Chapter Two: Growth of transnational education

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2.1. Introduction

2.1.1. This is one of two thematic chapters concerning transnational education (TNE). This chapter will focus on the learning and teaching aspects of TNE, whilst the other, 'Chapter Three: Quality Assurance in International Collaborative Courses', will concentrate on managerial aspects, in particular quality assurance issues.

2.1.2. The implied reader of this chapter, that is to say the hypothetical reader whose needs this chapter is addressing, is an academic or academic manager who, perhaps working with a small group of colleagues, is intending to begin to offer a programme to students in another country, possibly using an overseas partner or agent, hence is entering the field of transnational education.

2.1.3. 'Transnational education' (TNE) refers to programmes where students do not themselves move across borders, but instead remain in their home country whilst following a course provided by a foreign institution or agency. This often can involve some form of collaboration between a UK institution and a partner, which depending on national regulations may include state-run institutions, private suppliers, or professional bodies.

2.1.4. The OECD (2005) dates the beginning of the rapid growth of such provision to the 1980's, and Bone (2008) predicts that such programmes will soon become one of the largest components of international higher education. Bone points out that continued institutional reliance on traditional mass recruitment of students who physically come to the UK to study would be both risky as a strategy and is likely to be unsustainable, hence 'a longer term collaborative view of internationalization is probably the only safe way forward' (p3).

2.1.5. In confirmation of this growth and importance, Drew et al (2008), commissioned by the Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills (DIUS), researched the UK higher education sector 'to identify the scale and pattern of

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current and planned trans-national education' (p4) and found that 65% of the 135 UK institutions in their study had TNE programmes in 2007, totalling over 1,500 programmes involving more than 275,000 students, that being 12% of the total number of students in UK HE.

2.1.6. This chapter will principally refer to three texts to introduce some key considerations which have to be addressed, and any staff planning to enter into this field should read all three of them at an early stage, as well as 'Chapter Three: Quality Assurance in International Collaborative Courses':

- OECD (2005) *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border education*[1], which this chapter will refer to as 'The OECD (2005) guidelines';
- Drew et al (2008) *Trans-national Education and Higher Education*[2], written by Drew and a team at Sheffield Hallam university, (the report was written for the DIUS) which this chapter will refer to as 'The DIUS (Drew et al 2008) report';
- The recently amplified *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education. Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*[3] *(*QAA 2010), which this chapter will refer to as 'The QAA (2010) Code of practice'. This third document, it should be noted, is not restricted to international or transnational collaborations but to any form of collaboration which higher education institutions may engage in within the UK and beyond.

2.1.7. The chapter is structured into three sections. Firstly it will address the ethical considerations relating to TNE which should be the starting point, so that all subsequent decisions are ethically based. Secondly it will very briefly discuss a classification of different models of TNE which should enable the implied readers to begin to select which form(s) most suit their needs and the implications which arise from each (this is dealt with in more depth in 'Chapter Three: Quality Assurance in International Collaborative Courses'). Thirdly it will draw on primary research conducted in relation to this project to discuss the learning and teaching considerations which should be addressed when transplanting a programme which draws on one culture of learning to a different setting with a different culture of learning. This is further exemplified in the case study 'CS 9: Transnational Education'.

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[1] http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/54/62/34266472.pdf
[2] http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/migratedd/publications/d/dius_rr_08_07.pdf
[3] http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeofpractice/section2/default.asp

2.2. Ethical Considerations

2.2.1. Although not every instance of TNE will involve inequalities it is fair to anticipate that many will; indeed the motivation for engaging in such programmes (at the level of nation, institution, and individual) often results from a need to address some form of disadvantage. The inequalities may relate to (amongst other factors): resources, finance, knowledge, expertise, or access, all of which can be considered as inequalities of power and which therefore require the instigators and managers of TNE programmes (also known as cross-border education, collaborative provision, or borderless education, with some authors drawing subtle distinctions between these terms) to operate within certain ethical principles. Hence this chapter, by referring to the OECD (2005) guidelines, will first introduce an ethical framework which should be consulted before engaging in TNE.

