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**Creators:** Burnapp, D., Zhao, W., Boteju, D., Jament, J., Feng, Y., Li, S., Powis, C., Klimes, C. and Mallam-Hassam, Y.

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**Case study authors:** Yan, F. And Shengxiao, L.

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## **CS 8: Staff Development in China**

### **The impact of international collaborations in higher education on staff continuing professional development: a case study of Shaoxing University, China**

**Author: Feng Yan; Li Shengxiao**

#### **Research background**

In China, CPD is currently high on the Government's agenda (China's 11th Five Year Plan 2006-2011). Hence this case study covers a topical theme. This growing awareness of CPD fits at several distinct levels: national; provincial; institutional; departmental; and the personal development of the individual academic staff concerned. The rapid social transformation and educational reform which China is witnessing has led to the reconstruction of professional identity for academics in higher education (HE). International collaboration has become a strategic choice to accelerate the pace of sustainable development and internationalisation in HE. Hence CPD, and wider capacity building of institutions, is one of the many motivations for Chinese HE institutions to engage in international collaborations. There has been an increasing demand both for and from academics to seek their personal and professional improvement and to develop international knowledge and skills through international collaboration. CPD models differ among institutions and/or within institutions in structure, finance and content. Opportunities and challenges in staff CPD in terms of involving international collaborative programmes have varying impacts on individual academics as well as institutions. It is therefore critical to reflect on policies and practices of CPD in China to draw implications for international collaborations in HE.

#### **Key learning up front**

When establishing a collaboration which aims to provide continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, this case study suggests the following learning points:

## **Strategic Implications of International Collaborations in Higher Education**

- **CS 8.1.** Check on the strategy of the nation or institution concerning the priority of CPD, this may affect funding and resources.
- **CS 8.2.** Recognise that it will be necessary to adapt the programme to cater for specific national and cultural contexts.
- **CS 8.3.** Identify the models of CPD in the institution or department (school) you are collaborating with, as these differ and so different plans are more conducive to different contexts.
- **CS 8.4.** Identify the role of the institution in supporting, financing, and monitoring the initiative, as this may affect the motivation and willingness of the staff to engage with the programme.
- **CS 8.5.** Investigate the institutional or departmental support mechanisms in place in the envisaged partner to examine the impact of CPD on the motivation of participants.
- **CS 8.6.** Investigate how the participants for programmes will be selected.
- **CS 8.7.** Involve the participants in the design of the CPD programme as much as possible.
- **CS 8.8.** Gather staff perspectives as one of the methods of evaluating the outcomes of the CPD programme.
- **CS 8.9.** Encourage, as far as possible, a two way flow in the collaboration so that even staff who do not themselves travel internationally can benefit from contacting with visiting staff and students.
- **CS 8.10.** Recognise that institutional reputation can be enhanced by participation in high quality CPD collaboration programmes.

### **The case study**

This case study was conducted as a sub-project of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) commissioned research (2008-2011) on 'Strategic implications of international collaboration in HE'. It was conducted in Shaoxing University, a provincial-level university college in China established in 1996 by merging some institutions of higher learning in Shaoxing, a city dynamic in socio-economy and rich in historic-cultural heritage. By evaluating the CPD models in relation to the international collaborations undertaken by this university during 1999-2009, this case study aims to investigate the impact of the programmes on staff motivations for CPD, and institutional/departmental capacity building. It also investigates institutional support mechanisms from the perspectives of the academics involved. The purpose of this case study is to provide

insights of initiatives to follow and pitfalls to avoid for others considering participating in HE collaborations concerning CPD.

Three schools within this university were under study, namely, the School of Business and Management, the School of Foreign Languages and the School of Humanities. Each school adapted different models of CPD through international collaboration programmes. The programmes included visiting scholarships of between 3-6 months, and shorter language and culture immersion programmes both at home and abroad.

### **The preliminary findings**

There is a distinction between two sources of funding. 'International collaboration programmes' can be financed by national or provincial funds, by the institution centrally, or by the department or school. These may require the individual academics to make a contribution to the total cost. Alternatively there are examples of CPD which are completely self-financed by the academics concerned. In all cases, however, staff members engaging in CPD need to sign contracts with the institution, which enable the institution to monitor all such activities, and also to bind the recipients for a period of service after their CPD programmes.

