Chapter 2
The Challenges of Managing a Transnational Education Partnership

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Abstract This chapter reflects on more than a decade of experiences associated with how transnational education is managed across the UK higher education sector. It highlights what should be done, both in terms of QAA expectations and an institution's need to deliver a high-quality experience to their students, wherever those students may be located in the world. These expectations and requirements are contrasted with the realities of the situation based on observations made over many years in numerous partnership locations and also derived from conversations with a large number of TNE practitioners, during that period, both UK-based and colleagues working for TNE partners overseas. The chapter focusses on the three key phases of a partnership life cycle: set-up, ongoing management and termination with the conclusion that insufficient emphasis is placed on the ongoing management despite this being the longest (hopefully) and most productive phase.

Keywords Transnational education · Quality assurance · International partnerships · Due diligence

2.1 The Context to Transnational Education Partnerships

2.1.1 The QAA Requirements

Any UK Higher Education Institution (UKHEI) entering into a partnership with another institution, whether in the UK or overseas, has a responsibility to safeguard their own reputation and more broadly the reputation of UKHE. As such, it is critical that the management of such an operation is undertaken with the utmost assiduity and professionalism from the start of the initial partnership negotiation process through, potentially, many years of operation and finally to the, inevitable, end of a partnership. The termination of a partnership may be due to any number of negative reasons, which will be discussed later, or simply due to the natural evolution and development of

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one or both partners in their capacity, ambition and/or status as providers of tertiary education.

As a general guideline, the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality_Assurance_Agency 2018) has provided the following statement defining a required "*Core Quality*" in their list of "*Expectations for Quality*":

> Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.

It is imperative that the quality assurance framework implemented by a UKHEI in relation to TNE provision is carefully designed to allow this QAA expectation to be delivered in all cases. This chapter contains observations and guidance on how this can be efficiently and effectively achieved and highlights some of the potential pitfalls common across the sector.

2.1.2 The Background to UK TNE Activities

Transnational education programmes are a popular alternative to overseas education in many countries. For example, according to a recent British Council report (British_Council 2019), most employers in China who have recruited overseas returnees have also employed graduates from TNE courses delivered in China. It was reported that roughly the same number of employers found value in a foreign degree course delivered in China as those who prefer overseas graduates rather than those educated domestically. This is true in a number of key TNE markets across the globe. Consequently, it is not surprising that around 85% of UKHEIs are involved in some form of TNE provision (British_Council 2016); however, it does still remain a highly contentious activity. There is often tension between the staff who are directly involved in the delivery of TNE provision and the financial and legal teams of the associated universities. The perception of the legal and financial teams may be that the risk exceeds the direct financial and indirect non-financial benefits derived from TNE-related activities. However, a report published by the Department for Education outlining the diverse benefits of TNE (Mellors-Bourne 2017) clearly states that the indirect benefits are wide-ranging and not only of value to both of the participating HEIs but also the UK more generally. Clearly, there should also be benefits for the partner institution which go beyond the increased marketability of their courses derived from being associated with a UK university. These benefits vary in nature from partner to partner and from country to country but will usually revolve around the enhanced pedagogy derived from the delivery of a foreign curriculum and the cross-cultural exchange that this brings to both staff and students. It is important that the true value to the UKHEI of delivering degree courses via a partner institution either overseas or domestically is clearly conveyed to all key stakeholders to allow them to fully appreciate the less tangible benefits. It is also equally important to be able to demonstrate that the management structures put in place mitigate against the

Table 2.1 Volume of TNE type versus perceived risk

Type	Proportion (%)[a]	Risk[b]
Overseas campus	3.6	Medium
Distance	16.6	Medium
Joint/Dual	20.7	Medium
Franchise/Validated	58.0	High
Other	1.1	Medium

[a](Universities_UK_International 2018)
[b](Leadership_Foundation_for_Higher_Education 2014)

perceived risks and can be clearly articulated to the members of the senior leadership teams of both HEIs to ensure that they are willing to provide the necessary support in the form of appropriate staff resources. It is fascinating to note that despite the relatively high levels of both reputational and financial risks associated with TNE provision, compared with on-campus teaching-related activities, UK universities continue to pursue the type of TNE associated with the highest risk as outlined in Table 2.1.

