

UK collaboration in India: institutional thematic studies

Staff development

June 2009

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ISBN 978 1 84482 948 4

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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1 This thematic study is based upon information provided through briefing papers from 25 United Kingdom (UK) universities with partnership links involving the delivery of collaborative programmes in India. Before considering staff development, it is important to clarify that the collaborative programmes all lead to qualifications from the UK universities. The term validating university is used to convey the fact that the UK university formally approves the collaborative programmes leading to its awards. Responsibility for teaching in India invariably lies with the partner organisation; in only a very few links are staff from the UK university engaged in teaching in India.

2 Most of the links attach particular significance to staff development, understood as the induction of staff in the partner organisation into procedures for delivering and assuring the quality of the collaborative programmes. The briefing papers provide considerable detail on such 'operational' staff development activities: what is delivered, when and where it is delivered, how it is delivered and who delivers it to whom. In some cases these arrangements are built into the procedures for approving the partnership. In one partnership the respective responsibilities for the appointment, management and development of staff are set out in the memorandum of agreement. Detailed responsibilities for staff development in another partnership can be found in an operations manual, together with provision for regular reports on its effectiveness.

3 The scrutiny of curricula vitae (CVs) is the main way in which the validating university ensures that partner staff are qualified to teach on the collaborative programmes. At least one university requires that its partner submits up-to-date CVs at the start of each academic year in order to assure itself that the local teaching team is suitably qualified and to identify any staff development needs. Even when staff are highly qualified there remains what has been identified by one university as the 'challenge' of inducting them into the procedures for delivering the curriculum. This form of 'staff development' can include such matters as learning and teaching strategies; dissemination of good practice; development of marking criteria; methods of assessment; procedures for dealing with plagiarism; referencing and citation; use of virtual learning environments and other learning resources; contextualising learning materials; and pastoral support of students. Understandably, local teaching staff are the main recipients of such developmental activities, but in at least one link, staff development for administrative staff in quality assurance procedures is considered to be of equal importance.

4 Staff from the validating university are usually responsible for inducting local staff into the procedures for delivering the collaborative programmes. In one case, for example, the university's Centre for Academic Practice delivers an intensive one-week programme of staff development at the start of a new partnership, and an initial staff development visit is made by subject staff from the school responsible for the programme. In another link, staff from the sponsoring school visited the partner organisation in India before the start of the programme to undertake training in module and programme management for administrative staff. In addition, a specialist in business information provided training in library searches and the use of databases, and the school's India coordinator delivered staff development relating to programme overview, student feedback and support issues. Such development activities usually take place in India, but one university has organised staff development sessions during visits to the UK by members of the teaching staff from India. The first week-long session, delivered by members of the two faculties involved in the collaborative programmes, concentrated on the delivery of the first year of the programmes but also covered academic regulations and quality assurance procedures. A similar session in the following year concentrated on the second year of the programme and covered any particular issues that had arisen in the first year of delivery.

5 The distances involved mean that regular visits between the partners, and staff exchanges, assume crucial importance and help to ensure that staff development is a continuous process. The most intensive training and staff development appears to take place at the partner organisation in India before the collaborative programmes start and, in several cases, at the beginning of sessions or semesters when UK university staff involved in the programmes are present. In one link, where staff development is regarded as 'an ongoing activity', programme liaison officers incorporate staff development as a standard agenda item when on visits and have conducted sessions on topics such as teaching methodologies, dealing with academic misconduct and the use of the virtual learning environment. Additional staff visits, some of them at a senior level, to the Indian partner organisation are encouraged in several links. The director of studies responsible for the management of programmes in one link visits the partner organisation three times a year to meet every member of staff involved in delivering the programmes; these meetings are an opportunity for the director to provide feedback from university staff and external examiners on marking, and also to resolve any issues and plan ahead. The academic director for collaborations and partnerships in another link visits India at least once a year to deliver staff development in pedagogy, quality assurance and quality enhancement.

