



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

## Case Study: University of Plymouth and The University of Hong Kong, School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE)

**May 2018**

### **Background**

1 This case study is based on collaboration between the University of Plymouth (the University) and The University of Hong Kong, School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE). The case study does not attempt to evaluate the overall operation of the partnership in the manner of a review; the purpose is to look at the scope. After a brief description of the nature of the link, the study is focused on how the two institutions work together from approval to ongoing monitoring looking particularly at the Enrichment Modules which contribute to the top-up programme; a topic of interest to UK higher education providers who may be considering international partnerships.

2 HKU SPACE was established as the Department of Extra Mural Studies in 1956/57, renamed as the School of Professional and Continuing Education in 1992, and incorporated as a non-profit-making company limited by guarantee in 1999.

3 The partnership with HKU SPACE commenced in March 2007. The Agreement Distance Taught Arrangements was signed in 2014 and a Deed of Variation signed in 2017 to take account of changes to programmes being delivered and those suspended. The legally binding agreement sets out the rights and obligations of the University and HKU SPACE, and specifies all the key matters relating to academic standards and quality that are expected from Chapter B10 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in March 2017 for a five year period, reinforcing the strategic partnership and the offering of University programmes in Hong Kong.

4 A 'flying faculty' model is used, with the 'top-up' programmes being the same as those delivered by the University in the UK. The Module Leader is from the University and the delivery primarily by the same academic staff with additional local tutor input. The same assessment strategy is also used.

5 The University has a dedicated Directorate to manage UK and international TNE partnership arrangements. The Academic Partnerships (AP) was created in 2012.

6 The University's strategic intent is to strengthen overseas developments. The Academic Partnership Strategy 2017 identified its ambition for collaboration with partners in the UK and internationally to build on and sustain connections with local, national and international partners to enrich the academic experience and the internationalisation of students. The Strategy 2014-20 supports the enhancement opportunities for students to enable them to have an international experience. The University sees its role as an anchor institution that forges relationships and builds partnerships based on shared values and mutual benefits. It sees the continued development of TNE arrangements as a key aspect.

7 The University has taken into due account the operational guidelines for credit accumulation and transfer developed by the Hong Kong Education Bureau, which recommend providers to accept the transfer of credit from other institutions up to a ceiling of 50 per cent of the total credits required for completion of a programme. Although not compulsory, HKU SPACE in consultation with the University made the decision to integrate three level 2 20-credit modules alongside the level 3 modules to create an integrated bridging programme. Initially these modules were pass/fail then changed to percentage mark, they are delivered by HKU SPACE staff. The level 2 Enrichment Modules are considered an appropriate foundation for the level 3 modules and evidence suggests the student outcomes are improved as a result. It was made clear at the Institutional Approval and Learning and Teaching Committee that this should be communicated clearly to students in the Programme Specification and the Student Handbook; it is also included as part of the student induction.

8 The AP roles and responsibilities and a range of policies and procedures are contained within the 'Governance of academic partnership activity'. The Academic Partnership Board is responsible for strategic work and planning with operational management achieved through regular Senior Management Team meetings. The Director of HKU SPACE visits the University and meets with Faculties annually.

9 The University has a rigorous process for the approval of a new partner and the approval of a new programme delivered by an existing partner. Once an approach is made the Academic Partnership Directorate will do a due diligence check and the Senior Management Team reviews the proposal, some are rejected at this stage. The Academic Development Partnership Committee (ADPC), a senior level committee chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) with senior representation from partner institutions, from AP and a representative from the Teaching Learning and Quality Committee, work up the proposal based on the business case. A risk analysis, and financial analysis and external due diligence are then considered, and if approved it is followed by the partner and programme approval processes.

10 An Approval Event takes place chaired by a DVC. The approval panel is made up of a representative from the Central Quality Office, an external representative, professional body where appropriate and a student. This is followed by a Programme Approval event and if successful the formation of a Project Board and appointment of a Relationship Development Manager (RDM) who is the key point of contact between the Faculty, senior management of the University and HKU SPACE. The RDM provides an oversight of programmes delivered and the quality assurance of the programmes. The RDM also communicates any changes in policy

and the direction of travel for the partnership. A site visit is carried out to look at, for example, staffing and facilities. The report goes to ADPC and an Academic Cooperation Agreement, giving responsibilities of each partner, is signed.

11 The BSc Business Management, BSc Hospitality Management and BSc Tourism Management programmes were accredited by HKCAAVQ and the Statement of Approval received in January 2015.

## **Academic quality and standards**

12 The processes for approval of new awards delivered by international partners is primarily the same as for internal delivery with the additional stage of AP scrutiny, prior to the final approval event. AP scrutiny is to ensure all aspects of the award design and delivery have been fully considered including scrutiny of the staffing resources and the CVs of international staff with leadership responsibility. The definitive documentation following a programme approval is the Programme Specification, Operational Specification and Module Records. The level 2 Enrichment Modules mentioned earlier went through this process. Partners are supported in the processes of programme design, development and approval by Academic Partnership staff. They also have access to the University Quality Assurance Handbook.

