

Review of UK transnational education in China: Harper Adams University and Beijing University of Agriculture

November 2012

Executive summary

The partnership between Harper Adams University (Harper Adams) and Beijing University of Agriculture (BUA) is founded on shared academic interests and the commitment of both institutions to international outreach and to the enhancement of cultural exchange between China and the UK. It is centred on the joint delivery of bachelor's degree programmes in food science and retail management, and international business. Each of these leads to a 'double degree': an award from Harper Adams and an award from BUA. The courses are approved by the Chinese Ministry of Education as a Chinese-foreign cooperation programme.

Both universities have extensive expertise in agri-food science and strong links with the wider agri-food sector. Their involvement in this area extends beyond the purely academic sphere to embrace applied research and programmes for continuing professional development. This expertise and the industry contacts that have been developed provide the two institutions with the means to enrich the student learning experience. In this regard, the establishment of the Agri-food Supply Chain and Business Management Research Centre, with its potential to enhance learning and teaching, highlights the emphasis placed by both institutions on developing the links between research and teaching. The partners have a similar strategic approach to internationalisation, and their work to promote student cultural exchange - securing industrial sponsorship through financial support of two-way student exchange - underlines their long-term commitment to collaboration.

Course management arrangements work well, and are based on the broadly parallel structures on either side of the partnership required by the formal agreement. These arrangements, combined with strong liaison between staff on both sides of the partnership, provide a secure framework for the jointly delivered courses in terms of operations, quality assurance and longer-term strategy. Links between the partners operate efficiently at both institutional and programme level and are maintained through well established formal mechanisms - most notably annual partnership review meetings, course committees and assessment boards - and also through informal communication channels and reciprocal staff visits. Harper Adams' overriding commitment to maintaining the academic standard of its awards is reflected in the rigour and attention to detail applied in the operation of the annual course monitoring process.

Teaching is resourced by carefully selected BUA academic staff, with good English language skills, combined with teaching support from Harper Adams staff. Students can draw on general academic and personal support available from a variety of individuals and there are thorough student induction arrangements at key stages of the course. Harper Adams has formulated plans, yet to be implemented systematically, to extend the use of electronic resources to enhance student learning at BUA. The student feedback systems in place enable issues to be raised and facilitate effective student input to course evaluation, operation and development.

As Harper Adams seeks to extend its outreach in China through the development of partnerships with selected Chinese universities, its collaboration with BUA provides a useful model, which Harper Adams has already used as a reference point in a recent agreement with another university in China. While building on its experience of the collaboration with BUA to broaden its partnership activity in China, Harper Adams is also continuing to strengthen and deepen its links with BUA. The student cultural exchange initiative, plans to introduce joint master's programmes, and continuing engagement with joint research clearly demonstrate Harper Adams' active and forward-looking approach to this collaboration.

Report

Introduction

1 The partnership between Harper Adams University (Harper Adams), a dedicated agri-food science university, and Beijing University of Agriculture (BUA) was established in December 2003. It developed from an earlier arrangement, under a British Council scheme, that resulted in recruitment of BUA graduates to Harper Adams master's programmes in the UK.

2 Harper Adams, founded in 1901 as Harper Adams Agricultural College, has since obtained degree-awarding powers for taught degrees (1996) and for research degrees (2006). It is organised into five academic departments, each of which contributes modules to an integrated modular scheme for undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses, based on principles of credit accumulation. Located in Shropshire on a site that includes a working farm, Harper Adams has about 2,500 students enrolled on courses leading to undergraduate or postgraduate awards.

3 In its current strategic plan, Harper Adams identifies the internationalisation of its academic activities as a key objective for the planning period 2012-17. Through various initiatives, it is extending its international teaching work and its burgeoning international research networks. Specifically, it is seeking to build on the experience of its partnership with BUA to develop other partnerships with selected universities in China. An agreement for a similar collaborative arrangement with another Chinese university (Huazhong Agricultural University) has recently been signed.

4 BUA was founded in 1956 as Hebei Tongzhou Agricultural School, taking the BUA name in 1965. It was granted degree-awarding status by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 1998 and now offers bachelor degrees in 24 disciplines and master's degrees in eight subject areas. In addition to its partnership with Harper Adams, BUA has links with universities and higher education colleges in Japan, the USA, Australia and Kazakhstan. It is organised into 13 academic schools, one of which is the International College; this manages the collaboration with Harper Adams and is located on the main BUA campus in north Beijing.

