



QAA

UK collaboration in Malaysia: institutional case studies

University of Newcastle

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Establishing an international branch campus

1 The University of Newcastle (the University/Newcastle) is establishing an international branch campus in Malaysia called Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia, or NUMed. NUMed will provide a range of biomedical and medical degree programmes beginning with the undergraduate medical degree programme, Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MB BS). It is scheduled to open in May 2011. This case study looks at the University's preparations for the new venture, with an emphasis on quality assurance and the student experience. It may provide signposts for other institutions considering overseas campuses and/or providing programmes overseas which are subject to professional accreditation locally and in the UK.

2 NUMed's origins lie in the University's long history of recruiting Malaysian students to study in the UK and its recent strategic decision to establish a physical presence in South East Asia. These two factors converged with the Malaysian government's ambition to increase the provision of high quality medical programmes, in order both to train more doctors and provide more opportunities for continuing professional development within Malaysia, leading to a formal invitation from the Malaysian Minister of Higher Education for Newcastle to establish an international branch campus as a constituent of EduCity, a new higher education hub in the special economic region of Iskandar.

3 NUMed is an integral part of its parent institution and will operate as a company of the University. The academic concept underpinning the new venture is for the delivery in Malaysia of a range of undergraduate and postgraduate biomedical and medical degree programmes, identical and of comparable standard to those on offer at the University's home campus, but contextualised to the local environment and taking account of cultural differences. NUMed's academic offer is founded on the five-year MB BS programme. This programme will lead to the award of the same degrees, and be subject to the approval of the appropriate professional, statutory and regulatory bodies in both Malaysia and the UK.

4 NUMed was registered by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education as a Private Institute of Higher Learning in March 2009. The first cohort of students on the MB BS programme began in September 2009. During construction of the campus in EduCity, the first two cohorts of about 25 and 40 students respectively will undertake the first two years of their studies at the Medical School in Newcastle before returning to Malaysia to complete their programmes. Subsequently, from 2011, all five years of the MB BS will be delivered in Malaysia.

5 NUMed's academic development plan is to increase the student intake incrementally from 25 to 180 students in its first five years, with the total steady state enrolment of 900, over all five years of the programme, being reached in 2017. The University plans to add other undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes in biomedical sciences once the new campus is established, and develop research capacity based on a 'hub-and-spoke' relationship with research institutes based in Newcastle.

6 Meticulous planning has underpinned each stage of the development of the new venture, from the initial concept in 2005, to the enrolment of the first cohort of students four years later. The process has involved detailed feasibility studies, due diligence and risk assessments, and has drawn on external guidance, such as that from experts on international law, and on the advice of the most senior managers from other UK higher education institutions.

7 Planning and development for NUMed was led by the University's senior managers, including those from non-academic groups such as Estates and Human Resources. Newcastle has acknowledged that the level of attention required of senior managers has probably been disproportionate to the scale of the operation. However, it has also emphasised that the involvement of senior managers from across the University has been very important in

establishing NUMed as a fundamental part of the University's business, rather than an adjunct of the Medical School.

8 Developing NUMed also entailed working with a number of Malaysian Government Ministries and some of their agencies, including the Malaysian Qualifications Agency and the Malaysian Medical Council, to obtain the necessary legal approvals. Although the political climate was conducive to NUMed obtaining these approvals, the University was still obliged to fulfil the related application processes, which were rigorous and time-consuming.

9 The University's ambition is for NUMed to provide a genuine Newcastle student experience which is comparable to the student experience in the UK. This ambition is manifest in NUMed's staffing plans; initially most of NUMed's senior managers, including the Chief Executive Officer, the Chief Operating Officer and the deans, as well as many of the teaching staff, will be seconded from Newcastle. The University acknowledges that this may temporarily deprive the home Medical School of some key staff; however, it also creates opportunities for aspirational staff in the UK to assume new responsibilities and skills. In the longer term, the University seeks a balance between UK and Malaysian staff in its target compliment of 125 full-time equivalents by 2017. This target is commensurate with an overall academic staff:student ratio of 1:8, equivalent to that for medical sciences in Newcastle. The University has developed a detailed briefing process for UK staff seconded to NUMed, which includes pre-visits, and has enabled seconded staff to continue their practice via honorary contracts with local hospitals.

