



QUALITY ENHANCEMENT NETWORK

New Challenges, New Solutions: Doctoral Partnerships

September 2013



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Foreword



Dr Jayne Mitchell

The Quality Enhancement Network builds on the previous QAA institutional liaison scheme by working with our subscribers across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Network enables QAA to share experiences, expertise and innovations in quality enhancement with subscribers and other key stakeholders such as professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. It provides an opportunity for quality professionals to take a step back and reflect on what enhancement really means for their organisation, how it can be achieved, and what QAA can do to support this. Throughout 2013, a series of New Challenges, New Solutions events were delivered through the Quality Enhancement Network, which were designed to take a fresh look at challenges faced by the sector.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the first publication from the Quality Enhancement Network's New Challenges, New Solutions series, the Doctoral Partnerships event held at the University of Exeter on Thursday 18 April 2013. Our thanks go to Professor Sir Steve Smith, his staff and the University of Exeter, for working with us to develop the programme, and for providing a very warm welcome. The event focused on two main themes: maintaining the academic integrity of qualifications; and assuring the quality of the student experience. Professor Sir Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Exeter and with special interest in this area gave an opening address which outlined the current landscape of postgraduate education as well as current and future challenges.

We hope that you find this series useful, informative and, most of all, inspiring.

Dr Jayne Mitchell

Director of Research, Development and Partnerships, QAA

Introduction



Professor Sir Steve Smith

This publication could not come at a more important time. Universities in the UK are going through a period of unprecedented change and it is more important than ever that we collaborate to make the most of our respective strengths and to reach out to our global peers.

At Exeter, we recognise the importance of growing and nurturing our formal national and international collaborations, particularly doctoral partnerships, as a key flank of our institutional research strategy. We recognise that we have a better chance of succeeding if we work with others, and most, if not all, UK universities are taking the same approach. In fact, many of us are embracing collaboration in a much more holistic way than ever before. Partnerships now involve complex arrangements such as joint awards, and joint supervision and recruitment of doctoral students. The catalyst for this is the profound changes that we are witnessing to the research funding landscape.

These changes present institutions with some serious challenges to long-established traditions, systems and structures. But we are also presented with opportunities to combine our research strengths with others, and by doing so, to be more than the sum of our parts and lever in vital investment. Learning how we can overcome these challenges and make the most of the opportunities was, of course the theme of the conference we hosted at Exeter in partnership with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and Research Councils UK (RCUK) that has led to this publication.

This publication captures the themes from the conference, so that we can share good practice, identify common areas of concern, and start to devise solutions. QAA will be a pivotal partner in this, helping institutions to ensure that once we have seen our way through (what seems like) a myriad of obstacles in the path of successful collaboration, the postgraduate student experience in our universities retains its international reputation for high quality. I am sure that this will be a valuable guide to colleagues across the sector grappling with these issues.

Steve Smith

Professor Sir Steve Smith

Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, University of Exeter

Keynote, Professor Sir Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, University of Exeter



Professor Sir Steve Smith delivers his keynote speech

Professor Sir Steve Smith has over 25 years experience as an academic, having co-written or edited 17 books, published over 100 academic journals and has given over 150 presentations at conferences both within the UK and internationally. As well as extensive knowledge of higher education, Professor Sir Steve Smith has also been President of Universities UK - the representative body for the executive heads of UK universities - and had led for higher education on the Prime Minister's National Council of Excellence in Education, providing advice to government about higher education and measures to achieve world class education. Sir Steve provided the keynote address, highlighting key challenges for doctoral partnerships in the future.

On postgraduate education in the UK: 'By 2020, over 80 per cent of jobs created will require higher level skills.'

'Doctoral training partnerships are a key indicator of success and reputation in research.'

On the UK research base: 'UK research attracts more citations per pound spent than any other country.'

On research spending and concentration: 'c. 80 per cent of research funding is focused on 25 institutions.'

On collaboration: 'Collaboration is one characteristic of institutional success.'

On the public spending environment: 'By 2017-18, cuts to BIS could total 43 per cent compared to 2010/11. Where will the cuts come from?'