5 The collaboration between Harper Adams and BUA is centred on the joint delivery of two bachelor degree programmes that each lead to a 'double degree'; an award from Harper Adams and an award from BUA:

- BSc/BSc (Hons) International Business Management (Harper Adams) and BEc International Economics and Trade (BUA)
- BSc/BSc (Hons) Food Quality and Retail Management (Harper Adams) and BEng Food Science and Engineering (BUA).

6 The courses are approved in China as a four-year programme, sometimes called the joint (Harper Adams/BUA) programme. The first three years comprise a foundation year followed by years one and two of the degree (corresponding to levels 4 and 5 on the relevant UK framework for higher education qualifications); teaching is mainly by BUA, although Harper Adams supports teaching of designated modules. The final year of the degree (level 6) is taught by Harper Adams in the UK. Chinese students recruited through the quota system on the basis of having reached the requisite standard in the higher education entrance examination (gaokao) may qualify for the double degree. The courses each have an annual quota of up to 40 students. In addition, a small number of students are admitted 'off-quota' via other routes, for example by transfer from other BUA courses, or on completion of the foundation year at the International College, but these students are eligible only for a Harper Adams award. In 2012, total student enrolment on both courses was 228: 85 at level 4, 69 at level 5 and 74 at level 6.

7 The development of jointly delivered master's programmes, again leading to double degrees, is currently under consideration, although there is the complication of the Chinese master's degree being a three-year programme, as compared with the one-year UK master's degree.

Part A: Set-up and operation

Establishing the link

8 At Harper Adams, the process of establishing a partnership comprises several stages. Informal contacts with the partner lead to an outline proposal being put forward for approval in principle. Due diligence is undertaken, including a risk assessment of the partner and a financial risk assessment of the proposal. A panel conducts a preliminary partnership review, which may include a visit to the partner, leading to a recommendation to Academic Board (the senior academic committee). The Board's approval paves the way for a contractual agreement to be drafted and for a course validation event to be arranged at the partner's premises, which deals with the detail of the modules to be delivered. Course validation panels include external members with relevant subject and profession expertise.

9 There are thorough procedures covering each stage of the process and these are compiled in a discrete section of a comprehensive Academic Quality Assurance Manual. The criteria for the risk assessment of the partner include its corporate objectives, its legal status, its reputation, its experience of delivering higher education, and its management and quality assurance arrangements. The risk assessment also addresses the extent of Harper Adams' familiarity with the higher education environment and the relevant legal and cultural aspects of the target overseas country. A separate financial risk assessment examines a range of factors aimed at ascertaining the financial standing of the partner and the viability of the proposed collaborative courses.

10 The preliminary partnership review pertinent to BUA (November 2002) pre-dates the current procedural documentation, but it is apparent from the report on the review that it followed a broadly similar process. A risk assessment of the partner was undertaken by an executive director and financial information was scrutinised, although there were limits on what the partner was able to make available for this purpose. Among the documentation considered in the review was a submission from BUA covering educational provision, staffing, physical resources and student welfare services. During a week-long visit to BUA, the review panel was able to see the facilities available, meet staff and students and observe teaching. Academic Board gave preliminary approval for the joint delivery of the courses in partnership with BUA, subject to a successful course validation event. This took place at Harper Adams rather than at BUA, which is at variance with current procedures.

11 The review report points to an extensive and thorough evaluation of BUA's quality assurance systems and learning resources, and of its approach to improving quality. It contains a number of recommendations on establishing key structures and linkages between the institutions, which were also intended to guide contractual discussions and course management arrangements, including teaching arrangements for students following their transfer to Harper Adams.

12 The report also identified a number of issues for the partnership to address. These were chiefly related to differences in pedagogical approach (traditional teaching versus student independent learning); the need for improvement in the standard of English language (of both staff and students); and the UK requirement for external examiners (not a part of the Chinese system). Other issues included the limited amount of research specific to the courses to be delivered being undertaken by BUA staff and the limited involvement of BUA students in course management and quality assurance processes. These latter issues both relate to key characteristics of UK higher education: research-informed teaching and student engagement.

