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CS 6: Developing an institutional approach to international collaborations: The University of Nottingham

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Summary

This case study illustrates several of the themes identified elsewhere in this project report, in particular 'Chapter One: Institutional Internationalisation Strategies'; 'Chapter Two: Growth of Transnational Education'; and 'Chapter Three: Quality Assurance in International Collaborative Courses'. This study is based on information in the public domain published on the website of the University of Nottingham, and also on interviews and correspondence with key staff, in particular the Head of Partnership Development. The case study will examine the stages followed in this university to develop a co-ordinated strategy concerning collaborations, and will then analyse the published international strategy of the university. It shows two phases of development: the first being a movement from having disparate activities initiated around the institution to having a more centrally managed and organised strategy of partnership development; the second being the emergence of an institution which can claim to be internationalised in all its activities.

Key learnings up front

- **CS 6.1.** It is essential to have a clearly articulated internationalisation strategy to align a wide range of stakeholder interests.
- **CS 6.2.** There needs to be a clear link between the internationalisation strategy and a wider institutional ethos to help to embed international activities. This may be, for example, an ethos of excellence, but for other institutions other stances are possible, for example an ethos of widening participation, or of involvement with development education.
- **CS 6.3.** It is essential to have a clear policy concerning which types of collaboration are acceptable within your institution, and which

are not, to enable early champions of collaborations to align their plans with the overall strategy.

- **CS 6.4.** It is essential to supply practical support for instigators of collaborations to balance the top-down control imposed on any bottom-up initiatives, for example by using the expertise of the International Office.
- **CS 6.5.** There needs to be clear institutional guidance concerning the approval and review procedures for each type of collaboration.
- **CS 6.6.** It will probably be necessary to develop a clear business plan early on in the planning of any intended collaboration, in order to identify the resource implications.
- **CS 6.7.** It is essential that senior management remain sensitive to individuals' feelings of ownership of initiatives, something which should be possible even in a centralised model.
- **CS 6.8.** Support and direction from the highest levels of management facilitates a rapid and wide-reaching change.

Background

In 'Chapter One: Institutional Internationalisation Strategies' there was a reference to three categorizations of institutional strategies. One is a model of strategic development suggested by Middlehurst & Woodfield (2007), involving a movement covering three stages. The first stage was labelled 'International activity', which describes activities set up by individuals or small groups, often short-term in nature, without overall institutional engagement. The second phase of this model was labelled 'International strategy', which was connected to the creation of an International Office to rationalise and co-ordinate initiatives across the university. The third phase was labelled 'Internationalisation process' when an institution has a clearly articulated strategy, clearly defined roles in a structure including senior management, and a detailed procedure for creating and monitoring collaborations.

An alternative model described by Fielden (2008) describes a traditional strategy primarily aimed at recruitment; a second strategy where recruitment is combined with the creation of partnerships and collaborations; and a third type which aims at internationalising all aspects of the institution.

Examining an institution's strategy also involves identifying what have been labelled internationalisation 'aboard' activities (IA), including student recruitment, creating transnational programmes, and engaging in

international projects; and internationalisation 'at home' activities (IaH), including curriculum changes to engender international outlooks amongst home students, and the development of international perspectives amongst staff (Koutsantoni 2006).

Phase one. Stages of strategy development: a movement from disparate activities to a centrally managed and organised strategy.

This section is largely informed by accessing materials on the University of Nottingham website, supported by an in-depth interview with the Head of Partnership Development at the university.

The experience at Nottingham can be mapped onto aspects of all of the models outlined above. Until recently there had been very little central control – or even shared knowledge – of a large number of international collaborations entered into by different parts of the university, hence this was typical of the first stage of 'International activity'. To address this lack of knowledge, in 2008 a 'transnational education committee' was created[1], and an early outcome of this committee was the creation of a document 'Overseas Partnership Development Guidelines'[2] which will be examined below. An initial intention of this change, as explained by the Head of Partnership Development, was to tidy up the process of creating Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) and Memorandums of Agreement, which sometimes were also referred to as Memorandums of Association (MoA):

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[1] See http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/registrar/committees/tne.htm for the terms of reference of this committee.
- To advise Teaching and Learning Board on matters of policy and strategy concerning Transnational Education (TNE) activities which involve students and international institutions. The activities will mainly concern collaborative and off-campus award bearing courses and matters concerning placement learning and study abroad.
- A sub-committee, the Memorandum of Association Approval Committee, will approve, monitor, review and renew TNE courses or partnerships, to ensure that the standards and quality of such courses and awards are congruent with awards delivered on the University campuses.
- The Committees will be responsible for collaborative agreements at the overseas campuses where applicable and from time to time other issues concerning international students - teaching and learning.

