



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

Case Study: University of the West of England, Bristol and SHAPE, VTC

May 2018

Introduction

1 The international strategy of the University of the West of England, Bristol (the University) includes the development of teaching partnerships for degree programmes. It has a portfolio of collaborative provision in other parts of the world, in partnership with local education providers. In Hong Kong it partners with the School for Higher and Professional Education (SHAPE), a member institution of the Vocational Training Council (VTC). Currently three top-up degrees are run in collaboration with SHAPE, with two further top-up degrees planned as well as one master's programme. This case study visit was conducted together with new programme accreditation of the two new top-up degrees for HKCAAVQ (the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications). The HKCAAVQ panel concluded that the programmes met Hong Kong requirements, while the QAA case study concludes that HKCAAVQ accreditation can be relied upon by QAA for reassurance that the TNE programmes meet UK requirements.

2 There is close collaboration between the University and SHAPE in the development and delivery of degree programmes using a franchise model. Both the University and SHAPE have clear structures for the approval and oversight of programmes, together with joint programme teams. This involves some duplication of functions and processes, for example in annual review of programmes. The two institutions work together closely in programme delivery that includes some teaching by University staff.

3 There is strong industry input into decision-making about new programmes, which therefore respond to current and future employer needs. Programmes are contextualised to the Hong Kong environment using a consistent approach. The objectives of one programme were such that achieving all these aims within 120 credits would be challenging and require ongoing monitoring. Processes for admission of students onto programmes were sound, although the documentation associated with Hong Kong Associate Degrees requires further attention.

4 Mechanisms for ongoing assurance of academic standards and quality have been systematically implemented including annual review and external examining. Actions have been taken within both the University and SHAPE in response to stakeholder feedback.

5 The University's international strategy includes the development of teaching partnerships for degree programmes. It seeks where feasible to extend this collaboration through student mobility, in particular student exchange, and research collaboration. It has a portfolio of collaborative provision in other parts of the world in partnership with local education providers. Apart from the partnership with SHAPE, the University has collaborations in Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Nepal, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Cyprus, Finland and Oman.

6 Three of the University's programmes are run in Hong Kong by the School for Higher and Professional Education (SHAPE). SHAPE was established in 2003 as a member institution of the Vocational Training Council (VTC). Established in 1982, VTC is the largest vocational and professional education and training provider in Hong Kong with 13 member institutions including SHAPE. VTC offers a range of sub-degree programmes through IVE (Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education) and other member institutions.

7 SHAPE offers Higher Diplomas which typically involve two years' full-time post-secondary school study (or the equivalent if studied part-time). As there are limited opportunities for graduates of these programmes to transfer to local universities, SHAPE also offers a range of non-local degree programmes, many of which are awarded by UK universities. This approach started in 1999 and was refined in 2001. In 2017-18 SHAPE offered 59 top-up degree programmes in collaboration with 14 overseas and local universities; 53 of these programmes have been accredited by HKCAAVQ. Over 2,200 students are studying on UK TNE degrees at SHAPE of whom 526 were registered with the University.

8 The current University programmes run in partnership with SHAPE are a BSc (Hons) Information Technology (BScIT), a BSc (Hons) Digital Media (BScDM) and a BEng (Hons) Building Services Engineering (BScBSE). All are top-up programmes. Two new top-up programmes are planned to start in 2018-19: a BSc (Hons) Architectural Technology and Design (ATD) and a BEng (Hons) Electronic and Computer Engineering (ECE). SHAPE sees these as a way of fulfilling its strategic goal of providing pathways for further study on a bachelor's programme for its Higher Diploma graduates. An MSc Information Technology is also planned as a registered programme that is not HKCAAVQ accredited.

9 The University's goal is to develop the partnership beyond taught programmes to develop a 'multi-faceted strategic partnership' that also includes research collaboration, and staff and student mobility. In terms of student mobility there have been short visits to Hong Kong by UK students and vice versa. The MSc Information Technology was seen as a stimulus to research cooperation. Initially this was taking the form of registering SHAPE staff as part-time University research students. Both UWE and SHAPE saw potential to deepen and extend the current partnership.

