



# Review of UK Transnational Education in Malaysia: Lancaster University and Sunway University

**October 2019**

## **Executive summary**

Lancaster University (Lancaster) has been in partnership with Sunway University (Sunway) since 2006 to offer a suite of undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. With the exception of the Executive MBA, these programmes are designed and delivered by Sunway University academic staff, but validated by Lancaster University, allowing students to receive an award from both institutions. Sunway University is recognised by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia and its programmes are accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). Sunway's campus is located in Bandar Sunway in Malaysia.

The nature of the partnership between Lancaster and Sunway has evolved over the years into one of equals based on mutual trust at all levels. Lancaster now considers that the governance and management of the partnership is sufficiently mature and trusted for it to adopt a risk-based approach and operate certain key functions with light-touch oversight.

The dual degree programmes are subject to Sunway's Academic Regulations, approved by Lancaster, and Sunway's Academic Quality Manual supplemented by a specific chapter on collaborative partnerships in Lancaster's own Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures. A checklist of operational responsibilities records delegated authority to Sunway and Lancaster's own Faculties and Schools, which effectively formalises activities that could otherwise be open to misunderstanding. Oversight of the partnership takes place through a Partnership Management Group with representation from both institutions.

Lancaster considers its presence on the Sunway campus to be a key aspect of its oversight, exemplified by the recent appointment of an onsite Academic Dean. Currently, direct engagement between the two institutions is limited, with limited engagement at committee level, through the Partnership Management Group, through discipline-level visits of Lancaster staff to Sunway, through examination board attendance or in terms of the visibility of Lancaster with students on these dual degrees.

Lancaster and Sunway work together to deliver excellent staff development opportunities to those staff who teach on the dual degree programmes. The Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice programme (PGCAP) delivered onsite, the International Partnership Development (IPD) programme delivered in the UK and Lancaster's development of research capability at Sunway are examples of the range and effectiveness of staff development opportunities available to build higher education capacity at Sunway.

Students on dual degree programmes at Sunway are offered opportunities to undertake a study abroad programme or summer school at Lancaster, with very positive feedback from students on their experience there.

## Introduction

1 As part of Lancaster University's vision to be a University that is globally significant, it has a strategic goal to establish itself as a global leader in higher education and have at least 7,500 students registered at overseas partners by 2020. It engages in TNE to enhance the reputation and profile of Lancaster University, to generate income and to develop research links across the world. Consequently, Lancaster has created a number of articulation arrangements with partner universities across the world, and has also engaged in the validation of full programmes, primarily at undergraduate level. Over the past six years, it has sought to strengthen existing partnerships with Sunway University, and has also established new partnerships in three other strategic geographical areas, in Ghana, China and Germany.

2 Sunway was established under the provisions of the *Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996*, the *National Council of Higher Education Act 1996*, and the *Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007*. Lancaster's partnership with Sunway was established in 2006, initially with Sunway University College and now Sunway University since it achieved full University status in 2011. The first students started in January 2007 on programmes designed and delivered by Sunway academic staff and validated by Lancaster, allowing students to receive an award from both Lancaster and Sunway. There are now around 4,400 students at Sunway registered on one of these dual awards, representing over 55% of the total student body at Sunway.

3 The dual award programmes offered by Lancaster at Sunway are:

- BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance
- BSc (Hons) Biology with Psychology
- BSc (Hons) Biomedicine
- BSc (Hons) Business Management
- BSc (Hons) Business Studies
- BA (Hons) Communication
- BSc (Hons) Computer Science
- BA (Hons) Design Communication
- BA (Hons) Digital Film Production
- BA (Hons) Entrepreneurship
- BSc (Hons) Global Supply Chain Management
- BSc (Hons) Information Systems
- BSc (Hons) Information Systems (Business Analytics)
- BSc (Hons) Information Systems (Mobile Computing) with Entrepreneurship
- BSc (Hons) Information Technology
- BSc (Hons) Information Technology (Computer Networking and Security)
- BSc (Hons) International Business
- BA Interior Architecture
- BSc (Hons) Marketing
- BSc (Hons) Medical Biotechnology
- BSc (Hons) Psychology
- BSc (Hons) Software Engineering
- MBA Business Administration (Executive)
- MSc Computer Science (by research)

- MSc Information Systems (by research)
- MSc Life Sciences (by research).