[2] http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/quality-manual/collaborative-provision/Partnership_Development_Guidelines.doc

> *'Basically what we wanted to do … we had been signing MoUs without a clear policy on how we should sign them, and who we should sign them with, and what was in the MoU'.*

An initial task therefore was to collect and collate the different MoUs, of which there were found to be around 300, including some which had become moribund, or were unsigned, or which the university decided not to continue with. Those that the university wished to continue were renewed, reducing the total to around 100[3]. MoUs, however, are not seen as indicating much beyond a general desire to be friends, 'made as a gesture of goodwill between the two institutions'[4], but these may be the basis for subsequently developing more specific relationships for which a MoA would be necessary. At the same time as reducing the total number of MoUs a more structured process for establishing partnerships was developed[5].

The introduction to the Overseas Partnership Development Guidelines states that they are: 'not intended to be rigid or prescriptive. It is intended that it should be a working document which can be added to, developed and updated over time'. The document initially explains that the activities it envisages should be seen to supplement the internationalisation of the university which was already being achieved at that time by the creation of two overseas campuses, and it discusses the types of links which should be encouraged. The Head of Partnership Development gave examples of: progression from a foundation programme in a world-leading university in China where Nottingham staff are external examiners and offer flying-faculty support; credit transfer allowing students to go to Nottingham after two years in Thailand; and intensive input to a MBA programme in Singapore by flying faculty.

In 'Chapter Three: Quality Assurance in International Collaborative Courses', there is a discussion of the growth of transnational education, describing a variety of forms which university collaborations can take. The Overseas Partnership Development Guidelines identifies which of these forms the University of Nottingham is willing to engage in, including joint and double awards, split-site PhDs[6], and e-learning and in-country teaching. However the guidelines stressed that the University of

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[3] There is a searchable database of all MoUs and MoAs at:
http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~cczappdv/intoffice/sships/_moa_search_school.php
[4] The pro-forma structure for MoUs and MoAs is on the University of Nottingham website, as are guidelines for the processes of establishing them.
[5] See 'Collaborative Provision Approval Policy and Procedure'
http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/quality-manual/collaborative-provision/procedure.htm
[6] The university has a range of split-site and joint PhD opportunities: see
http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/gradschool/newphd/

Nottingham 'does not and will not pursue validation and franchise activity overseas'; and this is repeated in the university's current Collaborative Provision Approval Policy and Procedure section of the Quality Manual[7]. This policy seems to be based on a firm principle that preservation of excellence should the predominant consideration in all developments. Hence the guidelines indicate that care should be taken to 'establish the credibility and status of the institution' when considering a partner. The Head of Partnership Development stressed this need for due diligence, and the Quality Manual sets out the approval and review procedures for each type of collaboration. These quality assurance procedures would usually involve visiting, which is just one of many resource implications which collaborations can involve. Resources are available for the development of collaborations, but a careful check is essential, hence the Overseas Partnership Development Guidelines stipulate that: 'A business case should also be developed early on ensuring that net financial benefits of the link are achievable within a realistic period'.

In 'Chapter One: Institutional Internationalisation Strategies' there was a discussion of top-down and bottom-up approaches, in particular referring to the danger that a movement to more centralised control inadvertently risks alienating early instigators of international links. This risk was identified by Middlehurst (2008) who describes one possible pitfall in the internationalisation process as being a failure 'to achieve the right balance between centralised and devolved responsibilities' (p17). This risk is overtly recognised in the Overseas Partnership Development Guidelines which offer encouragement for bottom up initiatives: 'Some links arise from top down initiatives, others (possible the majority) from individual academics … The balance of top down and bottom up activities should not be of particular importance'. It is evident, therefore, that the university, in making the movement from 'International activity' to 'International strategy' was sensitively looking for ways of creating a shared vision, a buy-in by all. The Head of Partnership Development sees one function of her department being to provide support and expertise in such situations: 'supporting them but not in an autocratic way'. It will be shown later that in the current international strategy, when discussing research partnerships, there is also a specific mention of the possibility of individually instigated partnerships as well as institutional ones.

As a final point concerning analysis of the guidelines, the final sentence reads; 'It is expected that the numbers of students entering the university

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[7] http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/quality-manual/collaborative-provision/procedure.htm#moa

through partnership agreements will increase by at least 70% over the next 3 years'. This seems firmly to place this stage of strategy development in the second type identified by Fielden (2008), with a combination of recruitment targets with the creation of partnerships and collaborations.

