



Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK Transnational Higher Education

Sustaining growth and quality in UK TNE:
Interim findings from QE-TNE Scheme



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Terminology

UK TNE includes a broad spectrum of UK institutions, types of partnerships and levels of provision from Diploma to PhD. This report has adopted the terminology below in order to assure brevity. Full descriptions and definitions of types of provision can be found in the QE-TNE Thematic Insight on [branch campuses](#) and other [types of partnerships](#) (available to QE-TNE Scheme members).

Transnational education (TNE)

Transnational higher education (TNE) is the delivery of higher education-level awards by recognised UK degree-awarding bodies in a country, or to students, other than where the awarding provider is based. The term encapsulates all forms of delivery including distance, online, face-to-face and combinations of these. The qualifications being awarded can be at any level but, for the purposes of the QE-TNE Scheme, it relates to higher education - undergraduate and postgraduate study and research.

Quality enhancement (QE)

Taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students.

Provider

All UK universities and colleges - public or private - who award the qualification that students are working towards, or, in the case of dual and joint awards, they are one of the awarding bodies.

Partner

The non-UK body responsible for delivery of the programme of study/PhD. This terminology has also been applied to joint ventures simply to differentiate the UK body from the overseas provider and in full recognition that they are both equal partners in the relationship.

Partnership and arrangement

The term 'arrangement' is generally used to refer to branch campuses of UK universities and 'partnership' refers to all other types of arrangements. However, as many branch campuses involve some form of partnership with local providers - for example, in relation to provision of certain services - the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably.

Foreword

We have all in recent years become increasingly aware of the value of transnational education to higher education providers based in the UK, and, indeed, to the nation as a whole. This value is not only in terms of its economic benefits but in its power to strengthen our social and cultural relationships across the world - relationships which profoundly enrich us all.

We are also very conscious of the importance of continuing efforts to evaluate, enhance and support the quality of our transnational provision. This not only mitigates uncertainties and risks which may be involved in any mode of overseas partnership and delivery, but also promotes the global recognition of the quality of UK TNE and its capacity to help transform so many people's lives.

I've long believed in the crucial importance of international cooperation in the development, delivery and enhancement of higher education, and in the application and demonstration of shared principles and approaches. This consistency and transparency can help to underpin confidence in educational provision in the eyes of students and prospective students, partner institutions, employers, sector agencies, governments and publics.

The QE-TNE Scheme is the only UK-wide mechanism for the evaluation of UK programmes delivered outside of the UK. It is designed to support the enhancement of TNE practices, processes and structures, for the benefit of members of the Scheme, but also of all the students and overseas partners it involves.

The success of UK TNE is founded upon its global reputation for quality. Given the growing importance and impact of transnational education, we believe that the need to maintain and develop such a mechanism for coherent, visible and sector-wide oversight and enhancement, rooted in a common understanding of core principles, is clear.

I am therefore immensely grateful for the efforts made - and the insights gained - by higher education providers which have chosen to participate in this initiative, and of course to Universities UK and GuildHE for having commissioned this project in the first place.

Three years into the five-year duration of this initial scheme, our interim report clearly shows how over 75 participating UK higher education institutions - representing about 70% of the UK's entire higher education TNE student population - have embraced the opportunity to benefit from the sharing of best practice in responding to the opportunities and challenges of transnational provision.

The support of overseas institutions, government departments and quality agencies - and, of course, the British Council and network of diplomatic representations of the UK overseas - has also been vital to the success of this work.

Massive thanks, therefore, to all involved. The findings detailed in this report are clearly of real value and significance to the sector, and I very much hope that our participating providers will continue to benefit, and that we will all continue to learn, from working in partnership with this global scheme.

Vicki Stott, Chief Executive, QAA

Introduction

Transnational higher education is a significant component in UK universities' portfolios of provision and one that is likely to continue to grow, particularly in light of the current and predicted challenges related to recruitment of international students. As the data below and the subsequent discussion of findings from the QE-TNE Scheme demonstrate, it is a crucial time for UK TNE and one that requires a keen eye on quality and continuous enhancement in order to preserve and develop the UK's reputation in this arena.

The Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK Transnational Higher Education (QE-TNE) Scheme was commissioned by Universities UK and GuildHE and launched in 2021, following two sector consultations. During the period since its inception, TNE recruitment has continued to grow, with total student numbers rising by 18.6% between 2020-22 and 2022-23.¹ Increases apply to both undergraduate and postgraduate provision, and all types of partnerships and arrangements. Postgraduate research numbers have remained stable at an average of 7,235. The countries where there are the greatest numbers of UK-TNE students have remained unchanged - with China, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Egypt as the top five host locations.

The QE-TNE Scheme is a programme of country-specific quality enhancement thematic activity. It is designed to evaluate practice, over and above the regulatory baseline, by focusing on quality **enhancement**. Any conclusions or findings from the activity are not intended to have regulatory effects but support continuous improvement and shared learning across TNE providers in the Scheme. It is initially approved to run for five years and is a **voluntary** standalone programme for UK providers. Now that the Scheme has passed its mid-point, this report reflects on the findings and activities of the first two and a half years of implementation and sets out the plan for the remaining period.



¹ HESA Aggregate Offshore Record, extracted 24.06.2024, subject to rounding

Vision, principles and purpose of QE-TNE

The QAA's **vision** for the Scheme is for UK transnational higher education to be recognised worldwide as providing education of the highest quality, an outstanding student experience, added value and enhanced outcomes.

This vision foregrounds:

- the recognition, and thus the importance, of quality of UK TNE
- the centrality of students and the student experience
- how approaches to quality need to do more than check and assure - they need to add value to and help improve or enhance the provision and student experience.

Its core purposes are:

- strengthening the reputation of UK TNE
- providing valued information and insights
- building mutual trust
- delivering benefit for TNE stakeholders.

While strengthening of reputation is difficult to evaluate in the short term, the focus of the Scheme - on surfacing and sharing effective practice among its participants; on providing the opportunity for participating institutions to focus on quality enhancement in a particular partnership; and on understanding in greater depth where there may be areas for further enhancement - all contribute significantly to this goal. The continuing commitment of the UK to improving or enhancing its TNE provision strengthens the reputation and standing of UK higher education, demonstrating the value the UK places on the quality of the student learning experience.

TNE is about partnership and a further benefit of this Scheme and its concentration on a small number of countries each year is that it allows for relationship-building in country. The QAA contacts local quality agencies and other authorities as well as the in-country British Council Offices as part of the QE-TNE process and they often provide important contextualisation. Among their contributions are the valuable insights and accuracy checking of the QE-TNE Country Guides which aim to provide practical advice to current and potential TNE providers. Some agencies have also chosen to be involved in visits, enabling them to gain a deeper understanding of the partnership or arrangement and the issues they may face, as well as providing input on context and their requirements. Two '[Agency Spotlight](#)' documents have been produced on the United Arab Emirates as a result of these consultations, giving valuable insights for providers on regulation and accreditation from the Raz Al Khaimah Economic Zone (RAKEZ) (replaced by Ras Al Khaimah Department of Knowledge (RAKDOK) in June 2024) and The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA).

QE-TNE draws on the skills, experience and insights of peer evaluators to explore, in a spirit of enhancement: how providers ensure academic standards are maintained; how the equivalence of student outcomes is ensured; how teaching and learning is continuously improved, and high-quality learning provided. Evaluators explore the challenges involved and identify effective responses and approaches. Peer interaction and evaluation helps to build mutual trust between participating institutions but also, by undertaking a case study or a self-evaluation and visit, the relationship between partner and UK provider can be enhanced and new ways of working promoted. Some of those who have participated in the Scheme so far have fed back on tangible improvements that have been made to their ways of working with partners, to their TNE management structures and processes, and on more concrete changes to the student experience.