10 The University has further provision in Hong Kong delivered in partnership with HKU SPACE. This is a BA(Hons) Media and Cultural Production which is not accredited by HKCAAVQ. This programme did not form part of the QAA review.

11 As well as analysis of documentary evidence provided by the University, this case study has been informed by two related activities:

- An accreditation by HKCAAVQ of the two proposed new programmes: a BSc (Hons) Architectural Technology and Design (ATD) and a BEng (Hons) Electronic and Computer Engineering (ECE). This was conducted over three days by panels with a common Chair and sub-panels for each programme. The Chair was also the QAA TNE reviewer. The role of the panel was to decide whether the specific

- programmes met the stated objectives and Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) standard, hence should be accredited in Hong Kong.
- A further meeting held with staff of the University as well as senior representatives of SHAPE on issues not already covered during the HKCAAVQ accreditation, focusing on the institutional level and programmes not covered by the HKCAAVQ panel. Two observers from HKCAAVQ were present at this meeting.

12 At the time of the review, the ECE programme had been successfully registered in Hong Kong, while the outcome of the registration application for ATD was pending. Successful registration was therefore a pre-condition for operating the ATD programme in Hong Kong as well as for HKCAAVQ accreditation.

Developing, agreeing and managing arrangements for setting up and operating the link

13 The University has clear processes for the approval and management of international partnerships. The University is responsible for the quality and standards of all its academic awards. In parallel, SHAPE operates its own processes for developing, agreeing and managing arrangements with UK and other non-local and local universities.

14 The University's Academic Board has overall responsibility for the University's academic strategy. The Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee is responsible to the Academic Board for the enhancement of the University's approach to learning, teaching and assessment, and the maintenance of UWE's academic standards across all provision. The Collaborative Provision Committee is responsible to Academic Board for the oversight of the implementation of the University's quality management and enhancement procedures as it relates to collaborative provision.

15 At faculty level there is a faculty Academic Standards and Quality Committee that oversees the implementation of the University's quality and standards procedures by departments as well as taking an overview of the student experience. At the time of approval, each faculty had a Curriculum Approval Panel that covers approval of new programmes and modules and approval of revisions to approved programmes and modules.

16 The University and SHAPE, VTC entered into a collaborative partnership in July 2010 to jointly deliver the top-up degree programme, BSc (Hons) Information Technology starting in 2011-12. In November 2013, HKCAAVQ granted the partnership of UWE and SHAPE Initial Evaluation (IE) status to operate non-local bachelor level programmes from 2014-15. In the same exercise, the BScIT programme and the BSc (Hons) Digital Media (BScDM) were accredited through HKCAAVQ Programme Validation. Both programmes were successfully reaccredited in 2017. The BEng (Hons) Building Services Engineering programme was successfully accredited by HKCAAVQ in December 2015.

17 The University and SHAPE have a five-year agreement from 2015 to 2020. This is a comprehensive framework for managing the delivery of the University's programmes including such questions as admissions, external examining and the responsibility for appeals and complaints. This contract followed a Panel visit to SHAPE in October 2014 to conduct a review of the partnership.

18 The University sees the SHAPE programmes as franchised under its 'Franchise model (international partners)'. The model is clearly documented including charts of University, partner and shared responsibilities in such areas as marketing and recruitment, admissions, induction, learning resources, teaching and delivery, assessment, student support and student representation. There is a Partnership Board and Programme Committees that bring together relevant University and SHAPE staff.

19 SHAPE's committee structure includes a Steering Committee for Collaborative Degree Programmes that sets strategic direction and approves the overall programme portfolio. An Academic Committee for Collaborative Degree Programmes covers new programme development and quality assurance and a Management Committee for Collaborative Degree programmes covers marketing, facilities and resources. Together these provide direction and oversight for SHAPE's partnerships. There is also a Quality Assurance Committee for Collaborative Degree Programmes at institutional level as well as Discipline level Academic and Quality Assurance Committee for Collaborative Degree Programmes. Programme Boards oversee the delivery of a group of programmes as well as examining annual monitoring reports prepared by Programme Coordinators.