4 Equivalent awards are made by Sunway. A student must achieve both awards and neither institution can confer an award independently.

5 Sunway has three intakes of undergraduate students - in January, March and August. In 2018-19 there were 4,331 students registered on dual degree programmes, 4,203 being undergraduates and the other 128 studying for a master's degree.

## **Developing, agreeing and managing arrangements for setting up and operating the link**

6 The partnership was approved by Lancaster's Senate in May 2006 in accordance with its Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures, following initial planning approval in November 2005 and an Institutional Review panel visit to Sunway in March 2006.

7 Lancaster works with Sunway to assure itself that it meets not only the requirements of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) but also the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Sunway initially develops new dual degrees to the requirements of MQA frameworks and benchmarks, with Lancaster then checking programmes against the appropriate UK frameworks and subject benchmarks.

8 The dual degree programmes are subject to Sunway's Academic Regulations, approved by Lancaster when the partnership was first established. Lancaster's Standing Committee on Academic Regulations considers and approves Sunway's regulations, including any that vary from Lancaster's own regulations and any amendments to the Sunway regulations on an ongoing basis. As a consequence, Lancaster has adopted Sunway's Academic Quality Manual, supplemented by a specific chapter on collaborative partnerships in Lancaster's own Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures (MARP). A checklist of operational responsibilities records delegated authority to Sunway and Lancaster's own Faculties and Schools. These are comprehensive documents, covering programme development, approval, delivery, assessment, monitoring and periodic review, as well as a range of other activities from student admissions to student support. The review team considered it to be a **positive feature** of the partnership, as it formalises activities that could otherwise be open to misunderstanding.

9 The main Lancaster committees with responsibilities for collaborative provision are the Collaborative Partnership Sub-Committee with responsibility for developing and monitoring policies and procedures relating to collaborative provision and for ensuring that these are implemented, and the Education Committee and its subcommittee the Academic Standards and Quality Committee with responsibility for ensuring that there are comparable academic standards and equivalent educational experience across the University's programmes.

10 One of the original conditions of approval of the partnership was that a senior member of Lancaster should sit on Sunway's Academic Board to monitor their academic procedures, and that a senior member of Sunway sit on a Lancaster committee, for instance Senate. The review team heard that there was currently no representation on either senior committees, but that cross-representation instead occurs through membership of the Partnership Management Group (PMG). Oversight of the Sunway partnership takes place through the PMG, attended by key academic and administrative staff from both universities and reporting to the University's Pro Vice-Chancellor (Digital, Global and International Development). It considers a range of matters to monitor the financial and academic health

of the Sunway partnership and its provision. Sunway's input had been confined to the occasional attendance of its Provost or nominee, which limited its effectiveness, and so the terms of reference and membership of the PMG are being amended to take account of a wider Sunway membership including its Provost, Director of Student Services and Academic Standards and Quality team.

11 Lancaster undertakes a Partnership Review of provision on a quinquennial basis. The partnership review covers strategic issues and relationship development, academic governance, quality assurance processes, management of teaching and learning, and the quality and availability of public information. The last Partnership Review at Sunway took place in 2016, with the Lancaster PMG reviewing the resulting action plan. Lancaster considers that the governance and management of the partnership is now sufficiently mature and trusted for it to adopt a risk-based approach and operate certain key functions with light-touch oversight, preferring instead to rely on data analysis, regular programme review and moderation of the assessment process.

