

Enhancing the UK TNE Student Experience in Dubai and Singapore:



A Case Study in Cross-border
Cooperation in Quality Assurance

September 2018

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Executive summary

This case study reports the outcomes of a joint initiative between the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) of Dubai, and the Committee for Private Education (CPE) in Singapore. Over the course of spring 2018, the three agencies joined forces to develop a student satisfaction survey to administer to UK transnational education (TNE) students in Dubai and Singapore, followed by a discussion forum with some of those students.

The case study provides insights into three areas, all of which are of interest to those UK providers delivering TNE. Firstly, it explores ways in which we can find out more about the UK TNE student experience and students' views through the use of a survey and discussion forums. Secondly, it provides detailed insights into what is important to TNE students studying in two strategic locations for UK TNE - Singapore and Dubai. Finally, it illustrates effective ways that quality assurance bodies and agencies can work together co-operatively to generate valuable outcomes and intelligence.

This initiative is an example of innovative practice in cross-border cooperation between quality assurance agencies to improve the efficacy of their efforts to ensure that TNE students receive a quality and relevant education. It shows the potential of using similar instruments more systematically to inform a better understanding of the challenges facing TNE students in different operating environments and different types of TNE provision. It also serves the purpose to remind students of the importance of raising their views with their institutions with an expectation that they are listened to, as a key tool for enhancing their and future students' experiences

From both the surveys and the discussion forums, it clearly transpires that UK TNE students in both locations are generally satisfied with the academic side of their experience. However, students in both locations feel that more improvement is needed in the areas related to work experience, engagement with industry and employability, and the broader student experience.

In relation to the latter, for Dubai students studying at branch campuses of UK universities, improving their student experience means primarily having an experience more comparable to that of students studying at the home campus in the UK, including the broad range of student services and extra-curricular activities. Singapore students, studying on collaborative partnerships with delivery partners, are generally aware that they cannot expect a branch campus-type student experience, however, they do feel that more could be done to strengthen the sense of belonging to the UK university from whose degrees they are studying.

Students in both locations appeared to have similar views about the best features of their learning experience. These include the quality of lecturers, the relevance of the course content, the approach to learning based on the practical application of knowledge and the development of critical thinking, and the flexibility in programme delivery - allowing students to pursue their studies while in employment.

Setting the context

The Quality Beyond Boundaries Group

The Quality Beyond Boundaries Group (QBBG) is a network of quality assurance agencies in some of the main sending and receiving countries of transnational education (TNE), formed to address the quality assurance challenges and seize the opportunities associated with the growth of TNE. Growing TNE requires quality assurance agencies to work more closely together across borders to strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of quality assurance systems, addressing any regulatory gaps or unnecessary overlaps.

The Knowledge and Human Development Authority of Dubai has played a driving role in the establishment of QBBG, hosting the inaugural meeting in Dubai, in 2014. The Quality Assurance Agency in the UK has also played a key role in supporting QBBG since its inception, hosting the second meeting in London, in 2015, where the network was formally created, and its vision and key objectives were set out. The Committee for Private Education in Singapore has supported the initiative from its inception as one of its founding members.

The vision of QBBG is to develop a trusting alliance of international quality assurance agencies committed to a collaborative and innovative future for transnational quality assurance. QBBG members have committed to achieve this vision by creating a platform to share information and best practices and work together to improve quality assurance systems for cross-border higher education. Three major areas of cooperation have been identified forming the guiding principles of the group:

- 1 CONNECT to develop a zone of mutual understanding and trust among QBBG members
- 2 COLLABORATE on the quality assurance processes
- 3 COMMUNICATE to stakeholders about the quality assurance of TNE and the need for increased collaboration.

The members of QBBG include:

- Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) of Dubai
- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) from the UK
- Committee for Private Education (CPE) from Singapore
- Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ)
- Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA)
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) from Australia
- WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC).

Since the inaugural meeting QBBG has met several times in different cities, continuing the dialogue to improve reciprocal understanding, build reciprocal trust, and seek opportunities for innovative collaboration. At the 2017 QBBG meeting hosted by HKCAAVQ in Hong Kong, the member agencies decided to establish working subgroups focusing on specific areas of work. One of such identified areas of focused cooperation is that of the TNE student experience and TNE student engagement. Based on its extensive experience in student engagement and TNE review, QAA was assigned the lead on this area of work.

Over the course of 2018, QAA worked closely with KHDA and CPE to start cooperation in this key area by developing a TNE student satisfaction survey and running discussion forums with UK TNE students in Dubai and Singapore. This report aims to share the key findings and considerations resulting from the surveys and forums carried out with UK TNE

students in Dubai and Singapore. Before doing that, the first preliminary section will set the broader context outlining some of the main challenges associated with TNE student engagement and the TNE student experience from a UK perspective, as these were presented for discussion at the 2017 QBBG meeting in Hong Kong.

TNE student engagement: a UK/QAA perspective

Student engagement is at the heart of the UK higher education (HE) and quality assurance (QA) system. It is therefore crucial from a quality assurance perspective that it remains at the heart of UK HE, even when this is delivered overseas.

Student engagement in the UK HE and QA context covers three main domains relating to:

- the participation of students in their own learning
- the participation of students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes at institutional level
- the participation of students in external quality assurance, for example, in QAA's work.

The first domain of student engagement refers to the capacity of institutions to engage students successfully in their studies, both as independent learners and contributing in the classroom, as well as engaging them as co-producers of learning.

Based on QAA's work, UK TNE providers are generally doing a good job in engaging TNE students in their own learning. This is confirmed by QAA's own TNE reviews, which include meeting with students. However, there are some challenges that are prominent for TNE provision. Geographical and cultural distance, for example, pose important challenges to ensuring the quality of interaction between students and the home institution. These challenges include: ensuring regular contact between students and fly-in/fly-out UK faculty; that local staff are familiar with the UK approach to teaching and learning and quality assurance; that programmes of studies are contextualised and relevant to the local context; and ensuring that TNE students have access to key facilities, such as library and virtual learning environments, as well as support services - such as study skills, English language and career advice.

The second domain of student engagement - student participation in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes at institutional level - refers to making available opportunities for individual feedback, such as through student evaluations at module and course level, as well as collective feedback through student representation systems, and ensuring in general that the student voice is heard, valued and acted upon. This aspect of student engagement is characteristic of the UK and wider European approach to student engagement, as expressed, for instance, in the European Standards and Guidelines¹, and it is based on recognition that the views of students, individually and collectively, should inform quality systems to improve the student educational experience both for current and future cohorts.

UK providers regularly use student evaluations at module and programme level and have developed student representation systems at different levels - programme, departmental and institutional - with student representatives involved in decision-making processes at all these levels, including governing boards and senior committees. When it comes to TNE, this type of higher-level engagement might be more challenging than engaging students in their own

¹ www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf (PDF 624KB)

learning, although the two dimensions are critically related, since student engagement with their own learning will be facilitated by a sense that their views are listened to, valued and acted upon.

Generally, the more challenging aspect is engaging TNE students through collective feedback and student representation and involving the TNE student voice in the broader institutional-level decision-making. TNE students will normally be asked feedback through module evaluation forms and staff-student committees in pretty much the same way as in the UK. The key difficulty in this context has been posed by the challenges for UK institutions, and UK students' unions or student bodies, to include the TNE students' voice in the same way as in the UK. This is often due to a lack of awareness by the home campus about TNE students combined with a lack of awareness of TNE students about the ways they can get involved and make their voice heard, including their membership to the UK university students' association or union. Cultural and political differences might also affect the ability to replicate collective systems of listening to the TNE student voice.

Moving to the third domain of student engagement - that of external QA - cultural differences and geographical distance pose similar challenges. It might be useful for an illustrative purpose to outline some of the challenges that QAA has encountered in transferring to TNE, the same student engagement practices it follows in the UK.

QAA engage students in different ways. Students are embedded in QAA's governance, with two student members on its Board, and a Student Advisory Committee providing strategic input on developments in the higher education sector. This high-level involvement of students in QAA's decision-making bodies does not automatically guarantee adequate representation of TNE students. QAA also regularly uses student reviewers, with a student reviewer in every review team. However, student reviewers' involvement in TNE review is qualified and limited. This is because QAA TNE review teams are small in size and therefore it is necessary to prioritise expertise on TNE or international operating environments when selecting them. QAA's review teams do speak to TNE students as part of TNE review visits and a key rationale of QAA's TNE review is, in fact, that of getting a better understanding of the TNE student experience.

QAA's approach to TNE

In addition to looking at institutional policies and procedures for TNE provision as part of its reviews of UK higher education providers, QAA regularly scrutinises UK TNE through a dedicated review process which includes visits to overseas delivery sites. In-country TNE review is aimed at testing the implementation of UK providers' policies and procedures for safeguarding the standards and quality of their TNE provision, and at getting a better understanding of the TNE student experience. TNE review is carried out on a country-by-country basis, each year selecting a country of strategic importance for UK HE and scrutinising a sample of TNE arrangements in that country.

Given the geographical spread and quantity of UK TNE worldwide, a country-based approach is more cost efficient than looking at TNE on an institutional or thematic basis. It is also a way for QAA to facilitate cooperation with host countries' agencies, a priority for QAA having to monitor such an extended and growing TNE provision. QAA last reviewed UK TNE in Dubai and Singapore in 2013 and 2011 respectively. In order to experiment with gathering information about the experience of UK TNE students outside TNE review visits (with a view to eventually informing a risk-based approach to TNE), over the course of 2018, QAA has worked closely with KHDA and CPE to administer a TNE student satisfaction survey and organise UK TNE student forums in Dubai and Singapore.

Before looking at the methodology adopted and the outcomes of the survey and the forums run in Dubai and Singapore, the next two sections offer a short overview of the local TNE landscape and operating environment in both locations.

The Dubai operating environment

Over the past 15 years, the Emirate of Dubai has been successful in attracting foreign higher education providers. It is now a leading higher education hub, hosting the highest concentration of international branch campuses in the world and, with nine UK branch campuses out of the existing 29, the UK is the main sending country.² The predominant model of TNE is, in fact, that of branch campus delivery. This is due to the main rationale for importing TNE provision, which is to allow students - primarily expats and other international students - to access undiluted quality foreign provision, rather than developing local higher education capacity through collaborative partnerships, as is the case for other main host countries of TNE, such as China, Malaysia and Singapore.

Key to Dubai's strategy has been the development of purpose-built free trade zones (FTZs), dedicated to specific business industry categories, and offering a number of incentives to attract international investment and facilitate business opportunities. FTZs include, for instance, the Dubai Knowledge Park and Dubai International Academic City (DIAC) dedicated to education. FTZs now host the majority of higher education providers and students in the emirate, and the great majority of providers within the free zones are international.

KHDA is responsible for the regulation and quality assurance of all higher education institutions located in Dubai's FTZs. All higher education providers wishing to operate in the free zones must obtain academic authorisation to operate and have their education programmes registered with the KHDA. The KHDA grants and annually renews institutional permits and academic programme registration, either on approval by its internal quality assurance body - the University Quality Assurance International Board (UQAIB) - or on institutional licensure and programme accreditation by the CAA.³ To assure the quality of foreign higher education offered in Dubai, the UQAIB has developed an Equivalency Validation Model aimed at assessing the demonstrated quality equivalence of provision in Dubai in relation to the home higher education provider.