20 In the development of the programmes, the University Partnership Lead and the SHAPE Head of Collaborative Degree Programmes were involved in discussions at a strategic level. The Curriculum Approval Panel of the University and SHAPE's Academic Committee for Collaborative Degree Programmes both approved the launch of the programmes.

21 Programme development at SHAPE includes a range of factors such as market demand, the number of eligible VTC HD graduates, physical resources and competition from other providers. Suitable international partners such as the University are then identified. Of particular importance is input from industry stakeholders including advisory boards, such as one for engineering, which enables alignment with industry needs and boosts student employability.

22 Arrangements between the University and SHAPE include operating both institutions' quality management arrangements, as well as those associated with HKCAAVQ. For example, programmes were subject to the University's monitoring and review processes, as well as those in SHAPE and reporting to HKCAAVQ. These processes had been undertaken regularly including consideration of external examiner reports and student feedback. As a result, there is duplication of activity and preparation of similar documents for different audiences given that the University and SHAPE both have multiple relationships with other partners. SHAPE staff felt that it was necessary to have their own consistent internal processes as well as those of the University. At some points these did come together, for example in consultations around programme design.

Quality assurance

Academic standards

23 In relation to programmes offered in Hong Kong, the University first approves the programme internally, then applies for registration in Hong Kong, and finally applies for programme accreditation from HKCAAVQ. The programmes in Hong Kong lead to the same award as in the UK with the same learning outcomes and syllabus. The top-up programmes have a duration of one year (full-time) and one and a half years (part-time) and are of 120 credits, which is typical of a UK top-up degree. This is less than many Hong Kong top-up programmes which are of 180 credits.

24 As franchised programmes, the programme learning outcomes, syllabus and module specifications are essentially the same as in the UK. As noted below, both specific aspects of programme content and assessment are contextualised to Hong Kong while maintaining identical learning outcomes and external examining arrangements.

25 The ATD programme is hosted by the Department of Architecture and the Built Environment, Faculty of Environment and Technology while the ECE programme is hosted by the Department of Engineering Design and Mathematics, Faculty of Environment and

Technology. Both programmes were developed with reference to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and QAA Subject Benchmark Statements.

26 To obtain accreditation in Hong Kong, the University and SHAPE submitted programme-level applications for HKCAAVQ accreditation in a standard format together with detailed information in a number of appendices. The range and depth of information on the programme was comparable to that used by internal validation panels in many UK higher education institutions, for example programme and module specifications and information on staff and other resources. The main application document was structured to provide an overview of the partnership followed by sections based on the relevant areas of the Hong Kong standards.

27 The programme-level applications for HKCAAVQ accreditation also contained Hong Kong specific information and analysis, in particular:

- analysis of academic standards in relation to the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF)
- mapping of 'feeder' Hong Kong Higher Diplomas to the syllabus of the programme in order to assess recognition of prior learning on entry to a 'top-up' programme
- financial projections and financial viability of the programme
- market analysis and employment opportunities for graduates
- staffing and other resources in Hong Kong.

28 As well as the University's internal programme approval process, the HKCAAVQ provides further external assurance of the academic standards of the programmes from a local panel with international participation. This provides the University with substantial externality in programme approval related to Hong Kong as well as potential feedback to the UK programme. While specifically reviewing the programme's academic standards against the HKQF, the QAA review considered that this was essentially equivalent to scrutiny against the FHEQ in all major respects.

29 The HKCAAVQ panel scrutinised the academic standards of the two programmes in depth. In particular it reviewed information provided including:

- a mapping table showing the alignment between the Programme Aims (PAs) and Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs)
- a mapping table showing the alignment between the PLOs and the Generic Level Descriptors (GLDs) at HKQF level 5 (equivalent to FHEQ level 6)
- a mapping table showing the alignment between each module and the PLOs
- a mapping table showing the alignment between each module and the GLDs at HKQF level 5
- programme and module specifications.

30 The HKCAAVQ panel concluded that the programmes met Hong Kong requirements, in particular those associated with level 5 of the HKQF. The QAA reviewer concluded that the programmes also met the academic standards associated with level 6 of the FHEQ. It was noted that the PLOs of the ATD programme were ambitious as students are encouraged to integrate sustainability, conservation, contracting, alternative building solutions and other relevant areas. The HKCAAVQ panel considered that achieving all these aims within 120 credits would be challenging and advised the University and SHAPE to review the time taken for students to achieve these aims.