2.2.2. The potential benefits of these programmes are clearly identified in the OECD (2005) guidelines:

> *cross-border provision of higher education offers students/learners new opportunities, such as increased access to higher education, and improvement and innovations in higher education systems and contributes to the building of international co-operation, which is essential to academic knowledge as well as, more generally, to national social and economic wealth (p5).*

2.2.3. The potential dangers arising from inequalities are equally clearly identified as the reason for needing to create the guidelines:

> *to protect students and other stakeholders from low-quality provision and disreputable providers (p3).*

2.2.4. Perhaps a greater threat, though, is a provider who does not intentionally set out to exploit, those described in the OECD (2005) guidelines as 'rogue providers', but an institution which slips into low-quality provision through a failure of planning, and providers who wish to avoid these threats are the intended beneficiaries – the implied readers – of this research.

2.2.5. The OECD (2005) guidelines, having identified the possible benefits and dangers, then list recommended actions for six sets of stakeholders: governments; higher education institutions/providers including academic staff; student bodies; quality assurance and accreditation bodies; academic recognition bodies; and professional bodies (p12).

2.2.6. A brief summary of the main issues, drawn principally from the section relating to institutions and academic staff, is given below. However those entering into the provision of transnational programmes should read the

complete document in order to be able to identify any aspects of their plan which they may not have previously analysed deeply, but by becoming aware of them at an early stage may help to avoid difficulties later.

2.2.7. The issues raised in the guidelines which relate specifically to institutions and academic staff have been grouped here into three major topic areas; these might be seen as reiterative steps which the programme leaders should refer back to throughout the steps of planning, instigating, and operating the transnational programme in order to ensure that ethical considerations are being adhered to.

2.2.8. It is suggested that as a first step the team involved in planning a collaboration should discuss these three areas, and so recognise that the issues are indeed related to ethics – an examination of right and wrong – rather than simply being managerial requirements.

2.2.9. Concerning any envisaged partners:

2.2.9.i. Checking that the envisaged partners (and/or agents) abide by the government registration/licensing requirements. There are indeed 'rogue providers'. Do these institutions have any existing (or former) partners who can be approached?

2.2.9.ii. Checking on the quality of the faculty and their working conditions. This relates to the conditions of staff and students; what do these conditions tell you about the institution's care of stakeholders, and about their motivations?

2.2.9.iii. Checking the conduct of any agents involved in establishing or recruiting to the programme by taking 'full responsibility to ensure that the information and guidance provided by their agents are accurate, reliable and easily accessible' (p14). Do these agents have any existing (or former) partners who can be approached?

2.2.10. Concerning the envisaged programme:

2.2.10.i. Checking that it is comparable in level and quality with similar programmes offered in the home institution, whilst recognising that local factors (cultural, linguistic, social) need to be considered to ensure relevance. Does the programme truly match the needs of the intended students? This requires a balancing to ensure both that quality is maintained and that relevance is ensured. The need for such balancing is

also repeated in the QAA (2004) code of practice, which clearly underlines that this is a responsibility which must be openly addressed:

For example, in comparing the appropriateness of physical learning resources, the question to consider is not whether there are identical resources available to the two groups of students, but whether one group is being significantly disadvantaged in learning opportunities relative to the other (taking into account different learning contexts and environments) (p5).

2.2.10.ii. Checking that the envisaged programme abides by the quality assurance procedures of both countries. This is covered in more detail in 'Chapter Three: Quality Assurance in International Collaborative Courses'. Again it is necessary to check the record of the envisaged partner; what recognised qualifications do they currently offer?

2.2.11. Concerning the envisaged qualification:

2.2.11.i. Checking that the qualification will lead to national and professional recognition, and guidance and information concerning the qualification will be accurate and openly available. Are the students being misled in any way?