Given the strategic importance of foreign higher education to Dubai, and the UQAIB's quality assurance model for TNE, which places great reliance on providers' home country quality assurance, international cooperation with other quality assurance agencies is a high priority for the KHDA. This explains KHDA's driving role in establishing QBBG, which followed the successful cooperation between the KHDA and QAA as part of QAA's review of UK TNE in the United Arab Emirates in 2013.⁴ Since then the two agencies have proactively sought to explore different and innovative ways to cooperate beyond the sharing of information, data and intelligence, including around the UK TNE student experience.

² QAA's Country Report: The United Arab Emirates www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/international/country-report-uae-2017.pdf?sfvrsn=25caf781_4 (PDF 792KB)

³ Quality Assurance in The Free Trade Zones of Dubai, available at: www.khda.gov.ae/en/FZQA?i=4.

⁴ *Review of UK Transnational Education in United Arab Emirates: Overview*, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/international/review-transnational-education-uae-14.pdf?sfvrsn=1407f481_2 (PDF 580KB)

The Singapore operating environment

In Singapore, TNE is delivered primarily through local providers, registered as private education institutions (PEI) under the Private Education Act. There are currently 110 non-local higher education providers offering their undergraduate and graduate degree programmes in partnership with local PEIs, of which 66 are from the UK.

The PEIs are regulated by the Committee for Private Education (CPE) which is appointed by SkillsFuture Singapore Board to carry out its functions and powers under the Private Education Act.⁵

PEIs must meet mandatory registration requirements in order to operate in Singapore. A PEI is granted a registration period of between one to four years depending on a basket of indicators. In addition, PEIs may apply for EduTrust Certification which is a voluntary external quality assurance scheme administered by CPE. It aims to distinguish PEIs that are able to consistently maintain a high standard of quality in the overall provision of education services and make continual improvement that lead to positive student outcomes. Both PEI registration and EduTrust certification are subject to renewal upon expiry of validity period. PEIs must also seek approval from CPE prior to offering courses.

There is no government authority in Singapore that assesses or grants recognition to PEIs' programmes, including the degree programmes offered in partnership with foreign institutions. Each PEI is responsible for the management of its school, the academic quality and rigour of its course offering.

However, to strengthen student protection and increase information transparency, for PEIs that wish to offer undergraduate degree programmes in partnership with foreign institutions and pathway programmes leading to undergraduate degree programmes, they must meet the pre-requisite of being an EduTrust certified PEI (validity of four years) apart from meeting minimum financial requirement and participation in an annual graduate employment survey administered and published by CPE.

CPE also provides resources and guidance to help prospective students in making informed decisions before taking up courses with PEIs.

As CPE continues its efforts to keep abreast of the dynamics of external environment that may impact the provision of PEIs' courses, collaboration with selected overseas regulatory and quality assurance agencies to share information, intelligence, best practices and participate in projects is essential to achieving the strategic intent.

⁵ www.cpe.gov.sg/

TNE student survey and forum

Methodology

This is the first time that student forums or a satisfaction survey aimed at TNE students have been organised by the three agencies. An annual National Student Survey (NSS) exists in the UK gathering the views of final-year undergraduate students about their time in higher education. The NSS, however, does not cover TNE students. KHDA regularly holds student focus groups (known as 'Snappy Chats') to gather their views on different topics and also runs an annual student happiness survey for all students but does not regularly gather information about the student experience of TNE students specifically. Similarly, CPE runs a range of student surveys, but these are not aimed at gathering information about the experience of TNE students specifically.

In this context, QAA, KHDA and CPE worked together to develop a TNE student satisfaction survey (with minor differences to accommodate the specific features of each location - see Annex) and agree a common format for the student forums in Dubai and Singapore, with a view to facilitating comparability. UK TNE students were recruited by the local agencies (KHDA in Dubai and CPE in Singapore), who also took care of the logistical aspects of the forum. Each student forum involved approximately 20 students. Two consecutive forums were run in Dubai. Recruited students were asked to respond to a survey prior to attending the forum. KHDA also administered the survey to a wider student population, reaching out to over 350 students studying UK TNE programmes in the free trade zones of Dubai. The TNE student forums were intended to facilitate a more in-depth discussion of the questions listed in the survey, focusing on perceived challenges and areas of satisfaction, and the main rationale for choosing their TNE programme of study.

Students were asked to respond to each question - with the exception of the last two open questions - on a five-value scale of 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neutral', 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. Students were informed that their anonymity and the anonymity of their university of study would be protected, and that all information gathered, either through the survey or the forums, would be treated confidentially. The aim of the survey and forum was not to identify any issues with specific TNE arrangements but to get a sense of the issues that TNE students might face in those locations and identify areas for enhancement.

Two Dubai UK TNE student forums, each with about 20 students, took place on Sunday 22 April 2018 at KHDA offices. Prior to the forum, KHDA administered the satisfaction survey to TNE students studying on different programmes delivered by four UK providers in the FTZs in Dubai. Two providers were delivering their TNE through comprehensive bricks and mortar campus operation, the other two adopted instead a fly-in/fly-out approach. KHDA received 350 complete responses to the survey. Approximately 60 per cent of respondents were enrolled on master's programmes - the remainder were on bachelor's programmes. This reflects the high percentage of students studying at master's level in the Dubai FTZs (over 40 per cent). As outlined in the survey template reported in Annex 1, there were a total of eight thematic areas in the survey form administered to UK TNE students in Dubai.

The TNE student forum in Singapore took place on Saturday 5 May 2018. CPE organised the event, including contacting local partners of UK degree-awarding bodies to nominate students to contribute to the forum. 20 students were nominated - all responded to the online survey which they were invited to complete prior to the forum; 16 attended the forum. Of all 20 students responding to the survey, 18 were studying at bachelor's level and the other two were master's students. Some were studying through franchise arrangements, others through validation arrangements or fly-in/fly-out delivery supported by local partners.

There were a total nine thematic areas in the survey form administered to UK TNE students in Singapore. An additional area on the relationship with the UK university was added to account for the fact that, while in Dubai the survey focused on branch campus provision (the predominant form of TNE provision in the emirate), in Singapore, TNE is delivered primarily by means of collaborative partnerships with local providers.

Satisfaction survey

The following sections report the key findings from the surveys and the discussion forums in Dubai and Singapore. When considering these findings, it is important to note that students who responded to the survey and contributed to the forums were studying with different UK providers on different programmes and TNE models. When comparing the responses from Singapore and Dubai, consideration also needs to be given to the much smaller sample of students responding to the survey in Singapore (20 students compared to 350 in Dubai), and that students in the two locations experienced different models of TNE provision (branch campus in Dubai, and a variety of partnerships models in Singapore). Also, while UK TNE students in Dubai are predominantly expats and international students, there is a higher percentage of Singaporean students studying on UK TNE programmes in Singapore (30 per cent of students engaging with the forum were from Singapore).

Average satisfaction by thematic area

Figure 1 and 2 illustrate the average satisfaction level for each of the broad thematic areas for Dubai and Singapore respectively. The average satisfaction level has been calculated aggregating 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses for each question and calculating the average for each thematic area.

Students in Dubai are most satisfied in areas pertaining to academic support (85 per cent), learning resources (84.5 per cent), information and induction (84 per cent), and teaching matters (83.5 per cent); while students in Singapore are most satisfied in areas pertaining to teaching matters (87 per cent), academic support (85 per cent), and assessment and feedback, and student engagement (82 per cent each).

The least satisfactory areas for students in Dubai are relevance and career services (63 per cent), assessment and feedback (73 per cent), and student engagement (73 per cent); while students in Singapore UK TNE are least satisfied with the relationship with the UK university, and relevance and career service (60 per cent each), and learning resources (65 per cent).

Figure 1: UK TNE student satisfaction levels by thematic area, Dubai

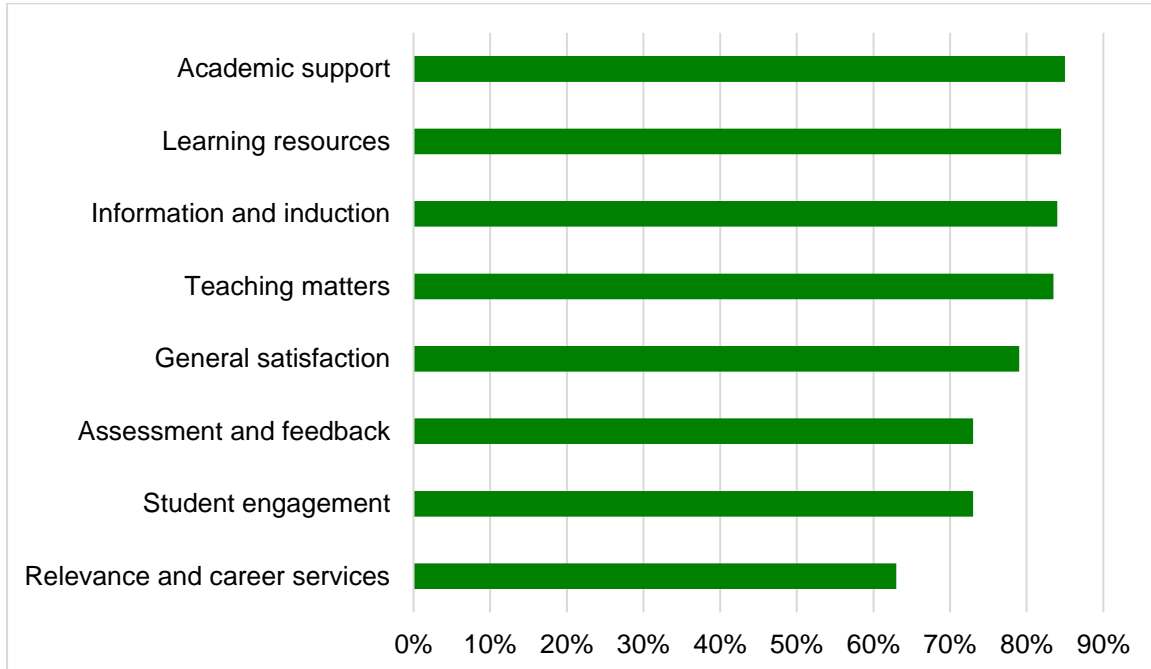
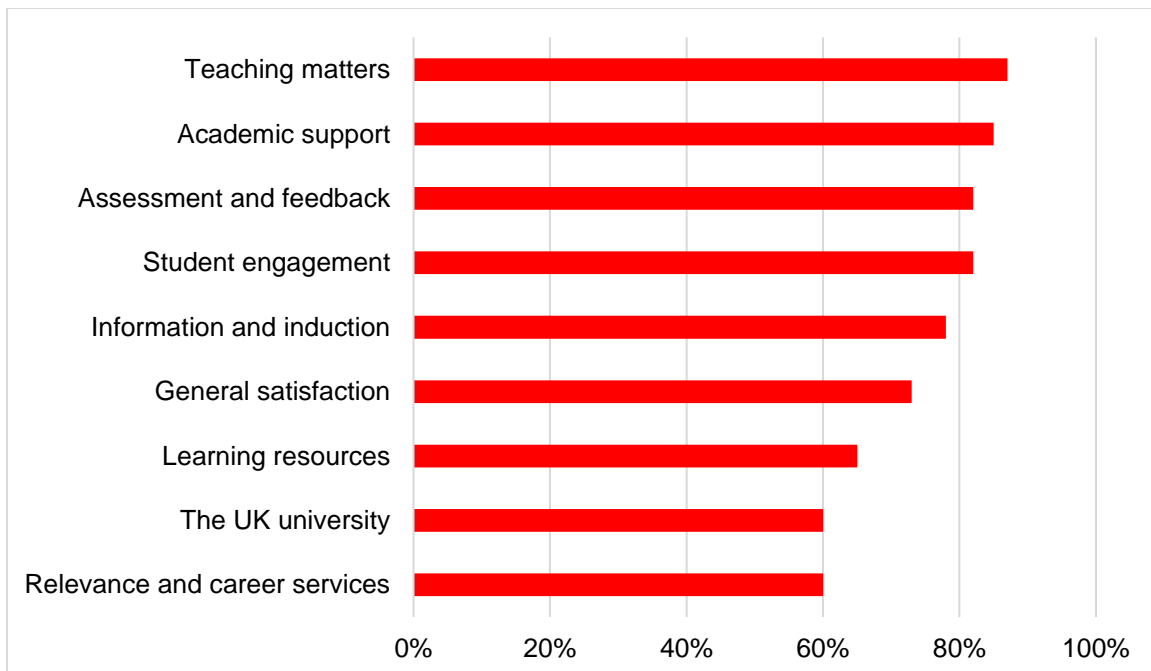