Franchised and validated courses involve the delegation of teaching, assessment and management of courses to the partner institution. This is certainly in the highest risk category given the level of detachment from the UK provider but, rather surprisingly, accounts for nearly 60% of all TNE-related activity. It is, therefore, of vital importance that the management structures and processes in place are robust and meticulously designed. Unfortunately, this is certainly not always the case which means that TNE partnerships are prematurely terminated due to quality-related issues on a regular basis.

It is interesting to note that the life cycle of a TNE partnership is often represented as cyclical (UK_Higher_Education_International_Unit and Eversheds_LLP_International 2013) as the illustration below suggests (Fig. 2.1).

The cyclical nature of this diagram is an unfortunate misrepresentation as it suggests that a terminated academic collaboration partnership might well be resurrected. This is extremely unlikely given that the breakdown in the relationship will naturally be associated with a severe loss of trust between the two parties. The reality is that the cycle tends to be repeated with an alternative UKHEI, with the period of the cycle diminishing with each iteration. The achieved level of recruitment and financial viability reduces with each iteration due to gradual erosion of the reputation of the partner institution through a series of failed course offerings. It becomes difficult for the partner institution to recruit students once a failed attempt at a TNE partnership has been observed by prospective students and their parents in that particular recruitment market. An additional problem of note is that the new UKHEI is generally aware of many of the problems they are inheriting when they step into the vacuum left by the previous partner.

Fig. 2.1 Commonly proposed cyclical nature of TNE

2.1.3 The Decision-Making Process Behind a New Development

The development of a new partnership initiative will, ultimately, be approved by the senior leadership team of a university and, in the case of developments in geographic areas of the world which may be contentious, the governing body of the university may also have a say in whether the development goes ahead. This will be problematic for the team responsible for instigating the proposal. The development team will, inevitably, have a deep understanding of the opportunities and threats of a given proposal. Having visited the potential partner, they will have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the local operating conditions. However, the people making the final decision on whether or not to proceed with a proposal may be influenced by unconscious bias when making, what should be, a purely objective and business-related decision. There have been many examples of perfectly sound TNE projects being vetoed because a country is deemed to be a security risk despite UK government advice to the contrary (Foreign_Office 2019) and wider UK industry being actively involved in the country in question. There is almost inevitably a conflict between the opinions of staff involved directly with TNE and those, for whom, TNE is a small component of their total HE responsibilities. Numerous attempts to remove the subjectivity from the decision-making process have been made by introducing metrics at the initial project proposal stage of the development and approval of a new project. These quantitative systems are, however, not immune to distortion and manipulation and ultimately, often, tell a predefined story at the behest of a dominant member of staff. The key to successful and accurate decision-making is to ensure that the team producing the initial proposal, whatever form this might take, have the resources and information available to produce a detailed and accurate account of the potential of the partnership. Failure to commit appropriate levels of resource at this early stage can lead to problematic results further down the line and, ultimately, the requirement for much more resource to be invested to avoid reputational damage during the chaotic failure of a partnership.

It is also true to say that the team, or individual, driving a new partnership development should be separate from those staff responsible for the maintenance of existing partnerships. The two roles require very different skill sets and given the importance of getting the initial direction of travel absolutely correct to avoid problematic consequences in the future. The partnership development team should not be pressurised into trying to meet unrealistic targets as this promotes the likelihood of partnerships being developed which have inherent excessive risk attached and the potential for financial income and student recruitment will become wildly exaggerated. This can lead to a proliferation of underperforming partnerships with institutions which do not have the potential to deliver the results they claim in the initial project proposal. The role of the partnership development team in assessing the viability of a new collaboration is sensitive to several pressures. The team itself may be subject to its own bias either in favour of the project or opposed to it. These biases can arise from a wide range of preconceptions: political, financial, travel accessibility, workload considerations and many others. Impartial assessment of the prospective partnership is therefore an aspiration more often honoured in the breach than delivered in reality. However, it is important that, as far as possible, as dispassionate a view of the prospects for the project is arrived at. This can be easily compromised by the institution's executives who will ultimately make the decision to proceed or otherwise by placing undue pressure on the team to predict unrealistic targets for income generation or student numbers.