12 Lancaster considers its presence on the Sunway campus to be a key aspect of its oversight, and its recent review of its Sunway-based structure has led to the appointment of a team consisting of an Academic Dean supported by two professional support staff at Sunway, supported by academic and professional service teams at both institutions. At Lancaster, Faculty International Teaching Partnership Directors and the Academic Standards and Quality team support the arrangement and are in contact with their counterparts at Sunway. At department level, scheme directors are responsible for quality assurance activities such as the moderation of assessments and student work.

13 There is regular contact between academic staff at the two institutions, and Lancaster staff occasionally visit Sunway for guest lectures and other activities. There are no link tutors from Lancaster who visit Sunway, but it is envisaged that the Academic Dean based at Sunway will undertake many of the responsibilities typically expected of a link tutor. The recently-departed Lancaster Partnership Manager at Sunway had similar responsibilities, but in practice they were not being carried out as anticipated by Lancaster.

14 The review team **recommends** that Lancaster increases its ongoing engagement with Sunway on a range of levels, including more active involvement in PMGs. The new Academic Dean would have a key role to play in such engagement activities.

15 The nature of the partnership between Lancaster and Sunway has evolved over the years, with increased trust and delegated responsibilities for Sunway exemplified by its role in the appointment of Lancaster's new Academic Dean. Sunway has also been instrumental in developing Lancaster's international strategy and in changing the mindset of the University in the UK. In turn, Lancaster has played a key role in developing Sunway's staff and working with them to develop a research culture.

16 With Sunway developing rapidly as a university, the thrust now is to develop into a more multi-disciplinary partnership with Lancaster and offering more postgraduate degrees. Lancaster is also encouraging Sunway to engage with its other strategic partners in Ghana, China and Germany. The review team considers the maturity of the partnership, and how it has evolved over the years into one of equals based on mutual trust at all levels, to be a **positive feature**.

17 The legal agreement between the two universities was signed in June 2017, covering all undergraduate and postgraduate dual awards and research collaboration over the following 10 years.

## Quality assurance

### Academic standards

18 There are effective processes in place for programme approval, monitoring and revalidation. New collaborative programmes, including dual awards, are approved in accordance with Lancaster's Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures. Lancaster approved the first dual award programmes at Sunway for delivery in 2007 through a validation exercise carried out by videoconferencing. This thorough review considered both UK and Malaysia quality requirements. However, programmes and modules are now subject to approval at both institutions through a process that does not require a validation event, although Lancaster is currently reviewing this.

19 New programme concepts are developed by Sunway staff, which are then shared with Lancaster. This initiates a process of collaboration in designing and developing the programme's curriculum, which represents a significant development in the nature of the partnership, as early programmes were independently designed by Sunway for validation by Lancaster. Once Sunway and the relevant Faculty at Lancaster are both satisfied with the programme it is considered for approval by Lancaster's Faculty Teaching Committee, and then the programme approval process culminates in the programme being signed off at Lancaster University level by the University Dean for Academic Quality. There is no validation event, but a committee process through which the programme is approved. Lancaster is aware of the need to gain greater external insight in approving a programme, and as a consequence is developing a more rigorous process to satisfy this need. The review team encourages Lancaster to pursue this approach.

20 Programme annual monitoring is undertaken through Lancaster's Annual Teaching Review (ATR) process. Sunway completes Lancaster's monitoring pro forma tailored for the Malaysian context. After consideration by the relevant Sunway department, the completed form is then reviewed by the relevant department and Faculty at Lancaster and outcomes fed back to Sunway. Lancaster's Academic Standards and Quality Committee reviews the themes and recommendations emerging from ATR reports and external examiner reports, detailed in an Annual Quality Report on International Teaching Partnerships.

21 The department-level ATR process is currently being replaced by the programme-level Annual Programme Review (APR) process with effect from the end of the 2019 calendar year, which will provide departments with the opportunity to reflect far more closely on individual programme's performance in the preceding year. Lancaster is currently piloting APR, and the review team welcomes this more robust approach to programme monitoring.