The work undertaken in the QE-TNE Scheme is based on the following key principles:

- is UK wide
- applies to all degree-awarding bodies engaged in TNE
- is valid for all types of TNE including online and distance learning
- has student experience at its heart
- ensures equivalence for students to the same/similar courses delivered in all jurisdictions
- is flexible and responsive to the contexts in which the TNE is delivered
- is enhancement-led (that is, focused on practices above regulatory and statutory baselines)
- is informed by robust metrics
- enables UK higher education qualifications to retain international trust and maintain reputation.

The focus on enhancement in TNE is important as it is a trigger for a more in-depth look at specific partnerships or arrangements and ways in which continuous improvement is being assured. Where effective practice has been identified, as it was in all cases, this learning can, where appropriate, be applied to other partnership provision – both within the provider network and more broadly across the QE-TNE Membership. All the meetings at the provider visits included representation from the partner; in many cases they were in the majority, and gave them an opportunity to talk about their practice and experiences. These insights were valuable in their own right, but also helped the UK provider to understand perspectives that may not have come up through other activities.

The inclusion of a range of categories of provider and the full range of types of partnership means that there is material for information and reflection on practices in branch campuses, joint ventures and joint degrees, as well franchised and validated provision. Some of the case studies focus on very specific aspects of TNE and inevitably provoke further thoughts and reflection for members on new opportunities and practices. The case studies and visits have included institutions from all four UK nations of varying sizes and across the types of provider.

The flexibility and responsiveness to context that have been built into the Scheme's principles has meant that it has been possible to vary the approach taken - depending on factors such as particular areas that a provider may wish to explore in a partnership or specific circumstances and requirements in certain countries. The most prominent example of the need to be flexible due to context was in relation to visits in Sri Lanka during their economic crisis in 2022. A consultation exercise with UK providers who had partnerships in Sri Lanka identified that while the standard approach to provider visits would be too onerous for institutions that were already facing changing and challenging issues on a day-to-day basis, it was important to capture what was happening and the provider and partner responses to it. The approach was therefore to focus specifically on management of the TNE provision during a crisis, and providers were invited to prepare a critical reflection based on a choice of themes related to this. Online meetings were held as usual with senior management, staff and students, and the learning from this has been incorporated into a '[Country Insight](#)' and updated [Country Guide](#) (both available to QE-TNE Scheme members) with a view to opening up the conversation about future proofing and readiness for other local or global crises.

Mid-point outcomes

Quantitative outcomes

Over 75 institutions across the UK higher education sector participate in the Scheme - representing nearly **420,000 UK-TNE students** in 2022-23. This is approximately **70%** of the whole UK-HE-TNE student population.



75+ institutions

The Scheme has evaluated provision across **nine countries** so far: China, Cyprus, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates and Vietnam. This represents over **187,000 UK-HE-TNE students** across the Scheme's participating institutions.



9 countries

In the first two years of the Scheme (2021-22 and 2022-23), TNE provision in scheme-participating institutions increased by **66%**, growing from around 250,000 students to nearly 420,000.



66% increase

The most popular type of provision among QE-TNE Scheme participants in 2022-23 was **collaborative provision** (mainly validated and franchised), representing more than 40% of all provision.



Collaborative provision

The [Membership Resources area](#) is accessible to QE-TNE Scheme members and includes:

- [Scheme documents](#)
- [Country resources](#) - sections for each of the nine countries covered by the Scheme so far, that include country guides, case studies prepared by UK-TNE providers, reports on visits
- [Thematic Insights](#) - covering important themes that have emerged during visits; these are being developed throughout the Scheme and include:
 - branch campuses
 - other types of partnerships
 - developing a new TNE partnership
 - operational management of TNE provision
 - student belonging.

In total, this amounts to over **40 outputs** including:

10 provider-led case studies

9 country guides

15 institution visit reports

6 thematic insights

2 'spotlights' on regulation and accreditation in the UAE

Qualitative outcomes

The sections below surface some of the themes that have emerged from the QE-TNE visits and research, as well as interactions with agencies and the British Council. They summarise some of the detail that can be found in the fuller reports and case studies in the [Membership Resources area](#).