Working in partnership: Perspectives from employers, the National Union of Students and other stakeholders

Professor Sir Steve Smith's opening address was followed by a panel discussion. Dr Mike Hardman, Vice-President of Research and Development Science Relations, Astra Zeneca; Adam Wright, Research and Policy Officer, National Union of Students (NUS); and Professor Clive Neal-Sturgess, Engineering Professors Council, all shared their experiences with regard to doctoral partnerships. The key challenges and solutions to doctoral partnerships as identified by the panel on the day are outlined below.



L-R: Dr Clive Neal-Sturgess, Engineering Professors Council; Dr Mike Hardman, AstraZeneca; Derfel Owen, University of Exeter; Dr Adam Wright, NUS

Dr Mike Hardman, AZ Science Relations and EMTRAIN (European Medicines Research Training Network) Coordinator

Dr Hardman works on the EMTRAIN initiative, which aims to strengthen the European community of drug developing scientists through a number of initiatives, including encouraging integrated training programmes, providing guidance about competencies and promoting European standards in education and training.¹

On a Danish industrial PhD programme:

'Industrial PhDs earn approximately 7-10 per cent higher wages than both regular PhDs and comparable university graduates [and] are more likely to be found at the top levels of their organisations.'

'Companies that host Industrial PhDs see on average increasing patenting activity. [They] are characterised by more positive developments in gross profit and employment growth.'

On the EMTRAIN PhD Framework:

'The overall aim of this framework is to contribute to knowledge exchange, networking, mobility between industry and academia and establishment of a cohort of industry-aware scientists.'

Dr Adam Wright, NUS, Research and Policy Officer (Higher Education)

Dr Wright is a Research and Policy Officer at NUS and has been working on the issues of postgraduate funding and the importance of partnership.

On partnership:

'NUS believes partnership must involve empowering parties to co-produce and become active in shaping their surroundings.'

'Postgrads should be partners in learning, as well as in research and teaching.'

¹ www.emtrain.eu/index.php/about/mission

Dr Clive Neal-Sturgess, Engineering Professors Council

Dr Neal-Sturgess is a member of the QAA Doctoral Characteristics working party and is Emeritus Professor of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Birmingham as well as visiting Chair at the University of Coventry and Birmingham City University.

On Partnership:

'[Partnerships should be built on] close working relationships, not cold-calling.'

'Should intellectual property rights (IPR) be negotiated at the partnerships (not project) level?'

'How do we manage lead times?'

'How do we handle confidentiality and ethics, multi-company projects?'

Useful links

AstraZeneca at Nottingham University: www.nottingham.ac.uk/pgstudy/courses/pharmacy/epsrc-astrazeneca-doctoral-training-centre-in-targeted-therapeutics.aspx

Where to find funding for postgraduate students: www.nus.org.uk/cy/advice/money-and-funding/higher-education/what-funding-is-available-for-postgraduates-studying-in-the-uk

Engineering Professor's Council: www.epc.ac.uk

PowerPoint slides from all of the keynote presentations are available at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/Newsroom/Events/Pages/doctoralpartnerships.aspx

Q&A: Gill Clarke (Vice-Chair, UK Council for Graduate Education) in conversation with Dr Iain Cameron (Head of Research Careers Diversity Unit, Research Councils UK)



Gill Clarke, Vice-Chair, UKCGE and Dr Iain Cameron, Head of Research Careers Diversity Unit, Research Councils UK

Following the panel discussion, Gill Clarke, Vice-Chair, UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) and Dr Iain Cameron, Head of Research Careers Diversity Unit, Research Councils UK (RCUK), held an 'in discussion' session regarding the role of UK research councils and their plans for the development of doctoral partnerships. UKCGE are the leading independent representative body for postgraduate education in the UK. The aims of UKCGE are to 'promote quality leadership and support to its members to promote a strong and sustainable postgraduate education sector'.² Research Councils UK support and fund over 30,000 researchers at any one time, including up to 19,000 doctoral students.³ As funding is becoming ever more pressured, partnership working between organisations is being more critical. Gill and Iain discussed the benefits of doctoral training centres (DTCs) and doctoral training partnerships (DTPs), the potential for consortia of universities for collaboration and the importance of the individual student's experience.