13 With these pointers for the course validation event, the preliminary partnership review panel returned a positive recommendation. There was evident enthusiasm for the partnership to proceed. BUA was seen to be a well managed institution, with a reasonably robust quality assurance system and a comprehensive system for human resource management and staff development. The partnership also had the support of the Beijing Municipal Government, the British Embassy in Beijing and prospective employers.

14 The course validation event was no less rigorous; indeed, the courses were not approved at the first attempt (April 2003). Instead, the panel deferred its decision, requiring further work to be undertaken in the light of its findings and a re-submission of the course documentation at an event six months later. This resulted in approval of the courses (December 2003). From the Chinese side, approval to run the courses was obtained from the Ministry of Education, with the term of the initial approval spanning five intakes, starting in 2004-05. The courses were successfully revalidated by Harper Adams in April 2008 and the Ministry renewed its approval for a further five intakes, indicative of the commitment to continued partnership from both sides.

15 Course validation is focused on the set of component modules, in terms of both content and delivery (paragraph 36). The 2008 revalidation report again picked up on the different teaching styles of Harper Adams and BUA staff, by then apparent from the jointly delivered parts of the course; that is, modules directly supported by Harper Adams staff and input to lectures and tutorials made by other visiting staff. It also paid considerable attention to the English language qualifications of BUA staff and students, in the context of the requirement for students to achieve a standard equivalent to IELTS 6.5 in order to progress to the final year (level 6) at Harper Adams. How the partnership is addressing these issues and others identified through programme approval and review processes is dealt with in paragraphs 26 and 29.

16 The contractual arrangements governing the partnership are contained in a memorandum of agreement (agreement) relating to the double degree, supported by a financial annex and an administrative annex listing validated modules and course structures and dealing with course management and administrative responsibilities. The original agreement (2004) ran for a five-year term and was in place ready for commencement of the courses in 2004-05. The current agreement was signed in March 2009 for a further five years. These agreements mesh perfectly with the cycle of course approvals by both Harper Adams and the Chinese Ministry of Education, meaning that students are not exposed to any uncertainties in this regard. The agreements state explicitly that Harper Adams has

responsibility for oversight and maintenance of the academic standards of the validated courses, and that BUA will 'utilise' Harper Adams' course management, quality assurance and assessment systems. The agreements address the relevant provisions of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) concerning written agreements, except that they do not state the partners' position on subcontracting. Harper Adams is **recommended** to include in any future formal agreement a statement about whether serial arrangements involving further subcontracting are precluded.

17 Harper Adams requires that its partnership agreements and associated financial arrangements are reviewed annually by senior staff of the respective institutions. Accordingly, annual partnership review meetings are held at BUA. The scope of these meetings covers institutional, financial and course-related matters. The reports of these reviews suggest that they are effective from both strategic and operational perspectives in identifying issues requiring attention and in formulating action plans for the year ahead. At Harper Adams the reports are considered by a Collaborative Programmes Management Committee reporting to Academic Board, thereby providing a suitable mechanism for institutional oversight, as confirmed by the relevant committee minutes.

Making the link work

18 Outside the formal monitoring mechanism of annual partnership review, senior managers from Harper Adams and BUA maintain liaison through reciprocal visits. As stipulated in the formal agreement, course management relies on there being broadly parallel structures on either side of the partnership. Accordingly, course managers, appointed by their respective institutions, have day-to-day responsibility for the operation of the courses and are supported by senior tutors. In addition, BUA has appointed a Higher Education Coordinator as a further liaison point with the course managers and with Harper Adams. In relation to quality assurance, the link is with Harper Adams' Head of Education Development and Quality Enhancement, who oversees the academic management and administration of the collaboration. An important formal link between these two roles exists through their involvement in assessment boards: the Higher Education Coordinator normally attends the boards at Harper Adams where module marks are confirmed, while the Head of Education Development and Quality Enhancement (or nominee) chairs the boards that determine student progression (paragraph 45).

19 At BUA, a single course committee has the remit to ensure that the two courses are operating in line with the procedures and agreed responsibilities of both universities. Chaired by the Higher Education Coordinator, the membership includes the course managers from both BUA and Harper Adams, all BUA staff teaching on the courses, and the students' elected representatives. Meetings are held at least once a term and are conducted through a videoconference link with Harper Adams, so that staff and students at both universities may participate.