10 Newcastle has been responsible for designing the new campus. The design replicates the look and feel of the University and also incorporates a number of innovative features which the existing Medical School in Newcastle cannot accommodate. Thus, the centrepiece of the new building is the Learning Resource Centre, which is intended to be students' principal day-to-day home when they are not in lectures. The Centre will be largely open plan to provide a range of flexible learning spaces, including 'quiet zones' for self-directed study, study rooms for group work, and other social learning areas, which students will be able to rearrange to suit their needs. All study areas will have access to a wireless network.

11 NUMed is EduCity's 'anchor' tenant – the beginning of what the Malaysian authorities hope will become a diverse, multi-faculty campus run by several different overseas institutions. As other tenants move in, it may become possible for NUMed to manage some student support services in partnership with its neighbours. However, the University has not assumed any central provision in its planning; NUMed has the capacity to be completely self-sustaining.

12 Newcastle is committed both to soliciting feedback from students on their experiences and to drawing on this feedback in the management of programmes. The challenge for NUMed is to apply this commitment in a culture where students are less familiar (and perhaps less comfortable) with the kinds of representative structure that prevail at the parent institution. Newcastle recognises the scale of the challenge and is working with the first cohort of NUMed students in the UK to help them understand that their feedback is valuable and welcome. This approach has already borne fruit: the Malaysian Student Society has established an active social networking group, within which students share their views about the Newcastle programmes.

13 The NUMed MB BS is identical and of comparable standard to that on offer at the University's home campus, but contextualised to the local healthcare environment (enabling NUMed, for instance, to emphasise the study of particular tropical diseases). The existence of a distinct healthcare environment in Malaysia provides the opportunity to enrich the home MB BS, and the University plans to build on this opportunity, for example, by enabling home students to take electives in Malaysia and study diseases which they are unlikely to encounter first hand in the UK.

14 All academic programmes at NUMed are those of the parent institution; Newcastle has no academic partner in Malaysia. Thus, the NUMed programmes are subject to the University's standard quality management procedures for admissions, assessment, external examining, annual monitoring and periodic review. However, to mitigate the risk of any issues at NUMed being missed or understated by the University's normal quality assurance processes, the next periodic review of the MB BS will be slightly modified to incorporate some enquiries normally associated with collaborative provision.

15 Executive responsibility for the standards and quality of the NUMed provision resides with the local Chief Executive Officer, reporting to the University Senate and Teaching and Learning Committee. Deliberative responsibility is consistent with the arrangements for the home MB BS: NUMed reports directly to the appropriate Boards of Study, which report, in turn, to the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee.

16 The MB BS is also subject to quality assurance and audit by the statutory medical bodies – the General Medical Council in the UK and the Malaysian Medical Council in Malaysia. As the MB BS leads to the award of primary UK medical qualifications, it is essential that NUMed fulfils all the requirements and recommendations of the General Medical Council. Indeed, since the General Medical Council does not accredit programmes, but rather makes recommendations as to whether or not UK higher education institutions remain listed for the award of a UK primary medical qualification, should the new programme delivered in Malaysia fail to comply, Newcastle's home provision would also be put in jeopardy.

17 Newcastle views the creation of NUMed as a long-term, 'not-for-profit', high-quality venture designed to enhance its international reputation. For the Malaysian government, NUMed promises to be an important component in its drives to enhance the quality of Malaysian healthcare, grow the nation's human capital and establish the country as a regional higher education hub.

18 While it is too early to say if the University's ambitions for NUMed will be completely realised, it has already begun to have an impact on student recruitment: since NUMed was announced, Malaysian students have become the third largest body of overseas students in the University.

19 The experience of creating NUMed has also taught or reinforced a number of important lessons in establishing an international branch campus, which Newcastle was kind enough to share with the QAA team:

- political support does not obviate the need to invest much time and effort in understanding and working through local quality assurance, approval and/or accreditation procedures. In this context, early engagement with quality assurance and regulatory bodies in the UK and overseas is essential
- the true costs of engaging with both UK and overseas quality assurance agencies and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies should not be underestimated. These costs should be built into the project's budget from the start
- expert professional guidance from outside the University, for instance on international law, is crucial
- the team overseeing planning and development must understand and respect the culture and governance of the country in question and recognise that each country has its own approach to developing and approving higher education programmes
- managing the student experience in a new venture like NUMed requires disproportionately high levels of investment until the student body reaches its optimum size.

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