



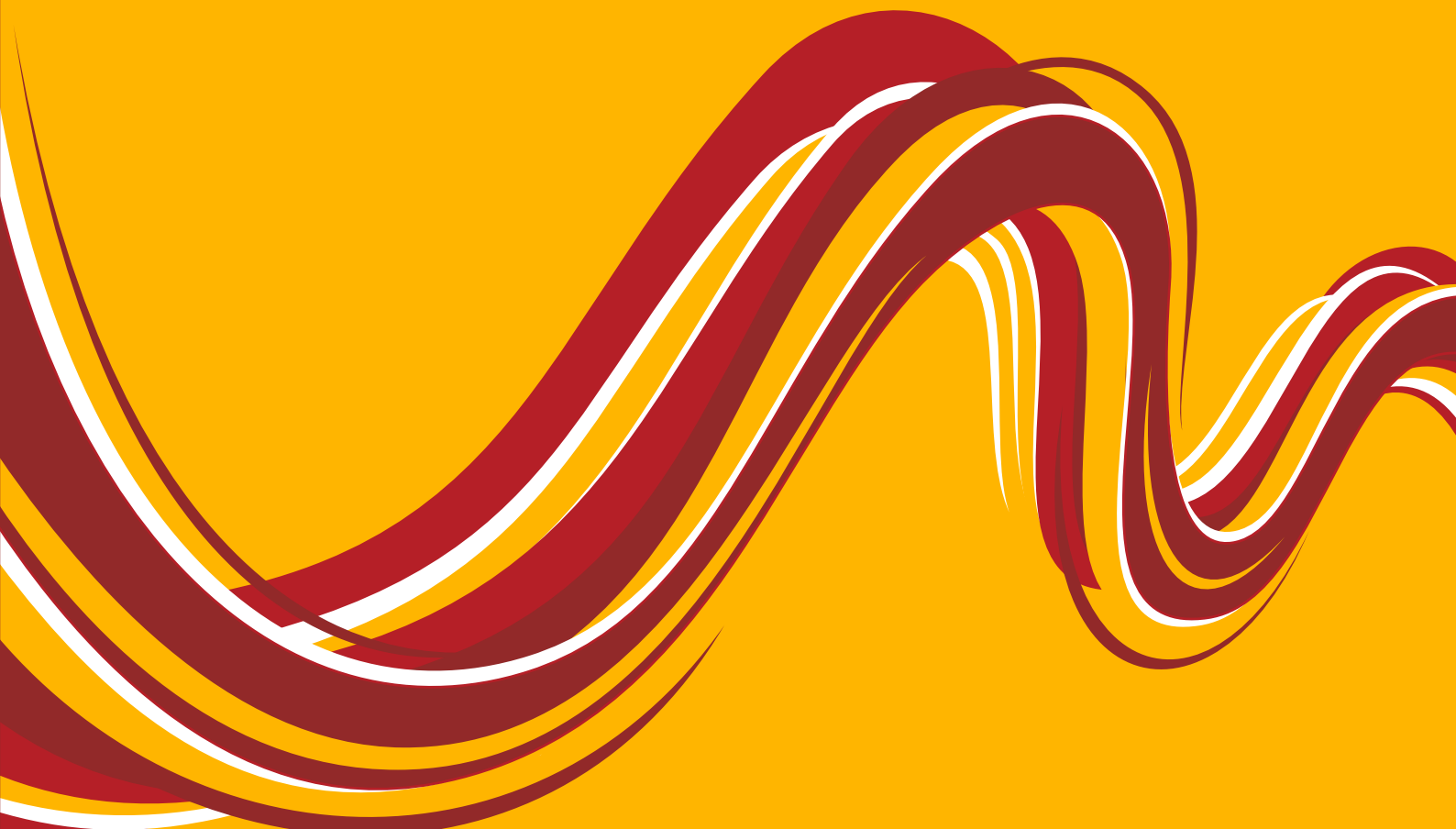
**QAA**

# Review of UK transnational education in China 2012

## Case studies: Setting and maintaining academic standards

- Oxford Brookes University and the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
- Staffordshire University and the International College of the Global Institute of Software Technology
- The Northern Consortium UK and the Sino-British College
- The University of Wales and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences

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# Introduction

Following its review of transnational education in mainland China in November and December 2012, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has compiled a set of four case studies dealing with different aspects of setting and maintaining academic standards. The review reports and an overview report on UK higher education delivered in China are published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/overseas/Pages/China-2012.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/overseas/Pages/China-2012.aspx).



Map of Mainland China, showing the places included in the review team's itinerary: Beijing, Dalian, Kunming, Ningbo, Shanghai, Suzhou.

## Case study 1: Bridging the academic professional divide

### **Oxford Brookes University and the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)**

This case study is centred on a degree programme that requires students to demonstrate knowledge of professional practice; it considers the use of a subject benchmark statement.

Subject benchmark statements set out the academic characteristics and standards of UK programmes of study. Some benchmark statements are combined with, or make reference to, professional standards required by external professional or regulatory bodies in the discipline.

## Case study 2: Dealing with diverse progression routes

### **Staffordshire University and the International College of the Global Institute of Software Technology (GIST)**

Within the context of a particular partnership, this case study looks at the various ways students may progress towards a degree, including the option of a diploma 'top-up'.

It explores one of the key purposes of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), which is to identify potential progression routes.

The FHEQ describes the achievement represented by higher education qualifications. It applies to degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic awards granted by a UK higher education provider with degree-awarding powers.