2.3. Classifying Types, models, and modes of TNE

2.3.1. The DIUS (Drew et al 2008) report supplies a classification of ten models of TNE, which each require different validation and management procedures, as well as necessitating different learning and teaching methods. The classification divides collaborations between two large categories depending on the institution with which the students have a contract: this may *either* be a contract with a local partner institution (body, organisation) of the UK institution, *or* it may be with the UK institution directly. These are described in more detail in 'Chapter Three: Quality Assurance in International Collaborative Courses' so are only briefly covered here.

2.3.2. The six different types of TNE partnership within the general category where the students' contract is with a local partner of the HEI are: Validation; Articulation; Franchise; Joint awards; Dual awards; and Partial credit.

2.3.3. In the second category used by the DIUS report, where the students have a contract directly with the UK institution, there are four further types of provision: In-country/flying faculty; Distance learning; Blended delivery; On-campus provision overseas.

2.3.4. The authors were keen to point out that there is considerable blurring and mixing amongst these categories, and it is partly because of this that those

involved should constantly be checking that they are sharing definitions (see 2.3.7 below).

2.3.5. The QAA (2004) Code of Practice does not deal with specific types of TNE in this way, rather it describes a continuum of arrangements along three axes: whether the mode is predominantly face-to-face or via FDL[4]/e-modes; whether the learners study alone or in a cohort; whether the students are on-site or off-site. This places the focus on the student experience rather than on the institutional process, and re-emphasizes that the models described above are not discrete categories but are common types which are often blurred in practice.

2.3.6. There are, of course, considerable resource implications connected to each model of TNE. Staff therefore need to consider which of these models (or which blend of these models) most suits the programme they are considering, to make an initial rough list of the resources which this would require, and to check whether this form of programme would fit within their own institution's strategic planning concerning internationalisation.

2.3.7. There is a high risk of misunderstanding between partners (or indeed between departments within one institution) by loosely using terms like 'validation', or 'joint award', particularly if at early stages negotiations are being conducted with interpreters or agents, without a clearer and more detailed itemisation of *exactly* what is being proposed. This might be particularly dangerous if the parties have existing relationships with other institutions, possibly in a different country with different regulations and using different terminology, and so the parties may bring to the discussion different sets of expectations. It is essential to itemise what is being proposed in detail rather than to start off by loosely talking about '2+2 articulations' or 'flying faculty'.

2.3.8. The three most common forms identified in the research contributing to the DIUS report were 'Franchising', followed by 'Validation', followed by 'Distance Learning', which together amounted to more that 60% of the programmes they identified. However they found distinct differences between types and sizes of institutions:

> *DL is by far the preferred model for specialist institutions/colleges and for small HEIs (66% and 71% of their programmes, respectively). Franchise is most common in post 92 (36% of their programmes) and medium sized HEIs (47% of their programmes). Validation is most evident in post 92 (23% of programmes) and large HEIs (26% of programmes). Overseas Campuses are most in evidence in pre 92 (16% of their programmes) and large HEIs (7% of their programmes). Where a model is common, there may be proportionally more students than programmes. For example, in*

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[4] Flexible and Distributed Learning

> *small institutions/colleges, 66% of the programmes are DL with 98% of their TNE students. (p6)*

2.3.9. There are a range of 'modes of studying' possible within these different models of provision. Drew et al (2008) define mode of study as 'the amount of direct contact students have and the way in which that contact is experienced' (p36), including full-time, part-time, distance learning and mixed modes. Other factors which may implicate different modes concern levels of programmes (undergraduate or postgraduate) and academic subject. The OECD report refers to 'modalities' rather than 'modes' to distinguish between such things as face-to-face delivery and distance learning.