Nevertheless, there are different opportunities for involvement in CPD for academics in different schools, dependent on the nature and financial strengths of their schools as well as the vision and strategy of the schools' senior management for internationalisation. This may result in staff dissatisfaction if it is perceived that institutional or school funds are not used equitably.

### **Example from the School of Business and Management**

As an example, the number of teaching staff in the whole university has increased from 332 in 1999 to 1,072 in 2008. Within the School of Business and Management, which was established in 2001, 15 out of 55 teaching staff members have had 3-6 months' overseas study or visiting scholar experiences through international collaboration programmes developed by the university centrally, with active engagement and contribution from the school. These 15 School of Business and Management staff are 29% of the total number of teachers in the whole university (N=52) who have had 3 months' or more study or visiting scholar experiences through national, provincial or self-funding as well as the university's international collaboration programmes.

### **Example from the School of Foreign Languages**

However, among 93 teaching staff in the School of Foreign Languages, only 11 teachers have had 3 months' or more study or visiting scholar experiences through national, provincial or self-funding as well as the university's international collaboration programmes, occupying about 21% of the university total. Therefore in 2007, in order to increase the proportion of academic staff who had at least some such CPD experiences, the school sent a batch of 16 teachers to a UK university for three weeks' language and culture immersion study. This was immediately before the Ministry of Education of China came for an inspection of the school.

### **Example from the School of Humanities**

Among the 42 teaching staff of the School of Humanities, eight of them teach Chinese to overseas students in the Department of the International Culture Studies. Three out of the eight have had over 3 months' study or visiting scholar experiences through state-funding as well as the university's international collaboration programmes, occupying about 6% of the university total. By the time of the field work, one has retired, one is still teaching abroad, and another is teaching in the university.

### **Staff Perspectives**

As a way of gathering staff perspectives from a purposive and selective sample of staff for this research, a mixed methods approach was taken using semi-structured interviews, observations, document scrutiny and narrative enquiry. The findings reveal the participants' positive perspectives towards the international collaboration programmes. The participants perceived the initiatives as channels for widening their visions of internationalisation, and for developing their capacity in learning and teaching in HE. Whilst the academics generally appreciated the opportunities and perceived a positive impact on their personal and professional development, issues such as the design and evaluation of the programmes, the institutional CPD policies on the selection of the participants, and support mechanisms in terms of the allocation of the funds were identified. Warnings of pitfalls to avoid in future international collaboration were provided.

### **An example programme**

In 2003, Shaoxing University developed a partnership relationship with a university in Europe which has a history of over 700 years. The two institutions shared a vision of international education for cultural change.

Since then, the institutions have started a range of collaborative initiatives including mutual visits of the top administrators, themed symposium, student exchange, and a language and culture immersion (LCI) programme. The universities' initiative of the LCI programme to be conducted in the Chinese institution was to provide the students from the European institution opportunities to enhance their Chinese language proficiency and cultural understanding, whilst giving the Chinese staff opportunity to work with international students. This case study traced the history of the LCI programme which had been tailor-made for the students of the European university in the past six years. It examined the perceptions and perspectives of the Chinese academics on the collaboration with the university in Europe with a specific focus on the impact of the LCI programme on the academics' motivational change for CPD after their involvement in it.

The findings indicate that, by collaborating with the university in Europe, Shaoxing University witnessed a significant change in its reputation nationally and internationally. Most of the academics perceived the collaboration, especially the LCI programme, a positive strategy which enhanced their capacity in learning and teaching and further motivated them in seeking CPD opportunities. Nevertheless, issues are also revealed concerning the motives behind the cooperation and the quality of provision, which reflect problems in the design, evaluation and assessment of the programme and create certain barriers for the effective teaching and successful management of the programme.

### **The implications**

This case study provides an overview of the CPD models in a Chinese university in relation to academic collaborations with international HE institutions. The evidence of the research, especially the issues and challenges identified are likely to be encountered by similar institutions. Awareness and understanding of country and culture specific issues in relation to CPD are perceived to be crucial for healthy and sustainable collaborative relationships between the partner institutions internationally. Given the obvious limitations due to the sample size, the implications drawn can illuminate future institutional policies in terms of staff CPD and the sustainable development in international collaboration in China and beyond.

## **Strategic Implications of International Collaborations in Higher Education**