## Case Study 3: Handling the complexities of a university consortium

### **The Northern Consortium UK and the Sino-British College (SBC)**

In this case study the scenario is multiple UK universities involved in collaborative provision within a single institution that they collectively part-own. This case study examines how the universities assure the standards of their individual awards in the context of a variety of collaborative models.

Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them.

## Case Study 4: Managing assessment in a foreign language

### **The University of Wales and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS)**

This case study considers the long-term sustainability of a programme that involves assessment in a foreign language, focusing on the additional quality assurance requirements and the associated resource implications.

Assessment of students' work in a foreign language poses serious challenges to the ability of a degree-awarding body to be in proper control of the academic standards of awards made in its name.

# Case study 1: Bridging the academic-professional divide

## Oxford Brookes University and the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)

1 This case study concerns the BSc (Hons) Applied Accounting by distance or open learning offered by Oxford Brookes University (hereafter Oxford Brookes) through its Faculty of Business. It focuses on the steps taken by Oxford Brookes to safeguard academic standards when developing a bachelor's degree that builds on a professional qualification, and steps taken to establish a quality framework capable of managing large-scale delivery and assessment processes.

2 The BSc Applied Accounting is a joint programme developed as part of a strategic partnership between Oxford Brookes and the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA). ACCA was founded in 1904 and is one of the largest and fastest-growing professional accountancy bodies, with 154,000 members and 432,000 students in 170 countries taking its professional qualification.

3 In 2001, ACCA introduced a new syllabus which responded to a perceived need for a more academic approach to its accountancy qualification. This need originated in part from the changing nature of the accountancy profession and in part from moves by other professional accountancy bodies towards graduate entry. As a result, ACCA sought a university with which it could collaborate to develop a degree programme that would meet both academic and professional body standards, and it selected Oxford Brookes as its chosen partner.

**'ACCA is one of the largest and fastest-growing professional accountancy bodies, with 154,000 members and 432,000 students in 170 countries'**

4 From ACCA's perspective, the resulting programme enhances the knowledge and skills gained by its students in their professional studies so as to improve their effectiveness as professional accountancy students and/or practitioners. From Oxford Brookes' perspective, it enables thousands of ACCA students across the world to have the opportunity to obtain an Oxford Brookes degree, thereby widening access to higher education. To date, over 14,000 students have graduated with the BSc Applied Accounting.

5 The admissions requirements for the ACCA qualification are identical to those for the BSc Applied Accounting, so students registering with ACCA are automatically registered with Oxford Brookes for its bachelor's degree, unless they choose to opt out at the time of initial registration. There are approximately 285,000 registered students worldwide (excluding any who have opted out) and over 19,000 in China alone. In order to obtain the ACCA qualification, students are required to pass nine 'fundamentals' papers, based on a syllabus developed by ACCA and assessed jointly by ACCA and Oxford Brookes, plus an online (self-assessed) professional ethics module. In order to obtain the BSc Applied Accounting degree, students must additionally achieve a pass in a project incorporating research and analysis, designed and assessed solely by Oxford Brookes.

6 In developing the BSc Applied Accounting degree, Oxford Brookes used the relevant parts of the UK Quality Code to map the structure, content and learning outcomes of the ACCA qualification against those of modular undergraduate awards in accounting. The initial task was to

map the nine ACCA fundamentals papers against *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and against the subject benchmark statement for accounting, in order to assess equivalence of level and content respectively. It should be noted that the FHEQ has five levels, three undergraduate and two postgraduate; they are numbered 4 to 8 and a bachelor's degree is at level 6.

7 In addition, the fundamentals papers, comprising three knowledge papers and six skills papers, were credit-rated, enabling a volume of credit to be assigned to each level. As a result of this mapping exercise, the degree programme specification identifies the first three fundamental knowledge papers as being equivalent to 90 level 4 credits, with the remaining six fundamental skills papers being equivalent to 240 level 6 credits, representing 330 credits altogether. The remaining 30 credits for the award are derived from the project, giving a total of 360 credits, which is the norm for a UK bachelor's degree. Degree classification is determined by the numerical average of the marks achieved in the fundamental skills papers and the project, which together comprise 270 level 6 credits. Oxford Brookes, as the degree-awarding body, approved some specific modifications to its general regulations for degree classification in order to meet the specific requirements of ACCA. Such modifications are not uncommon when universities integrate one of their degrees with a professional qualification.

8 The project leads to a 6,500 word research report and a skills and learning statement. It is designed to develop and assess a range of skills that would normally feature in an undergraduate degree programme but which are less prominent in a professional qualification like ACCA's, which is delivered by distance or open learning and assessed solely by written examination. The ACCA fundamentals papers do not provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate all the 'cognitive abilities and non-subject specific skills' included in the subject benchmark statement for accounting. These encompass a range of communicative skills, research skills, IT skills, self-reflection, report writing and referencing, and it is these skills that are covered by the project.

9 The fundamentals papers are assessed by time-constrained written examinations set and marked by ACCA. Oxford Brookes has oversight of academic standards through the joint appointment with ACCA of examiners, level coordinators, external monitors and a Chief External Examiner, and through membership of relevant ACCA committees such as the Examination Paper Panel (which sets examinations), the Examination Review Board (which critiques examination papers that have been taken but not yet marked in order to give guidance to markers), and the Annual Review Panel (which deals with mitigation cases).

10 Project reports are not dealt with by ACCA but are submitted directly to Oxford Brookes where they are assessed by a group of markers managed by the BSc Programme Director. Markers meetings ensure the consistent application of assessment criteria, and a Project External Examiner monitors the standard of the topics set, student achievement, and the robustness of the assessment process. There is a team of 13 markers, with each one marking up to 50 projects. A team of 10 moderators is used to achieve consistency between markers and to make allowances for the different national contexts in which students are working. Oxford Brookes believes this system to be both robust and scalable.