Gill and Iain's conversation demonstrated that although much has been done regarding postgraduate education in the UK, there is still some way to go. By working with others in an effective way and creating collaborative partnerships the quality of education for future postgraduate students can be assured.

The transcript of the conversation between these two organisations is set out below.

Gill: Although they are at an early stage of development, how well do you think the research councils' DTCs and/or DTPs are fulfilling your expectations so far? Can you give some examples of the benefits to doctoral training experienced by students in these centres/partnerships and how universities are providing an equivalent experience for other PGR students?

Iain: Some of them are quite new, for example the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) introduced DTPs in 2012. There have been good practice events which indicate that a good start is being made. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) plan to review partnerships in 2016 and look at issues such as innovation, the pooling of expertise and the experience of postgraduate researchers.

For the Research Councils, a more centre-based approach accounts for about 25 per cent of postgraduate research funding. The House of Lords inquiry into STEM skills recognised that a cohort-based approach is an effective means of providing postgraduate research training. They noted that many centres have shown that they can help attract further funding from other sources,

² www.ukcge.ac.uk/main/about-us

³ www.rcuk.ac.uk/ResearchCareers/Pages/home.aspx

and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Council (EPSRC) has seen universities extending the approach to researchers not funded by them. The role of the ESRC has been to address structures for postgraduate research and encourage partnerships between universities and other research organisations, and to provide advanced training and high quality supervision across the participating organisations' research environments. Students not funded by the Research Councils may benefit from the advanced training being developed here.

Gill: On the topic of concentration of research council funding, how do you think it might be possible to integrate with existing DTCs/DTPs some of the high quality research training taking place in universities that aren't part of a centre or partnership? Can this be done without significantly more funding and is RCUK aware of current practice in this area?

Iain: The approaches for partnership and centres have not been developed to provide concentration. However, there has been some concentration, as a side-effect, and it is likely this will continue.

Effective collaborations are welcomed. They require the investment of time and effort, but can bring benefits to all partners. There is real potential for consortia, as the partnership here between Exeter, Bristol and Bath universities shows.

Gill: Do you think it would it be desirable to achieve greater consistency among the DTC/DTP models, or do you think that different groups of subjects naturally tend towards different ways of providing research methods and other training for doctoral students? In either case, what are the implications of interdisciplinary training for funding and other elements of DTCs/DTPs?

Iain: There will always be differences between disciplines, according to the research communities, the demands of research project(s), and the need for resources and research facilities. In some cases this is shown through a difference in emphasis. For example there is greater emphasis on multi-disciplinary working for ESRC centres whilst EPSRC has several centres with a specific research theme or topic. However, neither model precludes multi-disciplinary working and both expect postgraduate researchers to develop deep expertise to address their research. Interdisciplinarity can take many forms, for example emerging through the research environment, supervisory teams, or the nature of the project.

There are also commonalities. The research councils are working on a document to set out collective expectations for doctoral training and common language. The term 'partnership' will certainly feature.

Gill: How can universities integrate their existing training into the DTCs/DTPs?

Iain: A lot of pre-existing training has been brought into partnerships and centres. Although it may be that a more cohort-based approach has helped with economies of scale and provided some focus.

Training should reflect what individual students need and universities bring expertise on encouraging research students and providing suitable training and development opportunities. The funding has some effect on how opportunities are structured, but it relies on universities, their partnerships and interactions with their students to flesh out the framework and make it work.

Gill: Universities need to realise that they have expertise and the flexibility to innovate and develop their own doctoral training?

Iain: Yes. The universities in the partnership we see here at Exeter have funding from a range of Research Councils and other funders of research. There is potential to look at how that interacts and works across the whole university. From experience with the 'Roberts'⁴ funding, we know there are many universities that have a strategic overview of researcher development activities.

Gill: Will industry partnerships or those with other non-academic partners grow? How might universities develop these?

⁴ Following the Roberts' Review in 2002 which set out guidelines for postgraduate students including funding, industrial secondment opportunities, clear career development plans and improvements in salaries for research staff (webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/documents/enterprise_and_productivity/research_and_enterprise/ent_res_roberts.cfm).