2.1.4 The Benefits of TNE—Student Numbers or Financial Income?

Universities can suffer from a rather schizophrenic attitude to the strategic driving forces behind new partnership development. Since TNE student numbers are reported to HESA and subsequently placed in the public domain via the Aggregate Offshore Record (AOR) this metric has become an important measure of perceived success in the TNE arena. However, it is very rare to see data relating to income from partnership-related activities published since this information is deemed to be commercially sensitive. The closest one can get to this information is the "*other income*" declared in the published accounts of a university. Since this is a rather opaque measure of success it does not provide a university with the same bragging rights associated with TNE numbers. Universities, therefore generally, look for ways to maximise the HESA returns related to their TNE activities. However, it is ironic that when a truly winning formula is achieved such as in the case of the "*Oxford Brookes effect*" (Hiles 2016) it is quickly dismissed by the sector since it so dramatically skews the data reported.

Table 2.2 An illustration of the Oxford Brookes effect

	2012/13	2014/15	% increase
All students including Oxford Brookes ACCA students	598,925	665,995	11.2
All students excluding Oxford Brookes ACCA students	337,260	382,610	13.4
Oxford Brookes ACCA students	261,665	283,385	8.3

It is reported that approximately 43% of all TNE students in the 2014/15 AOR data appeared to study with Oxford Brookes University, and nearly 99% of these include Oxford Brookes University ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) registered students (Hiles 2016). Students are required to register onto the Oxford Brookes University BSc (Hons) in Applied Accounting degree while undertaking ACCA papers. The students would then subsequently be eligible to undertake the Oxford Brookes University Research and Analysis Project (RAP) to top-up to a bachelor's degree. The tuition fee only being payable on submission of the project (Association_of_Chartered_Certified_Accountants 2018).

The magnitude and impact of this single TNE development are illustrated in the table taken from a report by HE Global published in 2016 (British_Council 2016). This report (along with many similar reports) disaggregates the Oxford Brookes University data throughout to allow the reader to make sense of the trends in TNE numbers in isolation from this phenomenal achievement (Table 2.2).

It is worth noting that during this period when growth in ACCA students of 8.3% was observed for Oxford Brookes University that their annual accounts reported a growth of only around 0.5% within the "*other income*" (Oxford_Brookes_University 2013, 2014). This illustrates a severe disconnect between TNE student numbers and associated income which is prevalent across the sector.

2.2 Pre-cursors to a Successful Partnership

2.2.1 Set-Up (And Termination)

The size of the UK Transnational Education portfolio is growing year-on-year with in excess of 700,000 students across the globe currently registered on one of the several types of collaborative programmes offered by UKHEIs. TNE targets including number of TNE students, number of partnerships, number of branch campuses, income and surplus, are all parameters defined in the strategic plans of universities across the UK. It is not surprising, therefore, that the whole internationalisation agenda is extremely high profile among the senior management teams of UK universities. Add to that, the attraction of travel to exotic locations (the term "*Academic Tourism*" was coined many years ago) and the world of TNE quickly becomes hugely appealing to large swathes of UK academics.

The most visible part of the TNE life cycle is, without doubt, the initial set-up. New partnership proposals are paraded in front of the great and the good with the promise of untold riches and thousands of students to be registered on the new programmes to be offered. This is, certainly, an opportunity for young, ambitious academics to make a name for themselves with their superiors. The next time a partnership warrants this much attention is when things go catastrophically wrong, and it is flagged up for termination. At this point, all of the tough, ambitious, change managers come running to show how ruthlessly they can pull the "*academic rug*" from under a partner who was being wooed so effectively not so long previously. It is interesting that there is, relatively, little attention paid to partnership who are between these two high profile phases of development. There are very few plaudits for the effective and efficient management of a functioning partnership, and therefore, this part of the life cycle is often neglected.

2.2.2 Internal University Politics

To guarantee the quality of provision it is absolutely critical that the approval of the business case driving a partnership development is totally separate from the academic approval process undertaken to validate the proposed collaborative course(s). The QAA quality code states:

> Policies and procedures ensure that there are adequate safeguards against financial impropriety or conflicts of interest that might compromise academic standards or the quality of learning opportunities. Consideration of the business case is conducted separately from approval of the academic proposal (Quality_Assurance_Agency 2018).