20 Harper Adams' own internal reporting systems indicate that the course management arrangements are operating well. For instance they were noted as 'good practice' in the 2008 revalidation report, while the 2009 annual partnership review report confirmed them to be effective. There are evidently regular meetings and communications occurring between both universities. Formal links, such as the course committee and examination boards, are supplemented by less formal links maintained through staff visits to BUA for teaching or for staff development (paragraph 26). Effective course management underpinned by strong liaison between the staff on both sides of the partnership is identified as a **positive feature** of the partnership.

21 Student admissions are primarily a BUA responsibility, since the majority of students are admitted through the national quota system on the basis of the gaokao. There is oversight from Harper Adams concerning applicants' English language attainment, which is expected to be at a level equivalent to IELTS 5.0. For progression to the first year (level 4) of the degree courses, following successful completion of the foundation year, the threshold is equivalent to IELTS 5.5 and is assessed through a test devised and marked by Harper Adams. Students are again assessed in English language before transfer to Harper Adams for the final year (level 6), this time through a specific language module, for which Harper Adams sets assessment expectations based on a requirement of IELTS 6.5. Harper Adams moderates marks on a sample basis.

22 As mentioned in paragraph 6, students admitted through the gaokao route enrol for a double degree, while students admitted 'off-quota' through other routes enrol only for a Harper Adams degree. Enrolment records for all students are held by both universities. Irrespective of their admission route, students later transfer to Harper Adams, subject to satisfactory progress. Therefore, Harper Adams keeps a close watch on total enrolments on the courses, with a view to maintaining an appropriate balance between Chinese and other students on its own campus.

23 Induction arrangements are a shared responsibility. BUA publishes a study guide for students entering the foundation year with the intention of joining the degree courses. This is a student-friendly document, written in both English and Chinese. It gives helpful tips and advice for successful integration into student life and offers detailed guidance on how students should approach their studies, bearing in mind that for most of them the ultimate goal is a double degree. It sets out clearly the English language requirements for progression to the degree courses.

24 Induction to the first year (level 4) of the degree is spread over a five-day programme, attended by the Harper Adams Course Manager; previous graduates from the courses are invited to contribute. The programme includes separate sessions for the respective courses that introduce the modules, explain the course handbook and allow time for team-building and group discussion. There is also a joint session for both courses delivered by an external speaker about studying and living in the UK. Towards the end of the programme, student representatives are elected, following speeches from candidates. Students receive course handbooks at induction (paragraph 50) .

25 In preparation for transfer to the UK, students are given briefings on Harper Adams and the UK student experience. Assistance with visa applications is available from an independent company representing Harper Adams in China, which also hosts a reception for students and parents where they can meet Harper Adams senior staff. Students are accompanied to the UK by a member of staff. On arrival, there is a 10-day induction programme incorporating information sessions; social, geographical and cultural orientation events; and assistance with official formalities. The programme is timed to lead into freshers' week (an introductory week for newly arrived students). Integration of Chinese students is facilitated by accommodation arrangements; they are not housed together, but dispersed across campus residences. Thorough induction arrangements at key stages of the courses are identified as a **positive feature** the partnership.

26 As explained in paragraph 6, the first two years of the degree courses (levels 4 and 5) are taught in English by BUA staff, who must be approved by Harper Adams after having received their curricula vitae. Approval decisions are made against criteria that include proficiency in English of at least IELTS 6.5, or equivalent (confirmed at interview and by means of a trial lecture), plus several years of overseas experience operating in English. A further requirement for a doctoral degree involving a thesis written in English has recently been adopted. The development and application of explicit English language proficiency

criteria for approving teaching staff is identified as a **positive feature** of the partnership. Harper Adams runs an intensive one-week training course at BUA for new staff teaching on the courses, covering aspects such as assessment and student support.

27 The teaching support provided by Harper Adams for designated modules involves staff who 'fly in' for one or two-week teaching blocks. These modules may change over time, but they are planned and agreed in advance with BUA, and students are kept fully informed of the precise arrangements. Harper Adams also provides electronic resources to support module delivery through a virtual learning environment. There has been a drive to upgrade online materials for modules, and students at BUA find these materials particularly useful for essay writing. Videoconference facilities have also been utilised to transmit teaching and revision sessions from Harper Adams, as a supplement to teaching at BUA. Annual course reports have recommended the extension of such initiatives, but with action reported as 'ongoing' over the past two years, progress is now overdue. Harper Adams is **recommended** to implement, systematically, its plans to expand the use of electronic resources to enhance the student learning experience at BUA.