13 For Academic Partnership UK Partners, planning and review are held soon after the start and towards the end of the academic year to allow outstanding issues of concern regarding the quality of an award, results from surveys, and activities to enhance the student experience to be discussed. The meetings also provide a forum to discuss issues covered at the University through the Teaching Learning and Quality Committee. The planning and review meetings are to be rolled out for international partners. A named Academic Partnership Administrator coordinates the processes related to quality, standards and student administration.

14 Standards are maintained in a number of ways through the delivery, assessment and monitoring. University staff are involved in the delivery of a third of the teaching for all level 6 stage 3 modules. The intention is to build local staff capacity as well as maintain standards and enhance delivery. The teaching and assessment is undertaken jointly by University and HKU SPACE. The University marks all examinations and coursework assessments at level 6, while local tutors mark level 5 work, which is moderated by the University module leader. The arrangements are clearly articulated in the Agreement.

15 Local staff approved by the University have access to online staff development via MOODLE. There is also a Teaching and Learning Handbook to which all staff have access. DVC Education Plymouth is leading on the development of an online teacher training package, which should be available in 2019-20. Staff from Plymouth also conduct workshops for staff when in Hong Kong. New tutors have an induction and are mentored. HKU SPACE also provides continuing professional development for staff and there is an eNewsletter, and staff can seek leave or sponsorship for conference attendance.

16 Students from HKU SPACE have attended the University of Plymouth Summer School; to further enhance the student experience discussions are ongoing regarding student exchange and other opportunities for internationalisation of the student experience. Consideration is being given to students studying on the same course at different locations to contribute to group work via Skype.

17 The University engages with employers, some of whom they meet at the graduation ceremony. The individual programme teams engage with employers many of whom provide internships and contribute to the programme as guest speakers. Also a number of part-time tutors are from the industry, helping to contextualise the programmes. Students are also signposted during induction to online alumni resources; this is also included in the Handbook.

18 The student voice is heard through the Learning Experience Survey, Academic Committee and Student Staff Liaison Committee meetings. Student evaluations and feedback are reported through the annual report, and actions taken are displayed on the notice board. There is also an informal mechanism for students to raise issues with the tutor at the end of the lecture; most issues are resolved in this way.

19 External examiners are appointed by the University of Plymouth. The arrangements for HKU SPACE are the same as campus-based programmes, with a remit to ensure awards conferred on HKU SPACE students are comparable in standard to awards conferred by other UK higher education institutions. They are required to submit an annual report on the standard template. Students are given access to external examiner reports.

20 Assessment of University awards delivered by partners are in line with the Assessment Policy and Academic Regulations, included in the partner agreement and the approval of programmes. Changes that relate to assessment are handled through the University's minor or major change process and are scrutinised by AP academic and administrative staff.

21 Subject Assessment Panels and Award Assessment Boards are held at partner institutions or by videoconference. Panels always have a University representative and Boards are chaired by University staff.

22 The HKU SPACE Programme Leader is responsible for annual programme monitoring, which ensures standards are maintained and the quality of the student experience. Data includes progression, retention and attainment data, HKU SPACE student survey and University Student Perception Questionnaire outcomes, feedback from external examiners and employment data. The University provides a common action plan template for consistency. Programme level action plans are developed from module action plans provided by Module Leaders.

23 In addition to the University governance arrangements, HKU SPACE considers the annual monitoring report at their Academic Committee meeting. Since 2017 the University has strengthened annual monitoring to include Project Board meetings with videoconference link-up to Hong Kong. These meetings are every six weeks and provide an opportunity for continuous monitoring and modifications to programmes and modules. From February 2018, this is being supplemented by a Joint Board of Studies meeting where external examiner reports and programme action plans will be formally received and progress updated. The intention of the ongoing monitoring is for action to be taken promptly and only outstanding items to be carried forward to the AP action plan and forwarded to the University Teaching, Learning & Quality Committee for endorsement.

24 All partnerships are subject to a periodic review, the last was undertaken in 2014. The action plan demonstrated that issues identified were addressed, for example both institutions have established similar quality processes and a

recommendation was made to harmonise the two, that is the University of Plymouth Programme Committee with HKU SPACE Academic Committee to take place once per year in Hong Kong and staff to attend via videoconference from Plymouth.

25 The three Enrichment Modules are a good example of how a good foundation helps develop the students' knowledge and understanding of the subject, which in turn helps to improve the overall student performance. The governance arrangements continue to be modified to provide more regular monitoring so that action can be taken promptly and only outstanding items carried forward into the AP action plan and forwarded to UTLQC for endorsement.

26 As indicated, this is a longstanding partnership between the University and HKU SPACE that has been running successfully for 11 years. The teaching staff consider themselves a well-established team, with both partners learning from each other. The partners also have a very good relationship at a senior level. There is evidence the teams listen to each other and have mutual respect from programme level upwards. Both institutions see students as central and they are always looking to see how the experience of students can be enhanced.

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