31 In general, the content of modules and assessment was aligned with programme learning outcomes. In one instance in ECE, it was found that a module should contain more

explicit coverage of the understanding of customer and user needs and their translation into specifications and technical solutions in the individual project module. This led to a specific programme recommendation in the HKCAAVQ review.

32 The HKCAAVQ panel paid particular attention to academic standards in admissions to ensure that students entering the programme had sufficient prior learning for appropriate recognition of prior learning and to be able to study successfully:

- the mapping of pre-designated 'feeder' programme(s) against the earlier stages of a programme
- processes for mapping of other Higher Diploma (HD) or Associate Degree (AD) programmes against the earlier stages of a programme to identify whether recognition of prior learning was appropriate.

33 Applicants who do not possess a relevant post-secondary qualification will not be accepted for admission to the programme. No pre-programme bridging modules are offered meaning that mapping needs to cover all relevant aspects of recognition of prior learning for 'feeder' and 'non-feeder' programmes. The University is ultimately responsible for such mappings and their approval.

34 The mapping of 'feeder' programmes was of a high standard and demonstrated their suitability as entry points to a top-up degree. Mappings are updated if either a 'feeder' programme or the University's top-up programme changes. While most Hong Kong top-up programmes are 180 credits, the University considered that 120 credits was appropriate given the outcome of the mapping of 'feeder' programmes.

35 For 'non-feeder' programmes taken by applicants, a similar approach to mapping is used, on a case-by-case basis. However, in view of the specialised nature of the ATD and ECE programmes, and the requirement for AD that at least 60 per cent of curriculum consists of generic content, the HKCAAVQ panel was concerned that AD graduates may not have the necessary underpinning knowledge to study the ATD and ECE programmes. Given that specific AD programmes with less specialised content were anticipated as 'non-feeder' programmes, detailed and properly documented mapping was required to evaluate whether graduates of relevant AD programmes have sufficient underpinning knowledge and skills.

36 Applicants who are graduates of VTC or similar Higher Diploma (HD) or Associate Degree (AD) programmes taught in English are regarded as demonstrating the required English proficiency; in other cases, a minimum overall international English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 6.5 with 5.5 in each component; or an overall IELTS score of 6.0 with 6.0 in each component or equivalent.

37 External examiner reports confirmed that the academic standards of the programme met UK threshold standards and were equivalent to those of the UK programme. Action had been taken in response to issues raised by external examiners.

38 The programmes were subject to the University's monitoring and review processes, as well as those in SHAPE. These had been undertaken regularly including consideration of external examiner reports and student feedback. Annual module reviews and an annual programme report are produced which are then consolidated into an annual report by the Partnership Lead, which is considered by the University's Collaborative Provision Committee. Action plans are formulated at both programme and partnership level.

Assessment

39 Assessment details of each module are given in module specifications. Various assessment methods are used, including presentations, projects, portfolios and reports. University teaching staff are responsible for approving all assessments, questions and marking schemes proposed by SHAPE teaching staff, and moderating the marked assessments. SHAPE teaching staff propose assessments and conduct first and second marking. Project modules are double-marked by SHAPE teaching staff. A sample of marked assessments are moderated by University teaching staff.

40 The external examiners for the UK-based and the top-up degree programmes at SHAPE are the same to ensure comparability in standards. The external examiners are also responsible for reviewing assessment briefs, examination papers and sample solutions, as well as reviewing samples of student work. University Examination Boards are responsible for approving the assessment results and awards of the programmes.

41 The HKCAAVQ panel scrutinised a selection of marked assessments from current UK-based programmes and was satisfied with the consistent application of academic standards and assessment criteria.

42 The arrangements for assessment are considered to be sound and appropriate. The pre-assessment moderation by the University ensures that contextualised assessments meet University standards while allowing flexibility in relation to the industry and regulatory context in Hong Kong. Also, the design of assessments ensures that there are sufficient opportunities for formative feedback to monitor independent learning.

