

UK collaboration in India: institutional case studies

University of Central Lancashire

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Appraising a tried and tested approach

1 This case study concerns the partnership between the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) and the Padmashree Dr D Y Patil Vidyapeeth University Mumbai (DYP). DYP is a private institution and a Deemed University, a status conferred by the Indian Government on the recommendation of the University Grants Commission (UGC). DYP has awarding powers for bachelor's and master's degrees.

2 At the centre of the partnership is the delivery by DYP of part of two undergraduate degree courses from the Faculty of Science and Technology at UCLan: the BSc (Hons) Biomedical Science and the BSc (Hons) Molecular and Cellular Biology. The first of these courses recruited its initial student cohort at DYP in 2002-03, while the second commenced in 2006-07. Two other courses have also been approved for delivery at DYP but have not run. One has since been withdrawn, while the other has a proposed start date of 2009. In 2007-08, there were 78 students on UCLan courses at DYP, 65 students on the Biomedical Science course and 12 students on the Molecular and Cellular Biology course. UCLan has in place a single Institutional Agreement with DYP, plus separate memoranda of cooperation for each course. These agreements run for a fixed term and contain provision for extension.

3 The UCLan courses at DYP operate on a 2+1 basis, whereby the first two years are delivered at DYP, with students then completing their final year for the award at UCLan. While the link with DYP is at present UCLan's only collaboration in India, elsewhere it has a substantial portfolio of overseas collaborations (mainly involving undergraduate degree courses) accounting for almost 3,500 registered students in 2007-08, with some two-thirds of these in mainland China and Hong Kong. The model adopted by the majority of overseas collaborations is the 2+1; in this sense the link with DYP is operating according to a tried and tested model.

4 External reviews (including those by QAA) have consistently shown UCLan's collaborative work to be a source of confidence in the University's capacity to assure quality and maintain academic standards. The case study looks at UCLan's management of its 2+1 model in the context of the link with DYP and at possible implications for the future of recent strategic developments.

5 The key characteristics of UCLan's approach include:

- a clear strategy endorsed at a senior level
- a comprehensive policy framework with centrally determined structures and procedures
- careful selection of partner organisations
- thorough approval and review processes
- quality assurance processes that are sensitive to local context
- monitoring processes that allow comparison with in-house courses
- mechanisms for encouraging students to identify with UCLan
- early and continuing emphasis given to students' transition to the United Kingdom (UK)
- reciprocal staff development.

6 UCLan's international strategy, up to 2005, gave emphasis to the development of collaborations based on the 2+1 model, and contact with DYP was first made in 2000 at the initiative of UCLan's Dean of Science and Technology, responding to this strategic drive. The current strategy envisages further growth in overseas collaboration, particularly in China, but also in India, with a target of 3,750 students by 2011-12; it also has as one of its objectives the creation of joint venture campuses. Responsibility for the development and implementation of the strategy lies with the International Strategy Group, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International) and including senior staff, deans and heads of services.

7 The Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee, UCLan's senior committee for quality and standards, oversees the monitoring and review of collaborative provision. It delegates responsibility for approval of delivery by an overseas partner of the first two levels of UCLan's courses to its International Collaborative Subcommittee (which thus deals with approval of partner delivery under the 2+1 model), while retaining direct responsibility for approval of partner delivery at higher levels. Relevant procedures are fully documented in Overseas Collaborative Provision - Policy and Procedures, within the Academic Quality Assurance Manual.

8 The formal process for progressing a new initiative with a prospective partner includes a due diligence study which covers the activities that underpin both the academic and business cases; both of these must have been accepted by UCLan before a proposal can proceed further through the approval process. In practice, the expectation is that the faculty will have carried out an investigative visit to a potential partner organisation prior to instigating formal due diligence enquiries. For the prospective link with DYP, the initial delegation included a UCLan professor with contacts in India who was instrumental in introducing the two parties.