**'A research and analysis project assesses skills that would normally feature in an undergraduate degree programme but which are less prominent in a professional qualification like ACCA's'**

11 For the fundamentals papers, ACCA makes a number of learning resources available to support students. These include examination syllabus and study guides, examination papers and model answers, and a range of approved study texts, technical articles and micro-websites. A variety of support is also available from ACCA learning providers in the form of face-to-face tuition, distance learning or blended learning (which combines elements of online and face-to-face tuition); both full-time and part-time study modes are possible.

12 Similarly, for the project, Oxford Brookes makes a number of learning resources available to support students, including an information pack, approved study texts and web resources. Students are required to identify a project mentor, who may be an ACCA member, an ACCA learning provider or an employer. Mentors hold a minimum of three meetings per annum with each student. Their role is to be a guide rather than a tutor or supervisor, but all mentors have to be approved by Oxford Brookes.

13 The BSc Applied Accounting is subject to both annual programme monitoring and periodic review, with the student voice being elicited through student representatives on the programme committee, surveys, telephone conversations, workshops, and the skills and learning statement associated with the project. Periodic reviews took place in 2006 and 2011 and provided an opportunity to incorporate changes to the programme, taking into account revisions to the ACCA professional accountancy syllabus as well as the evolving requirements of Oxford Brookes. Continuous dialogue between periodic reviews ensures that the partners keep each other informed of relevant curricular or other changes. This is particularly important given that students have up to 10 years to complete their project from the point at which they have passed all nine ACCA fundamentals papers.

14 The pass rate for the BSc is dependent on the pass rate for the project since it alone accounts for the academic 'additionality' that separates the degree from the underlying professional qualification. Some 51 per cent of candidates successfully complete the project and therefore the degree, though there is substantial variation in the pass rate for different countries, ranging from 77 per cent (Malaysia) to 30 per cent (Ghana). The overall pass rate is broadly equivalent to that of students taking the ACCA examinations and is therefore not regarded as a particular cause for concern. At 44 per cent the pass rate in China is lower than the overall average, and Oxford Brookes is implementing a series of measures designed to close the gap. These include in-country workshops for students and mentors at three locations in China.

15 One of the key issues facing Oxford Brookes in some countries is to achieve recognition for the BSc Applied Accounting. Although progress has been made in several countries such as Pakistan and Kenya, it is proving more difficult elsewhere. In some parts of the world, for example Australia and South Africa, professional accountancy bodies are unwilling to recognise accounting degrees from other countries as counting for exemption from part of their national accountancy qualifications. In other countries, concerns about content or about delivery by distance learning supplemented with optional tuition are impeding recognition.

**'One of the key issues facing Oxford Brookes is to achieve recognition for the BSc Applied Accounting in China'**

16 At present this is a particular concern in China, which does not recognise overseas degrees delivered by distance learning. Of the 19,500 registered students in China, 5,500 have completed their nine fundamentals papers required for the professional qualification and are therefore eligible to progress to the project required for the degree. At present, however, only about 150 per annum are doing so. While there are other factors in play, recognition of the Oxford Brookes degree by the Chinese government is seen as key to increasing the progression rate and Oxford Brookes has been active in pursuing this point with the relevant government authorities.

17 The partnership between ACCA and Oxford Brookes involves a further collaborative programme, the Master of Business Administration (MBA), which was launched in 2002 to provide a progression route with automatic entry for ACCA members wishing to obtain a master's degree. The MBA is delivered by blending learning and so far there have been more than 500 graduates.

18 The partnership between Oxford Brookes and ACCA is firmly based on a shared vision of a new type of qualification which incorporates the core values of both institutions, particularly access and academic rigour, bridges the historic professional-academic 'divide' and enables those with professional qualifications to progress to an undergraduate or postgraduate award. Achievement of wider recognition for such a type of qualification is central to Oxford Brookes' future plans.



## Case study 2: Dealing with diverse progression routes

### Staffordshire University and the International College of the Global Institute of Software Technology (GIST)

1 This case study concerns the collaboration between Staffordshire University and the International College of the Global Institute of Software Technology (GIST). Through this partnership, the university is offering a practical education up to degree level in China that is linked with industry and delivered in English, thereby helping to meet local and regional business needs for employees with effective communication skills who can deal with foreign customers. The case study focuses on how the university has responded to the requirements and aspirations of its partner, as well as to relevant regulations in China.

2 Staffordshire University (Staffordshire) was established from the former Staffordshire Polytechnic, obtaining university title in 1992. GIST was set up in 2007 as a provincial-level dazhuan (diploma) college under a private college licence. It is a joint venture between the Suzhou Science and Technology Town Company and the Global EduTech Management Group, which develops business and technology education in China and Southeast Asia. The GIST International College was started in 2009 and is based on the Suzhou Industrial Park, alongside several other higher education institutions and high-tech companies. It offers diploma courses with progression routes to higher qualifications from international partner universities. There was a link with Staffordshire at the outset, as the college's Chief Executive was recruited from another of the university's partner institutions in Malaysia.