Does this really happen? It is extremely common to find references to enhanced internationalisation, increased globalisation and the development of further collaboration opportunities in the corporate plans of universities; however, the promotion of more rigorous academic approval of partnerships is rarely a well-articulated target. The quality departments of universities, therefore, often find themselves under intense pressure to approve TNE activities which are questionable in their ability to clearly demonstrate that they are in line with sector expectations for quality. It would be fascinating to study the number of partnerships which fail to deliver the promises made in the associated business case presented to the relevant university committee. It would be equally interesting to research across the sector, the number of prematurely terminated partnerships on the grounds of poor quality.

2.2.3 Due Diligence

The most important part of the initial set-up of a partnership is the performance of due diligence checks of a prospective new partner institution. Due diligence needs to scrutinise not only academic activities, typically through some kind of initial approval and subsequent periodic review process but also the legal and financial status of the partner institution. This legal and financial due diligence needs to be undertaken regularly throughout the life of a partnership to identify any fundamental changes in the operating conditions. This presents a challenge to the awarding institution in terms of capacity and cost.

Due diligence is a requirement of the QAA and is stipulated as a fundamental part of the initial partnership set-up process in Chapter B10 of the Quality Code but it is questionable how effectively these are performed. Universities often lack the specialist expertise and resources to conduct forensic due diligence exercises overseas where financial transparency is often deemed unnecessary. Institutional governance may also aspire to different standards than the UK, especially in private institutions.

Due diligence is expensive but can be a relatively fruitless exercise unless it is undertaken meticulously by extremely experienced individuals with an in-depth knowledge of the geographic location of the potential partner institution. Even then, many things can go wrong. It has been known for a highly paid consultant to contact the staff of the commissioning university to find out what those staff knew about the partner being investigating! A somewhat incestuous approach which is highly unlikely to be of any value to the instigators of the investigation. There is often a misconception that as long as money has been spent then the job has been done right. To put it another way, due diligence can become a tick-box exercise. It could be argued that the investment of resources might be better used by those staff committed to the prospect of the development than disinterested consultants. One might expect that the due diligence efforts would be undertaken with far more drive to establish the fundamental legal and economic foundations of the prospective partner than is sometimes the case.

Despite clear guidance being available from UKHE International Unit in the form of various publications universities often miss the obvious problems.

Broad generalisations such as the one below taken from an actual report are of little value when trying to make decisions regarding specific projects:

> Usually, government officials are high-risk on the basis that they may be vulnerable to bribery and corruption.

Such statements add very little value to pre-existing knowledge and seem only to reflect the pre-existing prejudice of the author.

Since due diligence can be, at times, merely a tick-box exercise, the reports produced are not always considered in detail and are simply filed away for the next QAA audit. The tick-box nature may be a rational response to the questionable reliability of the reports. However, this misses a real opportunity to identify issues before they develop into serious problems which can totally derail a mutually beneficial partnership. It is also an approach that would not survive scrutiny if actual malfeasance were to occur. Such activities are often, by their very nature, extremely well hidden and can be undetectable even by the most experienced investigator. An extreme example encountered by the author was a university with infrastructure, staff and students but no right to operate as higher education institution. Clearly, if an entirely fake university can be presented by a potential partner it would not be difficult for an organisation to provide falsified documentary evidence, such as audited accounts, to support a partnership development.

Sometimes however due diligence can be heavy-handed. Care should be taken when negotiating with state-owned universities and highly respected institutions. Disproportionately invasive due diligence activities may be construed as particularly intrusive and symbolic of cultural imperialism. Unfortunately, UKHEIs often have a one-size-fits-all attitude to many aspects of TNE management. This can leave the potential partner feeling at best alienated and at worst insulted. So, due diligence needs to be undertaken with appropriate intensity and applying the optimal resource to ensure the validity of the results obtained. This should not prevent the exercise from being undertaken but the focus should be appropriately tailored to the context. The due diligence activity needs to be planned and its objectives determined in advance. A risk-based approach should be considered; identifying sources of potential risk and the severity of their impact. Resources can then be targeted at those high-risk/high-impact areas and used to inform both future management effort and the drafting of the contract.