Quality of learning opportunities

43 As well as the University's internal programme approval process, the HKCAAVQ provides further external assurance of the quality of learning opportunities in the programmes from a local panel with international participation. While specifically reviewing the programme's student experience and outcomes against Hong Kong expectations and requirements, the QAA reviewer considered that this was equivalent to scrutiny against the Quality Code in all major respects.

44 To meet local students' learning needs, SHAPE planned to contextualise modules of the two programmes. Specific examples were given for both ATD and ECE. The University is ultimately responsible for assuring the quality of programme contextualisation. The approach to contextualisation was systematic with contextualisation activities to be completed prior to the teaching blocks concerned. It would involve SHAPE teaching staff along with discussions and oversight by UWE module leaders. For the ATD programme, a series of visits have been arranged including one during which SHAPE teaching staff will visit the UK in June 2018. A similar approach is planned for the ECE programme, although there was a less clear plan of activities. Examples included the 'Smart City' initiative in Hong Kong for ECE and the relative focus on cooling rather than heating in ATD.

45 Programmes employ a mix of teaching and learning activities including lectures, seminars, laboratory sessions and projects. The class contact hours are the same as in the programmes in the UK. However this is substantially lower than the norms in the Hong Kong Education Bureau *Operational Guidelines on Use of Credit*. As a result the HKCAAVQ panel paid special attention to the way in which students were expected to learn independently. Module descriptors specified the learning activities expected in independent learning hours. Examples were directed at study activities and formative assignments. Meetings with staff and students confirmed that such learning activity was guided by teaching staff to help students learn independently. Also, students from VTC feeder programmes are expected to

have developed their ability in self-study, especially in their final year HD projects. Potential student numbers and associated resource requirements are systematically considered in determining the target and maximum numbers of students. As a result, the style of learning is effective in achieving programme learning outcomes in current programmes.

46 University staff are involved in the teaching on the programmes. For example a total of 54 hours is taught on the ECE programme focused on induction and projects. The use of virtual resources and flipped learning approaches are being explored.

47 SHAPE teaching staff come from a combination of SHAPE full-time staff and part-time adjunct faculty. The appointment criteria on a top-up degree are normally at least a master's degree, and/or equivalent professional qualification such as CEng, and a minimum of four years' relevant teaching/working experience. These requirements are in line with the University's appointment criteria. All teaching staff must be approved by the University. Review of staff CVs proposed for ATD and ECE indicated that these criteria were being implemented and that there was sufficient expertise to cover all the modules of the programmes.

48 SHAPE Programme Coordinators are responsible for monitoring the overall operation and overseeing the quality and academic issues of the programmes. University Link Tutors, exercising the function of programme leaders, are responsible for monitoring the delivery and quality assurance of the programmes. University staff visit Hong Kong at least twice a year, in addition to SHAPE staff visiting the UK.

49 SHAPE provides support for English language skills beyond the programme. It was reported that over 100 English workshops were being held in 2017-18, both open to all and targeted at specific programme needs. Individual consultations were also available, as was support in employability - for example job searching, resumé writing and job application.

50 The HKCAAVQ panel paid attention to two areas which are not normally part of QAA reviews:

- the financial viability of the programmes, with confidential financial information provided only to the Chair and HKCAAVQ officers
- visits to, and demonstrations of, facilities that will be used by the programmes including classroom and library resources.

51 Facilities were sufficient for programme delivery. While two virtual learning environments were used (from the University and SHAPE), their respective roles were clear. Library resources combined those of VTC, with the electronic resources of the University. The BIM Studio and related facilities for ATD were up-to-date and well designed. The laboratory facilities for ECE were of good quality including limited amounts of specialised equipment for individual projects. The HKCAAVQ panel advised that plans and policies be developed should laboratory use rise beyond projected levels and/or there was high demand for specific specialised equipment.

52 VTC has an employer advisory board and other links with Hong Kong industry given its focus on vocational training. This gives strong insight into future industry needs as well as current high level trends. It also obtains good market intelligence related to the demand for graduates from both direct company links and from industry bodies. An example was information from employers and the Building and Civil Engineering Training Board on the growing demand for graduates with BIM (Building Information Modelling) skills. VTC and SHAPE staff participate in relevant professional bodies.

