

**UK collaboration in India: institutional case studies**

University of London External System

June 2009

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ISBN 978 1 84482 954 5

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

## Facilitating access to higher education

1 This case study concerns the partnership between the University of London External System (the External System), and the Russell Square International College (RSIC) in Mumbai. RSIC is a private, family-owned college, running alongside a school (École Mondiale), and thus providing education from kindergarten to degree level. It has a long lease on the land that it occupies and has permission from the Mumbai City authorities to run as a business. The link operates within a 'Permission to Teach' model, for the Diploma in Economics and Diploma in Social Sciences, given by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) on behalf of the University of London. The Permission to Teach model is one of the ways in which the External System relates to third-party institutions. Recently the External System has embarked on developing a new framework for managing its dealings with institutions, and the influence that the Permission to Teach model is having on this development is a theme for the study.

2 Provision through the External System is delivered to students via a range of external study support models, including e-learning. Academic support for students is commonly provided by various teaching institutions with which the University of London does not have a formal relationship. The External System does not maintain a central record of the extent to which individual students make use of such teaching institutions and whether they use more than one; rather it relies on the records kept by the teaching institutions themselves. The Permission to Teach model is used by only a limited number of programmes in the External System; these programmes include face-to-face teaching and students are required to study at a designated third-party institution. Therefore in this respect, although for the most part the External System does not regard itself as operating a system of collaborative provision, Permission to Teach may be viewed as collaborative in nature.

3 The University of London provides overarching governance for the External System through central committees and has primary responsibility for awards. Administrative and development support is provided through the University's External and Internal Student Administration Division. The academic direction of programmes is designated to an appropriate lead college. The LSE is a significant lead college, having a large external provision, and is the lead college for the link with RSIC.

4 Contact between RSIC and the External System was initiated by RSIC's owners who approached the LSE in 2004 with a proposal to run External System programmes. RSIC's rationale for developing the link derived from its wish to facilitate access for students to higher education by providing a progression route to a University of London degree. The diplomas offered under the Permission to Teach model at RSIC are one or two-year programmes designed to give access to higher education for students who typically do not have standard entry qualifications. Successful completion of the programmes is not in itself sufficient as an entry qualification to degree courses at universities in India, although students are able to progress their studies in India via the External System.

5 With assistance from the LSE, RSIC has been able to confirm, following initial uncertainties, that the arrangement is not subject to accreditation from the All India Council for Technical Education (as the diplomas do not contain a training element) or the Association of Indian Universities (as RSIC is not a university) or the University Grants Commission (as RSIC is not in receipt of government funding). The External System continues to keep the requirements for in-country approval under review.

6 In addition to the Diploma in Economics and the Diploma in Social Sciences, RSIC provides teaching support (outwith the Permission to Teach model) for degrees in the disciplines of economics, management, finance, banking and accounting (or in combinations thereof). Its pedagogical strengths, as described by the External System website, include small class sizes,

a tutorial system backed up by individual staff support, and regular internal evaluations. RSIC has extensive facilities for students, including a library and computer rooms, as well as access to a swimming pool, gym and audiovisual room, shared with École Mondiale.

7 Students at RSIC are made aware of their relationship with the External System through publicity materials, the web, the receipt of LSE study guides, including a programme handbook, and through the teaching and academic guidance given by the LSE Director of External Study during visits to RSIC (see paragraph 11). In addition, all students are provided with passwords and access to the External System website, access to the External System's virtual learning environment (VLE) and access to the University of London Library (via ATHENS). It is envisaged that this will also allow the production of podcasts of lectures and the provision of self-assessment exercises for students, but the External System also recognises the need to give further consideration to the nature of the integration of such material with the teaching at institutions such as RSIC.

8 With respect to student progression, eight students enrolled on the Diploma in Economics in 2006-07 of whom six were entered for all the examinations in 2007; four students achieved the award and five students were deemed eligible by the External System to progress to a degree programme. In 2007-08, another eight students enrolled on the Diploma in Economics, together with five on the Diploma in Social Sciences; of these, 12 students were entered for all the examinations and seven were deemed eligible to progress to a degree programme. In the summer of 2008, a total of 21 students at RSIC completed a University of London degree in Economics and Finance pursued through the External route, including one with First class honours. Graduates may apply for admission to higher degrees at the LSE and institutions within the University of London (or elsewhere). Within India, RSIC graduates of the University of London are eligible to apply for a master's degree at the University of Delhi. RSIC is seeking to extend such progression arrangements to other universities in India.