**'Through this partnership, the university is offering a practical education in China that is linked with industry and delivered in English, thereby helping to meet local and regional business needs'**

3 The collaboration is based on a franchise agreement under which the International College, using its own staff, is approved to deliver Staffordshire undergraduate courses in the computing and business subject areas. These courses are aimed at both Chinese and international students, the latter coming mainly from Malaysia and Indonesia. Delivery of courses at degree level was planned to be introduced gradually as the first student cohorts progressed. Eligibility for studying the final year at the college itself is restricted to international students, whereas Chinese students must transfer to Staffordshire for their final year. This is because, as a dazhuan college, GIST is not approved to offer bachelor's degree courses for Chinese students, who are instead admitted through the dazhuan quota system on the basis of having achieved a requisite score in the Chinese higher education entrance examination (gaokao). These students may qualify for a 'double' award, both the dazhuan from GIST and a DipHE from Staffordshire. Students with marginal gaokao scores are also recruited (off-quota), but are eligible only for the Staffordshire award. All successful diploma students, both Chinese and international, have the option to transfer to Staffordshire to complete the final year of the related bachelor's degree.

4 The International College also offers the Staffordshire International Foundation programme, again delivered by its own staff, and this is a common mode of entry to the undergraduate courses. It is designed to develop students' language proficiency to the level required for studying



wholly in English, with IELTS<sup>1</sup> 6.0 (or equivalent) being the benchmark. The partnership is thus able to offer students a coherent progression route from foundation programme through diploma to degree, with exit awards at key stages. It should be noted that the relevant UK framework for higher education qualifications has three undergraduate levels, numbered 4 to 6; a DipHE is at level 5 and bachelor's degree is at level 6.

5 Staffordshire is responsible for the quality assurance of the International Foundation programme under a separate collaborative agreement. The staff of the college who teach on the programme comprise a mix of native and non-native English speakers. As student intake also becomes more diverse, with students of different nationalities and native languages, and some not able to speak Chinese, the university faces a challenge to ensure that students can reach a level of proficiency in English that will allow them to progress with a good chance of success.

6 Staffordshire gave approval for the computing courses at the International College to start in September 2010, followed by the business courses in September 2011. Since they were all existing university courses, the process of setting academic standards through defining learning outcomes and assessment had already been completed and the programme specifications already developed. Therefore, the first stage of the approval process focused on any adjustments to the programme specifications that might be needed. In the event, it entailed limiting the range of optional modules to be offered by the International College, rather than amending the content of modules. This provided a reasonable basis for planning staffing and resources, recognising that student numbers would be low at first and build up over time. The approval panels overseeing these adjustments included a subject specialist from another UK university. By these means, Staffordshire ensured that the standards set for the awards met UK expectations, including the expectation for external involvement in programme approval processes. The opportunity was also taken to clarify that the accreditation of certain courses by UK professional bodies did not extend to the courses delivered in China.

**'As student intake becomes more diverse, with students of different nationalities and native languages, and some not able to speak Chinese, the university faces a challenge to ensure that students can reach a level of proficiency in English'**

7 Programme handbooks expand on the content of programme specifications, explaining course structures, progression routes and award regulations. They also deal with assessment procedures, which follow Staffordshire's mainstream processes, applicable to all courses. Student assignments and examination scripts are double-marked by the International College, with marks moderated by Staffordshire. Awards are made through a system of assessment boards operating at module and award level. External examiners have been appointed to cover the business and computing courses. Where practicable, the same external examiner is appointed to cover courses at the International College as has responsibility for the equivalent courses at Staffordshire. At present this is the case for the business courses but not the computing courses. External examiners must participate in boards where decisions affecting students' final awards are made, although this may be by videoconference. The first computing students at the college received their DipHE awards in July 2012; others opted to defer their awards and progress to the degree courses at Staffordshire.

8 It should be noted that Staffordshire has only been concerned that its courses at the International College meet the requirements for a UK award; it has had no involvement in the requirements for the dazhuan. As a consequence, it does not include this arrangement within its own definition of a double award. The university is also satisfied that the standard of its

<sup>1</sup> Note that the International English Language Testing System is better known by its abbreviation IELTS.

awards offered to students of the college is not jeopardised by the nature of this collaborative arrangement. Nevertheless, in the context of another partnership in the Asia-Pacific region, Staffordshire is working to clarify its policy on double awards, with a view to giving some distinction to the double award as compared with a standard single award.

9 Staffordshire has appointed two programme advisers from among its own staff who respectively cover the computing and business courses. They have each independently visited the International College every six months and completed informative reports, which track progress against an action plan between one visit and the next. Their reports feed into Staffordshire's formal process of annual programme monitoring. This system of programme advisers ensures that matters important to Staffordshire do not drift, and it was identified as a feature of good practice in QAA's last Institutional Audit of Staffordshire (April 2010). It has enabled Staffordshire, during the early stages of its collaboration with the International College, to pay close attention to staffing levels, the standard of teaching and the qualifications of newly appointed staff. Every visit to the college has included observation of teaching and feedback sessions with students. In addition, Staffordshire's Head of International Partnerships, a native Chinese speaker, has a special responsibility for the collaboration with the college.

10 As a basis for staff development, Staffordshire has provided teaching materials and formative assessment tasks (via its virtual learning environment), as well as training on quality assurance processes. It remains a priority that staff of the International College should produce their own teaching materials; they have been matched with a counterpart at Staffordshire through an informal mentoring system. Another priority, particularly for the computing subject area, is to build the capacity of the college's staff to take on the management and supervision of final-year student projects. This would advance the partnership's ambition to introduce a range of bachelor's degrees delivered entirely at the college, and would support any future application from GIST for government approval to offer degree courses. A further objective is the implementation of systems to record and monitor student progress. Such systems will be crucial should student numbers grow to planned levels.