53 While VTC and SHAPE industry links are strong, potential employers considered that the University could strengthen its internal processes to track the changing demands of

Hong Kong industry in relation to specific programmes as they anticipated that these needs will change significantly over the next few years.

54 The ATD programme is intended to be accredited by the Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists (CIAT) once the first group of students have completed all modules. Accreditation from the Hong Kong Institute of Building Information Modelling and Hong Kong Institute of Construction Managers would be sought after successful accreditation from HKCAAVQ. Professional recognition of the ECE programme is in progress with the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) to allow students to meet requirements for Partial Chartered Engineer (CEng) status. An accreditation visit was planned for June 2018.

55 In the area of staff development, the ECE programme had a stated intention of introducing new teaching methods such as 'flipped learning'. Given that potential SHAPE teaching staff would not necessarily be familiar with flipped learning, the ability to use this learning mode should be considered in recruitment of teaching staff, and appropriate development should be given to teaching staff without previous experience. This led to a specific programme recommendation in the HKCAAVQ review.

56 Staff stated that they encouraged students to speak up through in-class interaction from the start of the programme. Both staff and students reported that teaching staff were accessible to students out of class with generally fast response to queries. Staff with full-time roles at VTC/SHAPE had specific office hours.

57 Student feedback is obtained through a variety of mechanisms. Module feedback is obtained through Module Evaluation Questionnaires. Staff Student Liaison Committee meetings are held in Hong Kong to collect students' feedback and review actions taken. This is then fed into the Programme Committee. Examples of actions taken in response to feedback included improved Wi-Fi and revised scheduling of teaching sessions.

Quality assurance

58 The University uses a range of quality assurance mechanisms in relation to its provision in Hong Kong:

- a hierarchy of quality assurance committees for programme development, management and review of collaborative programmes
- external examiner system
- quality monitoring activities such as class visits
- student feedback from module surveys and Staff Student Liaison meetings
- annual programme reports and module review reports
- periodic review, updating and re-approval of the programmes.

59 In relation to management and review of the programmes, the University annual monitoring process sets out the expectations for the monitoring of modules and programmes. The SHAPE Programme Coordinator, with the support of the University Link Tutor, prepares the module reports and annual programme report (APR) for monitoring of modules and programmes. The module reports review data on student performance and student feedback at module level, and consider comments from the external examiner. The APR draws together data on student performance derived from the module reports, summarises feedback from students and teaching staff, addresses the issues raised in the external examiner's reports and assesses progress on the previous year's action plan.

60 SHAPE oversees the quality assurance activities of the programmes through its Quality Assurance Committee for Collaborative Degree Programmes (CDP QAC). In

addition, a number of quality assurance committees required by the University are involved in the management and review of the programmes, including the Programme Committee and Partnership Board with the participation of representatives from both the University and SHAPE, as well as the Collaborative Provision Committee and Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee of the University.

Information on higher education provision

61 Marketing materials are primarily in English. These reflect the definitive programme documentation. Programme specifications reflect the multi-site delivery of the programme, including relevant material about the delivery in both Hong Kong and a UK partner. However, admissions requirements within both ATD and ECE programme specifications are UK-specific and do not reflect Hong Kong requirements. The information on professional accreditation in the ATD programme specification was also UK-specific. While fundamentally appropriate and consistent, further attention is required to ensure the global nature of all parts of programme specifications.

62 During the review, the University confirmed that they will make clear to students the status of seeking professional accreditation from the relevant professional bodies during student induction. Based on the prospectus and student handbook scrutinised during the review, it was noted that there is no claim made in regard to the professional recognition of the programmes.

63 SHAPE provides students with a local Student Handbook that covers Hong Kong specific information (such as locations of facilities and typhoon arrangements), SHAPE fee and registration procedures, and student advice and support services. Students also receive a programme-specific handbook issued jointly by the University and SHAPE, which covers the programme syllabus including module specifications, University regulations and access to University learning and other systems.

QAA2194 - July 18

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2018
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557 000
Web www.qaa.ac.uk