Figure 2: UK TNE student satisfaction levels by thematic area, Singapore



Specific aspects of highest satisfaction and dissatisfaction

Looking at specific questions under each thematic area, responding students in Dubai are most satisfied (again aggregating 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses) with the opportunity to give feedback on their learning experience (92 per cent); the academic support and guidance received (87 per cent); as well as the information received about the course before enrolling, the preparation and accessibility of their teachers, and course specific resources (such as equipment, software, learning material) (86 per cent each) (Figure 3). Responding students in Singapore are most satisfied instead with the information received about the course before enrolling (95 per cent); and the preparedness of their teachers, and the opportunity they are offered to give feedback on their learning experiences (90 per cent each) (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Questions of higher satisfaction, UK TNE students in Dubai

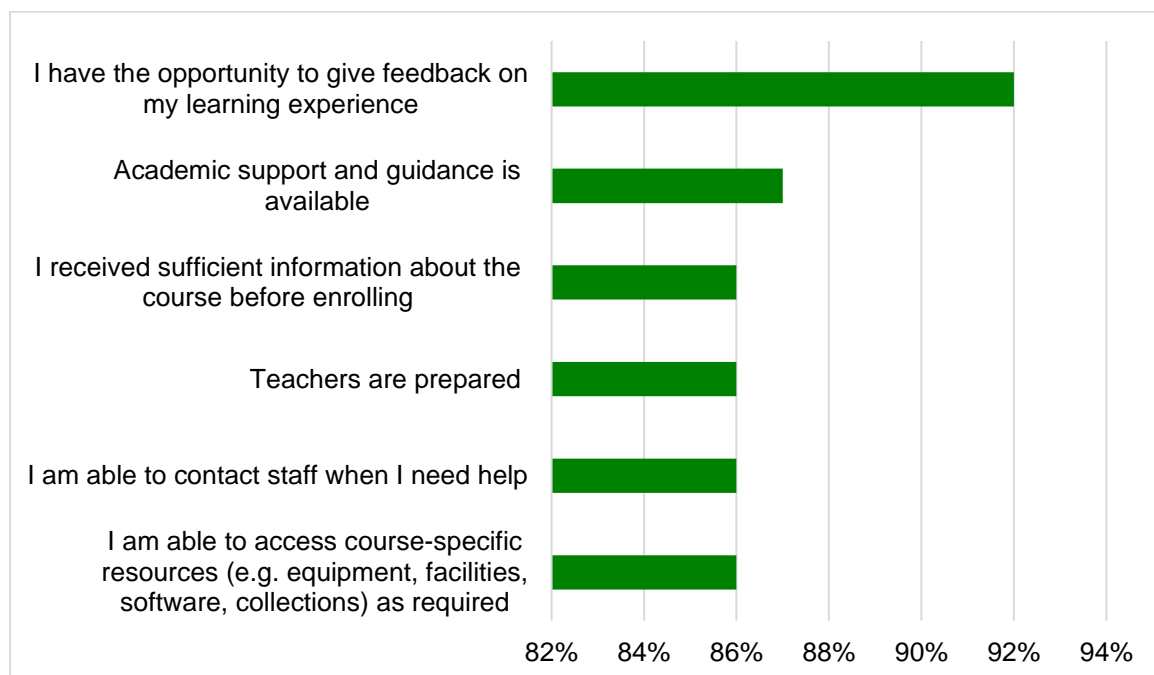
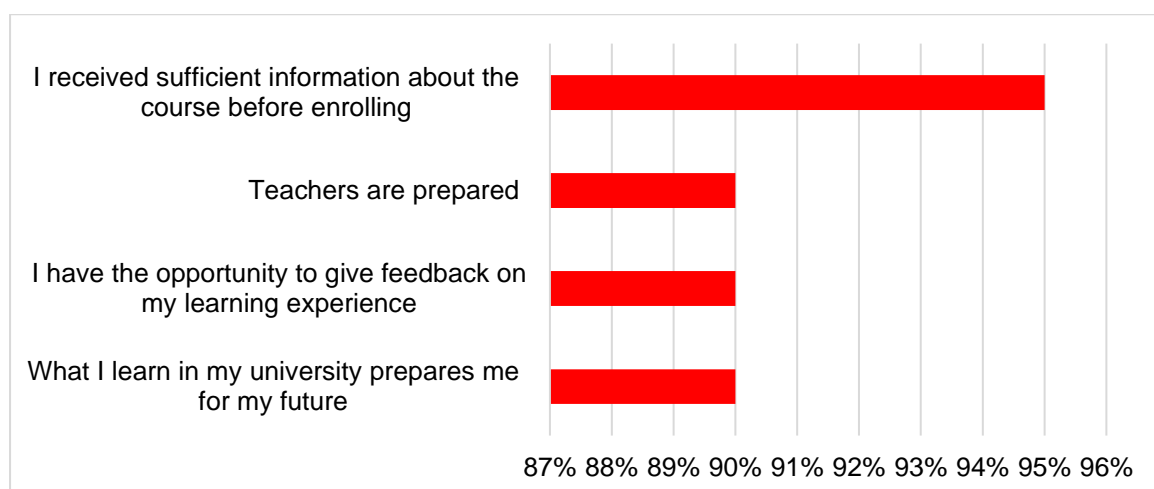


Figure 4: Questions of higher satisfaction, UK TNE students in Singapore



The specific aspects with which UK TNE students in Dubai who engaged with the survey are most dissatisfied (aggregating 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree') are the opportunities provided by the university to gain work experience through internships, attachments and industry project work (19 per cent dissatisfaction, with 54 per cent satisfaction); the timeliness of feedback received on their work (17 per cent dissatisfaction, with 67 per cent satisfaction); and the help they feel they will receive from the university in finding employment (16 per cent dissatisfaction, with 55 per cent satisfaction) (Figure 5).

For UK TNE students in Singapore, the aspect they are most dissatisfied with is also the opportunities provided by the university to gain work experience through internships, attachments and industry project work (30 per cent dissatisfaction, with 35 per cent satisfaction). This is followed by not having been made to feel part of the UK university (20 per cent dissatisfaction, with 50 per cent satisfaction), which is one of the questions applying to Singapore only; and, again similarly to Dubai students, the timeliness of feedback received on their work, and the help they feel they will receive from the university in finding employment (15 per cent dissatisfaction each, with 75 and 55 per cent satisfaction respectively) (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Questions of higher dissatisfaction, UK TNE students in Dubai

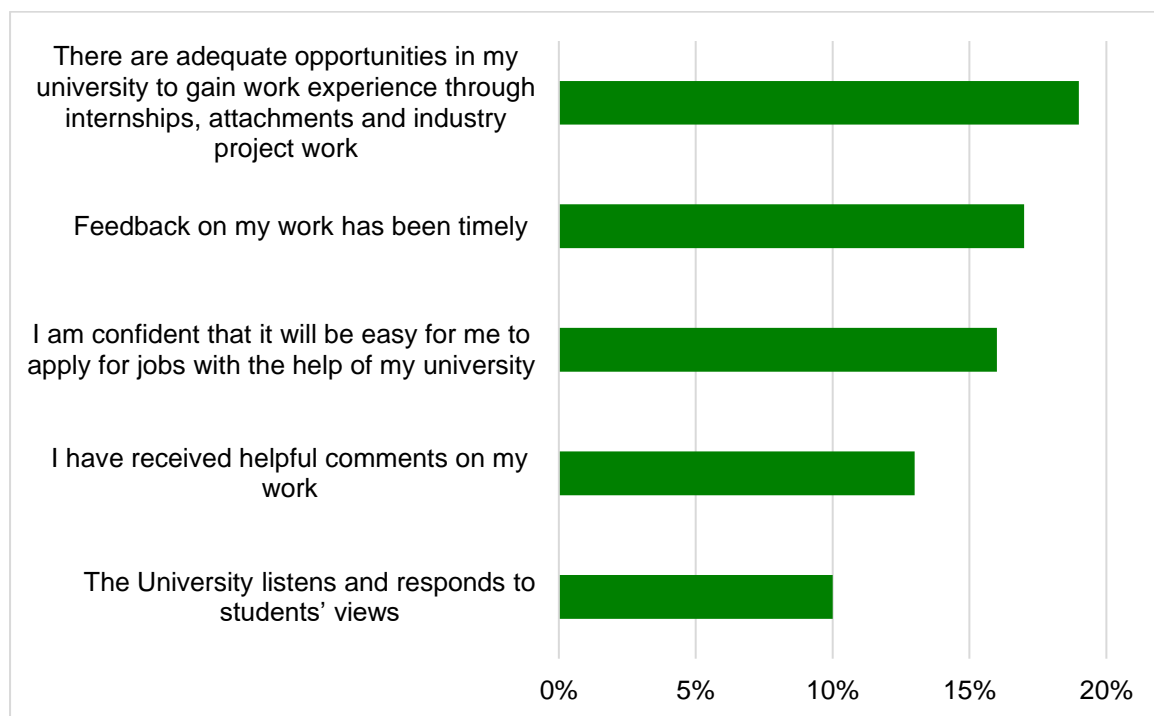
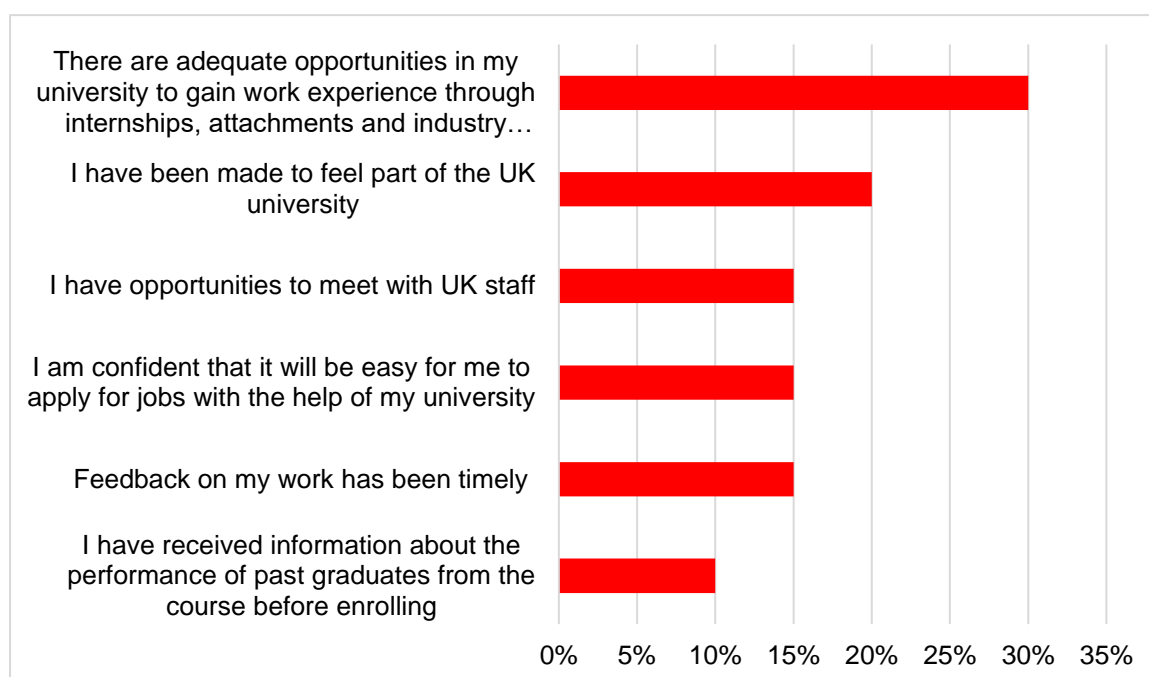


Figure 6: Questions of higher dissatisfaction, UK TNE students in Singapore



Looking more closely at the responses for each set of questions, it is possible to observe general comparability between the views of UK TNE students in Dubai and Singapore. However, there are, nonetheless, differences which will be highlighted by taking each thematic area in turn. When reporting differences, only divergences of at least 10 per cent are highlighted - this is to take into account the much smaller number of respondents in Singapore (20 students) in comparison to Dubai (350).