Iain: Universities tell us that around 20 per cent of the doctoral projects we fund through normal routes are collaborative. But this is just the proportion badged as collaborative and there may well be informal collaborations on more.

Some mutual interest in a particular subject is the most obvious starting point. We know of history PhDs who have visited local archives being commissioned by the council to inform and help develop information boards for sites around a city.

It was set out quite clearly by Clive Neal-Sturgess from the Engineering Professors Council in an earlier presentation that 'cold calling' companies with a sales pitch is highly unlikely to work. It's about developing routes for working with people, being open to connections and networks. Postgraduate research can provide a way to work out how a new collaboration might go, as well as build on existing collaborations. We've seen some shift - even a few years ago, we didn't hear industry being mentioned much in discussions of arts and humanities research, now we hear far more about the creative industries.

It's important to consider the breadth of experience being provided for the research student and what their options will be when they complete their studies. It may be that in a few subjects most will pursue an academic career path, but we know that for most subjects it's a minority who go on to employment in higher education. And whether it's most or some, the doctoral experience should prompt the researchers to think about their potential career direction and provide opportunities for their development.

Overall, the emphasis on non-academic partnerships is unlikely to decrease. Whether for leverage of funding, breadth of experience for the students, knowledge exchange and contribution to innovation or informing the way problems and research questions are tackled so that the research is better able to inform cultural development, social policy, our interactions with our environments or technologies.

Useful links

UK Council for Graduate Education: www.ukcge.ac.uk/main/home

Research Councils UK: www.rcuk.ac.uk/Pages/Home.aspx

Introducing the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others

The quality assurance issues of doctoral partnerships were next discussed, with a presentation from Sarah Butler, Assistant Director, QAA regarding Chapter B10 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education: *Managing higher education provision with others*.



Sarah Butler, Assistant Director, QAA

The scope of Chapter B10

Chapter B10 applies to the management of all learning opportunities leading or contributing to the award of academic credit or a qualification that are delivered, assessed or supported through an arrangement with one or more organisations other than the degree-awarding body, of particular relevance to doctoral partnerships.

The Expectation

Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.

Assessment and management of risk

A risk-based approach ensures that the effort invested is commensurate with:

- the complexity of the proposed collaboration
- the status of the delivery organisation or support provider
- the level of experience of the degree-awarding body
- and the risks associated with each of these.

Proportionate procedures and processes

- A range of different practices proportionate to the nature of the activity and key players likely to be involved
- Processes which are tailored to the type of activity
- Processes which are proportionate to the complexity and risk.

Useful links

Chapter B10 is available at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B10.aspx

Chapter B10 should be read alongside the Quality Code, Chapter B11: Research degrees
(published in June 2012):

www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B11.aspx

For more information about the UK Quality Code, see:

www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode



Lunchtime demonstrations

A lunchtime demonstration in the Forum exploration labs was held, where delegates had an opportunity to interact with some of the facilities available to doctoral students at the University of Exeter including touch tables which enable dynamic presentation of information.



Delegates enjoy a demonstration of the touch tables in the Forum's exploration lab

Workshop sessions

Following the break for lunch and demonstration in the Forum exploration labs, delegates were able to pick from a series of interactive workshops including:

- Industry Partnerships with Professor Jacqueline Labbe (Chair, Warwick Graduate School)
- Dual and Joint Awards with Sarah Butler (Assistant Director, QAA)
- Partnerships in the UK with Dr Julian White (CEO, White Rose University Consortium), Kate Hellman (Administrative Officer Graduate Research Faculty Office, University of Exeter) and Gill Clarke (Vice-Chair UKCGE and part-time DPhil student, University of Oxford)
- International Partnerships and the challenges and opportunities for doctoral partnerships when working with international colleagues with Professor Mick Fuller (Head of Graduate School, Plymouth University and Chair of UKCGE).

Notes from these workshops are outlined on the next few pages.

Notes from the workshops

How do we manage successful partnerships with industry?