11 GIST has already done the groundwork for marketing the International College in Malaysia and Indonesia. Applications for courses are administered from an international office in Malaysia, which has appointed agents to recruit students globally. Publicity material emphasises the high quality of facilities available at the Suzhou Industrial Park and aims to counter negative perceptions about the learning and living environment in China. The material seeks to differentiate the Staffordshire courses by focusing on their being UK degrees offered in China with a content and learning style particular to the UK. Staffordshire is thus marketed as being a part of the UK higher education brand. As GIST takes the lead in producing publicity (given that it is more attuned to local market conditions), Staffordshire has an important responsibility to assure itself that this publicity fairly represents the courses, the University and the UK higher education brand.

12 Nevertheless, actual student numbers have so far lagged well behind forecast and this is becoming a pressing concern, leading to the implementation of a number of measures. These have included introducing rolling intakes in September and March and extending recruitment to students from other colleges, who might bypass the International Foundation programme, provided they have appropriate entry qualifications for the courses, including English language proficiency to the required level. From September 2012, there has also been direct entry to the final year of the business course, enabling the students to 'top-up' a diploma qualification obtained outside China to a Staffordshire degree. As a result, level 6 of the degree has come on stream a year earlier than originally expected and before the first student cohort admitted to the business courses has completed the DipHE, or level 5. This means that the time which could have been devoted to preparation and staff development at the International College before starting to deliver the final year has been curtailed. Also, given the small number of students who joined

the course at level 6, there is a need to guard against their learning experience being diminished through a lack of interaction within a larger group. On both counts additional input from Staffordshire is likely to be warranted

13 The above measures are resulting in a move away from a relatively low-risk collaborative model, under which Staffordshire effectively retained direct control of the final year of its courses and the standard of its degrees, to one where the less experienced partner is taking an active role in delivering even the highest level of these courses rather more quickly than first envisaged. Meanwhile, however, Staffordshire has established a greater presence of its own in Suzhou. It has recently opened a university centre in order to expand the scope of the partnership to mutual benefit, and to take forward other interests in China. Another consequence of this development is, of course, the opportunity to strengthen oversight of the collaboration through having more staff 'on the ground'. This would help to keep on track the steady approach initially adopted by Staffordshire that aimed to build up GIST's capacity to deliver courses at degree level, when student number projections were strong. Now that the partnership faces an increasingly competitive market for student recruitment, it would also provide the means to reinforce the University's framework for the academic standards of its awards in the context of more diverse progression routes.

## Case study 3: Handling the complexities of a university consortium

### The Northern Consortium UK and the Sino-British College (SBC)

1 This case study concerns the collaboration between nine member universities of the Northern Consortium UK and the Sino-British College (SBC) in Shanghai. SBC is established in China as a joint venture between the nine universities and the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology (USST) and is an 'attached' (or associate) college of USST. The focus of this case study is on how operating in a consortium can help both to assure academic standards and to reduce financial and reputational risk, and on how an arrangement that combines the characteristics of collaboration and competition can work to the benefit of students and their learning experience.

2 The Northern Consortium was created in 1987 to facilitate collaboration among its members in establishing and running courses with overseas partners which prepare international students for study outside their home country. It comprises eleven universities located in the north of England: Bradford, Huddersfield, Leeds, Leeds Metropolitan, Liverpool, Liverpool John Moores, Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan, Salford, Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam. SBC involves the participation of nine Consortium members - all except Liverpool and Manchester, which were pursuing their own independent interests in China at the time the College was created in 2006.

**'The Sino-British College is the only higher education institution in China involving a partnership between a Chinese university and a foreign university consortium'**

3 Based on its own campus, provided by USST, SBC is the only higher education institution in China involving a partnership between a Chinese university and a foreign university consortium. The President of USST chairs the governing body and the UK universities have four of the nine seats, with the Northern Consortium acting on their behalf through a limited power of attorney. Under licence from the Ministry of Education in China, SBC runs courses (taught in English) leading to degrees in designated fields awarded by the participating universities (USST and the nine UK universities). Chinese students recruited through the national quota system can obtain a double award, a degree from one of the UK universities and a separate degree from USST, by meeting certain extra requirements. In 2011-12, there were about 2,000 full-time undergraduate students studying at SBC, including about 130 non-Chinese international students.

4 The degree courses offered by SBC commence with a two-year preparatory or 'pathway' programme focusing on either business or engineering, developed by the Northern Consortium. On completion of their pathway programme, students may take up an option to continue their studies in the UK, choosing one from a wide range of degree courses in the relevant subject field offered by the nine universities. Alternatively, they may continue their degree studies at the SBC, through a narrower range of courses, currently offered by three of the participating UK universities (see paragraphs 8-11). The arrangement is such that multiple universities first collaborate and then compete.

5 The pathway programmes comprise two elements. First, the International Foundation Year, which includes courses in English for academic purposes, together with subject-related work introducing study skills appropriate for UK degree courses; this is broadly equivalent to an access course in the UK. Second, the International Diploma, in either Business or Engineering, equivalent to the first year (level 4) of a UK bachelor's degree. Students holding the International Diploma can progress to the remaining years of their chosen degree course offered by one of the nine UK universities (levels 5 and 6). It should be noted that the UK framework for higher education qualifications has three undergraduate levels, numbered 4 to 6, and a bachelor's degree is at level 6.

6 Since the pathway programmes are normally delivered over two years, students typically study for four years to obtain their bachelor's degree, although native or near-native English speakers holding appropriate entry qualifications may be exempted from the foundation year. The various routes to a degree are described according to how the years of study are divided between China and the UK. For example, a 2+2 route denotes transfer to a UK university following completion of the International Diploma in China. The pathway programmes are delivered by SBC, but the Northern Consortium is solely responsible for the quality assurance of the resultant awards. The respective awarding universities have full responsibility for the academic standards and quality assurance of levels 5 and 6 of their degree courses, regardless of whether students are studying these courses in the UK or in China.