Phase two. Analysis of the current international strategy: emergence of an institution which is internationalised in all its activities.

This section of the case study will show that there has been a continual evolution of ethos in this university concerning collaborations. The university can now claim to have arrived at the third phase of the model of Middlehurst & Woodfield, 'Internationalisation process', with a clearly articulated strategy and clearly defined roles in a structure including senior management. The website of the university presents an organigram of how international activities are organised, with a Pro-Vice Chancellor specifically responsible for internationalisation, a Director of the International Office, and four departments (one of which is Partnership Development, the others concerning student recruitment, study abroad, and student support)[8]. More crucially, perhaps, the university also now fits into the third type of strategy identified by Fielden, typified by internationalisation of all aspects of the institution.

The university has a clear and well articulated public-facing international strategy:[9] (there is also a strategy document accessible only by the staff of the university) and this is examined below using the six items of the 'protocol' described in 'Chapter One: Institutional Internationalisation Strategies' [10].

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[8] http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/internationaloffice/about-us/index.aspx
[9] *'Internationalisation: Knowledge without borders'*
http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/internationaloffice/about-us/index.aspx
[10] The items of this protocol are:
1. What type of discourse does this strategy reflect: for example, a 'Marketisation' discourse, or a 'Sustainability' discourse?
2. What have been the stages of strategy development; how is it being managed and how is senior management involved?
3. What mentions are there of specific forms of collaborations; such as institutional and government partnerships, transnational education, engagements with the Bologna process, or seeking collaborative research funding?
4. What mentions are there of internationalisation at home activities in terms of changes to curriculum, preparation of home students for a globalised world, or links to careers and employability?
5. What mentions are there of staffing issues; for example in terms of staff development and recruitment?

Type(s) of discourse.
The most salient feature of the discourse observable in the strategy is a recurring reference to excellence: with various mentions of the university's ranking in different world tables; its membership of prestigious groupings; and frequent naming of internationally famous partners. For example, when describing teaching and exchange relationships, the strategy notes that these are 'with some of the best universities across the globe'. The Head of Partnership Development pointed out, however, that often it is the quality of the particular department engaging in the collaboration which is of prime importance, rather than overall reputation of the institution.

A second discourse feature of the strategy are repeated references to the need for the acquisition of international perspectives by all stakeholders, a type of discourse which 'Chapter One: Institutional Internationalisation Strategies' labelled 'holistic'. This is clearly articulated in an opening claim of the strategy: 'Internationalisation is at the heart of everything we do' and then later stating that: 'An institution-wide commitment to embedding an international dimension across all of our activities is essential'.

A third aspect of the university's strategy relates to the discourse of development as discussed in 'Chapter Five: Development and Discourse'; this is partly covered in the section of the strategy 'Our international responsibilities' which identifies securing scholarships for students from developing countries; providing bursaries for staff to participate in projects in development; and providing volunteering opportunities for students. An interesting example of development as capacity building is participation in the provision of open-access teaching resources for Africa [11]. In the section of the strategy which specifically deals with research, projects related to sustainable development are mentioned (examples include sustainable energy, biotechnology, drug discovery, and food security) however even in this section the theme of excellence is perhaps the most strongly emphasised aspect. In 'Chapter Five: Development and Discourse', which deals specifically with the relation of university collaborations and development, there is a discussion of the work of Professor Jack Rieley (Rieley 2009) of Nottingham University, giving 'an account of how over more than 20 years Rieley came to incorporate pragmatic issues of development, including different

6. How much of a focus remains on the recruitment of international students and associated issues such as those relating to international student experience?

[11] See the website of OER Africa for more details of this scheme http://www.oerafrica.org/

ideological discourses of development, into his first agenda of pure scientific research.' Overall, collaboration as a means of ensuring development seems to have a lower priority in the strategy than the discourses of excellence and holistic internationalisation of the institution[12].

Stages of strategy development, how it is being managed and how senior management is involved.
There is little mention of management issues within the strategy itself, but this was addressed in the introduction of this section, showing a movement to the third phase of 'Internationalisation process' with a clearly articulated strategy and clearly defined roles in a structure including senior management.

Mentions of specific forms of collaborations.
A key and distinguishing feature of this university is the fact that it has campuses in Malaysia and China as well as the UK, and although having international campuses is certainly not the sole form of its international collaboration their existence does enable the university to evidence with ease certain ambitions concerning internationalisation. Concerning these campuses the strategy claims: 'While locally embedded within the higher education system of their host countries these campuses remain full and integral parts of the University of Nottingham.' This balancing act needs to be monitored carefully, however, particularly bearing in mind the possible tensions which may exist between different cultures of education discussed in 'Chapter Two: Growth of Transnational Education'.