Strategy and governance

Main findings

- Strategic fit and shared vision are key to successful partnerships and arrangements.
- Regular, joint review of strategic compatibility is important.
- Robust initial due diligence and risk assessment are essential, as is regular review and updating of these.
- Data to underpin decision-making is not always sufficiently available to provider and partner.
- The impact of expansion of TNE on existing staff and structures is not always considered.
- TNE needs to be embedded in governance structures.
- Continuous horizon scanning should include understanding of the impact of local and global events on existing partnerships and arrangements.

UK-TNE providers involved in the QE-TNE Scheme to date have demonstrated that they have robust processes in place to identify, scrutinise and approve transnational education arrangements. Strategic fit was identified as key to success, with providers highlighting the need for shared vision and compatible institutional strategies, with longer-term partnerships developing even closer alignment over time. Underlying this is the importance of regular, joint review of strategic compatibility and management of all types of arrangements. Equally important are the structures that underpin the strategy. UK providers increasingly separate the business side of TNE from the academic. Therefore, structures related to identifying potential partners - undertaking legal and financial due diligence and examining the business case - are designated to sections and committees that are not involved in or responsible for assessing academic compatibility and programme development and approval.

Effective practice from the visits also identified that successful partnerships not only had robust initial due diligence and risk assessment but that this is regularly, jointly reviewed and updated in order to ensure that changing circumstances are recognised and considered. In some cases, a lack of robust data to underpin decision-making was an impediment to this and many other processes, and therefore an area identified for further enhancement.

While the initial scrutiny, approval and ongoing monitoring of partnerships and other arrangements at a strategic level were found to be well managed, there was a less consistent approach to examining the impact of expansion of activity. This applies to the addition of new programmes to a partner's portfolio and to increasing student numbers on their approved courses. In particular, there was found to be a lack of planning and assessment of the impact of expansion on existing structures and specifically in relation to the workloads of staff involved in partnership management, administration and academic delivery, as well as professional services and external examiners.

The QE-TNE case studies and visit reports also confirm the importance of embedding TNE within the governance and committee structure of the UK provider. The most successful examples have managed to find a balance between giving sufficient and specific scrutiny to TNE provision while ensuring that it is flexible and responsive and not siloed away from the mainstream business. This can be complex when provision is large and is commonly addressed by having TNE committees that feed into the main committee structure, with some duplication of representation in both. An area of potential enhancement is the representation of partner management, staff and students on relevant provider committees, which is currently limited except in the case of joint ventures.

The importance of having a TNE 'champion' in the senior management was highlighted through the visits and case study that the Scheme undertook in Sri Lanka just after the peak of its economic crisis. The constant communication between provider and partner at all levels was fundamental to supporting the Sri Lankan student experience, as was the ability to make decisions quickly, avoiding protracted discussions through committees. Many partnerships also noted the considerable strength in the relationships that had been built as a result of the necessity to keep in close contact during Covid and the willingness to maintain this communication moving forward.

Experience of the crises mentioned in the previous paragraph has led to the need for increased awareness of the changing circumstances in the contexts in which UK providers have or are developing partnerships. Traditionally, horizon scanning has been primarily related to the identification of potential new markets and opportunities, but increasingly it also needs to be about understanding and, if possible, planning for rapid changes in circumstances. Changes of government and new legislation can impact on partnerships at any time, but regular updating and awareness can identify and consider the impact of new laws, for example, well before they are passed.

The reports on Sri Lanka contain examples of a wide range of actions taken in relation to students, staff and fees. They also highlight the importance of the experience of Covid and, in some cases, earlier crises in partner countries in providing precedents and previous adaptations to regulations and processes that could quickly be reintroduced. The uncertainty in the world and lessons learnt recently mean that UK providers increasingly need to have flexible contingencies and regulations in abeyance that can be drawn on as circumstances change. One UK provider has instigated a process of regular review of news and events in countries where it has partners. This information is disseminated through regular updates to all staff involved in a particular partnership and, where necessary, is also considered by relevant committees.