Information and induction

Regarding information and induction, the surveys do not report any significant difference in the view of UK TNE students in Dubai and Singapore (see Figure 7 and 8). It is possible to note that Dubai's students' aggregate satisfaction with the information received about the course before enrolling is nine per cent lower than that of students in Singapore (95 per cent); however, dissatisfaction levels are equally low at five per cent in both locations. In relation to the satisfaction with the accuracy of the information received and the induction to the programme, both sets of students reported similar satisfaction levels of 85 per cent, and similar low dissatisfactions levels (between two to five per cent difference).

Under this thematic area, two additional questions were added for students in Singapore. These questions focused on information received about the performance of past graduates from the chosen course of study, and on whether CPE EduTrust Certification was taken into consideration when choosing the programme of study. In relation to the former, a high proportion of students (45 per cent) reported to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, with an equal proportion of students saying they were generally satisfied ('strongly agree' and 'agree' aggregated). In relation to the latter, most students (80 per cent) regard EduTrust Certification as an important factor when choosing their programme of study.

Figure 7: Information and induction, Dubai

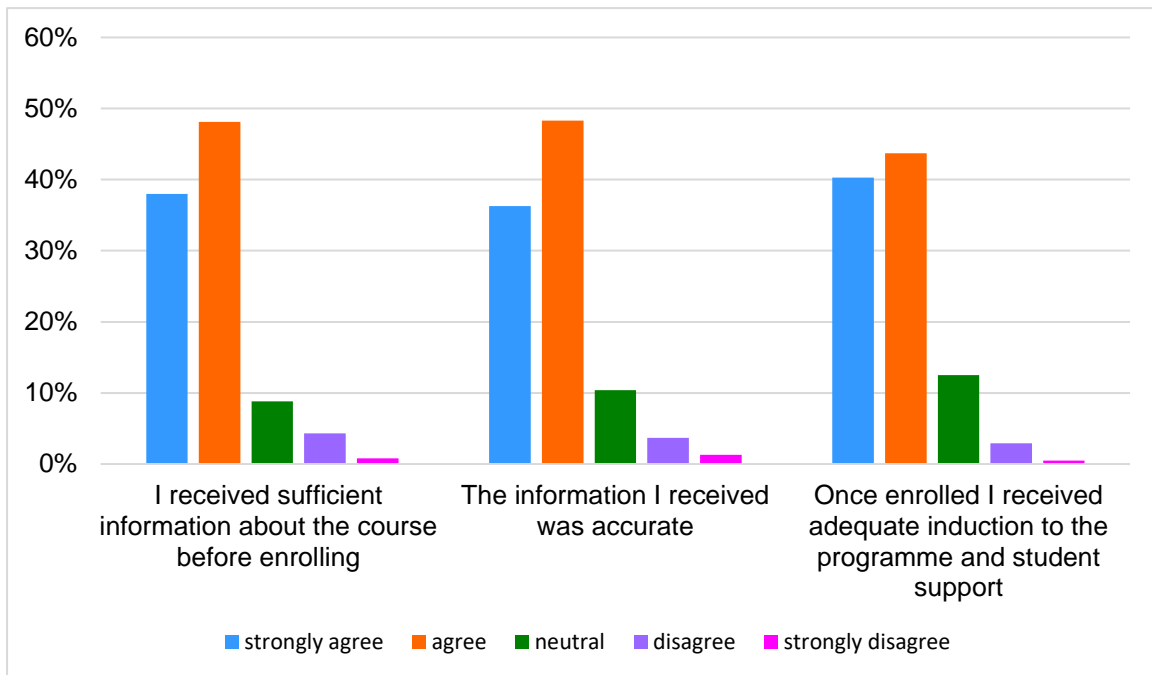
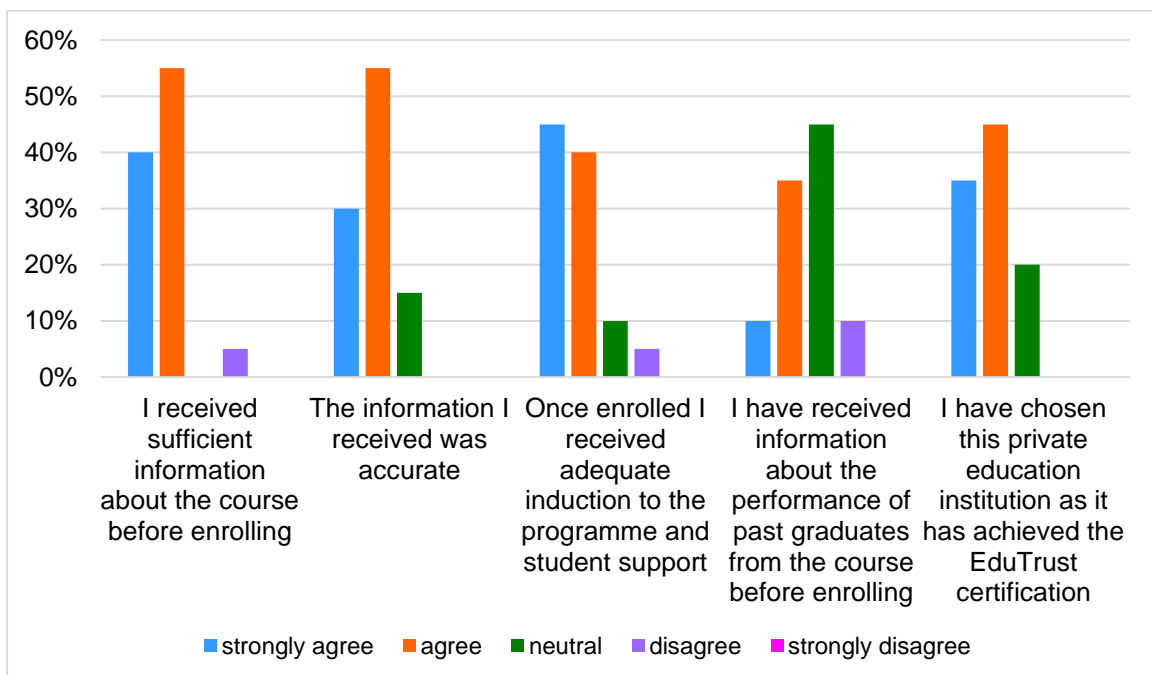


Figure 8: Information and induction, Singapore



Teaching matters

UK TNE students in both locations are similarly satisfied with their teachers and their course (Figure 9 and 10). The main difference that can be noted is that when it comes to students' views about whether their teachers are prepared, although aggregated satisfaction is roughly equivalent (90 per cent in Singapore and 86 per cent in Dubai), students in Dubai report to 'strongly agree' with this statement in a much higher proportion (13 per cent higher) than students in Singapore. A similar tendency can be seen for the question regarding whether the course is intellectually stimulating, with a slightly higher percentage (7 per cent) of students in Dubai saying 'strongly agree', although general satisfaction level is comparable (83 per cent for Dubai and 85 per cent for Singapore). Both sets of students have very similar patterns of agreement with regard to the question whether teachers are good at explaining things (with aggregated satisfaction levels of 85 per cent for Singapore and 82 per cent for Dubai).

Figure 9: Teaching matters, Dubai

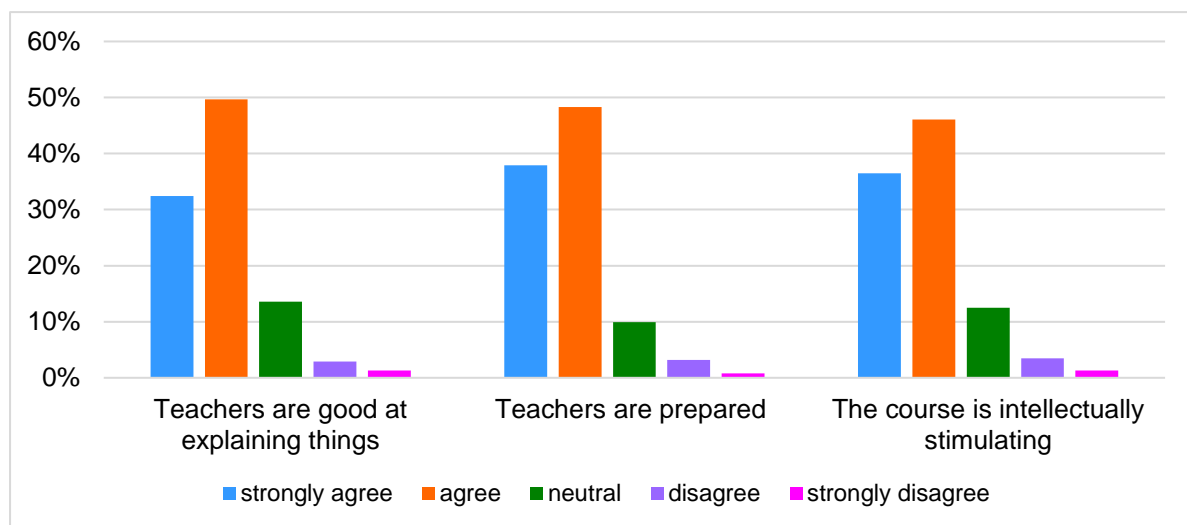
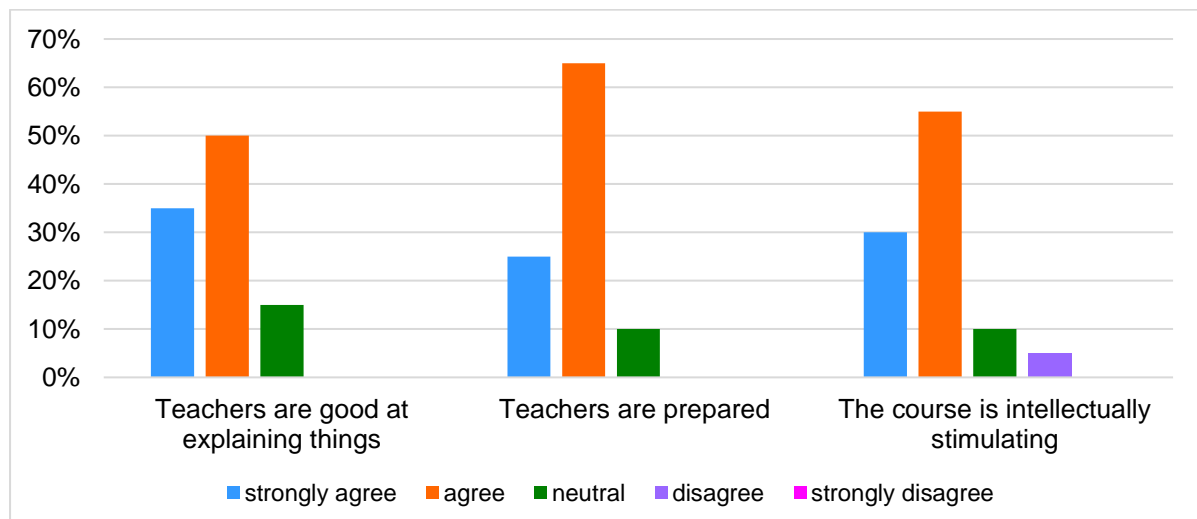