Professor Jaqueline Labbe, Chair, Warwick Graduate School

The case study: Warwick's Collaborative Postgraduate Research Scholarships (WCPRS) scheme

About the partnership

WCPRS scholarships are co-funded 50/50 with businesses, industry or through philanthropic partnerships and cover Home/EU level fees plus a Research Councils UK (RCUK) equivalent level stipend. Any additional costs for the project are met by the partner or department, not by the central University funds for the scheme. The partnerships are sought by individual academics using existing partners. Intellectual property (IP) relating to the project is shared.

The projects must have a broader focus and reach than a specific issue that is only relevant to the sponsor. The University, not the sponsor, is responsible for selecting the student. The central funds available for the scheme are not used to match funds with any funding body that would normally fund the full amount of a research degree.

Since the scheme's inception more than 50 scholarships have been awarded. The funds have been useful to help build new relationships and strengthen existing ones. A specific WCPRS case study was presented on how the scheme was used to build on an Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) funded initiative after the Research Council funding ended and, as a result, allowed a collaboration that had begun through Research Council-funded Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) studentships to continue.

The scheme is important as it has shown that a relatively small amount of money for individual scholarships can do a lot for helping to develop and deepen relationships with industry and help foster collaboration on a longer-term basis. Industry insights have directly informed a PhD project, and there is potential for a longer-term partnership between the University and sponsor to be pursued after the PhD project has been completed.

Challenges and solutions discussed

Challenge	Solution
Even though it is a central scheme open to all faculties, most of the scholarships have gone to the Science Faculty and most of those have gone to one discipline: Chemistry. The scheme has proved to be difficult to roll out in the Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities.	In 2011, there was a University mandate to try to increase the number of scholarships awarded outside of the Science Faculty. Staff operating the scholarship scheme found that not many people in the Humanities and Social Sciences were aware of it. They visited these faculties to try to raise more awareness and explain the scheme to academics in person. Some limited success resulted - two awards were made for students in the social sciences and one to a student in the arts.
IP issues present a potential challenge.	In this case IP is shared and is dealt with by the University Legal Team before the studentship starts.

Challenges and questions for the future

Getting the balance between the project being an industry-related practical project and analytical/theoretical piece of academic work right (that is, finding an appropriate balance between theory and practice).

Making sure the 'placement supervisor' has a good understanding of their expected role.

Identifying what more can be done to support the expansion of the scheme into faculties outside of Science.

Does the scheme's emphasis on fees and stipend alone suggest that studentships don't require additional funding along the way (for example funding for materials)? Consequently, does this give a sponsor an unrealistic sense of 'value for money', in terms of the actual costs involved in getting a research project done and, therefore, what they might be prepared to contribute for future research projects?

Slides from this workshop session are available at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Newsroom/Events/Pages/doctoralpartnerships.aspx

How do we approach the challenges associated with dual and joint doctoral awards?

Sarah Butler, University of Sussex and QAA

The case study: Joint awards at the universities of Sussex and Brighton

About the partnership

QAA distinguishes between dual/double/multiple degrees and joint degrees. Joint degrees involve two or more institutions jointly providing teaching which leads to a student achieving a single award with one certificate. Dual/double/multiple degrees involve two or more institutions providing teaching which will lead to two separate awards.

The University of Sussex and the University of Brighton offer joint doctoral awards in their joint Medical School. It was decided to create a bespoke set of research degree regulations and Code of Practice to deal with these based on a comparison of the principles encapsulated in the two universities' regulations and codes of practice. Where there was a difference in principles, the more demanding of the two was used. A Joint Research Degree Approval Board was set up to enable the universities to jointly process admissions and examinations. The process took at least 18 months from the beginning of discussions until students could be admitted.