Partnerships and arrangements

Main findings

- There is variable use of the terms 'franchised' and 'validated' provision which could be usefully viewed as a continuum rather than distinct categories.
- The impact on UK students of TNE in terms of internationalisation of their experience is limited.
- High-quality partnerships and arrangements promote mutual respect and bi-directional enhancement.
- Partnership and arrangement set up requires careful planning of training and a sensitive, joint approach to introducing different ways of working.
- Meaningful involvement of partners in annual monitoring and identification of effective practice and enhancements is an area that is not fully exploited at present.

Types of partnerships

QE-TNE aims to include a full range of participating institutions and types of partnerships and arrangements over the course of the Scheme and the first half has indeed included branch campuses, joint ventures, franchised and validated provision, joint and dual awards and fly-in faculty. Two Thematic Insights have been published based on the findings of the first year of the Scheme: one on branch campuses and the other on 'other types of provision'. These can be accessed in the [Membership Resources area](#) and are accessible to QE-TNE Scheme members.

While there is common agreement on most types of partnership provision, the work done in the first year and subsequently has identified that the distinction between validated and franchised provision is not always clear, and regulations of individual institutions differ as a consequence. It is suggested that there is a continuum on which courses can be placed. Therefore, some franchised programmes are not the same as those run on campus (as would be expected according to the classic definition of a franchise) and, in some cases, they may not run in the UK but have been developed by the provider in conjunction with the partner. This pushes them towards the validated end of the continuum and carries different risks to a straight duplication of UK provision.

Validated provision is normally developed by the partner and validated by the UK provider. What became evident is that, as partnerships mature and partner input to enhancement develops, tailoring to partner needs can lead to considerable modification and, hence, a once franchised course may look more like a validated one. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) does not currently make this type of distinction, using a more generic category of 'other arrangement including collaborative provision'. However, its latest consultation on the aggregate offshore record suggests that it may use 'validated' and 'franchised' categories with the differentiating factor being responsibility for course design. Whichever label is attributed, the UK provider, as the awarding body, is responsible for quality and standards of the programme.

The role of partnerships

The motivation for UK providers' involvement in TNE, beyond the financial, is commonly expressed in terms of internationalisation of provision, with TNE forming part of an international(isation) strategy. The European Parliament definition of internationalisation of higher education states that it is:

'an ongoing, institution-wide commitment to fostering a globally aware and inclusive learning environment. This process encompasses all aspects of HE, from teaching and learning to research and collaboration. Internationalisation benefits all HE students, regardless of their location, background, discipline, or mode of study.' ([Advance HE](#))

In reality, the reports on QE-TNE visits identify that while students and staff at partner institutions can benefit from learning and teaching that blends UK, global and local approaches and concepts, in most cases the reciprocal impact of TNE on the UK provision, and particularly on UK students, is limited. The best examples include joint research and projects, particularly at postgraduate level, exchange programmes and summer schools in the UK for TNE students. However, in the case of the latter, the benefits are frequently one way as they do not involve students working with their UK counterparts. This means that TNE can often be better classified as supporting global engagement rather than internationalisation.

It is well understood that in all UK TNE, the awarding body has the ultimate responsibility for the quality and standards of its programmes. In addition, there are often local accreditation and quality requirements that need to be taken into account in the host country. In a recent consultation with local agencies in countries where UK TNE operates, it was clear that for them, quality was the joint responsibility of the agencies in both provider and partner countries. The way in which quality and standards are assured is generally through policies, processes and procedures that are the same as those used in the UK. These may be adapted to incorporate contextual requirements of particular partnerships, arrangements and countries. For a partner, this can mean that there is a need to understand and implement processes that are very different to their own, sometimes with short lead-in times, potentially creating a feeling of alienation or subordination. The QE-TNE case studies and visit reports have surfaced a range of examples of partnerships where this has been avoided through building relationships, consultation, training and a focus on mutual learning and respect.



