

UK collaboration in India: institutional case studies

University of Warwick

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Shifting the balance of responsibilities

1 This case study concerns the partnership between the University of Warwick (the University) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). CII (the Indian equivalent of the Confederation of British Industry) is a non-government, not-for-profit, industry led and industry managed organisation that operates in partnership with the business and industrial sectors across India. The link is centred on the MSc Engineering Business Management (and associated awards). This course is offered in India through a 'distance delivery' arrangement under which the teaching staff are employed by the University. In seeking to make more use of locally based staff, the University is shifting some aspects of operational input to India, and how this is being managed is the theme for the case study.

2 At the University, operational responsibility for the link lies with the Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG) within the School of Engineering. WMG was instrumental in setting up the partnership with CII and runs several other similar links overseas. The course in India is hosted by the Naoroji Godrej Centre of Excellence in Mumbai, which was founded by CII in 1995 as one of four such centres. Its particular focus is the development of managers and executives in the engineering sector and it routinely provides short courses and other events for member companies of CII. The partnership has been fruitful in combining the University's academic credentials with CII's links with industry which have proved invaluable in identifying and attracting both students and course contributors. Day-to-day running of the programme is the responsibility of a programme coordinator at the University and the Executive Director of the CII Naoroji Godrej Centre of Excellence, with support from a team of CII staff.

3 The MSc is delivered in India as a part-time three-year course, with half the credits for the qualification based on taught modules and half on an industrially oriented project. As of October 2008, the University is working with CII to gain approval for the course from the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), and will continue to provide information to AICTE as necessary.

4 The course started in October 1995 and the initial student intake of 19 was considered healthy by WMG, with the students being drawn from a wide variety of employers. The course's modular structure and the absence of a fixed start date meant that further students were able to enrol during the year. Thereafter, student enrolments decreased, and by 2004-05 the programme remained viable only because CII was able to promote individual modules to companies as continuous professional development for managers and executives. In 2005-06, there was a concerted effort to improve recruitment to the MSc. Important in this drive was the development of a version of the course for a company in Pune, now in its third and possibly final cohort. As a consequence, far higher numbers of students were enrolled in 2005-06 (78) and 2006-07 (50), although from 2007-08 the number of new enrolments has fallen somewhat.

5 Students study nine taught modules (chosen from a total of approximately 25) that are each delivered over a continuous period of five days. CII selects annually the modules to be offered in the coming year. The selection is made from a range of modules made available by WMG and which have been previously approved through the University's standard procedures. In making its choice of modules, CII takes into account the views of its major industrial partners, the preferences of the students, and the course regulations. WMG appoints a tutor for each module who is responsible for organising all aspects of delivery and assessment, with CII giving logistical support. CII also provides teaching facilities that match the requirements specified by the University and identifies local practitioners who contribute to the course. Students are permitted online access to the University's library resources although, in practice, technical difficulties have so far inhibited use of this resource; there is also a limited book collection located at the industrial link in Pune.

6 Students are required to identify a suitable topic for their project and dissertation by the end of their first year of registration, gather all the necessary information to complete the project by the end of the second year, and submit their dissertation before the end of their registration period. WMG provides an outline specification to assist students in preparing project proposals. Each student has an industrial supervisor (usually a senior manager from the company in which the student is employed), whose suitability is first checked by the CII Executive Director against criteria set by WMG. There is also an academic supervisor whose focus is the dissertation. Both the project proposal and supervision arrangements are approved by WMG on the recommendation of the CII Executive Director (see paragraph 10).

7 Once the supervisory team is in place, the academic supervisor meets with the student and the industrial supervisor in order to clarify the project objectives and to brief the industrial supervisor, also ensuring that they both have a copy of the relevant WMG guidelines. Academic supervisors do not necessarily make a major contribution to guiding the subject content of a project, this being the remit of the industrial supervisor who understands the circumstances surrounding the project and can judge the relevance of methods used and conclusions drawn in relation to normal company practices and business objectives.

