

UK collaboration in Malaysia: institutional case studies

Keele University and KDU College, Malaysia

March 2010

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2010

ISBN 978 1 84979 194 6

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Challenges and learning from experience in developing a new international collaboration

1 This case study examines the development of a partnership between Keele University (the University) and KDU College, Malaysia (KDU, the College). It may provide signposts for other institutions considering entering into international collaborative arrangements. The case study was written in April 2010 when the arrangement was in the second year of operation. The University provided the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) with a commentary describing the collaborative arrangement, and a team from QAA visited the University in January 2010 to talk to staff about the collaborative arrangement. The case study is based on the commentary and supporting documentation, and the discussions with staff at the University.

2 Keele University was the first completely new higher education institution established after the Second World War, gaining degree awarding powers in 1949 as the University College of North Staffordshire, and university status in 1962 as the University of Keele. The University was founded to promote interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary scholarship and it continues to emphasise the development of a broad educational programme; around 80 per cent of its undergraduate students study two subjects to honours level.

3 KDU is a private tertiary college wholly owned by Paramount Corporation Berhad. The Corporation has property interests and also a substantial education division, which incorporates primary and secondary as well as tertiary provision. KDU offers pre-university A-level and foundation-level qualifications, as well as degree programmes in a diversity of subject areas franchised from UK and Australian universities. KDU was established in 1983 and has three campuses, two based in Kuala Lumpur and one in Penang. It describes itself as a pioneer in Malaysian private education and an innovative leader in tertiary education. It recruits both students who are Malaysian nationals and international students. The partnership with the University was initially approved to run on a campus in Petaling Jaya in Kuala Lumpur and was subsequently extended to the KDU Penang campus.

4 As a UK higher education institution, the University is subject to periodic Institutional audit by the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). QAA is an independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges, and through contracts with the higher education funding bodies. The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) has responsibility for the local accreditation of higher education programmes and qualifications, and for supervising and regulating quality and standards in education providers in Malaysia.

5 The partnership began with an approach in the academic year 2007-08 to the University by KDU, which wished to offer undergraduate programmes in the business area to lead to awards of the University. At the time of the approach KDU had business-related undergraduate provision with another UK university, which it was seeking to discontinue. The first students were enrolled on the Keele University degree programmes at KDU in the academic year 2008-09.

6 The programmes approved by the University to operate in collaboration with KDU are all dual honours degree awards within the University's business undergraduate programme area:

- BA (Hons) Business Management and Finance
- BA (Hons) Business Management and Human Resource Management
- BA (Hons) Business Management and Marketing.

The programmes are approved to operate as 'three plus zero' provision, with all delivery undertaken by KDU. The commentary on the provision stated that only two of these routes were in operation at the Penang campus, but all are listed in the KDU web information for the Penang campus. All three programmes have provisional accreditation from the MQA through to September 2012.

7 In the academic year 2008-09 there were 153 students studying on the KDU programmes: 58 on the Finance, 32 on the Human Resource Management and 63 on the Marketing pathways. KDU has notified the University that it expects student numbers to grow as the College phases out other provision.

8 The University had limited involvement with overseas collaborative provision prior to the approach from KDU. The only other such arrangement is a partnership in Sri Lanka, which was the subject of a full overseas audit by QAA in 2004. With the exception of the partnership in Sri Lanka, the University had ruled out the development of any overseas collaborative arrangements. The University has decided to relax this position, but describes itself as having a 'measured approach' to international collaboration. The University is not willing to validate programmes designed and delivered by other institutions, and intends to enter only into franchise arrangements. Reasons which the University cited for this change of stance were:

- the University's internationalisation strategy and a belief that collaborative provision in chosen markets raised the University's profile for the recruitment of international on-campus students
- a wish to diversify income streams
- that building volume created economies of scale which reduced the costs of operation.

9 A consequence of the embargo on overseas collaborative provision is that there was, and still is, a relative lack of experience in the University of the development and management of overseas collaborative provision. Prudently, therefore, the University sought advice from external consultants with significant experience of developing and operating collaborative provision in their own universities.

10 The University has a *Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision* which applies to domestic collaborations and is based on the QAA *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*. The University used its own *Code of Practice* as the basis for approval of the KDU overseas collaboration. The University does not have formal risk management mechanisms specific to collaborative provision.

11 In July 2008, a University panel, which included an external academic member, undertook a formal visit to KDU Petaling Jaya in Kuala Lumpur to consider approval of both the partnership and the franchising of the programmes. A due diligence investigation of KDU as a prospective University partner was also undertaken. The visiting panel produced a favourable report and recommended approval of the collaboration to the University's Learning and Teaching Committee (ULTC) with one condition and two recommendations. One of the recommendations was that a full review of the programme and of the partnership be conducted after the first year of operation. In the event the University decided that one year of operation was insufficient for meaningful evaluation of the provision and, with ULTC approval, the review was deferred.