28 Students at BUA have four hours of specialist English language teaching each week to support their language development, which is delivered through language modules taught by qualified native English speakers. Nevertheless, difficulties with the English language have been put forward as a possible contributory factor for the relatively low achievement levels of final-year students joining Harper Adams from BUA. External examiner reports have identified deficiencies in students' language skills and annual course reports have recommended closer monitoring of student achievement in English language in the earlier stages of the courses (paragraph 41).

29 A review of English language provision has resulted in reduced class sizes and extra sessions at Harper Adams for students following transfer. The overall performance of students from BUA has shown a marked improvement since 2009-10 (although levels still fall short of the achievement of other Harper Adams students). This might be attributable to better English language support; in any case, favourable comments about the support available have been made in review reports and by students.

30 General academic and personal support for students at BUA is available from a variety of individuals and services; students are directed to help on specific matters through their course handbook. For academic guidance, the primary sources are module tutors, other staff of the International College, and library staff. Students have been broadly positive in their evaluation of the academic and personal support provided.

31 As well as having common academic interests, Harper Adams and BUA both have strong links with the agri-food sector through continuing professional development programmes and applied research. They both place emphasis on developing links between their research and teaching. In this regard, Harper Adams has funded a small research centre at BUA (Agri-food Supply Chain and Business Management Research Centre), which currently has two research associates. These are a resource for staff pursuing joint research investigations and are also able to support students in research methods. The establishment of a research centre, with its potential to enrich learning and teaching, is identified as a **positive feature** of the partnership.

32 Under the agreed course management structures, course committee membership includes elected student representatives from each year of the course. A clearly documented system of student representation is in operation at BUA. Course handbooks explain the responsibilities of course representatives in considerable detail. As full members of the course committee, they are involved in course planning and development and act as a link between the course team and students. To encourage effective input, students are expected

to propose agenda items, collect students' views and feed back to their constituencies following meetings. Their other duties include organising course social events and activities.

33 Students evidently participate fully in course committees: agendas are designed to give them the opportunity to voice students' views on all aspects of course management, and minutes show that they perform this function confidently and with vigour. Their suggestions and concerns are appropriately addressed. In addition, students provide feedback informally to members of the course team.

34 Students also give feedback by completing course evaluation forms at the end of the year, rating their course according to various aspects of the component modules, course management, learning resources, and student support, and finally giving an overall satisfaction rating. The data is used to produce a satisfaction rating, by course, for each aspect, thus facilitating comparison between modules, as well as between the various resources and services. The resultant analysis is considered as a standing item at the annual course monitoring meeting of the course committee, and is appended to the annual course report, which is a combined report covering both courses. Student feedback systems that enable effective student input to course evaluation, operation and development are identified as a **positive feature** of the partnership.

35 In a recent development, Harper Adams and BUA have drawn up plans to promote two-way cultural exchange visits for students over a five-year period. Sponsorship has been secured from one of China's top-500 companies (Zhejiang Hengyi Group), providing the essential financial support to take forward the initiative. The work undertaken to enable student cultural exchange is identified as a **positive feature** of the partnership. It is illustrative of the long-term commitment of both universities to their collaboration.

Part B: Quality assurance

Academic standards and the quality of programmes

36 As the degree courses are based on Harper Adams modules, the initial course validation events in 2003 concentrated on the particular selection of modules and the sequence in which they were to be delivered. They entailed a thorough check of programme specifications, module descriptions and forms of assessment, in order to ensure that each course contained an appropriate amount and level of learning for the award of a UK bachelor degree (with reference being made to relevant subject benchmark statements and the National Qualifications Framework).

37 At the first validation, the panel deferred its decision, requiring the course team to revise module descriptions so that they better reflected the course aims, the intended learning outcomes and the award title. Following these changes, the entire set of modules at levels 4, 5 and 6 was subsequently validated, at the same time incorporating some contextual amendments to individual modules. From the validation reports, it is clear that there was a critical evaluation of the course proposals and that suitable rigour was applied in considering curriculum coherence and the quality of learning opportunities for students (teaching, learning resources, and student support). No modifications to delivery or assessment were necessary to meet BUA requirements for the award of the Chinese degree, other than the inclusion of the foundation year.