Challenges and solutions discussed

Challenge	Solution
Research degrees are more of a challenge than taught degrees - it is difficult to establish what the joint product is since there is no curriculum which can be jointly developed and approved.	Continually review policies and procedures and identify what is critical to each awarding body's academic standards for research degrees.
Issues arise where different institutions have detailed practices and procedures but which don't fit with each other. It is a challenge to overcome these where both institutions have good policies.	It requires the time and input of senior management to agree which approach to take and say that they will do it another way.
Ensuring that partners have the legal authority to award joint degrees. Examples were discussed where agreements were entered into on the assurance that a joint degree could be awarded, but when it was time for an award to be made it was found that the international partner could not award it. This poses a risk for the student experience.	Ensure that correct and appropriate due diligence is done to establish that partner/s (particularly international partners) have the legal right to award jointly. Most post-1992 universities have the power to award joint degrees already. Universities created by Royal Charter are amending their charters to explicitly allow for this power.
Increased examination process in mainland EU universities - other EU partners have different examination procedures to the UK.	Decisions need to be brokered on examination procedures which will satisfy both awarding bodies. One university asks their students to sign a document outlining and agreeing to the different examination process. When agreeing to a variation in, or additional examination procedures, you need to be aware of what these are and the possible additional cost of complying with them.

Challenges and questions for the future

Not all double or dual degrees are the same model. Some double/dual degrees comprise two independent awards of what is basically the same qualification 'for the same, single, jointly delivered programme of study' (doctoral degrees would generally fall within this category). Other taught dual or double degrees comprise two different qualifications which are awarded by two independent institutions but where there is a shared period of study common to both. In these instances, the common period of study contributes to each of the two separate awards but there is additional study at each of the two institutions which is associated with each of the discrete awards. It can be difficult to distinguish between these two models as there is no sector wide consensus on terminology. There are differences both within UK universities and at international partners.

Concerns have been expressed over the ethics of awarding two degrees for the same piece of work. Is there potential conflict with plagiarism regulations?

There are concerns that universities would shut themselves out of an international market if they did not offer joint degrees.

Slides from this workshop session are available at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Newsroom/Events/Pages/doctoralpartnerships.aspx

How do we run successful doctoral partnerships and centres when working with other UK universities?

Dr Julian White, CEO White Rose University Consortium

The case study: The White Rose University Consortium

About the partnership

The White Rose University Consortium⁵ is a strategic partnership between three of the UK's leading research universities, Leeds, Sheffield and York. The Consortium was developed in 1997 and involves the three universities working together through a variety of different networks. The aim of the consortium is to add value from partnership activity in research, enterprise, innovation and learning and teaching.

The Consortium is supported by an overarching written collaborative agreement between the three universities. Bespoke agreements are then developed for each activity, along with a risk register and a list of 'promises'. The Consortium often works within pre-existing/established relationships.

A number of Doctoral Training Centres (DTC) are in operation between the three universities including the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded Social Science DTC and a DTC funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) in Mechanistic Biology which offers support for researchers to access NHS funding. Furthermore the White Rose University Consortium has also developed various e-based research tools, a number of student networks created to reinforce partnership working between students, as well as language-based research platforms.

The Consortium has a good record of working in science and technology (and in securing funding in these areas). Recently it has been developing its work in the arts and humanities through the establishment of the White Rose College of Arts and Humanities. Projects to the value of over £100 million have been assured to the universities.



Dr Julian White presents to a group of delegates

Challenges and solutions discussed

Challenge	Solution
Suspicion with the academic base.	Provision of neutral brokerage to access funding through the Engineering and Physical Sciences Council. There may be other ways to ensure buy-in.
Managing the complexity of collaborations.	Write flexibility into the bid. Make sure that responsibilities, for example administrative responsibilities, are clear from the outset. The administration should be a servant of the research.
Finding ways to operate proactively as well as reactively, for example in relation to funding.	Further interaction with policy makers.

Challenges and questions for the future

How can/should the Consortium assure the quality of the student experience across these collaborations?

⁵ www.whiterose.ac.uk

How do we manage the challenges of setting up successful doctoral partnerships and centres with other UK universities?

Kate Hellman, University of Exeter; Gill Clarke, Vice-Chair UKCGE and part-time DPhil Student, University of Oxford

The case study: Setting up the ESRC funded South West Doctoral Training Centre (SWDTC).

About the partnership

The ESRC funded South West Doctoral Training Centre (SWDTC) is a successful collaboration between the universities of Bath, Bristol and Exeter. The initiative originated in discussions between the Vice-Chancellors of Bath, Bristol and Exeter, and emanated from a desire for the universities to engage and work together in a more ambitious model. The SWDTC partnership exists to enhance the student experience through the sharing of intellectual and physical resources. Its principal aim is to train the social science researchers of the future by equipping them with the skills, experience and knowledge to address important societal issues.