12 In September 2008 approval of delivery of the programmes was considered at a meeting of a subgroup of the ULTC, authorised by ULTC to consider and approve the final arrangements for the collaboration. The programmes were formally approved to operate at the Petaling Jaya campus from the academic year 2008-09.

13 Shortly after the programmes started at Petaling Jaya campus, the University was approached with a request for the collaboration to be extended to the KDU Penang campus for two of the three courses approved to run at Petaling Jaya. The University did not have a procedure to cover approval of additional delivery sites where there has already been a full institutional visit and approval of delivery, so it added an annex to its *Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision* to cover this eventuality. Under this new procedure, an internal approval panel visited Penang campus in November 2008 and recommended to ULTC approval of Penang as an additional delivery site.

14 The operation of the collaboration is governed by an agreement between the University and KDU which covers a number of matters, including:

- the respective roles and responsibilities of the University and KDU
- monitoring and review of the provision
- approval of staffing at KDU to deliver the programme, and termination arrangements.

15 The day-to-day operation of the provision is managed by the Keele Management School (KMS) on behalf of the University. The management arrangements are based on the programme teams, which are themselves based around the examining teams. Each course has a course committee and an examination board. KMS has appointed an Academic Co-ordinator, who acts as the link tutor with KDU. Initially, this role was calibrated as equivalent to 0.35 of a full-time academic post, rising to 0.5 of a post as the collaboration expands. In addition, KMS has appointed an Administrative Co-ordinator with 'a similar workload trajectory'. KDU provides equivalent academic and administrative liaison.

16 The basis of the collaboration is that students at KDU follow the same curriculum and assessment regime as on-campus students. In practice, such matching is not entirely possible because there is a second intake at KDU in February, which requires a separate academic calendar and that a new set of assessments be set by the University. Even the cohort which is notionally in synchronisation with the provision at the University is only partially run in tandem with the on-campus programme. This disjunction is because of different term lengths and holiday periods between the two institutions, and has resulted in some additional costs and extra demands on staff.

17 The University indicated that, at the time it arose, the opportunity to develop a collaboration with KDU was seen as a welcome initiative. In retrospect, the University realised that the timing of the development and speed of implementation had not been ideal. The establishment of the arrangement coincided with a major curriculum review in the Keele Management School, but the timing was such that the KDU collaboration had to be launched under the old degree scheme. The University is phasing the new scheme in, but still needs to support some teaching and assessment under the original curriculum arrangements.

18 The University encountered further difficulties because of the late arrival at KDU of material from the University to support learning and teaching at the beginning of the academic year 2009-10. The delay has required a flexible and pragmatic response from the University, with the rescheduling of assessment deadlines at KDU, and the possibility of deferring the assessments until the resit period to give students time to catch up with material that they have missed.

19 The University acknowledges that it initially underestimated both the academic and administrative staff resources needed to run the programme effectively. The Agreement between the University and KDU specifies that module leaders at the University should liaise with their equivalents at KDU, and they gain credit in the University workload allocation for this work. Staff at the University were open in saying that liaison was imperfect in the first year of operation of the arrangement. The University has recognised the need to develop a more systematic approach in this area.

20 The University based its initial planning for its management of the collaborative arrangement on the presumption that it would be working with staff at the campus in Kuala Lumpur. When approval was extended to the campus in Penang it was not anticipated that additional central liaison arrangements would be necessary. It emerged that the operation at Penang would require direct contact with the University, which was an additional unplanned demand on the University's resources.

21 Publicity issued by KDU for the programme relies principally on the University's promotional material. KDU also generates its own publicity material. The contractual agreement obliges KDU to seek University approval of these materials. At the time of writing, the University had not yet defined a formal policy and procedures to secure the accuracy of information, including that on the internet, published about its collaborative provision more generally.

22 Students are admitted to the programmes by KDU in accordance with entry standards agreed by the University. There are two entry points in the year. KDU can recommend to the University the admission of students who do not meet the entry requirements, but the University has the right to refuse admission. To date, the University has not had to override an admissions decision by KDU. Once admitted, students are registered as full students of the University and entered onto the University student records system.

23 The report from the Penang approval panel's visit suggested that most entrants would be seeking entry to year two (level 5) at the University. The then Head of School, who had been instrumental in setting up the collaboration, had undertaken a curriculum matching exercise. The University has not yet given consideration to how it will ensure that the curriculum match be maintained.

24 As the KDU students are fully registered students of the University, they have access to the e-learning resources of the University. On registration, they are issued with a University of Keele IT account, which allows access to the Keele Learning Environment (KLE) and the Library online resources. In practice, the University has set up a 'mirror KLE site' for each module studied by KDU students, since material on the Keele site was seen by the University staff as not wholly appropriate or relevant to KDU students. There were also problems with some copyright materials and issues with general connectivity. When University staff visited KDU in November 2009, both staff and students reported that access to electronic resources was patchy, with some staff and students reporting no access at all. In response, the University has appointed a Learning Technologist to support the availability of e-learning resources for KDU students. It is clear that the University has had to expend considerably more effort and resource to resolving these problems than it had originally envisaged.