38 There is a programme specification for each course and these are particular to the collaboration with BUA, covering all three years (levels 4 to 6). They identify the designated modules that are supported by Harper Adams at BUA and are routinely updated. The specifications relate only to the Harper Adams awards, since they are dealing with UK

academic standards at the programme level. Harper Adams has no written policy on double degrees, apart from a statement that all awards established under partnership arrangements are under the ultimate authority of its Academic Board. As Harper Adams enters into further arrangements involving double degrees, producing policy guidance may become more necessary.

39 The courses were revalidated in 2008 under Harper Adams' procedures for periodic review. The event was held at Harper Adams, although the course team presenting the proposal for revalidation included several BUA staff. The panel report made no mention of the course team having prepared a critical appraisal report (as is required under current procedures). Nevertheless, there was ample evidence of reflective evaluation of various issues that had persisted since the initial validation, including the continuing difficulties in teaching BUA students alongside other (mainly UK) students at Harper Adams. Problems with the English language was one factor, but the need for 'traditional' Harper Adams students to develop a greater cultural awareness of how Chinese students approach their studies was also acknowledged. The panel held discussions with final-year students from BUA, focused mainly on their experience at Harper Adams and the differences in teaching styles between the two institutions. One overall conclusion was the importance of managing students' expectations. Arrangements for student induction and cultural exchange visits should be helpful in this regard and have already been identified as positive features of the partnership in this report (paragraphs 25 and 35).

40 The annual monitoring process at Harper Adams is based on an annual course review report prepared by the course manager according to a standard template. The report includes an action plan for the coming year and highlights good practice for wider dissemination. It is discussed as the sole agenda item at a course committee meeting each year. The committee considers progress against the previous year's action plan; changes to modules, staffing and resources; external examiner reports and responses to them; student performance statistics; and an analysis of student evaluation of the courses. The individual reports on all courses are analysed centrally to produce an annual overview report for consideration by the Academic Standards Committee, a subcommittee of Academic Board.

41 Both of the courses delivered jointly with BUA are covered by a single annual course report, produced by the Harper Adams course manager. The 2011 annual course report shows good progress being made on action points from the previous year's plan, even though several actions were recorded as 'ongoing' and therefore were carried forward. For instance, against the 'ongoing' action that BUA staff and students should have full access to Harper Adams' electronic journals, it was noted that they now had access to several of the key resources. Another 'ongoing' action is to monitor student achievement and provide support for weaker students. Although English language support has been reviewed and degree results are showing an improvement (paragraph 29), student achievement continues to be monitored and the action point is being tracked from one year to the next until it can be signed off. However, one action that has stalled is a trial of online assessment and feedback to students at BUA. This project, initiated in response to external examiner comment on the quality of feedback, was due to be completed in 2011-12, but has been put on hold because of changes to staffing. Harper Adams is **recommended** to progress its trial of online assessment and feedback to students at BUA, with a view to improving the quality of feedback.

42 As noted in paragraph 34, the analysis of student evaluation of the courses is comprehensive and detailed. When combined with student feedback from course committee meetings it constitutes a strong evidence base for the annual course report. The report also deals with the impact of staffing changes and any consequent disruption for students, as well as evaluating the support or development given to staff taking on new roles or additional workload. The rigour and attention to detail applied in the operation of the annual monitoring

process is identified as a **positive feature** of the partnership. The process reflects an overriding commitment on the part of Harper Adams to maintaining the academic standard of its awards, and a considered approach to action that assists students in succeeding.

Assessment and certification of awards

43 Harper Adams' assessment regulations apply to all of its awards. The assessment methods for the courses delivered jointly with BUA were approved at validation (and revalidation) and are set out in programme specifications and module descriptions. It was agreed at the 2009 annual partnership review meeting that a review of assessment methods was needed, and this led to a greater diversity of methods and rescheduling of coursework deadlines. Further work on assessment is scheduled for 2012-13. Students are informed about assessment through the course handbook, which contains the generic assessment criteria and also relevant policies, such as the policy on academic misconduct (paragraph 50).