2.2.4 The Contract

There is clearly a legal imperative to underpin any collaborative operation with an appropriate legal contract. A large proportion of TNE ventures result in a transfer of funds from the non-UK institution to the UK institution. The production of the contract is usually driven by the legal department of the UKHEI who often want to adopt a standard approach to the task. The appropriateness of this approach varies markedly across the countries in which UK TNE is practiced.

Applying the conditions of a contract across international borders is complex and expensive so the question might be asked: "*What is the value of the contract when things go wrong?*" The default expectation by many UK institutions is that when a partnership fails and termination is initiated it is standard practice for the partner to stop paying the fee associated with the provision. This may be a realistic expectation since the contract is difficult to enforce in such circumstances and the cost of international legal intervention would usually exceed the amount of money recovered. There is also the reputational risk of becoming involved in a legal battle especially in countries with a lower economic status to that of the UK. Equally, if legal action were taken against the partner, the chances of executing a successful teach-out scenario without endangering the academic welfare of the remaining students diminish greatly.

The contract, therefore, has maximum value during the smooth operation of the partnership when fees are being invoiced and paid on a mutually acceptable basis and both parties are operating within its terms and conditions. Termination should be approached carefully, with the clear understanding that the terms of the legal agreement may not, ultimately, be fully enforceable.

2.2.5 Academic Approval Process

In order to grant an overseas institution, the right to deliver courses on behalf of a UK university there is usually an approval event of some description held at the overseas site. A large amount of documentation is produced to justify the approval and is scrutinised in detail by a large team of internally and externally appointed academics. There is wide variation in practice, but all too often the approval event, held several thousand miles away from the home institution at considerable financial cost to both parties, consumes a large amount of time which is spent scrutinising documentation which will be of questionable value to either the international partner or the partnership in general after the completion of the approval process. On many occasions, there is a disproportionate amount of time spent correcting the formatting and grammar missing the opportunity to really explore the true nature of the organisation.

As part of the approval process, there is, of course, the obligatory campus tour including a well-rehearsed library visit. A book is taken from a shelf and the publication date dutifully inspected with a disapproving look from the approval panel should the book be deemed obsolete. This charade is performed despite the fact that most partnership agreements now allow TNE students access to the e-book collection of the UK university's library. In fact, it is best practice for TNE-based modules to list as essential reading only books which are available in the form of e-books to the students. It is, on some occasions, one of the few tangible benefits that a TNE student obtains directly from the university with which they are registered to study their degree.

Disappointingly, very few approval events involve a detailed assessment of the ability of the partner's academic team to truly deliver a comparable student experience to that delivered in the UK. The judgement about the appropriateness of teaching staff is based, predominantly, on the assessment of a CV and a brief meeting with a small number of representatives of the overseas delivery team who have been hand-picked based on their ability to convey a convincing story to the approval panel. The overall effectiveness of the approval event may be limited by the political correctness of the approval panel which limits the penetrative nature of questions asked.

In reality, a truly successful approval event can only be achieved when enough trust exists between the two parties to explore potential problem areas collaboratively and work together to resolve any issues identified. Such a relationship needs to be established before the approval event and results from mutual respect being demonstrated between the initiation teams. Whether or not such a relationship exists is often missed by the approval event team.

The approval event also marks the handover from the initiation teams to the management teams and needs to provide the opportunity for this to take place in as positive an environment as possible. Again it should be the responsibility of the initiation team to prepare the management team and the ground for the handover. Often this is not even considered and sometimes the management team has not even been established. This can cause a hiatus in the operation of the programme to the frustration of the executives of both partners, but is usually the result of the provider not putting the necessary resources in place before the approval event. Such short-termism can have more long-lasting effects.

2.3 Ongoing Management of a Partnership

2.3.1 The Main Objectives

Whose responsibility is it to recruit students onto TNE courses? At times, the awarding university fails to recognise its responsibility for the promotion of the partnership but is then surprised when the venture fails to deliver sustainable student numbers. It is critical that all contributors recognise that they have a responsibility for the success of the partnership. Some academics are short on business acumen and are happier to remain in the ivory tower of academia. However, to successfully drive recruitment onto TNE courses, the academic staff who have been responsible for the new business development must take on the challenge of becoming actively involved in marketing and recruitment activities if the new venture is to succeed.