25 The contractual agreement requires KDU to provide curricula vitae (CVs) to the Head of School at the University for all staff recommended by KDU for teaching on the programme. The information must be provided not less than four weeks before the start of the relevant modules in a form specified by the University. The report from the University visit to KDU in November 2009 recorded that KDU faced a challenging recruitment situation for some modules. The extent to which the University was aware of changes to personnel and was approving newly appointed tutors to teach was questioned. The report recommended that updated CVs for KDU teaching staff be sent to the Head of KMS. The University has decided to set up staff development opportunities for KDU staff via its Learning Development Unit (LDU).

26 Students at KDU take the same assessments as the students on the cognate programmes at the University. As noted above, there are separate assessments for the February intake cohort at KDU. At the start of the arrangement, teaching staff at KDU did not see the examination papers set by the University prior to their students taking the examinations. In response to requests from KDU staff to have advance sight of examination papers, the University is arranging for this to happen through the examinations officer at KDU. The same external examiner arrangements apply to the KDU and on-campus programmes to allow comparability of academic standards across the provision to be confirmed.

27 Students' assessed work is double marked by KDU staff, in accordance with Keele regulations, using the University's assessment criteria. The examination scripts and assignments are then sent to the University for moderation by KMS staff. The University agreed to these

arrangements in response to a request from KDU. The assessment arrangements came under considerable pressure at the end of the first year of the collaboration, in the summer of 2009. Separate examination boards have been needed for the KDU provision, in part because, for reasons of timing, KDU could not meet the same assessment schedule as that in place at Keele. University staff who visited KDU in November 2009 offered staff workshops on assignment marking criteria

28 The policy of sending all assessed work to the University for moderation has led to student concerns that they are not receiving feedback on their assessments since the work is not returned to them. The University has responded by asking KDU tutors to keep paper copies of their feedback comments and to provide these to students. The University is also discussing the use of online submission of assessed work and online feedback as a solution to this issue.

29 Details of mitigating circumstances in connection with assessments are considered at the examination boards at the University. Allegations of academic misconduct are investigated by KDU; the University is in the process of appointing deputy academic conduct officers for each of the KDU campuses, and they will be provided with training for the role. If it is concluded that there is a prima facie case of academic dishonesty to answer, it is referred to the University for action. This approach has the potential for KDU students to be at a disadvantage compared with on-campus students since it would be impractical for them to appear in person at an academic misconduct hearing. The University is therefore considering the possibility of overcoming this difficulty through the use of video-conferencing. Complaints are dealt with by KDU but the University 'would want to know' if any significant issues were raised.

30 The University has developed a collaboration which is attractive to and meeting the needs of students in Malaysia if measured in terms of the student numbers for the first year of operation. At the same time, with relatively limited prior experience of developing, managing and operating overseas collaborative arrangements, the University has needed to develop rapidly processes and procedures to handle this aspect of its provision. The University has encountered a number of significant challenges during the first year of operation of the collaboration. It has had to learn quickly from experience and to adapt its procedures and operational management approaches to accommodate what it described as 'predictable surprises'. As the arrangement moved into the second year of operation, new challenges continued to face the University.

31 Staff associated with the development, management and implementation of the collaboration are both frank and insightful in summarising the lessons learned so far:

- the need for longer developmental and lead-in times to secure consistent and committed involvement from a broad range of staff at the University
- the importance of adopting a risk management approach to opportunities and initiatives
- the need to recognise that the process of change management at home and for the partner needs to be managed at institutional and operational levels
- the importance of considering the timing of establishing the provision, and being aware of the internal University context and external factors that could have an impact on the success of the initiative. The timetable for approval of delivery of the programmes coincided with significant changes to the home provision. The consequent disjuncture between the home and the franchised provision created additional problems and incurred additional overhead costs in running the collaboration
- the need to 'pin down the resources first'. In particular, it has become clear to the University that it significantly underestimated the costs associated with the establishment and implementation of the collaborative arrangement. There was also a need to build a contingency into the costings to cover operational problems not foreseen at the time the proposal was developed

- the University underestimated the amount of support and development required to make sure that the staff at KDU were familiar with the course material and the University expectations for delivery of the programmes, particularly in the early days of the collaboration
- with hindsight, the University should have put more emphasis on sending more of its staff to visit and work with the staff of the partner institutions at an earlier stage in the development and operation of the collaboration.

The University has responded pragmatically and prudently to these challenges to safeguard the academic standards of its awards.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk

RG 659 09/10