8 Projects are assessed jointly by the academic and industrial supervisors, with each contributing 50 per cent of the marks that make up the final assessment. WMG expects the academic supervisor to explain the marking scheme to students and to provide advice at an appropriate academic level, particularly towards the end of the project. The involvement of the industrial supervisor in assessment has been the subject of broader discussion at the University, and a recent policy amendment for all provision (both UK and overseas) has served to affirm the importance of this input, as well as the present assessment arrangements for this particular course. WMG has a team of MSc moderators, with one member of this team acting as moderator for all overseas MSc courses, in addition to having overall responsibility for the moderation of UK-based courses.

9 The way the link operates is rather different from that envisaged in the memorandum of understanding which dates from 1998. The intention at that time was that WMG would recruit academic staff from India as module tutors; these would receive training at the University but be permanently employed in India. Their responsibilities were to include 'localisation of module material, liaison with industry, identification of module contributors and case studies from industry, first-marking of assignments, and project supervision'. In practice, instead of drawing on locally-based staff, WMG maintains a pool of teaching fellows and assistant/associate professors who deliver the same modules both in India and in the UK, as well as at other overseas locations; often they are able to deliver several different modules and this affords greater flexibility.

10 In relation to the project and dissertation, however, there has been a shift of operational input and responsibility towards India. At first, WMG approved individual dissertation topics and appointed an academic supervisor for each student from among its own staff; this meant that, for the most part, the academic supervisor was based in the UK. This arrangement was manageable when student numbers were relatively low, but became less so after 2005-06 when the cohort size increased significantly. Therefore, WMG sought to develop a local pool of academic supervisors in cooperation with CII and, from February 2008, the appointment of academic supervisors by WMG started to be based on recommendations made by the CII Executive Director in accordance with relevant University guidelines. To facilitate this shift in responsibility, WMG has provided suitable training and support materials, and will continue to offer mentoring and coaching.

11 The University's guidelines stipulate that academic supervisors should normally be employed in an academic or academic related post in a higher education institution. Exceptionally, nominees may be approved if they are graduates who are employed in education related roles within companies; even so, it is still considered desirable that they have held previous academic appointments and hold a higher degree. By July 2008, under the new process, 26 academic supervisors had been approved, appointed and matched with students. Most of these supervisors have themselves completed an MSc or supervised previously at this level.

12 WMG has provided an induction and briefing session for the newly appointed cohort of academic supervisors at CII before they commence their duties. This briefing is seen as the beginning of a process, rather than as a one-off event, since WMG recognises that development opportunities for such staff will need to be offered on a continuing basis. It is envisaged that the work of academic supervisors at CII will be monitored in three ways: the Executive Director will keep a record; WMG staff with supervisory experience who teach modules at CII will monitor the activities of supervisors; and WMG staff will guide the process of assessment, initially by being present at oral examinations to check these are carried out properly, and then through normal moderation arrangements.

13 The appointment of academic supervisors in India has also triggered a change in the arrangements for moderation of the project and dissertation. Up to now this has been undertaken wholly in the UK but, from 2009, moderation will be conducted in India by WMG staff. In-country moderation is the norm for WMG's overseas collaborations, having the advantage that it provides for face-to-face discussions with academic supervisors, if necessary. The University believes that such moderation ensures consistency of standards and gives due recognition to the importance of the project and dissertation within the MSc programme, where it carries half the credit towards the degree.

14 The collaboration between WMG and CII was motivated by the identification of mutual interests in bringing together the benefits of industrial links in India on the one hand and academic provision at the University on the other. However, in establishing a link with a non-academic partner, the University has faced particular challenges. It has adopted a distance delivery model involving the use of staff based in the University to deliver modules in India, backed up by logistical and administrative support provided locally. Rather than following its original intention to appoint academic staff in India, it has followed a cautious route to encourage and assist its partner to become more involved in academic matters, particularly through arrangements for the supervision of dissertations. In following this path, the University has provided necessary support to its partner in India and is now in the process of embedding the revised division of responsibilities as a basis for further development.

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