



## **UK collaboration in Singapore: institutional case study**

**University of Birmingham and SIM University, Singapore;  
University of Wales, Newport; and the  
Asian Educational Consortium College, Singapore**

**Mandarin Chinese in UK higher education programmes  
in Singapore**

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# Mandarin Chinese in UK higher education programmes in Singapore

## Introduction

1 This case study looks at the inclusion of Mandarin Chinese language in programmes offered by UK higher education institutions through partnerships in Singapore. It has been developed in response to a request from Singapore's Ministry of Education, Higher Education Division.

2 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) publishes guidelines<sup>1</sup> to help UK institutions develop effective systems for maintaining the academic standards of their awards and assuring the quality of students' learning opportunities. Within this guidance are references to special considerations where students are taught and assessed in languages other than those in which UK institutions ordinarily work. Guidelines on examining and assessing in a language other than the language of tuition<sup>2</sup> have also been published by QAA to meet the particular circumstances of higher education institutions in Wales, although this guidance is also readily transferrable to other languages and contexts. These sources of guidance are used in QAA's peer review processes to measure and report on the effectiveness of UK institutions' arrangements in practice.

3 QAA's survey of UK provision offered in Singapore (see the Overview report), found only four programmes that included Mandarin - either being taught and assessed entirely in Mandarin or as an additional language component. Those four programmes are included in this case study within the following two UK-Singapore links:

- the University of Birmingham and SIM University, Singapore
- the University of Wales, Newport, and the Asian Educational Consortium College, Singapore.

## Case study 1: University of Birmingham and SIM University

4 The Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) was formed in 1964 as a not-for-profit membership institution with the mission to develop the human resource capital of Singapore. The Singapore Ministry of Education granted SIM approval to become SIM University in 2005, and SIM University gained EduTrust certification in 2010. SIM University has a student body of 30,500 and focuses on the upgrading and learning needs of working professionals and adult learners.

5 SIM University is one of a number of organisations worldwide with which the University of Birmingham (the University) collaborates. The Birmingham Business School (BBS) has delivered a part-time Executive MBA in Singapore and Hong Kong for 17 years.

6 In 2009 a suite of BSc (Honours) programmes were established to be delivered solely in English in Singapore, and included Business Management with Language (Mandarin Chinese only) and the International Business with Language (Mandarin Chinese only). These two programmes target the non-Chinese-race Singaporean and overseas students to study in Singapore, providing opportunities for students to learn a foreign

<sup>1</sup> The Academic Infrastructure; see

[www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/Pages/AcademicInfrastructure.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/Pages/AcademicInfrastructure.aspx).

<sup>2</sup> Guidelines for higher education institutions in Wales for effective practice in examining and assessing in a language other than the language of tuition; see

[www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/guidelines-assessing-Welsh.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/guidelines-assessing-Welsh.aspx).

language for business purposes. Students have the opportunity to study Mandarin Chinese and Chinese culture in a 40 and a 20-credit module. In addition, students taking International Business undertake an international placement attracting 120 credits, which can be taken in China or Taiwan, and is assessed by bilingual assignments in two 60-credit modules.

The provision is taught by 'flying faculty' from the University, with the Mandarin components delivered by SIM University staff. Assessment of the language component is continuous, following a similar model to that used at the University, and an existing UK external examiner covers the provision in Singapore.

7 The syllabus was developed by the BBS and the Centre for Modern Languages at the University. The latter is responsible for organising and monitoring the delivery, external examining and moderation of the Mandarin-language elements. The rationale is to teach Mandarin language for business, rather than cultural or literature studies.

8 Programme approval and quality assurance arrangements have followed standard practice at the University. While SIM University is responsible for administering the admissions procedures in Singapore, the University is responsible for making the final decisions on all student admissions.

9 The programmes of study are not accredited by any professional, statutory or regulatory body in the UK, but have been approved by the Ministry of Education in Singapore.

10 The suite of BSc programmes taught entirely in English have been popular in their first two years of operation in Singapore, with numbers being capped at 100, depending on resources. However, the 'with language' options, contrary to expectations, have not recruited, and the University plans to withdraw them. The Briefing Paper prepared by the University noted that 'The students...seem to be prepared to pay additional fees for exposure outside the region, but not within it'.

11 A review of the existing legal agreement, which runs until the end of December 2011, is currently in progress. It is hoped by both parties that the next agreement will be signed for five years.

## **Case study 2: University of Wales, Newport, and the Asian Educational Consortium College, Singapore**

12 The Asian Educational Consortium College (AEC; the College) was founded in the 1980s as a Singapore/Malaysia-based private provider of education in business and finance, IT, hospitality and early years education. The College is registered with the Council for Private Education in Singapore and was awarded EduTrust status in 2010. The University of Wales, Newport, (the University) has two partnerships in Singapore and a small number of outreach and articulation arrangements in other countries, in addition to provision offered in China, Hong Kong, Greece and Malaysia.