The ultimate aim of TNE is to provide students enrolled in a programme with an educational experience which is comparable to that of home students. In order for this to be achieved, there needs to be comparability of both physical and staff resources on both sites of delivery. It is an extremely challenging proposition for this to be possible and for the awarding institution to successfully monitor the situation. An initial check on comparability usually takes place during the initial set-up but it is unlikely that a partner institution would have invested sufficiently to ensure that all resources are present at the time of approval. It would be foolish for an institution to pre-empt the outcome of an approval event to the extent of investing hundreds of thousands of pounds and engaging large numbers of staff at this stage of the development. It is then left to an academic acting as a link tutor for the partnership to audit the acquisition of resources in line with curriculum demands. This is an onerous task, for practical subjects, where many variants in required equipment are possible and a diverse range of module requirements must be assessed. For computing courses this can be particularly expensive if labs have to be set up, software licences bought and installed, and specialist systems purchased. For this reason, it is recommended that a long-term strategy is established to start off small and gradually build the portfolio of courses as student numbers grow, the institutions' reputation is built and investment resources become available.

Clearly, even with the correct practical equipment and staff with appropriate qualifications and experience, the delivery of a comparable student experience is still down to the interpretation of the curriculum which will vary considerably across geographic regions and cultures. It will be necessary to supply exemplar teaching and assessment materials to provide some clue as to how the parent university expects the curriculum to be interpreted.

Many UK universities have very high expectations of their overseas counterparts. They provide an outline of a course through a programme specification along with a set of module descriptors and expect an inexperienced academic team in a geographically remote location to somehow deliver classes to students which in some way resemble those being attended by students in the UK. It is only when peer observation of teaching takes place that the true nature of the interpretation may be revealed. There then follows a period of intense retrospective "staff development" by staff from the UK who did not really know what they were letting themselves in for when they volunteered to take on the additional workload in the role of link tutor. So, for the experience to be truly comparable we need close to identical resources, both physical and staff, an accurate interpretation of the curriculum by an overseas academic team and a link tutor with unlimited energy, enthusiasm and subject expertise. Despite all of these challenges, it is surprising how often students produce work similar to their UK counterparts and describe classroom experiences which are very similar to those delivered at the degree awarding institution back in the UK.

2.3.2 *Managing the Relationship*

Successful and sustainable TNE partnerships are generally based on strong academic relationships. The diagram below illustrates the fundamental channels of communication present in a typical partnership and identifies the key interlocutors. The names given to these roles vary from university to university but those used below should be easily recognised by the reader (Fig. 2.2).

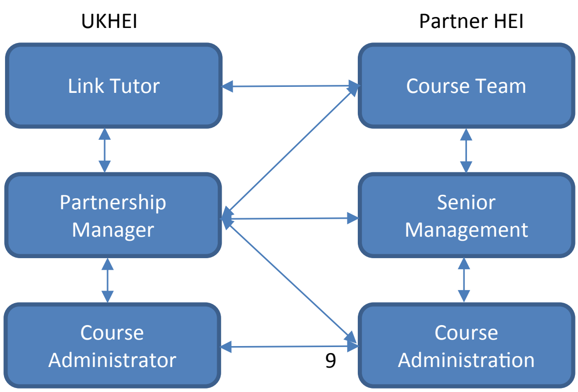

Fig. 2.2 Communication channels in a TNE partnership

1. **The Role of the Partnership Manager**:

Many of the successful TNE markets have a more traditional approach to higher education where the academic is still regarded as central to the operations of the institution. The business dynamic which now dominates in the UK is yet to become as prevalent. Some UKHEIs make the mistake of thinking that the relationship with the partner is a purely administrative one and can be managed as such. Matching a relatively inexperienced member of the administration team with a seasoned academic in some of these traditional HE markets will potentially be problematic and will almost certainly stifle the development of the partnership. Successful relationship management will be based on a combination of excellent project management skills, sometimes not possessed by a typical academic (even those teaching project management, ironically) and transparent communication. The role of Partnership Manager, or equivalent depending on nomenclature used, is therefore a challenging position to fill. However, the diagram above illustrates clearly that the position is critical to the operation of the partnership and its continued success. The individual needs a rare blend of business acumen, understanding of the academic principles of a university and the quality processes which underpin successful TNE. If this role is not suitably appointed to, the relationship is likely to be severely undermined.