7 SBC markets all courses and is responsible for admitting students according to criteria set by the Northern Consortium. Students are not registered initially for particular degrees but, according to their preferences and conditional on meeting the requirements set by the individual universities, they are allocated to appropriate courses in their diploma year. It is at this stage that the nine UK universities compete for students to join their degree courses, with each able to send its representatives to a recruitment fair and to make separate visits in order to offer advice to students on progression. Nevertheless, students cited financial and visa issues as being among the factors influencing their decision of whether to study in the UK or to continue their studies in China.

8 As mentioned above (paragraph 4), three of the UK universities - Huddersfield, Liverpool John Moores, and Leeds Metropolitan - have separate partnership agreements, with SBC covering the delivery in China of level 5 and/or level 6 of their degree courses. These give students supplementary options in addition to the standard 2+2 route, for example 4+0 or 3+1. A fourth university, Sheffield, has recently approved a similar arrangement. These universities use their respective quality assurance processes to set and maintain academic standards by establishing learning outcomes and devising assessment in relation to UK reference points. The courses delivered at SBC require approval by Chinese national and local government authorities, which have responsibility for maintaining standards according to the Ministry of Education regulations and for setting admissions quotas for Chinese students. Taking account of these parameters, decisions about the discipline mix at SBC are made by its governing body, while the Northern Consortium plays a brokering role in matching supply to demand.

9 By way of illustration, in 2008 the Chinese government granted a licence for degrees in events management to be taught in China. Huddersfield, having experience of collaborative provision in this field in other countries, was encouraged by the Northern Consortium to set up a course in collaboration with SBC. During 2009, Huddersfield applied its normal approval process for off-campus delivery, which considers the suitability of the partnership to deliver the provision, as well as the detail associated with the particular course. This process resulted in approval of the delivery of levels 5 and 6 of its BA (Hons) Events Management degree at SBC from September 2009. It also entailed mapping the respective curricula and level 4 learning outcomes of the first year of the degree with those of the International Diploma in order to confirm their equivalence.



10 Students have the option to study for four years in China (4+0) or to transfer to the UK for their final year (3+1). The first cohort graduated in July 2011. Initially, both level 5 and level 6 modules were taught at SBC principally by Huddersfield staff on a fly-in/fly-out basis, with SBC staff leading seminar and group work in-between teaching blocks. However, from September 2010, SBC was approved by Huddersfield to deliver the level 5 modules and it is planned for the whole course to be delivered by SBC from September 2013. Separately, there are plans to develop a BA (Hons) International Events with Chinese Studies degree to be offered in both Huddersfield and Shanghai from September 2013. It is hoped that these courses will encourage student exchange between the UK and China.

11 Also in 2009, Liverpool John Moores approved two of its BEng (Hons) degrees (in Industrial Electronics and Control and in Manufacturing Systems Engineering) for delivery at SBC. The approval process involved a site visit to check on resources. The particular degrees were selected because of their relevance to the needs of industry, both locally in Shanghai and generally in China. The courses are offered either wholly in China (4+0) or with the final year in the UK (3+1). The first students graduated in July 2011, having progressed to level 5 in September 2009.

12 The approach to staffing agreed at the approval stage was for Liverpool John Moores to deliver level 5 and level 6 on a fly-in/fly-out basis, while SBC would deliver tutorials and laboratory classes. However, it was also agreed that this approach would be kept under review, given the potential difficulties of teaching in blocks, rather than according to a more conventional timetable. Three years on, level 5 is now mostly taught by SBC although Liverpool John Moores continues to set all assessment and to moderate marking. The University has seconded a member of its own academic staff to SBC to support teaching, assessment and course development, who now also undertakes a broader academic management role within SBC. In 2011, variants of both courses were added, enabling students to take modules in more specialised areas that are seen as important to economic development in China, such as energy management. The next step is to seek professional accreditation from the UK Institute of Engineering Technology for the courses delivered at SBC.

13 SBC currently offers level 5 of the Leeds Metropolitan BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance degree, with students transferring to the UK to complete their final year (3+1). Successful students are able to gain exemptions towards qualifications from the major accounting professional bodies. The arrangement, which involves joint delivery by Leeds Metropolitan and SBC teaching staff, was put in place following an approach made to the University by the Northern Consortium and was subject to the University's approval processes for collaborative provision. The original intention had been also to offer the complete degree in China (4+0), subject to obtaining the necessary government approval. However, this has not been secured and no further students are planned to be recruited onto the 3+1 route from September 2012, although existing students will be supported to conclude their studies.

14 Sheffield has recently approved a collaborative arrangement with SBC involving its BA (Hons) Business Management degree, having obtained the necessary Chinese government approval. After the initial two years in Shanghai, students will spend an intermediate year at Sheffield, with the final year back in Shanghai, where the course will be delivered by Sheffield staff with support from SBC staff. Under this 2+1+1 route the first students are expected to arrive in Sheffield in September 2013.

15 There are advantages for the member universities in competing for students under the umbrella or collaborative framework of the Northern Consortium. It plays a key role in providing an administrative and quality assurance infrastructure, so member universities may have confidence in the standards and quality of Consortium pathway programmes. They are able to influence the content of these programmes to match their individual requirements, being joint-

venture participants as well as users of SBC. There is safety in numbers as financial risk is spread across the members of the Consortium, who also have a joint and several interest in maintaining its good reputation. SBC is a 'not-for-profit' organisation so there is no commercial imperative to be met.