Figure 10: Teaching matters, Singapore



Academic support

Academic support is one of the thematic areas where there are more noticeable differences between the responses of UK TNE students in Dubai and Singapore. Although aggregate satisfaction level ('strongly agree' and 'agree' responses combined) is the same (85 per cent), students in Dubai report to 'strongly agree' in a much higher proportion (17.5 per cent on average) than students in Singapore with all three questions under this area. These questions regard specifically: the ability to contact staff when needed (14 per cent more 'strongly agree' in Dubai); academic support (21 per cent more 'strongly agree' in Dubai); and English language support (18 per cent more 'strongly agree' in Dubai) (Figure 11 and 12).

Figure 11: Academic support, Dubai

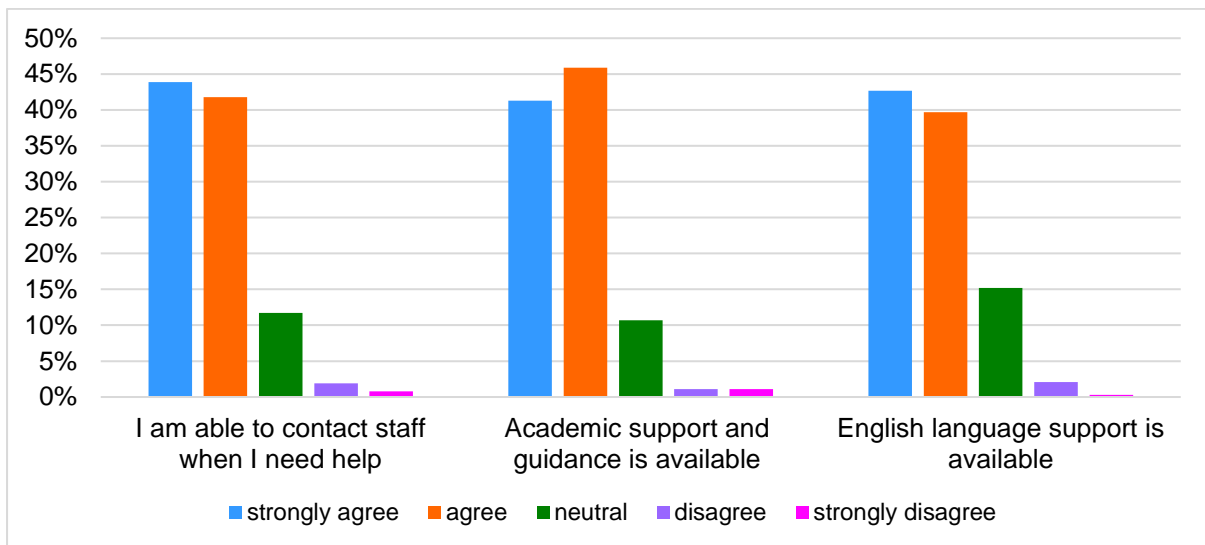
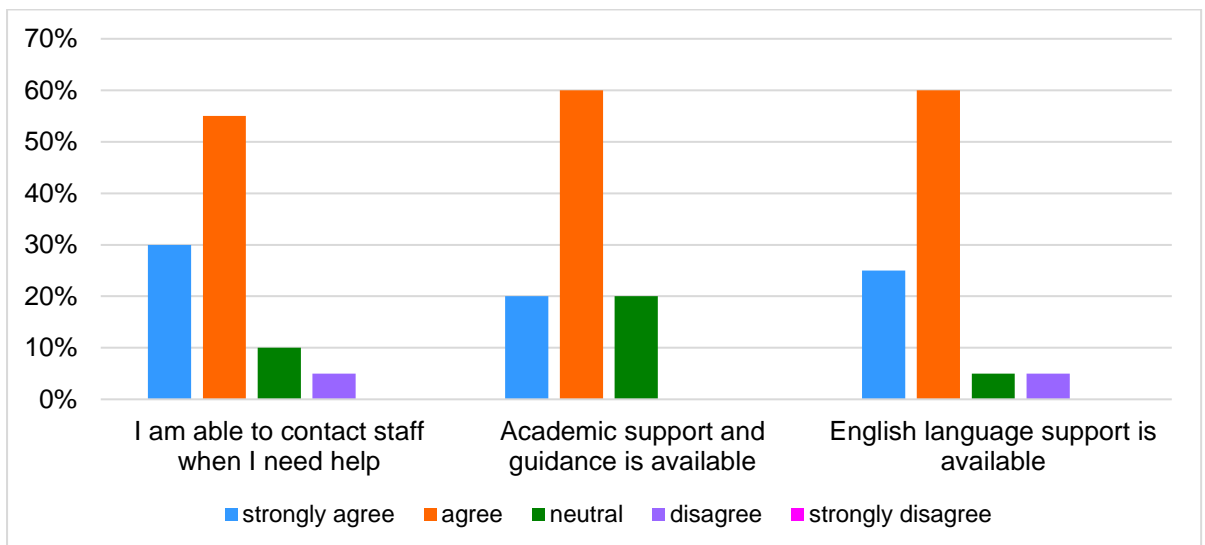


Figure 12: Academic support, Singapore



Learning resources

Learning resources is another thematic area where there are noticeable differences for students in both locations. General satisfaction in Singapore is about 20 per cent lower than in Dubai across all three questions, although general dissatisfaction level is low for both locations (no higher than five per cent). Specifically, students in Singapore have responded to be neutral in a higher proportion (about 22 per cent higher on average) than students in Dubai with the three questions under this area. These questions regard the IT resources and facilities provided (19 per cent higher satisfaction in Dubai and 24 per cent higher neutral responses in Singapore); library resources (19 per cent higher satisfaction in Dubai and 23 higher neutral responses in Singapore); and course specific resources (21 per cent higher satisfaction in Dubai and 19 higher neutral responses in Singapore) (Figure 13 and 14).

Figure 13: Learning resources, Dubai

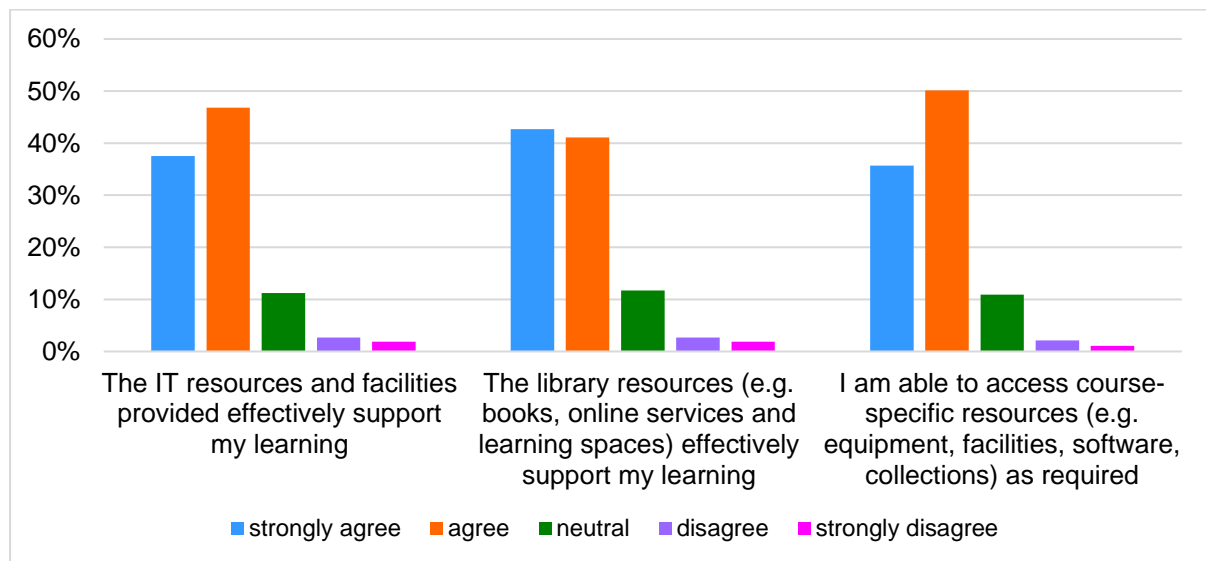
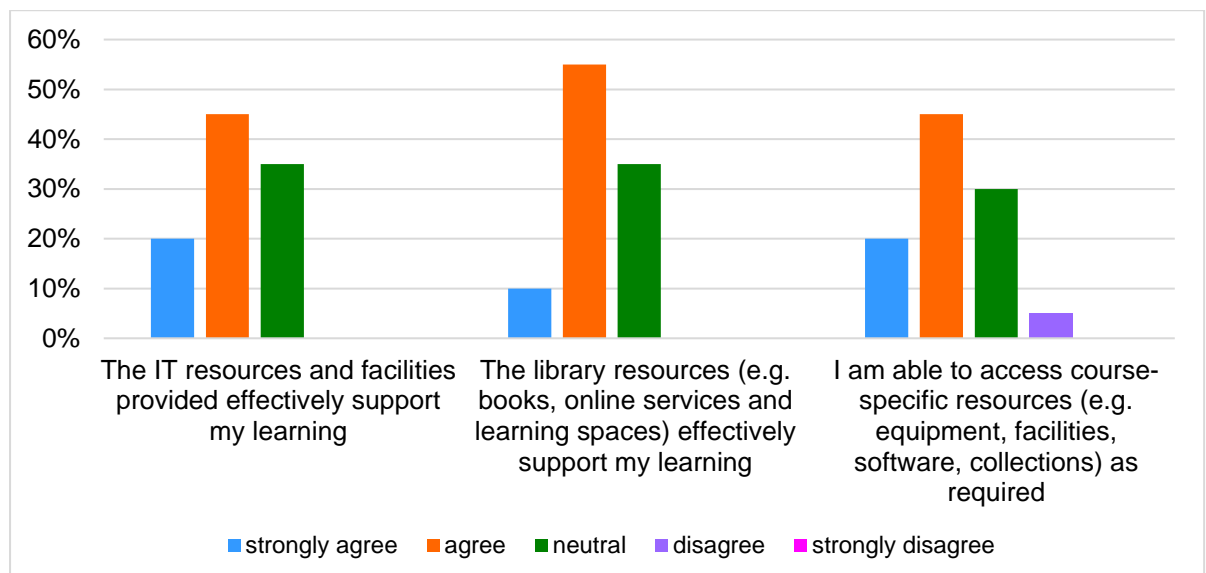


Figure 14: Learning resources, Singapore



Assessment and feedback

In relation to assessment and feedback there is broad comparability between the two locations of UK TNE provision, including similarly higher than average dissatisfaction levels with the timeliness of feedback on assessment (17 per cent in Dubai and 15 per cent in Singapore). The most noticeable difference in this area is about the question on whether the feedback received on assessment is considered helpful, where aggregated satisfaction of students in Dubai is 15 per cent lower than that of students in Singapore (85 per cent), and dissatisfaction is eight per cent higher in Dubai (13 per cent). Responses to whether information on the criteria used in marking was made clear in advance have very similar satisfaction levels, although students in Dubai report eight per cent dissatisfaction against zero per cent in Singapore (Figure 15 and 16).