13 In 2006 the University was subject to an audit of one of its partner links as part of QAA's overseas audit of UK links in the People's Republic of China<sup>3</sup>. That provision also included elements of teaching and assessment in Mandarin. The report identified good practice and made a small number of recommendations for improvement. Most relevant to the current case study was the recommendation to 'Codify and document existing practice with particular reference to the approaches to delivery and assessment in Chinese'.

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<sup>3</sup> University of Wales, Newport, and the Hainan Overseas Education Centre; see [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/overseas/Pages/UK-HE-China.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/overseas/Pages/UK-HE-China.aspx).

An Institutional review of the University conducted by QAA in 2010 found that these recommendations had been responded to in full.

14 The partnership with AEC is based on the franchise of two full-time programmes, namely (1) the final year of the University's BA (Honours) Business Studies, as a top-up to the AEC Advanced Diploma in Business Studies (or equivalent), since 2008; and (2) the MBA, since 2010. Both are delivered entirely by AEC in Singapore, while full responsibility for quality and standards rests with the University.

15 AEC recruits students from mainland China onto its own bilingual Diploma and Advanced Diploma programmes and wished to provide progression routes for these students. Equally, the University has experience in offering the MBA programme overseas, including through the medium of Mandarin. Consequently, the programmes were originally validated in 2008 to be delivered in either English or Mandarin, with successful recruitment to the undergraduate programme through the language of Mandarin.

16 Programme delivery in Mandarin, however, has now been withdrawn for the 2011 and subsequent recruitments in response to the Enhanced Registration Framework introduced in the Singapore *Private Education Act 2009*. Under this Singapore law, private institutions are prohibited from offering the provision of a foreign University unless similar provision is offered in the same language by the University at its home campus. As a consequence, future students on the University programmes will be taught and assessed by AEC wholly in English.

17 The approval of the partnership with AEC followed the standard procedures operational at the University at that time and was based on a proposal to the Overseas Collaborative Group by the Newport Business School, followed by a validation event in Singapore. A formal Memorandum of Agreement was signed by both partners in September 2008, setting out the arrangements for the programmes.

18 Management of the programmes rests with the programme leaders at the University, reporting to the Head of the Department of Business and Computing. They are assisted by a Link Coordinator, who ensures that the programmes operate in accordance with the Memorandum. The Link Coordinator is required to visit AEC at least twice each year and provides guidance and support on academic issues, quality and standards. The Link Coordinator provides reports to the Newport Business School using a standard University template, and the report is also considered by the University's Collaborative Partnership Group to ensure institutional-level scrutiny of progress and issues arising.

19 All assessment briefs are submitted to the University for approval, and University staff sample and moderate marking. All examination boards are managed by the University. In relation to the management of bilingual delivery, the University has established protocols for the translation of draft assignments, the sample size of assessed work for translation and the appointment of external examiners able to work in the language of assessment. A UK and USA-educated Mandarin speaker based in Hong Kong has been appointed as an external examiner for the BA programme. Two members of the Newport Business School are fluent speakers of Mandarin and have been able to provide support, especially in relation to translation activities. In addition, a Mandarin version of the student handbook is available.

20 Annual monitoring and review of the two programmes follows standard University procedures. AEC staff have prepared an Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report in 2008-09 and 2009-10. A periodic partnership review is planned for 2011-12.

21 The University and the University of Wales have sole responsibility for the award of certificates and transcripts for the programmes delivered at AEC. Transcripts are issued by

the University and certificates by the University of Wales. Details of the language of delivery and assessment are included on the student transcript.

## **Conclusions**

22 Having looked at the inclusion of Mandarin Chinese language in two UK universities' higher education programmes offered in Singapore, this case study concludes with the following points.

23 Mandarin has been included in higher education programmes to provide opportunities to learn a foreign language for business purposes, and progression routes to bachelor's and master's degrees for those fluent in Mandarin.

24 The programmes have obtained sufficient numbers of bilingual staff and internal and external examiners.

25 Institutions have put in place safeguards to mitigate the risks to academic standards inherent in the teaching and assessment in Mandarin.

26 Where the principal language of instruction and assessment is Mandarin, the UK institution's transcript records this fact and its certificate refers to the existence of the transcript.

27 Although the programmes have only been introduced quite recently, a lack of interest in the opportunity and/or changes in Singaporean legislation led to the decision to withdraw the Mandarin language option.

28 Under recently introduced legislation, private education institutions in Singapore are now prohibited from offering provision in Mandarin unless the UK institution also offers similar provision in the same language at its home campus.

29 The provision taught and assessed in English through the two partnerships in Singapore featured in this case study is continuing.

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