There are repeated references to international research collaborations, which should be 'world-changing'. The research partnerships include, but are not restricted to, opportunities arising from having their own campuses in different countries. Partners identified include private and public organisations, and there is a specific mention of the possibility of individually instigated partnerships as well as institutional ones, as was discussed earlier relating to top-down and bottom-up approaches to internationalisation.

The strategy also refers to teaching and exchange partnerships which allow students opportunities for overseas experiences (in 350 institutions world-wide), including over 30 exchange partnerships for students at all levels, and also some opportunities for split programmes. There is specific

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[12] It should be noted, however, that there will certainly be individuals and groups of individuals within the institution who are champions of development and who will identify this as their prime objective.

mention of membership of Universitas 21 (U21) and the opportunities this brings, as well as again referring to exchanges with the university's campuses in China and Malaysia.

There is no specific mention of the Bologna process in the strategy.

Mentions of internationalisation at home activities.
One section of the strategy deals specifically with how the UK campus sets out to supply a global experience for all members of its community, aligning the strategy with internationalisation at home priorities. There is a strong focus on engendering international outlooks amongst its future graduates (often related to employability skills including language proficiency and cross-cultural awareness), and this is given as one of the motivations for providing students with the overseas experiences described above. The teaching and exchange partnerships are in part linked to an aim in the strategy of ensuring that 25% of the UK undergraduates have some form of study abroad (or work placement) opportunity, ranging from summer schools to full years abroad[13]. Again this is eased by the opportunities presented by having their own campuses in other countries. The strategy also describes how students, alongside their degrees, can complete a Certificate in Global Competence, enabled by the university's membership of Universitas 21[14].

Staffing issues.
The strategy describes its staff as being cosmopolitan, and states that some of the collaborative links with 350 institutions mentioned earlier can also allow for staff exchanges. Also, as mentioned earlier, the university provides bursaries to enable staff to work with partner institutions in the developing world, and these are linked to the theme of 'capacity building' in developing countries (see 'Chapter Five: Development and Discourse').

Recruitment of international students and associated issues such as those relating to international student experience.
Mentions of international students coming to the UK campuses are overwhelmingly positive, identifying them as bearers of alternative perspectives, enriching not just the home campus but also the area of Nottingham more generally, mentioning international students working as volunteers in Nottingham. The need for specific support for these students is identified (significantly after describing the benefits that international

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[13] Note: this exceeds the Bologna process target of: 'In 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad' (NUS 2010. p5).
[14] http://www.universitas21.com/globalissues.html

students bring) describing both pastoral support on offer and assistance related to study skills, but this is balanced with recognising the need for language training and development of international competences of UK students. This seems to be a demonstration of the claim in the strategy that internationalisation is 'driven by the principles associated with partnership and reciprocity.'

Concluding comments

Nottingham's strategy makes a distinction between the UK campuses, sometimes referred to as the 'home' campuses (which have 8,000 international students amongst the student body) and the international campuses in Malaysia and China (with a total of around 8,000 students between them). Given the difficulty of classifying students (when and where is a student an 'international student'), and the repeated desire evident in the overall discourse to be seen as international in all activities, it will be interesting to see if this distinction will be continued in future iterations of strategy. It is evident that the three campuses are all seen as fully parts of the university, the strategy states that: 'while locally embedded within the higher education system of their host countries, these campuses remain full and integral parts of The University of Nottingham. We operate a common system for quality assurance and seek to deliver a comparable student experience across all our campuses'.

Investigating the nature of internationalisation at this university was greatly helped by the clarity of vision expressed in the various documents which have been produced as part of the process, and a willingness to make the evolution of the strategy public. The overall ethos which comes from reading these documents is that of excellence, but it should be noted that other discourses are possible for other institutions, and are equally as valid, for example widening participation, or vocational skills development. Each institution should decide what their particular role is, then articulate this clearly and ensure that all aspects of the institution's activities are congruent with this.

Similarly different institutions will identify different collaborations as being suitable for them: few will be able to create overseas campuses, and many may identify international learning and teaching collaborations as being more suitable for them than large-scale research projects. Involvement with franchising, strongly rejected by the University of Nottingham, may be favoured by universities which have links with further education providers as a part of a widening participation agenda, both within the UK and overseas. Indeed the growth of private colleges within

the UK offering franchised degrees is claimed to open up access to Higher Education for many international students[15].

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