44 Under the current arrangements, assessment briefs are devised by BUA and sent to Harper Adams for approval. Assessed work is marked by BUA module tutors and sent to Harper Adams for sample second-marking. Additional provision is in place for new BUA teaching staff, such that for the first two years, Harper Adams staff second-mark all assessed work. External examiners have commented positively on the integrity of assessment procedures and specifically on moderation processes in terms of the appropriate adjustment of marks and the way they are used to develop BUA staff. However, as noted in paragraph 41, they have also identified shortcomings in assessment feedback to students.

45 Under Harper Adams' two-tier system of assessment boards, subject assessment boards deal with module results, while course assessment boards deal with progression and award classification. Subject assessment boards take place at Harper Adams, with results for modules delivered at BUA sent in advance by the Higher Education Coordinator, who also normally attends relevant boards. There is a single course assessment board, covering both courses. This is chaired by Harper Adams and there is BUA participation from the Higher Education Coordinator and other members of the course team, either in person at Harper Adams or through a video or teleconference link with BUA. Such boards are well attended by BUA staff. Harper Adams keeps the official record of all assessment board meetings and decisions, and takes responsibility for their security.

46 Harper Adams is also responsible for the appointment and briefing of external examiners, whose role is to audit and moderate the standards of awards against those set in other higher education institutions, and whose duties include attendance of subject assessment boards and the submission of an annual report. Two external examiners oversee the modules contributing to the courses delivered with BUA. Both are subject specialists, one in business management and marketing, and the other in food-related subjects. The former acts as the course examiner, in a role that involves taking an overview of both courses in relation to student progression and award classification, but does not routinely require attendance at the course assessment board. However, the arrangements are at variance with those described in the 2009 written agreement between the two institutions, which envisages the external examiner visiting BUA to attend course assessment boards and meet with students. This is a point that Harper Adams will wish to clarify so that practice and procedural documentation align. External examiners have had the opportunity to meet students from BUA at Harper Adams, and their recent reports mention feedback obtained at such meetings.

47 Harper Adams confers awards on students in attendance or in absentia at its graduation ceremonies. Award certificates and student transcripts (records of achievement)

are produced by Harper Adams; any that need to be collected from BUA are either taken there in person or sent by secure delivery. The transcript names Harper Adams as the awarding institution and both Harper Adams and BUA as the teaching institutions. This is consistent with existing requirements but (as explained in a recent revision of the Quality Code) in the interests of transparency, institutions will, in future, be expected to make clear in the certificate or transcript whether a course leads to a single award or to a double (or multiple) award.

Part C: Information

Publicity and marketing

48 All advertising and publicity materials about the partnership and the courses, whether printed or web-based, must be agreed between the two universities. BUA provides an English translation of materials in Chinese for approval by Harper Adams before publication.

49 Harper Adams carries out routine checks of partner websites twice-yearly through a process monitored by the Collaborative Programmes Management Committee. Additional checks are made as necessary, for instance where course information has been updated or a partner website has been relaunched. Inaccuracies are drawn to the attention of the course manager and to other senior management as appropriate, who arrange for the material to be revised or removed. A few such inaccuracies relating to the BUA collaboration have been found and dealt with in this way. In addition, Harper Adams is now able to perform independent checks on materials published in Chinese through a UK-based member of staff proficient in the Chinese language. A recent initiative, still undergoing refinement, involves checking online information about Harper Adams more comprehensively.

Student handbooks

50 The course handbooks are clear and comprehensive. They are organised under the broad headings of course management; guidance on studying at BUA and at Harper Adams, including student support arrangements; an abridged programme specification (pointing to the full specification, available on BUA's virtual learning environment); and assessment requirements, regulations and procedures. While the handbooks do not contain complaints and appeals procedures, they direct students to the relevant offices at each university for assistance; students expressed confidence that they would obtain the necessary information from staff.

Conclusion

Positive features

The following positive features of the partnership are identified:

- effective course management underpinned by strong liaison between the staff on both sides of the partnership (paragraph 20)
- thorough induction arrangements at key stages of the courses (paragraph 25)
- the development and application of explicit English language proficiency criteria for approving teaching staff (paragraph 26)
- the establishment of a research centre, with its potential to enrich learning and teaching (paragraph 31)

- student feedback systems that enable effective student input to course evaluation, operation and development (paragraph 34)
- the work undertaken to enable student cultural exchange (paragraph 35)
- the rigour and attention to detail applied in the operation of the annual monitoring process (paragraph 42).