Figure 15: Assessment and feedback, Dubai

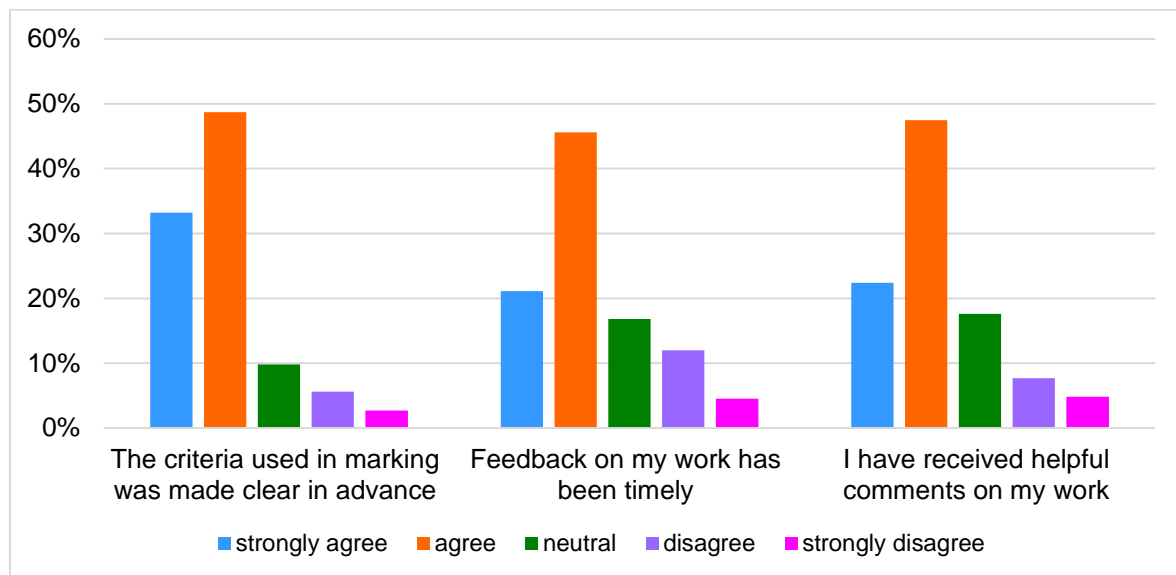
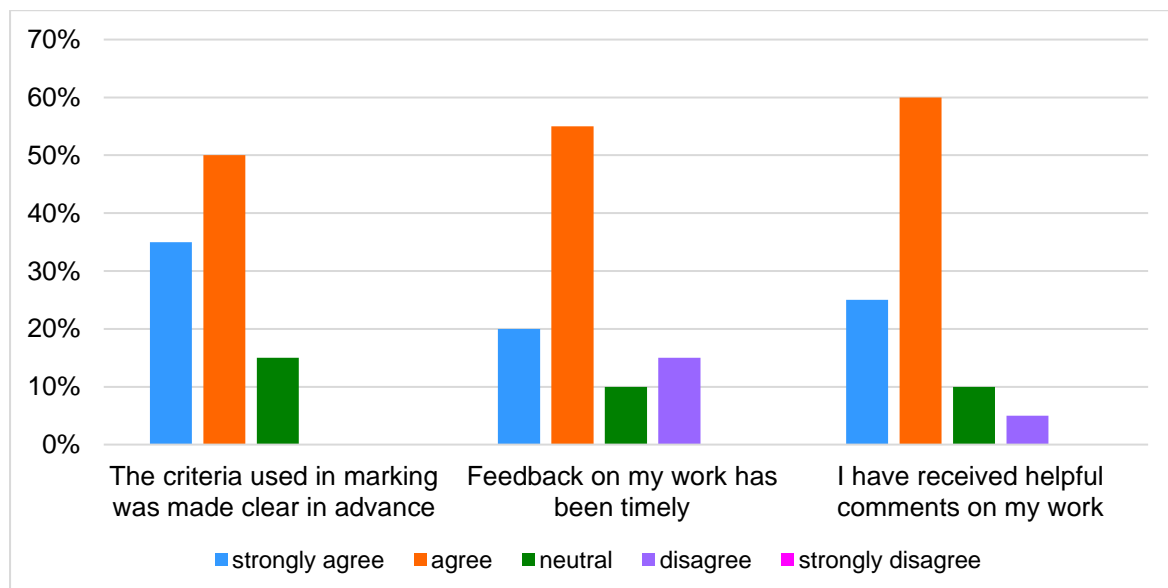


Figure 16: Assessment and feedback, Singapore



Student engagement

UK TNE students in both locations have reported very high levels of aggregate satisfaction with the opportunity provided by their UK university to give feedback on their learning experience (92 per cent in Dubai and 90 per cent in Singapore). Comparable responses have also been recorded for the question whether students can lodge a complaint or an appeal to the UK University (70 per cent aggregate satisfaction in Dubai and 75 per cent in Singapore), with equally comparable low levels of dissatisfaction (8 per cent in Dubai and 5 per cent in Singapore). Where it is possible to observe a difference is in relation to the question of whether the UK university listens and responds to students' views. The responses to this question point to a 13 per cent lower satisfaction of students in Dubai than that of students in Singapore (80 per cent), with 10 per cent higher dissatisfaction (students in Singapore reporting 0 per cent dissatisfaction on this aspect) (Figure 17 and 18).

Figure 17: Student engagement, Dubai

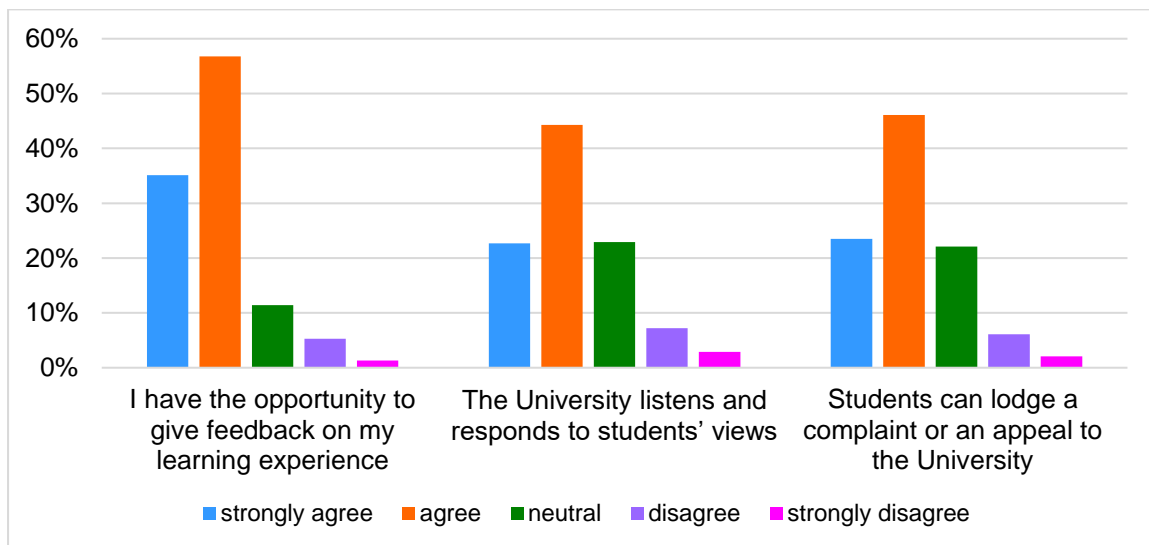
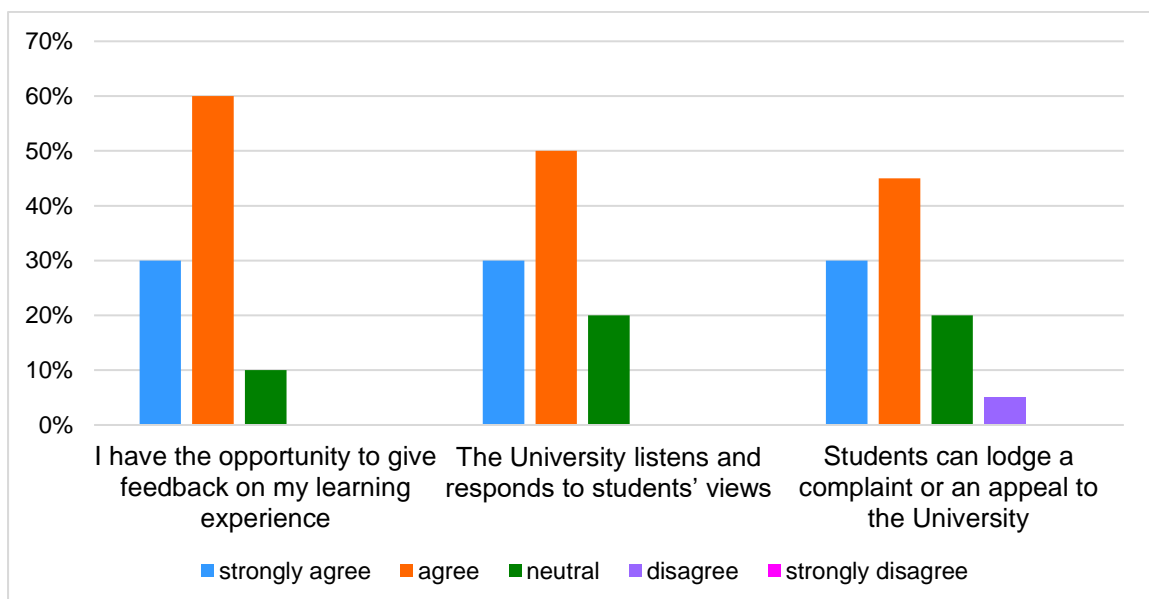


Figure 18: Student engagement, Singapore



Relevance and career service

Turning to the perceived relevance of the course of study to their career needs and career service support, there are some reportable differences between surveyed UK TNE students in Dubai and Singapore. Students in Dubai 'strongly agree' in higher proportion (11 per cent) than students in Singapore that what they learn prepare them for the future, and that studying at the UK university will help applying for jobs - even if general satisfaction levels are 10 per cent higher for students in Singapore for the former aspect (90 per cent), and equal for the latter (55 per cent). The main difference regards the question about whether there are adequate opportunities to gain work experience through internships, attachments and industry project work, where aggregate satisfaction of students in Singapore is 19 per cent lower than that of students in Dubai (at 54 per cent), and aggregate dissatisfaction (at 30 per cent in Singapore) is 11 per cent higher (Figure 19 and 20).