The partnership works through trust and compromise, and builds upon established contacts between the universities. The partnership has been further strengthened by the creation of GW4, which is a more formal, strategic alliance between the universities and Cardiff.

For the SWDTC, the principal benefits of the partnership revolve around the training of the researchers of the future and enhancing the student experience. The partnership and partnership working will ensure that the next generation of academics and social scientists already have experience of collaborative working, and take this forward in their chosen careers.

For the universities themselves, the partnership indicates their ambition to compete nationally and internationally in a changing intellectual and financial environment, and has cemented trust between institutions. It has led to further collaborations and proposals to work together on DTPs from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, the Natural Environment Research Council and the Arts & Humanities Research Council, and the GW4 initiative.

The future for the SWDTC partnership is particularly positive as it has already led to a more formal alliance between the institutions, and the trust and goodwill that has been built up will ensure new joint initiatives have a solid foundation on which to build.

Challenges and solutions discussed

Challenge	Solution
The biggest challenge faced by the SWDTC concerned variance of procedures between universities. These concerned differences in pass mark thresholds, grade thresholds, reporting mechanisms, IT systems, and the logistics of collaboration (for example travel and decision-making, especially during time-critical conversations). In addition, the student recruitment process had to be set up quickly, along with a very ambitious collaborative training programme that was to start with the first intake.	Adaptation of quality assurance arrangements were based on building trust between institutions and embracing compromise in order to successfully manage the process and, crucially, ensure students were able to enjoy the added value that the partnership brought to their training. Although compromise in adapting institutional processes was emphasised, this should not lead to any compromise of standards or a reduction in the quality of training received by students.
The partnership faced initial scepticism related to the cost and time involved in setting up the SWDTC.	The importance of academic leadership in making DTP collaborations work should be emphasised because strong and dynamic leadership was able to overcome initial scepticism in this case. It is important that there is a vision of where the partnership is going in the future, how it will adapt and build upon successes. Honesty and accuracy in the bid are important, as being able to deliver on promises, and ensure students get the full benefit of the initiative, is paramount.

Challenges and questions for the future

RCUK Doctoral Training Centres are not the only way to collaborate and, though the model itself can be adapted, collaboration through other funding streams or indeed for other reason (facility sharing, for example) should not be marginalised.

What are the particular challenges and opportunities for doctoral partnerships when working with international colleagues?

Professor Mick Fuller, Head of Graduate School, Plymouth University and Chair of UKCGE

The case study: International partnerships at Plymouth University

About the partnership

Partnerships bring the benefits of increasing the reach of research and reputation; increasing the mobility of staff and students; increasing the number of students which leads to additional student income; and providing opportunities for future projects.

Types of international partnership at Plymouth:

- Ad-hoc partnerships (mostly unfunded)
 - Relatively few, typically hangovers from previous employment. Challenges to workload of academic
- Funded schemes
 - Erasmus Mundus & Marie-Curie ITN's, international funded 'sandwich' type scholarships
- Remote PGR Nodes
 - Approved through a standard protocol
 - Enables DoS (non-PU employee) to be at remote institution; 2nd supervisor at Plymouth.

Plymouth PGR Nodes:

- set out to allow partnership with international partner who does not have the ability to award a PhD
- students will be registered at Plymouth with a second supervisor who is a member of Plymouth University staff
- students are remote students but they are linked to a particular research centre in order for them to get a good student experience
- some Nodes have been running for over 10 years.

Some international partnerships arise through funded schemes. A legal agreement is always used and the student will normally spend some time at each institution. Challenges include ensuring that regulations and examination schemes work.

Capacity Building Schemes are considered where a UK university would work with a partner in a developing country. While attractive to politicians, it is difficult to get the academic community to engage with this due to limited funding being available and concerns over the quality of facilities in the developing country.