6 Almost all the briefing papers note that staff visits to the UK from the partner organisation in India have taken place or are planned, with such visits often being funded by the validating university. In one case a proportion of fee income received by the university is returned to its partner for staff development purposes and is used mainly to fund visits to the UK. Funding from the UK-India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI) has enabled another university to expand the number of visits to the UK by staff from its partner. The visits, which can range in length from a few days to several months, take a variety of forms. At least one university has organised highly structured, week-long visits, related closely to the delivery of the collaborative programmes. Other visits are described as 'study' or 'teaching' visits and enable staff from the partner organisation to undertake developmental activities including shadowing their counterparts who teach on the in-house programme, observing and contributing to teaching, attending lectures, participating in research seminars and taking advantage of the opportunity to engage in staff development sessions. Both staff visiting the UK and those visiting India are expected to pass on to their colleagues at home what they have gained from the experience, and it is one university's view that, in spite of technological advances, staff visits and exchanges 'remain crucial for enhancing cooperation between institutions'.

7 Staff development relevant to the operation of collaborative programmes is delivered in a variety of ways. Some universities provide guides and handbooks to local teachers and others also make available, usually on the internet, information on the cultural context in India in the form of handbooks and visitor guides for their own staff involved in the delivery of the programmes. There is a certain amount of formal training at the beginning of programme delivery, but other staff development takes the form of observation of teaching, either during visits by UK staff to India or visits by India staff to the UK. In addition, partner visits are used as an opportunity to deliver lectures and hold workshops or seminars on such topics as research supervision, curriculum design, learning styles, plagiarism, and assessment principles and practice. Contact between individual teachers takes place during visits and via email and video conferencing; one link has established a 'buddy system' between module leaders and others organise open forums by email or during visits. Feedback on performance and the identification of staff development needs can take place during peer observation of teaching, often conducted during staff visits by the validating university.

8 In three of the links, access by the partner organisation to the validating university's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education is seen to have played an important developmental role. In one case, since 2006, partner staff have been registered for a one-year certificate based on the programme taken by new staff at the UK university and, in another, the university has

provided free places on its own certificate programme for partner staff. In the third case, stemming from the belief that effective international collaboration 'enables a sharing of expertise and learning with positive benefits for all participants', staff from both partners in the link have collaborated in the delivery of a postgraduate certificate programme which has involved them working closely together by means of a 'blended-learning' process. The initiative for this programme came from the partner organisation in India and was primarily intended to meet local and individual needs, but its development has also brought benefits to the UK university in terms of a greater understanding of how to support blended learning programmes.

9 There is not a great deal of material in the briefing papers on the wider aspects of staff development, or on the balance of responsibilities between the partners in delivering it. The latter would appear to depend both on the length of the partnership and the academic maturity of the partner. In one case, the criteria for granting permission to deliver a programme include a statement confirming the partner organisation's commitment to the academic development of its staff. One university requires all partners to demonstrate that they are developing staff in order to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching and allowing staff time for scholarly activity and the opportunity to improve their qualifications. Another briefing paper noted the existence of an active and healthy staff development programme at the partner organisation, with a real commitment at senior management level to the continuing professional development of staff. In several other links staff development is evidently regarded as a shared responsibility, with initiatives expected from each of the partners. In one case, funding from UKIERI was being used to upgrade the qualifications of staff at the partner organisation from master's to doctoral level, with arrangements for joint supervision.

10 In the links that underpin this thematic study, the extent of involvement in staff development occupies a wide range. Some articulation agreements, under which the partner's intermediary qualifications count towards the validating university's awards, do not require either the approval of teaching staff or the provision of staff development opportunities. At the other end of the spectrum, there are partners who see themselves as equals, and regard staff development as a joint responsibility. In some cases, staff development arrangements are laid down at the start of the partnership, but in others the provision increases and becomes more structured as the link develops. The geographical distance between partners, although mitigated to some extent by the possibility of electronic communication and support, means that staff exchanges and reciprocal visits offer the main opportunity for staff development activities. Effective staff development can have wider effects than the successful delivery of collaborative programmes and, as one institution has put it, the time and thought put into staff development sessions has 'built a solid foundation on which the partnership has grown'.

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RG 426 05/09