

A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL APPROACHES TO TNE AND ITS QUALITY ASSURANCE

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Abstract

This paper offers a comparative overview of different countries' approaches to transnational education (TNE) and its quality assurance (QA), intending TNE to refer to the delivery of national degrees overseas. It will first look at four key sending countries, the UK, Australia, the US and Germany, considering the main drivers for outgoing TNE, its main features and how it is quality assured. It will then turn to consider the same aspects from the perspective of receiving countries, looking at four key receiving locations, China, Dubai, Singapore and Hong Kong.

In the backdrop of this overview of different approaches to TNE and its QA the paper will conclude by outlining the importance of cross-border cooperation amongst QA agencies in sending and receiving countries for effective and efficient QA of TNE. In this context it will point to a number of recent initiatives aimed at improving reciprocal understanding and trust between QA agencies and strengthen cooperation.

Out-bound TNE

United Kingdom

In the UK HE providers with degree-awarding power are self-accrediting, and do not need to obtain prior approval by government or the QAA to engage in TNE activities. These can take any shape that suits UK providers' strategies and needs. Collaborative partnerships and distance learning are the dominant models, while branch campuses represent a minor share of the UK TNE landscape. In this context of high degree of institutional autonomy TNE is regarded as a commercial activity. Providers in receipt of public funding are not allowed to use taxpayers' money to support their international operations.

In fact, one of the key drivers, amongst others, for UK providers to engage in TNE activity is to increase international student's enrolment, including by increasing enrolment in the UK either through articulation agreements, but also by enhancing institutions' international visibility overseas.

QAA has monitored TNE provision since its inception as part of its mission to ensure the quality and standards of UK HE *wherever* this is delivered. The way QAA has done so has been twofold: as part of mainstream institutional reviews in the UK, which look at the total provision of a provider including their overseas provision; and through a complementary dedicated TNE review process. This TNE review process includes visits to overseas delivery sites to test the implementation of institutional policies and processes for ensuring the quality and standards of TNE, and to gain an understanding of the TNE student experience. Given the geographical spread and quantity of UK TNE arrangements QAA has adopted a country-based approach to ensure the efficiency of its TNE review processes. On an annual basis, a country with significant UK TNE is selected and a sample of provision in the country is reviewed, rather than looking at providers' TNE provision as part of their mainstream institutional review. QAA also regularly seeks to cooperate with host countries agencies to coordinate the oversight of UK TNE.

Australia

Australian self-accrediting universities are also free to engage in any type of TNE activity without having to seek prior approval from the national regulator, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA). Collaborative partnerships, or third-party arrangements, is also the predominant form of TNE activity. TNE, as in the UK, is not publicly subsidised, and Australian providers share the same drivers for engaging in TNE activities with UK providers. However, Australia's TNE landscape is much more limited in scale and scope, and this affects the way in it is quality assured.

TEQSA, maintains an oversight of Australian TNE to ensure the equivalency of the student experience and student learning outcomes. The two main differences with the QAA is that, because

of the smaller scale of Australian TNE, TNE is looked only as part of national institutional review processes (i.e. no country based approach is needed) and that reviews of TNE delivery sites are undertaken only when justified by risk-triggers. The UK approach to TNE review is instead more enhancement driven.

United States

The driving forces for outbound TNE in the USA include, in addition to commercial motives, an emphasis on outward mobility, as well as on exporting the USA HE teaching and learning experience. Two common forms of USA TNE are in fact study abroad centers, allowing US students to gain an international experience, and American universities integrated in national HE systems – to be considered as foreign universities delivering US style education and seeking USA accreditation. The only other form of American TNE is branch campuses.

In the USA QA is undertaken by different accreditation agencies recognised by the US Department of Education or the Council for HE Accreditation (CHEA), in particular the main 7 regional accreditation agencies. Different accreditation agencies will have different policies for TNE. However, branch campuses and study abroad centers are generally considered as a substantive change in a provider's HE offering requiring initial accreditation. After initial accreditation, an American university's TNE won't be reviewed directly unless there is a serious concern or if selected in a sample of overseas activity to look at as part of national re-accreditation. Another common feature is that US regional accreditation agencies would not accept collaborative or third-party arrangements, the most popular forms in the UK and Australia.

There is no available data about US TNE, but it is fair to say that it is much more limited in scope and scale to UK TNE.

Germany

In the context of a conception of HE as a public good, where HE is largely subsidised, TNE in Germany is publicly funded through the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), which disburses funding from different governmental departments.

The main drivers of out-going TNE are therefore not commercial, but national policies aimed at fostering the internationalization of German HE providers, promoting German cultural relations and education policy, as well as supporting international capacity development.

DAAD puts emphasis on the fact that German TNE provision should be characterised by a high degree of engagement and presence by the German institutions. No validation or franchise arrangements, the main forms of TNE for the UK and Australia, are funded by DAAD. The three types of DAAD funded TNE mirror the types of TNE in the USA:

- 'German study programmes abroad' to facilitate outward mobility;
- 'German-backed universities', where under the mentorship of one or more German providers a new HEI abroad is founded which is part of the local HE system, normally seeking accreditation by relevant German accreditation bodies;
- full branch campuses, also generally integrated in the local HE system.