9 The procedure for institutions seeking Permission to Teach is to apply to the appropriate lead college (the LSE in the case of RSIC), which has the responsibility to inspect the applicant institution against its criteria and to monitor the relationship in keeping with its remit for programme management. The LSE's criteria in respect of institutions seeking Permission to Teach embrace the following: financial probity, status and stability of the institution; management of the programme; student selection, teaching and learning support; premises; the library; and systems of evaluation. Permission to Teach is granted for a fixed period after which it has to be renewed and this normally involves re-inspection. A formal agreement between the lead college and the institution defines the relationship for a specific programme of study only. All teaching and formative assessment are conducted by the teaching institution, and the lead college retains responsibility for the programme of study and, in particular, for all facets of summative assessment. It provides the teaching institution with study materials and guidance on the operation of aspects of the provision from admission to examination, including all aspects of student support.

10 RSIC and the External System signed a Memorandum of Understanding in February 2004. RSIC began by supporting an Access course (comprising two modules) and, on the basis of its success with this, together with an assessment of its teaching standards and its ability to take responsibility for admissions and formative assessment, was awarded Permission to Teach for the Diploma in Economics in 2005 by the LSE, as lead college. More recently, following a wider review of the Diploma in Economics by the LSE, RSIC has also gained Permission to Teach for the Diploma in Social Sciences, which uses broadly the same modules as the Diploma in Economics (with the exception of mathematics and economics). For RSIC, Permission to Teach from the External System is a 'cherished brand'.

11 The LSE, as lead college, takes responsibility for the academic 'supply chain', prescribing the syllabus and developing the learning materials. The LSE Director of External Study makes regular visits (typically three times a year) to RSIC for the purposes of monitoring, development and teaching. This liaison is considered by both sides of the partnership as important in ensuring effective engagement with the learning materials by RSIC staff. Examinations remain under the control of the University of London, but are set and marked by academic staff appointed by the LSE. In terms of monitoring the link, RSIC is expected to produce a short annual self-assessment document. During visits to RSIC the LSE Director covers audit functions; aspects of quality enhancement, including staff development; and meets staff and students. Regular reports are written on the basis of these visits, to which RSIC responds formally.

12 Following a panel visit to RSIC in March 2006, Permission to Teach for the Diploma in Economics was extended in the following November by a further three years. The letter confirming the extension noted three areas that required attention: the monitoring of students' attendance at lectures and classes throughout the year, leading to early formal notice to students who fall below the minimum level acceptable, combined with active encouragement to improve attendance; a requirement to reintroduce a study skills programme, to be reinforced during classes; and the introduction of a short-term loan system in the library.

13 With the exception of the Permission to Teach model (and two other models not dealt with in this case study), the External System has not, until recently, regarded itself as having a formal relationship with the institutions offering teaching support, and took no responsibility for the quality of that support. The External System has been holding discussions since 2005 regarding the formal position that it takes on these institutions and, following an internal review, it is currently introducing a graduated framework for such relationships. This framework comprises the categories of Registered Centre, applied to institutions recognised by the University of London as providing suitable teaching and administrative support for students in their preparations for examinations, and Affiliate Centre, applied to institutions, that based on a proven track record in a successful partnership, can be recognised as being committed to providing high standards of teaching support and administration. It is envisaged that the new framework will encompass the Permission to Teach model.

14 The External System is adopting a phased approach to implementing the framework and is working with institutions on the basis of self-assessment documents, to build on structures with which they are already familiar. As part of this process, the External System is also offering a framework for staff development, a facet already available within the Permission to Teach model. For example, while staff development at RSIC is largely a matter for the institution itself, the LSE Director of External Study engages with RSIC in a programme that seeks to empower staff and supplements the lecturer's handbook already provided. This programme includes the development of team teaching, an emphasis on a 'student-centred' approach to learning and the use by staff of relevant examples deriving from their own work, rather than from the UK. In developing the use of the External System VLE by staff, the programme seeks to promote ways in which students can benefit directly from the VLE rather than relying on staff-generated printouts. Staff take part in the peer review of teaching which is seen as beneficial to those involved. Although staff exchange visits are encouraged, the External System has encountered practical difficulties in terms of staff availability and turnover.

15 The link between the External System and RSIC has grown from the latter's wish to extend access to higher education to a group of students in India who would not otherwise have been able to gain admission to university. Through the Permission to Teach model the External System has provided RSIC with a clearly defined progression route that facilitates its students to pursue full External degrees which may lead to higher degrees in the UK or elsewhere. Features of the model as exhibited through the link have informed the development of the new framework being

implemented by the External System to formalise its relations with third-party institutions. RSIC wishes to use the experience it has gained from exercising its Permission to Teach as a basis for building on its relationship with the LSE within the new structures being developed by the External System.

**The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**

Southgate House  
Southgate Street  
Gloucester  
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000  
Fax 01452 557070  
Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

RG 432 05/09