Figure 19: Relevance and career services, Dubai

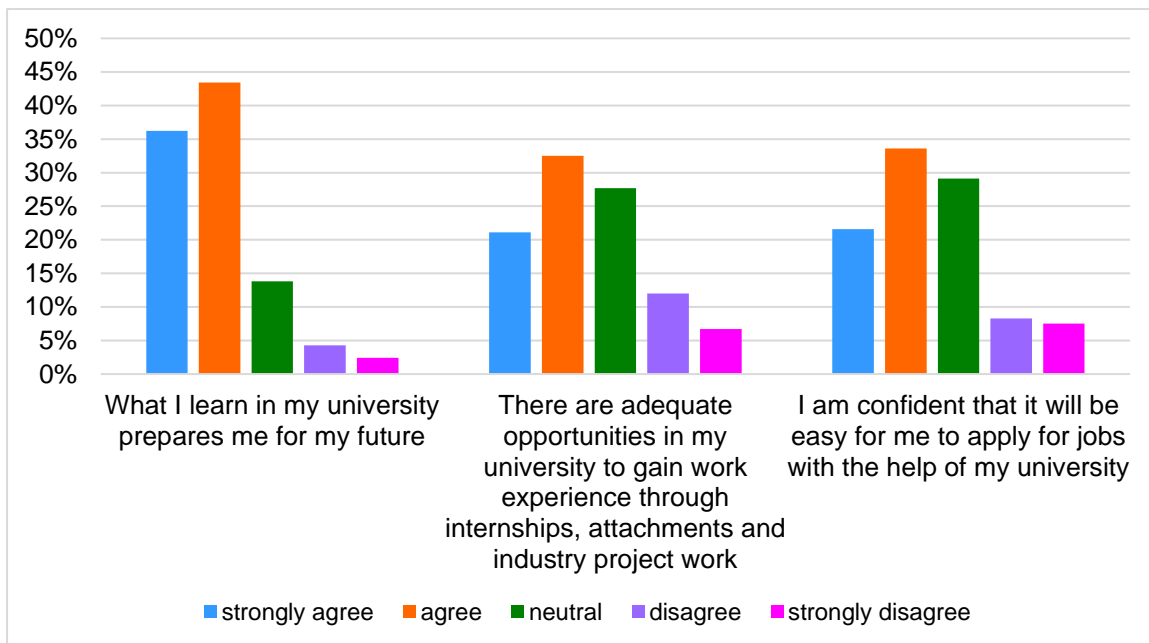
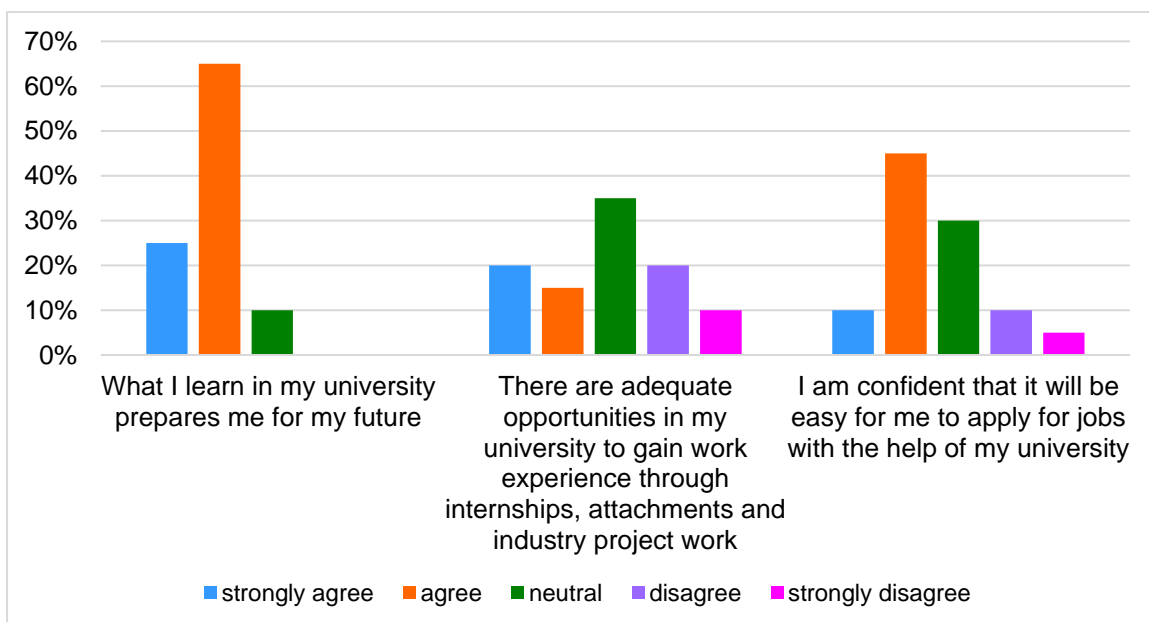


Figure 20: Relevance and career services, Singapore



General satisfaction

Two questions were included under the theme of general satisfaction: whether the programme of study is well organised and run smoothly, and whether the student would recommend the same programme to others. Some differences are reflected in the responses to both questions. Students in Dubai are more satisfied (11 per cent higher aggregate satisfaction) than those in Singapore (70 per cent) with the way the programme is organised and run. Also, students in Dubai 'strongly agree' in higher proportion (17 per cent higher) than those in Singapore (at 20 per cent) that they would recommend their programme of study to others - although aggregate satisfaction is comparable (77 per cent for Dubai and 75 per cent for Singapore) (Figure 21 and 22).

Figure 21: General satisfaction, Dubai

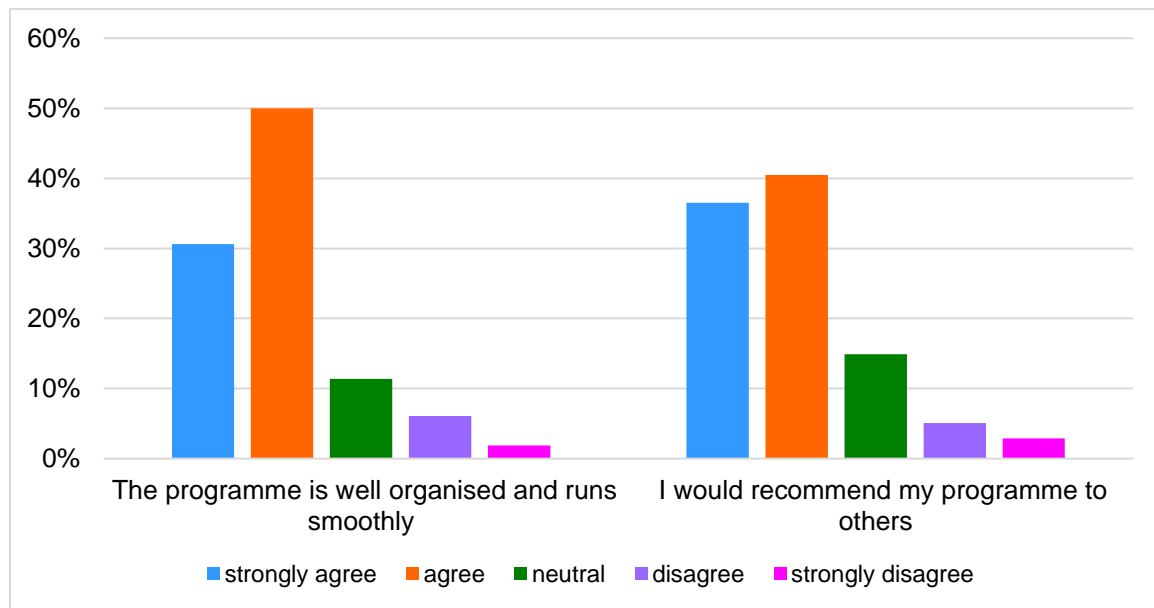
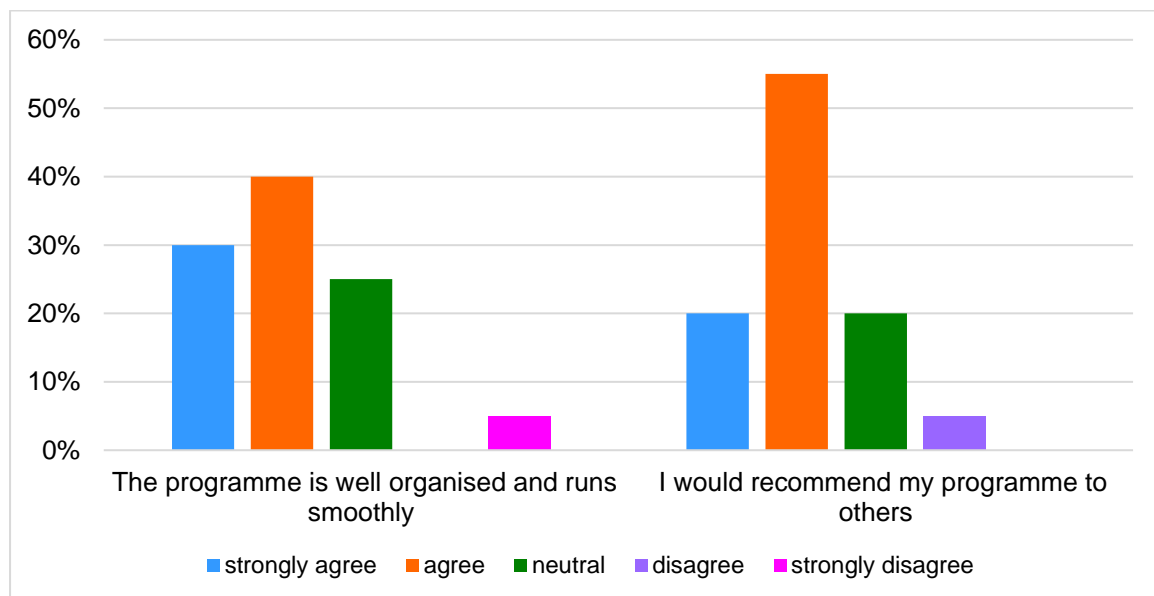


Figure 22: General satisfaction, Singapore

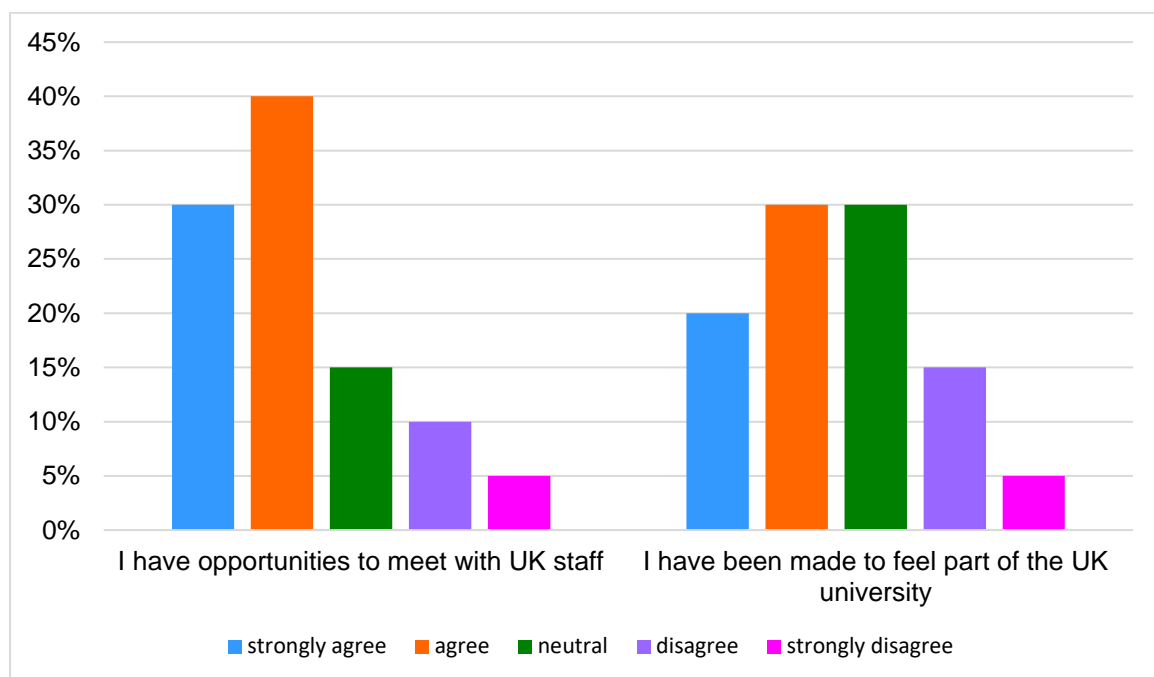


The UK university

UK TNE students in Singapore were asked two additional questions falling under the area of the relationship with the UK university, to reflect the fact that UK TNE in Singapore is delivered primarily through partnership arrangements with local delivery providers. This question did not apply to students in Dubai since they study at a branch campus of the UK university and thus relate with the UK university directly rather than through a delivery organisation.