22 All programmes are revalidated on a five-year cycle, through a strategic departmental Periodic Quality Review (PQR) process. Relevant recommendations from the PQR reports form the basis of rolling action plans. However, Lancaster is revising its review mechanisms, with PQR being replaced by an enhancement-led departmental Strategic Teaching and Learning Review and supplemented by programme revalidation, being more data-driven and focused on the programmes themselves. Sunway has its own PQR process, looking at how programmes are managed on a regular basis.

## Assessment

23 Lancaster appoints external examiners for all dual award programmes. Following recommendations by faculty teaching committees, appointments are managed by Lancaster's Academic Standards and Quality Team. External examiners typically have experience of both UK and Malaysian higher education systems and so are well placed to comment on comparability of quality and standards. External examiners also need to meet the expectations of Sunway's regulations, and so following Lancaster approval each external examiner is approved by Sunway.

24 External examiners review both draft assessments and samples of marked student work, and report to Lancaster on an annual basis. The review team was told that the relevant Head of Department at Lancaster responds to all external examiners' reports, primarily because external examiners are responsible for provision that spans more than the dual awards delivered at Sunway. Some external examiners may also comment directly to Sunway on specific matters but this does not form part of the external examining reporting process. Lancaster is **recommended** to clarify its external examining arrangements, to ensure that all external examiners are aware of their reporting requirements.

25 There are currently effective processes in place for maintaining academic standards applying to assessment. Lancaster's MARP and Sunway's Academic Quality manual both briefly describe assessment processes for the dual award programmes, and are used in association with Sunway's own assessment regulations. Lancaster agrees assessment regulations with each partner, and for dual awards it agrees assessment regulations that differ from the standard Lancaster assessment regulations in order to allow the partner to stay in line with its local requirements, as long as these variations do not compromise the standard and quality of Lancaster validated programmes and degree awards. An example of this is approval for Sunway to use a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) grading system in order to meet MQA expectations.

26 Module leaders liaise with Lancaster in the setting and agreeing of assessments. Lancaster staff review draft assessments and moderate marked student work, with a risk-based approach used for first year modules. Following Lancaster staff approval, the external examiner should approve identified assessment tasks.

27 Sunway undertakes moderation of marked student work in line with Lancaster's regulations. In addition, for any work which contributes to the final Lancaster degree classification, Lancaster tutors are involved in moderating assessed work prior to it being sent to external examiners for review. Some external examiners have identified possible over-assessment on some programmes, in line with one of the findings of the recent partnership review.

28 Many external examiners have commented on the good quality of feedback to students. However, students who spoke to the review team described their feedback as at best variable. At certain times of the year feedback consisted of marks only, and those students who had studied in the UK commented upon the far more useful and detailed feedback received there. Staff are aware of the fact that feedback to students is at times inadequate, referring to cultural differences in expectations on feedback, and the Annual Teaching Review process is attempting to address it. Lancaster is **recommended** to consider how to meet the expectations of its students at Sunway regarding feedback on their assessments.

29 External examiners review draft examination papers and moderate a range of marked student work, including examination scripts, project reports and selected coursework. However, there appears to be varied practice across Schools, with some

external examiners receiving marked coursework and others not, and some external examiners not receiving draft examination papers. External examiners typically attend examination boards at Sunway, or remotely via Lancaster.

30 Examination boards operate as Subject Assessment Boards (SABs) and Programme Assessment Boards (PABs). Sunway staff chair SABs with Lancaster staff invited to attend, although in practice they do not attend. PABs are co-chaired, with Lancaster staff in attendance remotely via Skype. The recent partner review recommended that the attendance of Lancaster staff be reviewed to ensure it has appropriate participation in the decision-making process. The review panel **recommends** that Lancaster increases its ongoing engagement with Sunway on a range of levels, including a greater presence in examination boards as recommended by the most recent partner review.

## Quality of learning opportunities

31 In 2016 Lancaster commissioned a study of student learning experience at its major international teaching partners, including comparisons between student experience at Lancaster and Sunway. It concluded that Sunway was providing a high quality experience, equivalent to that at Lancaster. The review team agrees with this conclusion.