9 The approval process culminates in a panel event, including an external adviser, which is managed by UCLan at institutional level and held at the premises of the partner organisation; the event relating to the BSc (Hons) Biomedical Science was held at DYP in April 2002. The resultant report recognised that there would be limited local variation to certain standard UCLan modules, so as to acknowledge the particularities of the Indian context. It also captured discussion on the transition of students from DYP to UCLan, emphasising the importance of the pre-sessional summer school as a fundamental part of the 2+1 model (see paragraph 15). There was explicit reference to using the expertise of UCLan staff with prior involvement in summer schools for students transferring from links in China.

10 New overseas links are subject to a mandatory interim review after one year of operation, conducted by the relevant UCLan faculty. The interim review of the collaborative course in Biomedical Science was undertaken in July 2003, through a UCLan panel visit to DYP which included the external adviser from the original approval event. This review resulted in a detailed set of recommendations, many of which sought to resolve relatively minor initial problems. Opportunity was also taken to explore the transition of students from year two to year three. Stress was laid on the support and guidance to be given to students on practical issues related to living in the UK; early induction to the 'host' department at UCLan (Biological Sciences), including familiarisation with laboratory facilities; preliminary discussion between students and visiting UK staff on intended projects; and the possibility of two DYP staff visiting UCLan to gain first-hand experience of the course's delivery in the UK.

11 Annual monitoring and five-yearly periodic review each follow mainstream UCLan procedures. Annual monitoring allows comparison of the performance of students from DYP with that of students who have followed in-house courses from the outset. The evidence suggests that students who transfer from DYP cope well in year three, indeed rather better than students from India coming through other recruitment routes.

12 Both monitoring and review provide mechanisms for adjusting curricula to local context, through minor changes to module content or, in one case, slight variation to the options on offer. The appointment of in-country external examiners (in addition to UK external examiners having responsibility for all delivery sites) affords the means of assuring sensitivity to local context in the area of assessment. Periodic review provides a check on 'drift' from the equivalent in-house course. A positive periodic review of the Biomedical Sciences course (leading to approval of the continued operation of the collaborative arrangement) took place in May 2007, with a panel visit to DYP, which included external representation.

13 The steps taken to encourage students to see themselves as belonging to UCLan are a key feature of the University's approach. From the outset there is a UCLan presence - it is involved in admissions and enrolment, where UCLan staff assist with administering the process in India. The students at DYP are enrolled as UCLan students and given passwords allowing entry to the University's electronic systems, including the virtual learning environment and library services; students are also given email accounts. UCLan staff visit DYP twice during the first semester to introduce themselves to students and give further information about the courses; contact details are also provided in student handbooks.

14 There is a requirement for UCLan staff to make three visits each year to partner organisations; in practice four visits are typically made, which is the pattern for DYP. These visits take place in September (start of the academic year), November, February (start of the second semester) and June (end of the academic year), with the February and June visits linking into assessment boards. The normal agenda for staff visits includes guest lectures, reciprocal peer observation of teaching, attendance at course management meetings and a meeting with students which excludes DYP staff. During their regular visits, UCLan staff will often teach a class, thus familiarising students with UK teaching styles, as well as allowing both staff and students to get to know each other. In addition, returning DYP students tell current students at first hand about studying at UCLan.

15 The February visit incorporates a preparatory session for year two students on transferring to UCLan, at which the final-year project is discussed in broad terms. The actual topic is confirmed during the pre-session summer school which comprises a programme of structured events, including introductory meetings with project supervisors and English language and study skills classes. For DYP students it is complemented by a week spent in UCLan's laboratories to familiarise themselves with the equipment they will be using in their project work.

16 Other mechanisms are in place to ease the students' transition to the UK. The Faculty International Co-ordinator is a key named contact and provides assistance with a range of accommodation, financial and legal matters, both before the students leave India and following their arrival in the UK. Organised at institutional level, international students are met at the airport and are given support on arrival at UCLan by the team of 'student buddies' (themselves international students). The International Office has a dedicated international student support team (based centrally in the University's one-stop-shop for student information and advice) and this also organises orientation programmes.