The different funding model also affect the dominant subject areas. UK, Australian and USA TNE being private endeavours are predominantly oriented towards programmes which are low cost to run, such as in business administration or informatics. German TNE can focus instead on resource-intensive disciplines such as engineering or natural sciences, where German university are traditionally strong. The funding model also limit the extent of German TNE which is more limited than Australian and UK ones.

All programmes of state recognized HE providers have to be accredited by agencies licensed by the German Accreditation Council (GAC). GAC's standards apply to programmes leading to a German degree, irrespective if the degree is offered inland or abroad.

DAAD will also undertake quality controls on a periodic basis to ensure that the German universities involved in TNE projects it funds fulfil the requirements for funding. These requirements include academic and QA requirements, as well as ensuring TNE projects becomes self-sustainable. DAAD funding are in fact generally limited to a number of years.

In-bound TNE

China

China, if compared to sending countries', presents features that can be regarded as closest to the German approach. In particular, the demand and types of imported foreign provision are driven and regulated by national education and social policies and priorities, and TNE partnerships must run as not-for-profit academic ventures.

China sees in-bound TNE primarily as a way to facilitate transfer of knowledge in the country and to develop the capacity of local HE institutions. This key rationale informs the types of TNE accepted in the country and the criteria for approving incoming TNE. TNE can only take the form of partnerships between foreign and national providers; China refers to TNE as China Foreign Co-operation in Running Schools (CFCRS)- covering both jointly run institutions and programmes.

CFCRSs are seen involving substantial involvement by both partners. Foreign institutions have to commit resources, delivering at least one third of the programme, and jointly-developed programmes are favoured by the Ministry of Education. The MoE has also put a limit to the number of CFCRSs that foreign providers might enter into in order to avoid the risk of overstretching.

Responding to previously unregulated growth, the MoE has also indicated priorities subjects and geographical areas, in order to ensure that new CFCRSs meet the labour and development needs of the country. Therefore programmes in popular subject areas like business, finance, and management are not encouraged or favoured, while partnerships in Western China are encouraged and favored.

The regulatory system for TNE can be split in the preapproval and post-approval stage. At pre-approval stage the agency playing a role is the China Education Association for Internal Exchange (CEAIE), operating under the ministry of civil affairs, and leading on international educational exchanges and cooperation (This applies to HE programmes only, since sub-degree level TNE is regulated at provincial level). CEAIE helps the MoE in screening new applications for CFCRSs, and in doing so it seeks cooperation with sending country agencies to ensure the MoE receives only genuine applications. CEAIE has also the statutory responsibility for quality assuring sub-degree level TNE, and runs a voluntary accreditation scheme for HE level TNE.

The statutory responsibility to quality assure HE level TNE after the approval stage rests with another agency, the China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center (CDGDC), which in relation to Chinese HE has the statutory responsibility to quality assure post-graduate education. CDGDC monitors TNE through desk-based analysis, and where they detect lack of or risk of non-compliance with the MoE's criteria for CFCRSs they might carry out a review visit.

Dubai

The Dubai approach to TNE and its QA can be placed at the opposite side of the spectrum from China. Dubai's drivers for importing TNE are very different as it is not interested in the development of local providers' capacity, but rather in meeting the skills and knowledge needs of a growing knowledge economy and a huge expat society representing approximately 90% of resident population. Dubai is also interested in developing education as an industry alternative to oil production through the creation of a HE hub. For this reason Dubai wants quality undiluted foreign provision in the form of branch campuses, and it is not interested in collaborative partnerships.

TNE providers in Dubai mostly operate from free-trade zones (FTZs), which are exempted from federal regulations, and therefore do not need to have federal accreditation by the Commission for Academic Accreditation. However, they need authorization to operate by the Dubai the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) and have their programmers registered with them. KHDA adopts an institutional authorization and programme registration process which is based on what they refer to as an 'equivalency model', whereby through a panel of international experts it assesses the extent to which TNE providers fulfil the QA expectations of the home country agencies, *whatever* these might be. The international panel also checks that TNE providers have policies, practices and resources in place to ensure that the learning experience and learning outcomes are substantially equivalent to those on similar programmes at the home campus. This is

generally a desk-based exercise, although KHDA reserves the right to undertake institutional visits where it detects any cause for concern.

KHDA has traditionally required TNE providers to deliver programmes that they already run back home, as a guarantee that the same QA processes are applied. However KHDA has recently reviewed its programme approval regulations allowing providers with a strong record of performance in the FTZs to deliver programmes in Dubai not already delivered at home in order to better meet local knowledge and skills needs. This reflects a move in Dubai toward an approach to TNE which is more strategically linked up with other broader economic and social policies and priorities of Dubai.