Recommendations

Harper Adams University is recommended to take the following action:

- include in any future formal agreement a statement about whether serial arrangements involving further subcontracting are precluded (paragraph 16)
- implement, systematically, its plans to expand the use of electronic resources to enhance the student learning experience at Beijing University of Agriculture (paragraph 27)
- progress its trial of online assessment and feedback to students at Beijing University of Agriculture with a view to improving the quality of feedback (paragraph 41).

Glossary

Academic Infrastructure The core guidance developed and maintained by QAA in partnership with the UK higher education community and used by QAA and higher education providers until 2011-12 for quality assurance of UK higher education. It has since been replaced by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (**Quality Code**).

accreditation of prior learning (APL) The identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of learning and achievement that occurred at some time in the past (perhaps as the result of a previous course, self-directed study, or active experience), which is taken into account when admitting a student to a programme of study.

articulation arrangement A process whereby all students who satisfy academic criteria on one programme are automatically entitled (on academic grounds) to be admitted with advanced standing to a subsequent part or year of a programme of a degree-awarding body. Arrangements, which are subject to formal agreements between the parties, normally involve credit accumulation and transfer schemes. Read more in the glossary of *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code.

C9 League A group of nine major research universities in China, established in 2009.

CET The College English Test, a national 'English as a foreign language test' in China.

CFCRS Initialism for Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools, denoting cooperation between foreign and Chinese educational institutions in order to establish educational institutions or educational programmes. The activities of CFCRS are governed by regulations introduced in 2003.

Code of practice A core element of the **Academic Infrastructure** (now superseded by the **Quality Code**).

collaborative provision or collaborative arrangement A term used to describe how institutions work together to provide higher education, including learning opportunities, student support, and assessment, resulting in a qualification from one or more awarding institutions.

comprehensive university A university in China that typically offers a full rather than a specialised curriculum, which includes a wide range of disciplines such as liberal arts, social sciences, science, technical and industrial studies.

dazhuan A three-year tertiary education diploma in China.

due diligence Enquiries relating to the governance, ethos, status, capacity, reputation and general suitability of a potential delivery organisation or support provider to satisfy the requirements of a degree-awarding body for an arrangement to deliver learning opportunities.

flying faculty An arrangement whereby a programme is delivered by visiting staff from the UK institution. Support for students may be provided by local staff. Also known as 'fly-in fly-out faculty'.

gaokao National higher education entrance examination in China.

IELTS International English Language Testing System, an international standardised English test.

kaoyan Postgraduate degree entrance examination in China.

post-experience education A postgraduate programme that typically requires students, as a condition of entry, to have substantial and appropriate graduate-level work experience, in addition to an undergraduate degree; a programme of this nature is designed to draw on students' experience and practice.

pre-experience education A postgraduate programme that typically does not explicitly require students to have work experience, and is designed to be equally accessible to recent graduates and those who have some relevant experience.

Project 211 A Chinese government programme, initiated in 1995, that is aimed at strengthening institutions of higher education and key disciplinary areas as a national priority for the twenty-first century. The '21' and '1' within 211 refer to the 'twenty-first' century and 'one' hundred universities, respectively. To be included in the programme, universities had to meet scientific and technical standards and offer advanced degree programmes. It includes the **Project 985** universities.

Project 985 A project to promote the development of world-class universities in China, which was initiated in May 1998 and named after the date: year '98', month '5'. Much of its funding is devoted to academic exchanges whereby Chinese academics participate in conferences abroad and foreign lecturers visit China. It includes the **C9 League** universities.

QS World University Rankings Annual university rankings published by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS).

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of reference points for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet.

TOEFL Test Of English as a Foreign Language, an English test by the Educational Testing Service.

Harper Adams University's response to the review report

'Harper Adams University and Beijing University of Agriculture welcome the report that endorses the effectiveness of the partnership arrangements by which the joint programmes are managed. Colleagues are pleased to note that seven positive features have been highlighted. Two of the three recommendations also constitute affirmations of plans already underway to further enhance aspects of student support and assessment. In relation to the one recommendation that we had not previously incorporated into our plans, the next routine update to the memorandum of cooperation is currently under discussion for completion by September 2013 and will make express provision concerning serial franchising arrangements.'

RG 1138 05/13

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ISBN 978 1 84979 832 7

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786