17 So far, five student cohorts have transferred from DYP to UCLan and four cohorts have graduated. Since graduation, many of these students have either remained at UCLan to carry out postgraduate study or have continued their studies at other UK higher education institutions; this is in keeping with one of the stated aims of the initial course approvals which was to encourage progression to master's and doctoral programmes.

18 A feature of UCLan's 2+1 model is that the University devotes 10 per cent of the fee income derived from students who transfer to the UK in year three to developing the relevant partnership. This funding is ring-fenced and available for three purposes: staff development, including registrations for research degrees; corporate visits; or contributions to in-country language programmes. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International) visits overseas partner organisations once a year, and one purpose of these visits is to keep a check on the use being made of the funding arrangement. In the case of DYP, the funds are used for staff development, which includes peer observation of teaching and staff visits. Four DYP teaching staff have now been to UCLan, typically shadowing their counterparts who teach on the in-house programme. In addition, in September 2008, a 'teaching toolkit' was rolled out through a week-long course.

19 Induction of DYP staff to UCLan's procedures occurs through the issue to all staff of the UCLan Staff Handbook; the 'teaching toolkit' provides additional support. DYP staff are provided with examples of student work that has been marked and moderated by UCLan staff, while other mechanisms include participation of UCLan staff in DYP course management meetings.

20 In relation to the longer-term sustainability of the 2+1 model in the context of DYP, UCLan has identified three risk factors: financial (in-country fees are lower than UK overseas student fees, so more affordable); academic (DYP is developing the staffing capacity to deliver year three); and the absence of work experience (there is demand from India for the +1 year to include a remunerated placement in the UK), although the University has begun to address this through its employability strategy. A further factor is the change to Indian legislation proposed in the draft Foreign Education Providers Bill. DYP is currently pursuing with both UGC and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) how the collaborative courses might be recognised, even though AICTE has no jurisdiction for the subject areas of the current UCLan courses.

21 As a next step, UCLan is investigating the possibility of a joint-venture campus with DYP in the academic areas of biomedicine/biotechnology and business/management. In this regard, the partnership has made a successful bid to the UK-India Education and Research Initiative for a collaborative programme delivery award. This funding will be used to extend in-country delivery of undergraduate programmes and also to develop postgraduate collaborative provision leading to joint supervision of UCLan research degrees; in addition, it is intended to increase staff exchange to boost in-country research activity, thus underpinning curriculum development.

22 The specific options being explored are:

- obtaining Deemed University status via UGC for a de novo joint venture with DYP
- establishing a joint campus arrangement with DYP on the basis of prospective state (as opposed to national) legislation, although this would be dependent on the enabling legislation being passed
- seeking AICTE approval, given the inclusion of courses in business and management.

Associated with these options would be a move to courses completely delivered in India.

23 The link with DYP involved the extension to India of UCLan's 2+1 model which has been tried and tested elsewhere in the world. The partnership has worked well, and although it has not led to especially high levels of student recruitment from India, a proportion of those transferring to UCLan have progressed to master's or doctoral programmes, fulfilling one of the original aims. However, UCLan is now having to assess whether its 2+1 model is best suited to the developing educational landscape in India, as impacted by proposed legislative changes. There has been a clear analysis undertaken of the long-term sustainability of the model and a detailed exploration of options for moving on from it. In the short term, expansion of 2+1 courses at DYP is being considered, with the possibility of these being enhanced through offering work placements in the UK. Looking at longer-term opportunities, however, and in anticipation of greater clarity being obtained on the position of foreign education providers in India, UCLan and DYP are already at an advanced stage in their plans for the development of a joint-venture campus and the provision of degree courses completely delivered in India.

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