16 The participating universities are free to decide on the extent and nature of their engagement with SBC, while the flexibility of partnership arrangements can provide certain benefits for both staff and students. The delivery of courses in China, whether on a fly-in/fly-out basis by university staff or by SBC staff, offers development opportunities for staff through their involvement in curriculum development. Although there are not yet formal mechanisms for sharing good practice between the courses of different universities, SBC staff clearly benefit from seeing firsthand the universities' practices in relation to learning and teaching. Students also benefit from the availability of choice offered by the various degree routes and delivery methods, as well as from exposure to the UK approach to independent learning. The impact of the intensive delivery of lecture material in teaching blocks on the student learning experience is monitored through student feedback and performance data.

17 The SBC operational model is already regarded as a success and there are plans by the Northern Consortium to replicate it elsewhere in China. Although there are physical constraints to expanding on the present campus, the intention is to increase the number of courses offered, particularly at postgraduate level where there is not a requirement for students to have on-campus accommodation. A proposal from the University of Salford for an MA International Business is currently under consideration by the Chinese authorities. There are also plans to increase the number of international students and to encourage students from the participating UK universities to study at SBC, thereby creating more two-way traffic between China and the UK. Research links are now being developed between the UK universities and SBC or USST, with Huddersfield and Liverpool John Moores again being pioneers. The aim is to have all nine Consortium members contributing in some way to the development of SBC, but not necessarily through course delivery.

**'As SBC grows in maturity, almost inevitably, tensions have developed between its own aspirations and the separate interests of the participating universities of the Northern Consortium'**

18 Yet, as SBC grows in maturity, almost inevitably, tensions have developed between its own aspirations and the separate interests of the participating universities of the Northern Consortium. As it implements its own structures and processes, it is pressing its case for greater independence in operational matters. Although the UK universities are tending to make greater use of SBC staff for in-country delivery of their courses, they are being suitably cautious about withdrawing their own staff, particularly those delivering level 6. They also remain directly involved in devising assessment and moderating marking. Similarly with quality assurance processes, where SBC would welcome greater harmonisation, the universities recognise that there may be high-level common ground but see it as inevitable that there will be differences in the detail of their respective requirements. Against this backdrop, the Northern Consortium is seeking to promote closer ties between the universities, for example by considering common arrangements for approving courses. Meanwhile SBC is dealing with the complexities of its relationship with a consortium and pushing the member universities to make better use of it as a resource in common.



## Case study 4: Managing assessment in a foreign language

### The University of Wales and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS)

1 This case study concerns the collaboration between the University of Wales, based in Cardiff, and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS). It focuses on how the University applies its academic standards through assessment; in particular, how it deals with the challenges of operating in a foreign language in which it does not ordinarily work. The case study is set against a backdrop of significant and ongoing organisational change affecting the University of Wales and its management of collaborative provision.

2 The University of Wales was founded in 1893 as a federal university awarding degrees taught by member universities located in Wales - it was not set up as teaching university in its own right. The relationship between the University and its members has been an evolving one as they have individually obtained their own degree-awarding powers, with some leaving the federation altogether. As part of a broader Welsh government strategy to rationalise the number of universities in Wales through a series of planned mergers, the federation has been disbanded, and the University of Wales is to join together with two other universities in Wales to create a unified institution. Integration is not expected to be complete until 2017-18, since the University must first fulfil its obligations to students enrolled on its own degrees. Many of these students, some 28,000 in total, are studying through collaborative provision, either in the UK (12,500) or overseas (15,500).

3 Founded in 1958 and administered by the Municipal Government of Shanghai, SASS is a research institute for the humanities and social sciences. While it is not primarily a teaching institution, it has a graduate school with about 600 students in total and an annual intake of about 200 students to its master's and doctoral degrees. The partnership between the University of Wales and SASS was established in 2010, enabling SASS to introduce a Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme in 2010-11 that leads to a University of Wales award.

4 The collaborative model generally adopted by the University of Wales has been to offer a centralised validation service for its collaborative centres, supported by academic staff drawn latterly from an alliance comprising five of its participant universities within Wales. The University currently works with 115 collaborative centres in over 30 countries, including the UK - in China alone there are more than 1,000 students spread across eight centres. In preparation for the merger, the University is in the process of bringing to a close all of its validated courses at collaborative centres, although existing students at all stages will be able to continue until the completion of their current course. Run-out arrangements involve either a transfer of responsibility to other universities, or the termination of links as and when contracts reach full term. It is the latter which applies in the case of SASS.

5 The SASS MBA is based on the curriculum of an existing scheme offered at Swansea Metropolitan University, though its content has been adapted to reflect the Chinese business environment and to fit the educational and market needs of SASS. It is delivered during weekends over the course of two years so that mature professionals can study while continuing in

employment; it is taught and assessed in Chinese by staff of SASS. Minimum entry requirements are a bachelor's degree from an approved institution, or a professional qualification plus two years' work experience, or two years' relevant work experience in a responsible position. Just over 100 students are enrolled on the programme with the University of Wales, and the first cohort is expected to graduate in May 2013. The same scheme is also offered at two other collaborative centres in China (Fuzhou University and Wuhan University). The development of all three links was initiated by an agency based in Hong Kong, which acts as the University's authorised representative in China (hereafter Representative), in a role that extends beyond business development to facilitating the University's longer term relationships with these collaborative centres by providing administrative support and translation services.