Initial training for partners normally includes understanding of UK quality and standards requirements and the processes that underpin these - regulations and the annual monitoring cycle. The majority have a focus on training in relation to teaching, assessment and moderation. In the most successful examples, this training is done jointly, with the partner's management and staff providing a local perspective and highlighting where the differences are and the reasons for this. This type of understanding greatly facilitates implementation. There are also examples of joint planning for the development of students' academic skills that are new for students in some contexts, such as critical thinking and assessment literacy. This type of joint planning and understanding of needs within the local context supports the early development of relationships and mutual respect. Similarly, careful work with professional support staff on academic terminology, action planning and minute taking, as well as regular contact and joint problem solving have led to what some staff classified as 'professional friendships' between partner and provider.

QE-TNE has a focus on enhancement and there are some good examples, particularly in mature relationships, where this is bi-directional. In some cases, when reviewing programme content, a dimension identified as an essential addition by a partner is also incorporated into the UK provision. Changes to assessment that work well for the partner are adopted across the whole delivery, supporting a more global approach. Opportunities for joint critical reflection and annual review at all levels have also led to enhancements in the student experience and identification of further partnership opportunities. However, this is not the case for all institutions and there are cases where annual monitoring is undertaken by the provider with little consultation with the partner. Some staff at partner institutions also stated that they did not have access to data related to the programmes that they were delivering. These types of issues reduce opportunities for mutual sharing of effective practice and joint responsibility for enhancement, and also limit opportunities for internationalisation of the home curriculum.

Comparability and contextualisation

Main findings

- There is a balance to be struck between comparability and contextualisation.
- Contextual differences need to be understood and adjustments fully communicated.
- Effective practice included contextualisation of employability - preparing students for both local and global opportunities.
- Effective planning and discussion between UK provider and partner staff promote a scaffolded transition to hybrid and UK approaches to teaching and learning.
- Student support also needs to be tailored to context.
- Assessment is an area that requires continuous monitoring to ensure comparability; marking, moderation and feedback conventions are often problematic for both partner staff and students.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion are routine considerations when approving new partners and provision, and can require input from experts on legal and cultural frameworks.
- TNE has the potential to widen access to high-quality higher education.

The QE-TNE visit reports and self-evaluation documents prepared by the providers include consideration of the comparability of the student experience. In fulfilling the UK requirement for comparability of quality and standards, the provider also has to consider the need for the programmes to be relevant to partner/campus students and other stakeholders. This balance between contextualisation and comparability has been achieved in a variety of ways, but as the context is constantly evolving it is another area that needs to be effectively monitored.

The collection of reports from the first half of the QE-TNE Scheme contains examples of contextualisation at different levels and at various stages in partnership development. In some instances, there is a need to take account of requirements of the partner country's laws, national or regional quality bodies and relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. For some, particularly branch campuses and joint ventures, this can entail adjustments to existing UK policy to incorporate supplementary elements that are only applicable to that partner or arrangements in that country. Ensuring that these differences are clearly communicated and understood is fundamental to implementation.

A number of UK providers have worked with their partners to fully understand the local and national employment context when developing or adapting their programmes. In the best cases, the employability elements of courses reflect a range of student aspirations and include preparation for both local and global employment through the variety and types of placements and case studies that they offer. Partner staff and students met during visits appreciated the UK approach of embedding industry input into the curriculum and gave examples of the inclusion of alumni and local employers, as well as contributions from UK and global industry representatives.

Teaching, learning and student support also require contextualisation. For branch campuses and joint ventures, the combination of the expertise of UK academics and local staff who understand the educational background of students results in a scaffolded transition to UK and hybrid approaches. In other types of partnerships, as was seen earlier, this may require careful induction and staff training along with plenty of support inside and outside the teaching context.

