



Review of UK transnational education in the Republic of Ireland

Case study: University of Wolverhampton and Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education

1 This case study is concerned with the collaborative partnership between the University of Wolverhampton and Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education (CDCFE). Through this arrangement, the University is offering opportunities to students to study locally to degree level in a range of subject areas, building largely on previously gained Higher National Diploma (HND) or equivalent qualifications. All courses offered in partnership with CDCFE operate through the University's Faculty of Arts. The focus of the case study is on the approach taken, the steps taken to set up the partnership, how oversight is maintained, and the benefits and challenges of the arrangement.

2 The University of Wolverhampton, previously Wolverhampton Polytechnic, gained University title in 1992. The University's internationalisation sub-strategy (2012-17), which is being updated following the review and updating of the University's Strategic Plan (2016-21), informs the University's approach to Transnational Education (TNE). The University's TNE strategy (2015-21) sets out its vision to be, 'a key contributor to skills and knowledge development for the EU and global economy connecting with like-minded partners through its transnational education collaborations.'

3 The University has partnerships with a number of organisations both in the UK and worldwide. It categorises its partnerships as follows: common academic and educational interests; articulation/progression arrangements; franchising (supported delivery); dual or multiple awards; joint awards; University branch campus; associate campus and validation of partner provision. The category determines the type of contractual arrangement put in place. The University's partnerships are listed on its website. The model utilised for this partnership, namely supported delivery/franchise, is a familiar and well-established model within the University as is the use of top-up programmes.

4 CDCFE is a large further education provider within the Republic of Ireland offering a range of Post Leaving Certificate Courses at Quality and Qualifications Ireland levels 5 and 6, and HNDs across various disciplines including Art and Design, Business, Health and Leisure, Media, Performing Arts, Science and Technology. It is located on four campuses in Dublin and currently has around 2,000 full and part-time students. CDCFE comes under the auspices of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board.

5 The University has a longstanding and evolving partnership with CDCFE, with whom it has had a Memorandum of Understanding in place since 1995. Originally, 20-30 students per year came to the University to undertake *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) level 6 top-up study to gain a degree in subjects including Video, Digital Media, Animation, Design for Multimedia and (for one year only in 2009-10) Architectural Design Technology. During 2012, when changes in the fee structure in the UK made study at the University unaffordable for the students progressing from CDCFE, the University worked with CDCFE to franchise several of its courses to allow progression opportunities in-country. Initially, this included degrees in Video

and Film Production, Animation and Visual Communication (Graphic Design), the latter being validated but never run; following the successful introduction of those courses, Drama, Broadcasting and Journalism were validated in 2015 and are now in their second year of delivery. Two new courses are proposed for delivery in 2018, namely Multimedia Journalism, and Film and Television Production.

6 All courses operate under the University's academic regulations and assessment policies. Responsibility for oversight and maintenance of academic standards remains with the University's Academic Board.

7 The University has a risk-based approach to the approval of partnership arrangements. Processes for the approval of partnerships and courses are set out on the Quality and Collaboration Unit website. The partnership with CDCFE is designated as supported delivery (franchise) for which the approval process includes due diligence, partner approval and validation of the proposed courses. Responsibility for ensuring that provision operates in line with in-country requirements rests with the International Centre. Following due diligence and institutional approval the various courses delivered through the partnership with CDCFE were approved through the Faculty's Committee Structure and confirmed at University level. The relevant CDCFE qualifications have been mapped against University courses to determine the entry point for students undertaking top-up degrees, and to ensure that learning outcomes at earlier levels (FHEQ 4 and 5) have been met.

8 Memoranda of Cooperation, signed by the Vice-Chancellor of the University and Principal of CDCFE, set out the responsibilities of the University and CDCFE in relation to the partnership. Two separate Memoranda exist for the partnership arrangement: the first covers the degrees initially delivered through CDCFE from 2013 and the second covers the additional courses delivered from 2015. Memoranda of Cooperation are signed for a period of six years in the first instance and may be renewed following periodic review of the courses for a further term.

