward mobility from Coventry to HK and SHAPE takes place with several faculties providing this opportunity.

Conclusion

30 Both CU and SHU and, indeed, VTC SHAPE, are using their multiple partnerships to great effect, to the benefit of their students and staff. Expressions of these benefits are as follows:

- Both universities make the most of the provision of the same programmes with different partners, in different countries and, therefore in different cultural contexts. This has helped to develop good practice which has then been shared between the partners, as illustrated by the deliberate establishment of online international learning projects and the annual multi-partner sharing conferences organised by Coventry.
- There are ample opportunities for student exchanges and mobility between sites, and shared experiences through summer schools and the multi-site student projects. As well as university support, SHAPE also provides support for visits to the UK universities.
- For its part, VTC SHAPE is also managing its partners well. It avoids competition for students among its portfolio of partners by selecting and dedicating feeder programmes for each of the top-up programmes of each partner.

31 Both universities spoke of the strength and depth of the relationship with VTC SHAPE that extends far beyond the classroom. Each of the partnerships benefits from the strength of SHAPE's reputation in Hong Kong, and all three partners recognise the increasing importance of this, given the implications of the changing demographic in Hong Kong for student recruitment.

QAA2195 - July 18

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