32 Sunway has responsibility for the recruitment of students, their admission and induction, according to their own admissions regulations and using admission criteria agreed with Lancaster. It also has full responsibility for the registration of students, according to its own regulations. Lancaster states that its staff should meet students during induction; however, students confirmed that this is not currently happening. When in place, it is intended that Lancaster's Academic Dean and his team will undertake this task.

33 Students who met the review team indicated that they had received accurate information on their studies at Sunway, but little or no information on the role of Lancaster. Students do not have communication with Lancaster staff, except for occasional guest lectures at Sunway. Many were not aware of the option to study in Lancaster, and neither do they receive key information such as how to appeal to Lancaster as Programme Handbooks simply inform students that their programme is validated by Lancaster. Students expressed a wish for more engagement with staff from Lancaster, and their current lack of engagement possibly explains why students consider themselves to be more students of Sunway University than Lancaster University.

34 Lancaster acknowledge that most students are not aware of potential engagement opportunities with the University, and so are considering how the Academic Dean can improve on this. The review panel **recommends** that Lancaster increases its ongoing engagement with Sunway on a range of levels, including raising the visibility of Lancaster with students on these dual awards. This would ensure that they are better informed of Lancaster and its role, and are more aware of exchange opportunities and how to appeal to Lancaster, as well as strengthening their sense of affiliation with Lancaster.

35 Sunway employs various means to seek student feedback, including end-of-semester surveys at module and programme level, student representatives on Student-Staff Committees and direct representation to teaching staff or the Dean. Students are also represented on the major decision-making committees at Sunway, both at School and University level. Most student representatives are elected by their fellow students, but some students indicated that they had been unaware they had been selected. Sunway's Student Council also has an important role to play in student welfare and interacting with senior Sunway management.

36 Staff are appointed as Sunway staff without reference to Lancaster, but the CVs of those staff who teach on the dual awards are referred to the appropriate Faculty teaching committee at Lancaster for ratification.

37 Although Sunway is responsible for the provision of learning support and associated resources, Lancaster reviews this provision through regular programme and partnership monitoring arrangements, and through reviews of student feedback. Students indicated to the review team that Sunway held a well-stocked library and that electronic resources are available from both Sunway and Lancaster. Students access course notes and other module-specific learning resources via Sunway's eLearn virtual learning environment.

38 Both Lancaster and Sunway work together to deliver staff development opportunities to those staff who teach on the dual award programmes. The Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (International) programme (PGCAP) is offered to all Sunway staff teaching on the programmes, and the International Partnership Development (IPD) programme is delivered at Lancaster to selected Sunway staff on an annual basis.

39 The PGCAP programme is the starting point for staff in developing their learning and teaching practices, with a focus of higher education in practice. It has been offered since 2008, initially with Lancaster staff visiting Sunway to deliver the programme, but it is now jointly delivered. Over 60 Sunway staff have now undertaken the course, which is accredited by Advance HE to offer Higher Education Academy Fellowship with the opportunity to progress to Senior Fellowship. There is a strong encouragement for staff to undertake PGCAP before teaching on a Lancaster programme, but it is not a necessary condition as some prior experience of teaching is preferred. Around 16 members of Sunway academic staff travel to Lancaster each year to undertake the IPD programme, with staff being nominated by the head of department depending upon the needs of individual departments. While there, Sunway staff have the opportunity to observe teaching at Lancaster and undertake a range of other activities.

40 Additional staff development needs are also identified as part of the ATR process. Lancaster has played a key role in developing research capability at Sunway, with Sunway academic staff enrolled on part-time doctoral studies and joint conferences at both universities on key research activities. The review team considers that the range and effectiveness of staff development opportunities available to build higher education capacity at Sunway to be a **positive feature**.