9 Oversight of the partnership is achieved through the Principal Lecturer Quality and Partnerships, and Associate Dean with responsibility for TNE from the Faculty of Arts, reporting through the Faculty and University committee structure. At CDCFE, the Assistant Principal and Principal have responsibility for the management and strategic oversight of the partnership. The operation and management of the courses is set out in a detailed Operations Manual. This also provides the names of the University link tutor for each course and staff holding other key roles; the role and responsibilities of link tutors is clearly set out in the University's Collaborative Handbook. Course leaders are appointed by CDCFE.

10 The partnership is enhanced by regular communication between the University and CDCFE. Link tutors visit at least once a year and provide reports of their visits. Other Faculty and University staff members also visit, for example to attend graduation. There is an increased use of Skype for communication, some support services have introduced training videos, and the Quality and Collaboration Unit has introduced a collaborative newsletter. Students and staff from CDCFE have also recently visited the University, highlighting the reciprocal nature of the partnership. A dedicated Partnerships Administrator within the Faculty of Arts provides administrative support to the staff both at the University and CDCFE including Partner College administrators; this role was acknowledged by both the University and CDCFE as being key to the smooth running of the partnership providing as it does a single point of contact for all involved. The Faculty College Management Committee provides one forum through which link tutors may share issues, and from 2017-18 the International Centre is introducing an Annual Partner Review, which will capture all in-year activity for each partner in one document.

11 Admissions are operated in accordance with the University's admissions terms and conditions; admissions criteria are agreed at validation and reviewed annually. Successful applicants will normally hold an HND (or equivalent) qualification, although mature applicants with other qualifications and relevant experience may be considered. Admissions are coordinated through the University's Student Transnational and Research office, in conjunction with the Faculty through the Principal Lecturer Student Experience and CDCFE Admissions Officers. Students apply through the University's online system; applications are sent to CDCFE, which arranges interviews; and a list of students is sent to the University for final confirmation. Recognition of prior learning is handled in accordance with the University's guidelines and confirmed through the Faculty. Students enrol online.

12 An induction programme is agreed by the University and CDCFE, and staff from the University visit CDCFE annually as part of the process. As well as meeting with students the link tutors provide staff development/update sessions for CDCFE staff. These annual visits are beneficial in supporting the effective operation and ongoing development of the partnership.

13 Students are allocated personal tutors from among CDCFE staff. Students have access to the CDCFE library and virtual learning environment (VLE), as well as the University's VLE and online library resources provided by the University. The University is moving to a new VLE, which from next year will also be utilised by CDCFE students, thereby simplifying the process of access to available resources - an issue that has been raised by students. CDCFE provides general IT resources and specialist learning resources. Students receive course guides and a CDCFE student handbook to support their studies and have access to both CDCFE's and the University's wider student support services. Course details are set out in course guides available online; module information is specified in module guides. Through the course guides, students are directed to the University's conduct and appeals website in relation to complaints and appeals.

14 Courses are vocationally oriented and are delivered part-time over 12 hours in the evenings by staff from CDCFE. Some staff are appointed specifically to teach on these courses while other staff also teach on day courses within CDCFE. Many CDCFE staff are University of Wolverhampton graduates and have relevant industry experience; staffing in some areas is supplemented by guest lecturers and speakers drawn from practice. Staff CVs are initially approved by the University through the validation process and ongoing approval of staff is undertaken through the Faculty of Arts Collaborative Management Committee. Staff development sessions and updates are provided to staff at CDCFE by the University through visiting link tutors and other University staff. Achieving the level of research and scholarly activity expected of staff teaching at degree level poses a challenge due to the nature of CDCFE's core business as a further education college. This issue has been recognised and is being addressed. The University is currently looking at addressing pedagogic staff development for partner staff, such as supporting Higher Education Academy membership or study for a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), and the Faculty is considering ways in which it can help promote research and scholarly activity among staff at CDCFE.

15 Assessment strategies are set out for each course in the relevant course specification. Assessments are set by University module leaders with local contextualisation where appropriate by CDCFE staff. Moderation of marking is undertaken by individual module leaders from the University with additional support provided through the University's Link tutors. Staff at CDCFE also sample each other's marking prior to submitting marked work to the University. Students are advised about the University's academic and assessment regulations, including those relating to academic misconduct in course guides. Timescales for feedback to students on assessment are those set out by the University, the normal expectation for which is four working weeks.