Singapore

Singapore's main drivers for importing foreign provision have been varied, including meeting unmet demands, filling skills gap, developing the capacity of local providers, and creating a HE hub. For this reason no type of TNE provision is privileged or discouraged.

In recent years there has however been, like for Dubai, a move towards consolidating quality and the relevance of TNE provision to local socio-economic needs. The approval process for new programmes has become therefore more selective. The gate keeping role in Singapore is played by the Committee for Private Education (CPE), which oversees private education in the country. The near totality of TNE provision is undertaken in partnership with local private education institutions (PEIs), as they are referred to in the country (branch campuses are regarded as private providers themselves.). All TNE provision in partnership with PEIs needs CPE approval. The key academic criteria for approval are similar to those for Dubai, namely that the foreign degree-awarding body is a legitimate institution in the home country and is in good standing with the local regulatory bodies; and that the degree programmes offered at the local PEIs are subject to the same QA processes as the programmes offered at their home campuses.

The CPE model differs from that of Dubai in that the assessment of equivalency of the learning experience and the QA processes with those at the home campus is conducted by CPE officers rather than a dedicated panel of international experts, and the assessment is more mechanistic, going less in-depth with regard to institutional QA policies and processes. It is more a registration than a QA process, and it is exclusively a desk-based exercise.

However, CPE has from this academic year made it mandatory for all PEIs to seek EduTrust certification, a local QA certification traditionally required only for eligibility to recruit international students. CPE will therefore be exercising more of a QA function than it has previously done, looking at TNE providers' compliance with local standards.

Hong Kong

Hong Kong' key drivers for TNE are very similar to those for Singapore, with a lesser interest in creating a HE hub. All types of TNE arrangements are accepted, collaborative partnerships with private providers are by far most common, but there is also a high number of TNE arrangements with public universities.

The gate keeping role is played by the Education Bureau of the Ministry of Education. All TNE programmes, referred to as 'non-local programme, need to be registered with the Bureau, which seeks the advice from the Hong Kong Council for Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) as to whether a non-local course meets the criteria for registration. The key criteria is again that the awarding organization is a bona fide institution in its home country and in good standing with its home country's regulatory bodies, and that the quality and standards of the learning experience are comparable to those of similar programmes offered at home. This is, as for Singapore, exclusively a desk-based exercise conducted by HKCAAVQ officers. HKCAAVQ will offer expert advice but the final decision for inclusion on the register is with the Education Bureau itself. Non-local programmes in Hong Kong can also seek voluntary accreditation by the HKCAAVQ against local standards. This will allow them to be recognised under the local Qualification Framework and listed on the HK Qualification Register, both managed by HKCAAVQ. Once accredited non-local programmes are treated as local programmes and their students can be eligible for public loans.

Conclusions: inter-agency cooperation

The comparative overview offered above highlights different approaches to TNE and its QA. These differences raise the question of how it is possible for the international QA community to ensure an effective and efficient oversight of TNE. Cross-border quality assurance of TNE cannot possibly, for the time being, take the form of an international agreed approach. However, there is scope for QA agencies to strengthen cross-border cooperation in the QA of TNE across differences.

A number of recent international initiatives, differently involving agencies mentioned above, have been trying to facilitate cross-border cooperation in a number of ways, including for instance:

- the *Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education (QACHE) project*, managed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and undertaken by a project consortium including APQN, which developed a Toolkit for strengthening inter-agency cooperation in the QA of TNE
- the Quality Beyond Border Group (QBBG), a KHDSA led initiative aimed at facilitating information sharing between key sending and receiving countries
- and the more recent *Cross-Border Quality Assurance Network (CBQAN)*, led by CDGDC aimed at strengthening Europe-Asia cooperation in the QA of TNE

All these recent initiatives share the same goal to helping improve *QA agencies' mutual understanding and therefore build reciprocal trust as a first step towards facilitating cross-border coordination of QA activities*. They demonstrate the shared view that QA agencies should be enablers not inhibitors of quality and relevant TNE, and that key to realising this is growing inter-agency cooperation.

This view is based on the realisation that TNE should not only be seen as an activity posing challenges to QA, but also as an innovative form of HE provision capable to benefit students, societies as a whole, as well as providers. Inter-agency cooperation is a way for QA agencies to respond in effective and efficient ways to the growth of cross-border HE provision.

DEVELOPING AND VERIFYING A CHECKLIST FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMS IN ASIA

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Abstract

Due to the increasing number of international collaborative programs between Japanese universities and universities in other Asian countries, the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education (NIAD-QE) has developed a checklist as a self-evaluation tool for internal quality assurance. The target audience for the checklist was universities in Asia, especially Japanese universities, which have been planning, developing, and running international collaborative programs so far. In order to verify the effectiveness of the checklist, we conducted an online survey. The results indicate that mean scores for "degree of implementation" and "recognition of importance" were high for most items on the checklist. Therefore, it can be inferred that the checklist is considered important and that it will be used to plan, develop, and manage international collaborative programs and as a tool for internal quality assurance.

Keywords

Internal Quality Assurance, International Collaborative Programs