41 Sunway manages both student complaints and appeals and has well-developed procedures for both. There is guidance to students on appeals, including grounds for appeal and who to appeal to, in the Student Handbook. Although students have recourse to Lancaster's appeals procedure should they exhaust all opportunities under Sunway's process, it is not clear how they would know of this opportunity and students were not aware. Guidance is provided on how students can complain to Sunway, but not to Lancaster.

42 Students on dual degree programmes are offered opportunities to undertake a study abroad programme or summer school at Lancaster. A small number of students travel to Lancaster for the first half of their second year of studies as part of an exchange arrangement, and a much larger number attend a summer school at Lancaster. Although many students were not aware of the option to study in Lancaster, those who had taken up the option were very positive about their experience and Lancaster's briefing and induction activities in advance. Lancaster would like to extend these opportunities to a larger group of students at Sunway, and extend opportunities across its other key partnerships in Ghana, China and Germany, but acknowledges that conflicting academic calendars limit these in practice.



## Information on higher education provision

43 The maturity of the partnership has earned Sunway 'highly trusted' status with respect to its responsibility for assuring the accuracy of information about the dual award programmes. Lancaster's Communications and Marketing team randomly monitors Sunway's publicity materials from time to time to ensure it is in line with University policy, and there is an annual meeting to discuss any issues arising.

44 Registered students receive both a Sunway University-wide Student Handbook and a programme-level Programme Handbook, with Sunway taking sole responsibility for developing and approving both. The Student Handbook is a useful reference point on all aspects of enrolment information, services and resources available to students, general University rules, management of studies, and so on. Programme Handbooks provide practical information about the organisation of the programme, assessment and award. Students were satisfied that both were accurate and useful reference points. Sunway is also responsible for approving formal public documents such as programme specifications.

45 Students successfully completing dual award programmes receive two award certificates but a single joint transcript issued by Sunway. The transcript recognises that the programme of studies leads to an award from both universities, and identifies the location of study of students.

## Conclusion

There is a long-standing partnership between Lancaster University and Sunway University, offering dual degree programmes with a strong reputation in the Malaysian market. This mature partnership provides an educational experience that meets UK academic standards and requirements for the student experience. There are effective processes in place for setting and maintaining academic standards, and Sunway is providing a high quality experience. However, Lancaster is recommended in particular to consider its current limited presence on the Sunway campus, as well as the direct engagement between the two institutions at committee level, through each other's Partnership Management Groups, and through examination boards.

The two universities plan to develop the partnership into one which is more multi-disciplinary, offering a greater range of postgraduate degrees. Lancaster also plans to engage Sunway with it in its other strategic partnerships across the globe.

## Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- The Lancaster University-Sunway University Partnership Operational Responsibilities checklist, which comprehensively documents responsibilities of both universities (paragraph 8).
- The maturity of the partnership, and how it has evolved over the years into one of equals based on mutual trust at all levels (paragraph 16).
- The range and effectiveness of staff development opportunities available to build higher education capacity at Sunway (paragraph 40).

## Recommendations

Lancaster University is recommended to take the following action:

- Lancaster should increase its ongoing engagement with Sunway on a range of levels, including more active involvement in PMGs and other relevant committees and groups, a greater presence on examination boards and in raising the visibility of Lancaster with students on these dual awards (paragraphs 14, 30 and 34).
- To clarify its external examining arrangements, to ensure that all external examiners are aware of their reporting requirements (paragraph 24).
- To consider how to meet the expectations of its students at Sunway regarding feedback on their assessment (paragraph 28).

### **Lancaster University's response to the review report**

Lancaster University thanks the QAA TNE panel for its balanced and considered report on the relationship with Sunway University. We value the encouraging feedback on the status and maturity of the partnership as it moves to the next stage of development through both greater subject diversity and increased research capacity.

In line with the report's recommendations Lancaster and Sunway will continue to work together to develop further engagement opportunities at all levels and to continuously review assessment and examination arrangements to ensure that processes are as clear as possible for staff and students.

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