2.3.10. Concerning worldwide regions, the DIUS (Drew et al 2008) report found that the largest concentrations were in Asia and Europe, but that there are differences in demand for undergraduate (highly demanded in Asia, for example) and postgraduate (highly demanded in Europe). The report suggests that:

> *… in some regions TNE's key function is to top up shortfalls in undergraduate provision whilst in others it is to develop high level academic knowledge and skills (p8).*

2.3.11. As an essential early step, staff wishing to create any form of TNE programme should consult the classification above in conjunction with an examination of their own institution's strategic plan, as the strategic plan might state clearly what forms of TNE the institution is prepared to be involved in and which are firmly ruled out. For example if the institution has firmly set itself against franchising there is little point in a group of staff developing a plan to franchise a programme.

2.3.12. Pragmatically they should also consider necessary resources and hence costs at an early stage, as some forms (for example flying faculty) may be greatly more expensive than others (for example distance learning via a VLE). In addition the necessary processes which need to be followed before a programme can start are themselves very costly.

2.3.13. It is also essential that all of the people involved, in all of the institutions involved and at every stage throughout the process of establishing the collaboration, continue to check that they are sharing definitions of any terms emerging in their discussions (such as 'articulation' or 'joint degrees') as such terms are open to misunderstanding.

2.3.14. The DIUS (Drew et al 2008) report points out that: 'there are different financial, legal, resource and quality issues attached to each model and the models may be affected by other countries' policies and regulations' (p11), hence it is important to identify the motivation of the partner institutions for

wanting to participate in the collaboration, and indeed to identify the motivations of the governments concerned for allowing or encouraging such collaborations. For example it is necessary to discover whether the national policy is intended to address skills shortages, to increase general access to higher education, to introduce new disciplines, or to provide internationally recognized qualifications perhaps by creating regulations allowing private institutions to enter into collaboration with foreign suppliers.

2.3.15. The 'fit' of the initiative with the higher order institutional or national plans can then be described in planning documents. For example plans for links with Chinese institutions could be described as fitting with the *Framework agreement on educational co-operation partnership* between China and the UK (Department for Business Innovation and Skills 2010) which talks of: 'educational collaboration by reflecting mutual interests, building mutual understanding and … delivering mutual benefits for both countries'.

2.3.16. Hence staff who intend to propose a TNE venture need to be able to identify how their initial plans can be amended if necessary to design a programme which will satisfy the different motivations of all stakeholders involved. They might need, for example, to demonstrate that the intended programme will introduce new disciplines in the students' home institution up to diploma level; and perhaps that it will simultaneously enable staff development in both institutions for example by introducing e-learning competences; or that it will enable institutions to enhance their reputation, for example to allow the partner to gain degree-awarding powers at a later date.

2.3.17. At the same time they should accommodate the UK institution's motivations by describing how the proposal could ensure a flow of students for top-up and Masters courses, so increasing both income and diversity of its student population, as well as describing how the proposal could enable their own staff to develop cross-cultural skills via flying faculty opportunities. Any of these could be stated intentions in strategy and policy documents which specific proposals should build on.

2.3.18. Government policies in any country can change, also the high degree of flux in demand for TNE, and the amount of investment (institutional audits, validation and QA procedures, creation of e-learning resources, staff development and the like), mean that – as with any form of globalised activity in any domain – it is essential to be alert to market intelligence. Therefore it is necessary to consult market intelligence reports, for example those produced by

the British Council and also The UK Higher Education International Unit, 'Global Opportunities for UK Higher Education'[5].

2.4. Learning and teaching methods

2.4.1. Much of what has already been outlined in this chapter relates to policies, procedures, and management, and there is a danger that such deliberations remain at the functional or instrumental level. However at a deeper level it must be recognised that different models of collaboration and different modes of delivery will require amendments to the learning and teaching methods some or all of the participants have previously been familiar with.

2.4.2. Education is about the construction of knowledge, and different cultures of education may not share a common philosophical base. Ensuring success of transnational education should be seen to involve both staff (and requiring staff development) and students, for example by ensuring that they are helped to understand not just the surface-level regulations of the programme but also the deeper-level (and often unstated) assumptions concerning the nature of knowledge which this particular programme is built upon.