The traditional view of comparability is that the same student support structures should be available to all students regardless of where they study. In reality, the most successful support, in the opinion of students and staff, is where it is tailored to the context. Students talked about various systems of academic coaches, mentors, buddies and student journey advisers, and identified the sorts of issues that they would approach them about. There was varying uptake of different types of services and valuable comments from support staff about cultural attitudes that mean that buddies and student mentors might be their preferred option. Some also identified that take-up of mental health services might be limited, or off-campus services preferred, due to cultural stigma that take a long time to change. Students appreciate the access they have to online UK-based services and resources, which have been enhanced as a result of Covid, with library resources and study tools being the most frequently cited.

Assessment is the area where contextualisation and comparability are of most concern. There are examples of effective practice, particularly in terms of adapting assessments to the local context and supporting students in building assessment literacy. The use of the same external examiner for all iterations of the same course was also common. There are, however, a number of recommendations around consistency of marking, internal moderation and associated training. Outcomes based assessment and the effective use of rubrics are areas that are unfamiliar to staff and students in many countries. Assessment feedback is also less commonly given than might be expected. In this case, not only do staff need to be trained and guided on the amount and quality of the feedback that they give but students need to be shown how to use it to promote improvement.



Equality, diversity and inclusion are routine considerations for UK providers, and they are actively involved in transferring this to practices with partners. It has to be recognised that this can be a problematic area when operating in countries where there may be very different laws and practices to the UK. In some instances, this leads to ethical issues and potentially a decision not to enter into a partnership. Other providers have proactively sought advice from the partner and external experts in order to understand how policies and approaches can be developed that take into account local regulation and cultural practices while also aligning with UK expectations. In addition, approval panels routinely include consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion in their processes and appropriate representation on the panel.

Policies relating to equal treatment and respect for staff and students were widely cited and understood. Examples were also given of in-country initiatives that focus on, for example, attracting females to under-represented subject areas and entrepreneurship training specifically for women. Others emphasise the ways in which the partnership programmes can promote diversity of thought and aspiration by giving students access to global perspectives along with diverse expertise and networks. Some providers had opened the staff development that they provide on campus in areas such as inclusion and decolonising the curriculum to partner staff, leading to enriching discussion and enhancements to teaching. Clearly, this is an area that will need continuous enhancement, but providers felt that diversity is 'recognised and valued' across their provision, citing the use of data from their UK courses as comparators for monitoring partners.

TNE has the potential to be a powerful tool in widening access to high-quality global higher education for students who may not be able to access study in the UK. During visits, students talked about needing to work and support their family in addition to studying; other students said that their family simply could not afford the fees in the UK. Partner providers also attract 'international' students from other neighbouring countries and further afield. There are good examples of adjustments that are made to ensure that these students have the language skills and additional understanding of the local culture that they need to help them to integrate.

Student experience

Main findings

- For student feedback to be effective, students need to understand why they are being asked to give feedback and, for partnerships, their input needs to be systematically reviewed by the partner and UK provider and given a joint response.
- Involvement of students at partner institutions in committees is variable.
- With the exception of branch campuses and joint ventures, students generally feel most connected to the partner institution. The UK provider is frequently seen simply as an awarding body.
- In some partnerships, students would like a closer relationship with the provider, but this is generally for specific reasons, such as access to employment opportunities or undertaking visits.

Enhancing the quality of the student experience is at the heart of the QE-TNE Scheme and has been central to many of the considerations, effective practice and recommendations in the published reports and case studies. It was noted in the previous section that best practice in relation to student support is where it is multi-dimensional, allowing for services by the provider and the partner to be linked and form a coherent package for the students to draw upon according to need. Of particular note is the supportive approach to partnerships in Sri Lanka during its 2022 economic crisis, where delivery, assessment, support and fee collection took into consideration local power cuts, food shortages, unemployment and curfews, with the aim of supporting students to remain engaged and complete their studies. Many other aspects of the student experience have already been covered in the previous sections so the concentration in this final section is on student representation and belonging.

Tailoring support to students' needs and context is very much enhanced when students are able to give feedback and understand that this 'voice' is valued. UK providers collect feedback from students studying at partner institutions and branch campuses, and student representatives are elected and give feedback on behalf of their peers. Some have student unions in country and where local laws do not allow student unions, other types of representation are in place.