6 The University of Wales requires that its collaborative provision is operated according to the provisions of its Quality Handbook and these are common to all the University's collaborations. Agreements made between the University and its collaborative centres bind the partners to these regulations and procedures. Delivery of the MBA programme by SASS was approved through a formal validation process. The validation report does not

**'The University of Wales is in the process of bringing to a close all of its validated courses at collaborative centres, although existing students will be able to continue until the completion of their current course'**

specifically deal with the management of assessment in Chinese, but the requirements for delivery in a foreign language are covered in the Quality Handbook. It should be noted that in the UK the University of Wales ordinarily works in two languages, Welsh and English, as students studying for its awards in Wales may take courses taught and assessed in either language.

7 According to its standard practice, the University has appointed a Moderator (in this case from Swansea Metropolitan University) to oversee the standards and quality of the programme at SASS. The role includes support of SASS staff in developing an appropriate assessment culture and in embedding the University's requirements for assessment practice. As the Moderator does not speak or write Chinese, the Representative facilitates the Moderator's visits to SASS, providing translation and helping to explain differences in pedagogical approaches between China and the UK. In addition, the Representative has assisted SASS with the preparation of the annual review report to the University and has supported staff training on the requirements for assessment and dissertation supervision. While the work of the Representative is recognised as having been useful and convenient to both sides of the partnership, the breadth of involvement and extent of reliance on the Representative could also be seen as detracting from the control and oversight that the University has the responsibility to exercise.

8 All modules are assessed by written coursework, except one which uses a time-constrained in-class test. Although translation of a sample of scripts is permitted by University of Wales policy, SASS has chosen to translate all assignment and test scripts into English, using a local company. The translations are not independently verified, but there have been no issues raised about their accuracy by the external examiners, both of whom are proficient in English and Chinese and receive copies of assignments and scripts in both languages (see paragraph 10). The University permits the use of oral examinations (at the discretion of the programme team), for purposes such as checking the authenticity of scripts. There have been no such examinations to date and neither are digital methods of plagiarism detection employed, although access to relevant software is provided by the University.

9 As required by the University, second-marking of scripts is carried out by SASS academic staff. According to the University, no marks have actually been changed through this process and it intends to encourage more critical discussion between markers. To date, all students have passed each assignment at the first attempt, but none has achieved marks in the middle or top ranges. The Moderator has been looking into this phenomenon with a view to introducing staff development on setting assignments that would help to stretch students' performance and differentiate marks - perhaps by giving greater attention to theoretical understanding. Assessment feedback to students has tended to be brief and general in content, and the Moderator plans to give further support to SASS staff in this area. Formative assessment is undertaken by SASS staff and the Moderator has given advice on the limits of this support and the distinctions between formative assessment and coaching.

10 Appointment of two external examiners is required for all University of Wales degrees. For validated programmes delivered at overseas collaborative centres the normal practice is to appoint both a UK-based and a locally based external examiner, both of whom would be fluent in the language of delivery. For the SASS MBA one external examiner has been appointed from a UK university and the other from a Hong Kong university (who has also studied and taught within UK higher education); both speak and write Chinese. The UK external examiner fulfils the University's normal requirement to report whether standards of assessment are appropriate for the level of the qualification and are comparable to those of similar programmes in the UK. The local external examiner is not required to do this but, together with the UK examiner, fulfils the University's other reporting requirements concerning the assessment process and the delivery of the programme. The role of the local external examiner is described in essentially advisory terms and as 'cultural mediation', and requires familiarity with Chinese higher education. However, in practice, the UK and local external examiners divide the programme modules between them for examining purposes. Thus the local examiner's role is extending beyond the advisory to include some responsibility for assuring standards on behalf of the UK examiner, even though the role does not formally entail reporting on comparability of standards with standards of similar programmes in the UK. Nevertheless, the Moderator is satisfied that, working as a team, the external examiners are meeting their overall joint responsibilities.

**'It is evident that because the University is operating in a language in which it does not ordinarily work, its processes are more complex and involve more separate roles and more layers of translation than would otherwise be necessary'**

11 Examination boards are held at SASS and are conducted in Chinese, with translation provided by the Representative. Initially, boards were chaired by the SASS programme leader, with the Moderator attending in an advisory capacity. However, from now on, the Moderator will take the chair, in a move by the University of Wales to exercise greater control of proceedings. Examination board minutes follow the University's format; they are taken by SASS administrative staff and deposited with the University. The University's examination board is preceded by an internal board meeting, in which SASS staff prepare for the main board. The minutes of this meeting are sent in translation to the Moderator, to facilitate the requisite monitoring and checking.

12 Certificates and student transcripts are produced in Cardiff by the University of Wales. Certificates make reference to the related transcript, which gives the place and language of study. This is in line with the expectations set out in the UK Quality Code. While SASS MBA students reaching the required standard will receive a recognised UK award from the University of Wales, the award may not have a similar level of recognition in China since the MBA programme is not approved by the Chinese Ministry of Education. The students are fully aware of the position.

13 The University is aware of the risks involved in conducting assessment in a foreign language. However, it believes that the risks can be managed through the mechanisms described above - in particular through having appointed external examiners who are fluent both in English and in the language of assessment. The University is also aware of the resource implications, including the costs of facilitation and translation and the challenge of finding suitable external examiners. It is evident that because the University is operating in a language in which it does not ordinarily work, its processes are more complex and involve more separate roles and more layers of translation from one language to another than would otherwise be necessary. The implications of this are more than simply financial, but place an inevitable strain on the level of control that the University is able to exercise. Such considerations put at risk the longer term sustainability of programmes involving assessment in a foreign language. For these reasons, among others, the University of Wales is pulling back from such arrangements and reducing the number of languages in which it is prepared to operate. From February 2012, the University agreed in principle that, except for seeing existing collaborations through to termination, it would not work in languages other than English or Welsh.

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