2.4.3. Taking the example of learning portfolios, which are increasingly being used both as a method of learning and as a method of assessment, it is easy to explain to partner institutions what components a portfolio assessment should contain. However it may be far harder to get the staff and the students in the partner institution actually to embrace the concept and practice of reflective learning (as opposed to learning didactically transmitted facts) which is the epistemology on which the use of portfolios is based.

2.4.4. Burnapp and Zhao (2009; 2010) have conducted research involving students who studied a transnational programme in China and then continued their education in the UK on final year top-up degrees and then Masters courses. They identified that although the students were remaining in their home country for the first years of their studies they still needed to negotiate several transitions related to *epistemology*, when moving from one culture of learning to the new culture of the transnational programme. They point out that:

> *There is no reason to doubt that the students and their teachers in China had genuinely believed they were delivering authentic UK style courses, and similarly there is no reason to doubt whether the correct procedures set out in the guidelines … had been followed by the validating agencies and the recruiting universities and their collaborative partners. However the students' seeming unpreparedness raises the possibility that even strict adherence to these procedures might not assure that – at a level*

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[5] http://www.international.ac.uk/home/

> *deeper than that covered by managerial guidelines, at a level which relates to what is deemed to be knowledge and how knowledge should be created – a mismatch may occur. (Burnapp & Zhao 2010)*

2.4.5. A danger that must be recognised (and addressed) by those designing transnational programmes is a possibility that all those concerned (including staff, students, quality assurance managers, and e-learning developers) may create programmes and learning activities which really only mimic the intended features of a specific culture of education but do not actually replicate that system in its essential features.

2.4.6. The QAA (2004) guidelines point out the need for considering 'the cultural assumptions about higher education learning methods' (p17), but this is an area where it is essential to do more than just supplying a brief introduction to study skills, and – turning to staff development – where academic staff may need development opportunities to consider the assumptions on which the TNE programme teaching is based, and to plan how to ensure that these assumptions are made clear.

2.4.7. A far from simple example of this concerns the need for students within the UK system of Higher Education to demonstrate critical thinking in their assignments: TNE in all its forms should consider the question of how the requirement of demonstrating critical thinking can be defined, described, modelled, and evidenced in settings where possibly this has not been a requirement in the students' previous experiences.

> *Cultures of education are likely to reflect to some extent the prevalent ideologies which are exhibited daily in such things as how the news is reported (for example whether several views are presented or just one official view), or how decisions are made in workplaces (using either horizontal or vertical decision making structures), or expectations of whose voices have the right to be heard in certain scenarios (Burnapp and Zhao 2009, p32).*

2.4.8. Hence it is essential that transnational education programmes have built into them several layers of activities which will enable all stakeholders to both recognise that such epistemological differences concerning how knowledge should be created do indeed exist, and then to design interventions to create bridges between them.

2.4.9. This will require staff development for both the UK academics and any involved academics in partner institutions, and in-depth interventions with students which go beyond description of learning activities and move on to explore the educational beliefs (that portfolios are based on reflective learning; that seminar discussions are based on a belief that knowledge can be socially

constructed; that evaluation is seen as a higher level of learning than reproduction).

2.5 Conclusions

The following bullet points develop the main items identified in this chapter as a series of hints which any staff members who intend to become involved in TNE should consider:

- **Ch 2.1.** It is recommended that any staff planning to enter into this field should read these three documents:

  > OECD (2005) *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border education*; http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/54/62/34266472.pdf

  > Drew et al (2008) *Trans-national Education and Higher Education*; http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/migratedd/publications/d/dius_rr_08_07.pdf

  > QAA *(2010) Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education. Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning).* http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeofpractice/section2/default.asp