16 The University operates a two-tier assessment board structure. Assessment outcomes at module level are considered at the appropriate Module Results Board; progression and award data is considered at the TNE Progression and Award Board, allowing comparison of outcomes across partners. CDCFE operates to a slightly different academic year than that of the University, starting earlier in the year with staff unavailable over the summer. While this presents challenges, the end-of-year assessment deadlines and timings of assessment boards are common to both institutions.

17 External examiners are appointed by the University; the same module external examiners comment on both the campus-based provision and that offered through CDCFE. External examiners attend module and award boards; a separate award external examiner attends the TNE Board. Responses to external examiner reports are made by University staff with input from CDCFE course leaders as appropriate.

18 The University's student charter is relevant to students on all courses, including those studying through collaborative partners. Class representatives are appointed for each course offered through CDCFE. The University's Students' Union offers online training for student representatives from partner institutions, although to date this has not been accessed by students at CDCFE, with informal training instead taking place through CDCFE. CDCFE is responsible for carrying out module evaluations and for providing feedback to students; some link tutors sample feedback forms and student feedback is captured through the annual monitoring process.

19 A course committee is established for each course and meets at least twice a year. Course committee meetings are attended by partner staff and students, and by University staff where possible, often through Skype. Course committees report to the Faculty Academic Enhancement Committee, with relevant items being forwarded to the University Academic Enhancement Committee.

20 The University's processes for monitoring and review are set out on the Quality and Collaboration Unit website. In relation to annual monitoring the University has adopted a continuous monitoring approach. All courses, including those delivered through CDCFE, are expected to keep a course journal, which involves ongoing reflection on a range of information including external examiner reports, student feedback and recruitment, progression and attainment statistics. Journals are discussed and updated at course committees; the CDCFE course leader completes the journal. Faculties submit a summary report annually to the University Academic Enhancement Committee confirming the maintenance of academic standards and the effective operation of the review process. Summary reports are collated and feed into an overarching summary report to the Academic Board.

21 The University has a process of partner reviews known as 'health checks', which involve a panel visit with an independent external adviser, and culminate in a report and action plan; recommendations go to the Partnerships and Collaboration Subcommittee. Reviews focus on the student experience and take place every three years; new partners are reviewed after their first year of approval. The most recent health check for CDCFE took place in April 2015. Overall, the report was positive: students were generally satisfied with their experience and staff from CDCFE noted the close working relationship with, and support received from, University staff. The action plan noted several issues for improvement, including the need for more help/support for students to access University systems and for additional staff development/support for CDCFE staff; all issues have been addressed.

22 The University's process for periodic review operates on a six-yearly cycle. The most recent relevant periodic review of the School of Media within the Faculty of Arts

took place in December 2015 and focused on all quality assurance aspects of the School of Media provision; collaborative provision is included in the periodic review process. The panel, which included an external representative, had conducted Skype meetings with two international collaborative partners, one of which was CDCFE; representatives of UK collaborative partners also met the panel. Issues raised in relation to CDCFE included access to the University's VLE and late changes to courses. Periodic reviews result in an action plan; issues relating to collaborative partners are itemised separately. Link tutors now ensure that they consult, and where appropriate incorporate input from, CDCFE about proposed curriculum changes.

23 Arrangements for marketing, advertising and policy information are set out in the Memoranda of Cooperation. The University produces degree certificates and transcripts; the latter identifies the teaching institution.

24 There are clear benefits for both CDCFE and University resulting from this partnership. The widening participation remit of CDCFE fits well with the ethos and values of the University, as does the shared vocational focus of the institutions and courses. Some industries such as animation are well established in Dublin, and the curriculum in some areas has been enhanced by CDCFE input. The multicourse partnership allows for a high level and standard of support to be provided to the partner including through the link tutors and the dedicated partnerships coordinator.

25 There are also some challenges, with distance and the different academic year structure at CDCFE being factors. There have also been some curriculum challenges, for example at the start of the partnership there was no history of Museum Theatre in Dublin (such as the Black Country Living Theatre in Wolverhampton) but this has now been established. As noted earlier in this report, the expectations around research and scholarship are different within the CDCFE environment to those at the University, but the University, having recognised this issue, is attempting to address it, which will clearly further enhance the partnership arrangement and the student experience.

QAA2015 - Dec 17

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2017
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786
www.qaa.ac.uk