Challenges and solutions discussed

Challenge	Solution
With international partnerships the status of the students could give rise to fees appearing to be due.	Plymouth have created a non-fee bearing student status to overcome this.
International students having the required standard of English (plus concerns that language skills may be depleted during years spent back in home country during a sandwich course).	Most universities use the IELTS standard 6.5. Look at the previous relationship and students who have already passed through. Consider phone interviews and written assessments before offering a place. A Study at Plymouth showed no correlation between the standard of English at the start of a course and the completion dates.
Working with international partners can take some time.	It is important to manage internal and external expectations during the process.

Challenges and questions for the future

International partnerships where no funding is involved put a strain on central services such as library resources and IT.

Slides from this workshop session are available at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Newsroom/Events/Pages/doctoralpartnerships.aspx

Closing speech: New Challenges, New Solutions: Doctoral Partnerships



Professor Judith Squires, Professor of Political Theory and Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, University of Bristol

Professor Judith Squires (Professor of Political Theory and Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, University of Bristol) delivered the closing keynote speech with the key message that one size does not fit all when it comes to doctoral partnerships. Each individual arrangement will be different and the challenges and solutions may vary between partnerships. Professor Squires highlighted that, for effective partnership, both communication and time are essential.

Key challenges to doctoral partnerships as highlighted by Professor Squires were the fostering of interdisciplinarity, maximising the impact of the work of doctoral partnerships, enabling a working relationship between scientists in the UK and internationally, and supporting innovation in research. Solutions to these challenges were identified as ESRC/higher education institution partnerships and fostering strategic partnerships across all sectors. Knowledge sharing, collaborative research including co-funding and planning of research priorities were also identified as key in successful doctoral partnerships.

The South West Doctoral Training Centre (SWDTC) was discussed including the benefits and challenges faced. The Educational Partnership Agreement was signed in November 2011 between the University of Bristol, the University of Exeter and the University of Bath. The SWDTC provides training with regard to core research skills - Research Design, Data Collection and Data Analysis.

Key challenges have been the processes and procedures, including student registration, virtual learning environments, joint examining boards, administration and progression. Additionally, alignment of the institutions' programme structures to ensure quality has been essential.

Useful links

Professor Squires' presentation:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Newsroom/Events/Pages/doctoralpartnerships.aspx

Information about the South West Doctoral Training Centre:

www.exeter.ac.uk/postgraduate/money/esrc

Feedback from the event

'It was very useful and insightful to hear about collaborative/international doctoral partnerships from people with experience with them since we are just starting the process.'

'Well organised. Food and accommodation excellent.'

'Thought provoking. A challenging area.'

'Good pace and plenty of variety. Excellent time-keeping.'

'The balance between presentations and workshops was very useful.'

'Helpful forum for comparing experiences.'

'Informative, thought provoking, realistic!'

'All very relevant and significant issues.'

'The panel session and perspectives very useful and interesting. I would have liked to attend more workshops!'

'Excellent space, catering and interesting presentations in the lab.'

Further resources

This event follows on from previous work carried out by QAA with regard to doctoral students and associated issues. QAA have previously created guidance with regard to doctoral degree characteristics (link below) and both Chapters B10 and B11 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education are relevant to doctoral degrees. This first publication outlines the sessions from the QAA Quality Enhancement Network event, *New Challenges, New Solutions: Doctoral Partnerships*. This event was held in partnership with the University of Exeter, Research Councils UK and the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE), all parties with a key interest in postgraduate education. The event was held in response to one of the emerging themes identified by higher education providers. It provided an opportunity for those in the field to discuss the current challenges and solutions with regard to postgraduate education, as well as any relevant quality assurance themes. The event facilitated networking and partnerships between academics, staff in quality assurance and other partners.

QAA have also held two further events in the *New Challenges, New Solutions* series, the *Quality Assurance of Placements and Partnerships for Higher Apprenticeships*. Links to the events pages are included below.

Useful links

Doctoral degree characteristics:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Doctoral_characteristics.aspx

UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B10: *Managing higher education provision with others*: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B10.aspx

UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B11: *Research degrees*:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B11.aspx

New Challenges, New Solutions: the Quality Assurance of Placements:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Newsroom/Events/Pages/NCNS_quality_assurance_of_placements.aspx

New Challenges, New Solutions: Partnerships for Higher Apprenticeships:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Newsroom/Events/Pages/Partnerships_for_Higher_Apprenticeships.aspx

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