While students in Singapore are relatively satisfied with the opportunities they have to meet with UK staff (70 per cent aggregate satisfaction, with 30 per cent strongly agreeing), they are less satisfied with the way they are made to feel part of the UK university. In fact, this is one of the questions with lower satisfaction levels for UK TNE students in Singapore (50 per cent), and the question with highest dissatisfaction (20 per cent).

Figure 23: The UK university, Singapore



Open questions

Turning to the two open questions, four aspects are most commonly mentioned by UK TNE students in Dubai as the best features of their learning experience:

- the quality of lecturers, perceived as prepared, good at explaining, supportive and having valuable professional experience (20 per cent of responses)
- the learning methods based on the practical application of theory, group interaction, and stimulating critical thinking (10 per cent)
- the flexibility in programme delivery, such as block-teaching by flying faculty and blended learning, allowing students to pursue their studies while in employment; (5 per cent)
- the course content perceived as up-to-date, relevant to their career, expanding their knowledge, and intellectually stimulating (5 per cent).

These responses match with the best features mentioned in the survey by UK TNE students in Singapore, which include in order of frequency: the quality of lecturers (both local and from the UK) again perceived as supportive, helpful and well prepared (30 per cent); the

focus on the practical application of knowledge (20 per cent); and the quality and relevance of the course content (20 per cent).

Looking at the most frequently mentioned areas of improvement, it is also possible to see parallels between the experience of UK TNE students in Dubai and Singapore. The main area of improvement for both sets of students relate to opportunities to engage with industry and gain hands-on experience, such as through the availability of internships. Another common area of improvement mentioned by both sets of students, although less frequently, relates to the timeliness and quality of lecturers' feedback on assignments. The main difference relates to the different TNE models adopted in each location. In Dubai, where all students responding to the survey were studying at the branch campuses, the emphasis of students is with having an experience more comparable with that of students at the home campus in the UK, in particular with regard to academic services and extra-curricular activities, as well as the range of electives available. In Singapore, where all respondents studied programmes delivered in partnership with local providers, the emphasis is on low levels of engagement and sense of belonging with the UK university.

Discussion forums

The discussion forums helped with understanding and confirming students' perceptions, allowing students to elaborate on their views and share with fellow students studying on UK programmes. Students participating in the forums confirmed and gave more details about the main areas of greatest satisfaction and those requiring improvement as these emerged from the survey.

Dubai students reiterated their generally high satisfaction with the supportive learning environment, the quality of their learning experience - underpinned by what is referred to as the UK approach to teaching and learning (centred on the practical application of theory, critical thinking, interactive and independent learning), and the flexibility of their programme of study. They also reiterated the need for having more and better internships, more opportunities to engage with industry, a larger choice of electives and subjects of study, and the need for bigger campuses with a broader range of students' services.

Singapore students participating in the forum, stressed another positive feature of their experience with UK TNE which was not mentioned in the survey's responses - this was the opportunity provided by UK TNE programmes to progress in their career through flexible modes of delivery, such as top-up degrees, block-teaching and part-time study. This is an area also appreciated by Dubai's students. In addition, students at the forum in Singapore were generally highly appreciative of local lecturers, both for the academic guidance provided and for acting as a communication channel with the UK university.

With regard to areas of improvement, students in both locations stressed aspects relating to work experience and employability, and the broader student experience. For Dubai students, the latter was expressed as the desire to experience a more similar study experience as students at the UK home campus, including a broader range of student services and extra-curricular activities. Singapore students were generally aware that studying with local delivery partners, they could not expect the same student experience as studying at a UK campus, however, many students expressed the desire to have more contact and engagement with the UK university, which at times was perceived as too distant and disengaged.

The appreciation of the practical approach adopted in their studies together with the request to have more opportunities to put learning into practice, such as through internships, might seem to be a contradiction. On the one hand this can be explained by the fact that, studying on different programmes, not all students were exposed to the same experience. On the

other hand, it points to the fact that enhancing employability prospects was the most shared expectation by students from their choice of study. This was the most common response by students at both forums in Dubai and Singapore when asked to explain the main rationale for choosing their course of study.

In relation to this question, an interesting difference seemed to emerge between the two sets of students. While both Dubai and Singapore students do refer to the reputation of the UK university of choice, or more generally the reputation of the UK higher education brand, this was a factor more commonly mentioned by students in Dubai. Students in Singapore generally mentioned first, the possibility to complete further study through flexible modes of delivery, which is offered by UK TNE programmes, and the local reputation of the local delivery partner. Again, this can be explained with the importance attributed to employability and career progression by the students, which in Singapore, given the partnership model of provision and the mostly local student population, translates into the reputation and connection with industry of the local partner; while in Dubai, given the branch campus model of provision and the international composition of the student population, translates primarily in the international reputation of the degree-awarding body.

Another area explored in some detail during the forums was that of student engagement. The idea itself of engaging with TNE students through the forums was that of fostering TNE student engagement by providing them an opportunity for feedback on their experience. Students in both locations are aware of and are mostly appreciative of the opportunities offered to them by the UK universities to give feedback on their experience. However, there seems to be a variable experience of the extent to which their voice and views are listened and responded to by their UK university, with some students in both locations complaining of a lack of interest or engagement with their needs by the home institution. Some students in Dubai questioned the transparency of decisions made by the home institution and the perceived lack of accountability to Dubai-based students. While some students in Singapore felt that not all students were given the opportunity to meet with UK universities representatives for feedback.

Conclusions

Value of the exercise

The TNE student surveys and forums run jointly by QAA and KHDA in Dubai and CPE in Singapore, are an example of innovative practice in cross-border cooperation between quality assurance agencies to ensure that TNE students get the best possible learning experience.

Given the geographical spread and amount of UK TNE, QAA is looking to find alternative additional ways to monitor the experience of UK TNE students to its formal TNE review processes. Cooperating with host countries' agencies in gathering TNE student views of their experience through satisfaction surveys and discussion forums could be one such way, in addition to the regular sharing of information and intelligence, in which QAA could implement a more-risk based approach and focus resources where these are most needed. Engaging with UK TNE students through this type of initiative is also highly valuable for KHDA and CPE, as UK providers represent the larger proportion of foreign provision in both locations. Similar surveys and forums could be developed further and extended to providers from countries other than the UK, allowing CPE and KHDA to monitor more regularly the experience of local TNE students and ensure that their expectations and local educational needs are met.

The comparative approach adopted in this exercise allowed the three agencies to gain a better understanding of how the challenges associated with TNE provision are shaped by different regulatory environments and different approaches to TNE. As KHDA is currently exploring opportunities to expand the partnership model of TNE provision in Dubai, the three-way cooperation adopted in this exercise allowed them to get a better understanding of the challenges pertaining to this type of TNE model. This shows another benefit associated with interagency cooperation, related to the sharing of intelligence and good practice.

TNE student experience

From both the surveys and the discussion forums, it clearly transpires that UK TNE students in both locations are generally satisfied with the academic side of their experience. This is consistent with the findings of the QAA 2011 and 2013 TNE reviews in Singapore⁶ and Dubai⁷, according to which, UK institutions were managing the provision in accordance with UK expectations. However, students in both locations feel that more improvement is needed in the areas related to work experience, engagement with industry and employability, and the broader student experience.

In relation to the latter, for Dubai students studying at branch campuses of UK universities, improving their student experience means having an experience more comparable to that of students studying at the home campus in the UK, including the broad range of student services and extra-curricular activities. Singapore students studying on collaborative partnerships with delivery partners are generally aware that they cannot expect a branch campus-type student experience, however, they do feel that more could be done to

⁶ [www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/international/singapore-overview-report-aop-11-\(1\).pdf?sfvrsn=bd2bf481_2](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/international/singapore-overview-report-aop-11-(1).pdf?sfvrsn=bd2bf481_2)
(PDF 624KB)

⁷ www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/international/review-transnational-education-uae-14.pdf?sfvrsn=1407f481_2
(PDF 580KB)

strengthen the sense of belonging to the UK university from whose degrees they are studying.

The students who participated in the forums seemed to have generally appreciated the opportunity to engage with both the local quality assurance body and QAA. The forum in particular, served the purpose to remind students of the importance of raising their views with their institutions and expect that they are listened to, as a key tool for enhancing their and future students' experiences. It also served to remind students that safeguarding the quality of their experience is at the heart of the mission of quality assurance agencies such as QAA, KHDA and CPE.

In conclusion, this initiative has demonstrated the potential to further develop TNE student surveys and forums and use them more systematically to inform a better understanding of the challenges facing TNE students in different operating environments and different types of TNE provision. This would allow quality assurance agencies in sending and receiving countries, to improve the efficacy of their efforts to ensuring that TNE students get a quality and relevant education, by means of more focused intervention and cooperation based on evidence on what is working well and what aspects need improvement.

Annex: UK TNE student survey questions

Information and induction

- I received sufficient information about the course before enrolling
- The information received was accurate
- Once enrolled I received adequate induction to the programme and student support
- I have received information about the performance of past graduates from the course before enrolling (Singapore only)
- I have chosen this private education institution as it has achieved the EduTrust certification (Singapore only)

The teaching on my course

- Teachers are good at explaining things
- Teachers are prepared
- The course is intellectually stimulating

Academic support

- I am able to contact staff when I need help
- Academic support and guidance is available
- English language support is available

Learning resources

- The IT resources and facilities provided effectively support my learning
- The library resources (for example, books, online services and learning spaces) effectively support my learning
- I am able to access course-specific resources (for example, equipment, facilities, software, collections) as required

Assessment and feedback

- The criteria used in marking was made clear in advance
- Feedback on my work has been timely
- I have received helpful comments on my work

Student engagement

- I have the opportunity to give feedback on my learning experience
- The University listens and responds to students' views
- Students can lodge a complaint or an appeal with the University

The UK university (Singapore only)

- I have opportunities to meet with UK staff
- I have been made feel part of the UK university

Relevance and career services

- What I learn in my university prepares me for my future
- There are adequate opportunities in my university to gain work experience through internships, attachments and industry project work
- I am confident that it will be easy for me to apply for jobs with the help of my university

General satisfaction

- The programme is well organised and runs smoothly
- I would recommend my programme to others

Best features and areas of improvement

- What aspects of your course were most useful or valuable?
- Are there aspects that you would wish to change?

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