Engagement with representation and feedback surveys is variable, however. Many of the students who spoke to teams during visits were less sure about why they should give feedback and, importantly, what happened as a result of their input. Reflecting on the best practice observed, it is very clear that there are two components that make this process effective in promoting quality assurance and enhancement. Firstly, students need to understand why they are being asked to give feedback. While this may be obvious in the UK, it is less so in other cultures, or students may be used to doing it in different ways. A number of partner students said that if they had an issue or a comment, they just talked to their tutors or directors of study. Secondly, students need to be shown that their voice is valued. In the best examples, feedback was systematically reviewed by the partner and provider and jointly responded to. In these cases, students were able to give concrete examples of the ways in which their feedback had brought about changes. Their involvement in staff-student liaison committees and annual monitoring would further enhance this impact.

Student belonging or connectedness to the UK provider is the subject of a recent [Thematic Insight](#) publication (accessible to QE-TNE Scheme members), and it is through the visits and case studies that this came to light as an important area for deeper examination. Without going into the detail of the Thematic Insight report, it is sufficient to note here that in many cases students felt little or no connection to the UK provider beyond knowing that they were the awarding body and having had meetings with representatives during visits. However, for many, or indeed most, their connection with the partner institution was the priority and their wish for more connection with the UK provider was more pragmatic: to gain input on careers and employment opportunities; to make short visits; to access particular resources. Where there are shared IT systems with UK provider branding and joint induction and training delivery for students, they did tend to feel more connected. Other UK providers have capitalised on the virtual workshops and induction input that were mainly put in place during Covid to offer partner students more opportunities for interaction with them, and occasionally with the UK students.

Joint ventures and branch campuses have much closer relationships with students and, indeed, this is more of an expectation for them and their parents. Examples include joint student projects, collaborative workshops, joint inductions and pre-departure preparation for students completing a period of study in the UK. This is also the case with some providers offering dual degrees and jointly supervised PhDs.

Future developments

As noted earlier, the QE-TNE Scheme has now passed the mid-point of its five-year approval period and has two more academic years in which to continue to engage with providers and their partners in understanding and enhancing their practices.

The countries for focus in the next two years are:

- Year 4: India, Malaysia and Oman
- Year 5: Indonesia, Nigeria and Nepal.

The choice of countries is based on their importance to the UK-TNE sector. Criteria for country selection include any or all of the following:

- scale of TNE provision
- inclusion in the UK [International Education Strategy](#) and the devolved administrations' internationalisation initiatives
- recent changes in TNE numbers
- internal policy developments impacting on TNE.

Country guides, visit reports and case studies (accessible to QE-TNE Scheme members) will be published for each of the selected countries.

Further Thematic Insights will also be published. As noted earlier, the exact themes tend to be surfaced and consolidated during the visits and through the case studies where trends and topics of particular interest come to light. Remaining themes that have emerged and are in the process of development include:

- link tutors and partnership staff experience
- careers and employability in TNE
- developing collaborative and equitable partnerships.

The work completed so far means that there is already a rich source of data and examples on which to draw and the work in Years 4 and 5 will provide additional dimension that will further enhance the collective knowledge and understanding of quality enhancement in TNE for participants and their partners.

The Scheme is due to come to the end of its five-year tenure in August 2026. We do not know what changes there will be in the UK higher education or TNE landscapes over the next two years, but the need for a UK-wide, coherent, enhancement-focused oversight of UK-TNE provision will remain.

It is clear that the success of UK TNE is contingent on its reputation for delivering high-quality provision. With the growth of TNE, there is a need to ensure that quality is not only maintained but also continuously improved. The Scheme highlights the abundance of effective practice that ensures outstanding student experiences wherever and however provision is delivered. It also identifies areas that need further enhancement. The need to maintain and develop this mechanism, with its core principles of enhancement-led, context-sensitive, student-focused, UK-wide oversight of TNE, is clear.

We look forward to working with the sector and our partners and friends overseas to continue shaping the future of UK TNE in the best interests of students around the world.

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