2. **The Role of the Link Tutor**:

Most universities assign an academic member of staff to liaise directly with the course team of the partner. This person is often referred to as a Link Tutor or some equivalent variant. The Link Tutor usually has specific course knowledge and can ensure that the course team at the partner are supported in the delivery of the TNE provision. This is a particularly important task in the early stages of development of the partnership when teaching materials are being developed and staff are becoming familiar with a different way of working. For the TNE to have value in the host country, there will be an implicit subtle difference between the academic content and pedagogical approaches adopted by the partner. The Link Tutor plays a vital role in ensuring that there is a smooth transition to the successful delivery of the TNE provision. The selection of the Link Tutor is, once again, critical to the success of a partnership. There are, however, many challenges to successful selection. The workload of academic staff in the UK has risen dramatically with the introduction of NSS, PTES, TEF, KEF, etc. Link Tutors are usually allocated a nominal time allowance when they take on the role of Link Tutor which is almost certainly inadequate in the early stages of a new partnership. The Link Tutor, therefore, often provides excellent support when in-country but when back at their home institution where the everyday pressures of the "*day job*" return, along with the additional workload accumulated during their absence while overseas, the support provided often diminishes rapidly.

3. **The Role of the Course Administrator**:

The Course Administrator has a critical role to play in the day-to-day management of the quality assurance processes which are in place to ensure that the TNE courses comply with standard on-campus norms of operation. The course administrator should be assigned exclusively to TNE operations rather than sharing resource with on-campus provision. This person can then develop a deeper understanding of the principles underpinning TNE and also the inner workings of the partner through daily communications about student-related issues. The Course Administrator can help to spot anomalies in the operation of a partnership and quickly bring issues to the attention of the Partnership Manager and the Link Tutor before problems escalate and become detrimental to the student experience and the operation of the partnership.

2.3.3 Monitoring the Quality of Teaching

The quality framework wrapped around the majority of TNE provision is very often based on frequent remote intervention with regular, but far less frequent, direct face-to-face involvement in the collaborative provision. There are ways of measuring the quality of the teaching remotely, such as inspection of teaching materials and the pre- and post-moderation of assessments with student work being, to some extent, indicative of the quality of teaching, or at the very least, the quality of the learning experience facilitated by the partner institution. Meetings with students can provide an insight into the quality of the classroom experience but comments obviously need to be treated with caution since student opinion is very often polarised and we only hear the voices of those who have something to say; be that negative or positive. Additionally, the reaction of students to the presence of a representative from the UKHEI responsible for awarding their degree can provoke disproportionately emotional outbursts as the perception is that the representative wields unlimited power. Therefore, the only way of accurately establishing the quality of the teaching experience provided is through class observations. This is a costly exercise and needs to be undertaken with the utmost sensitivity for obvious reasons analogous to those applicable during peer observations undertaken at the home institution.

2.4 Some Final Thoughts

Transnational education provision is growing and the UK is leading this growth along with some other key players in the market such as the USA and Australia. Not surprisingly, China and India are starting to increase their involvement in TNE and will certainly become dominant in years to come. There are many direct and indirect benefits to be derived from the activities associated with the academic relationships developed through TNE partnerships. As the UKHE sector is subjected to increasing financial pressures related to reduced EU recruitment, possible reductions in fees, overinvestment in campus developments and increased pension contributions; the income from “other activities” such as TNE will become more important in the sector. Partnerships can deliver large financial returns over a period of several decades if they are set up with the utmost of care in the first instance and well managed according to carefully structured principles throughout their life. Termination of a partnership should be handled sensitively with the welfare of the student remaining paramount through to the ultimate conclusion of the relationship. If these guidelines are followed, in accordance with the requirements of both domestic and international quality assurance agencies, there is no reason why UK TNE should not continue to grow and be a highly successful, integral part of the activities undertaken by many UK universities throughout the coming decades. However, success can be readily undermined by short-termism and lack of ongoing investment. UKHEIs need to recognise that there are ongoing costs in maintaining a successful TNE and that these should be factored into the expected returns. Some of those costs have been identified here. Each TNE partnership will undoubtedly be different, but it is probably prudent to assume that the costs will be greater than enthusiastic proponents of the partnership assume, whether this enthusiasm comes from the institutional executive team or the delivery team.

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