- **Ch 2.2.** It is essential to recognise that all decisions concerning the envisaged programme have an ethical dimension which needs to be considered.
- **Ch 2.3.** It is essential to itemise what the potential benefits are for all the stakeholders; national, institutional, and individual, of all the parties involved.
- **Ch 2.4.** It is essential to itemise what the potential dangers are for all the stakeholders of all the parties involved; national, institutional, and individual.
- **Ch 2.5.** It is recommended that the ethical audit should be a series of reiterative steps which the programme leaders and teams should refer back to throughout the steps of planning, instigating, and operating the transnational programme.
- **Ch 2.6.** It is essential to check that the envisaged partners (and/or agents) abide by the government registration/licensing requirements, perhaps by approaching existing or former partners.
- **Ch 2.7.** It is essential to check the quality of the faculty and their working conditions.
- **Ch 2.8.** It is essential to check the conduct of any agents involved in establishing or recruiting to the programme, is the information and guidance provided by the agents accurate, reliable and easily accessible?

Do these agents have any existing (or former) partners who can be approached?

- **Ch 2.9.** It is essential to check that the envisaged programme is comparable in level and quality with similar programmes offered in the home institution, whilst recognising that local factors (cultural, linguistic, social) need to be considered to ensure relevance.
- **Ch 2.10.** It is essential to check that the programme matches the needs of the intended students, a balancing to ensure both that quality is maintained and that relevance is ensured.
- **Ch 2.11.** It is essential to check that the envisaged programme abides by the quality assurance procedures of both countries.
- **Ch 2.12.** It is important to identify the motivation of the partner institutions for wanting to participate in the collaboration.
- **Ch 2.13.** It is important to identify the motivations of the governments concerned for allowing or encouraging such collaborations. The 'fit' of the initiative with the higher order institutional or national plans can then be described in planning documents.
- **Ch 2.14.** It is essential to check whether this form of programme would fit within your own institution's strategic planning concerning internationalisation, as this might state clearly what forms of TNE the institution is prepared to be involved in and which are firmly ruled out.
- **Ch 2.15.** It is advisable to check whether your institution already has transnational programmes in operation, with already approved procedures, which you can model your plan on.
- **Ch 2.16.** It is advisable to identify how initial plans can be amended to design a programme which will satisfy the different motivations of all stakeholders involved: for example, to demonstrate that the intended programme will introduce new disciplines in the students' home institution; that it will enable staff development in both institutions perhaps by introducing e-learning competences; or that it will enable institutions to enhance their reputation.
- **Ch 2.17.** It is necessary to consult market intelligence reports, for example those produced by the British Council and also The UK Higher Education International Unit, 'Global Opportunities for UK Higher Education' http://www.international.ac.uk/home/
- **Ch 2.18.** It is essential to check that the qualification will lead to national and professional recognition, and guidance and information concerning the qualification will be accurate and openly available, so that the students are not being misled in any way.

- **Ch 2.19.** It is essential to do an initial rough list of the resources which the intended TNE collaboration would require. Some aspects, such as the full cost of flying faculty visits, can be underestimated by partners.
- **Ch 2.20.** It is essential to calculate the costs of the necessary processes, including due diligence and validation visits, which need to be followed before a programme can start.
- **Ch 2.21.** It is essential to itemise in detail what is being proposed rather than to start off by loosely using terms like 'validation', or 'joint award', as the parties may bring to the discussion different sets of expectations and understandings of these terms. This is particularly important at early stages if negotiations are being conducted with interpreters or agents, or if the parties have existing relationships with other institutions, possibly in a different country with different regulations, and using different terminology.
- **Ch 2.22.** It must be recognised that different models of collaboration and different modes of delivery will require amendments to the learning and teaching methods some or all of the participants have previously been familiar with.
- **Ch 2.23.** It is necessary to recognise that staff and students need to understand not just the surface-level regulations of the programme but also the deeper-level assumptions concerning the nature of knowledge which this particular programme is built upon.
- **Ch 2.24.** It is necessary to recognise that although TNE students remain in their home country they still need to negotiate several transitions related to *epistemology*, moving from one culture of learning to the new culture of education of the transnational programme.
- **Ch 2.25.** It is necessary to supply development opportunities for academic staff of both partners to explore the assumptions on which the TNE programme teaching is based, and to plan how to ensure that these assumptions are made clear.

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