

UK collaboration in India: institutional case studies

University of Northumbria at Newcastle

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A link in abeyance

1 This case study concerns the link between the University of Northumbria at Newcastle (the University) and the Welingkar Institute of Management Development and Research, Mumbai (Welingkar); it centres on the delivery at Welingkar of three of the University's bachelor's degree programmes in business. These programmes commenced in 2005 and two cohorts of students have been recruited. However, recruitment has since been suspended due to a shift in policy relating to the requirement for government approval, and the case study focuses on this aspect.

2 The link emanated from enquiries by the University's Business School (known as the Newcastle Business School (NBS)) to the British Council asking it to suggest high quality Indian partners interested in collaborating with institutions in the United Kingdom (UK). Welingkar is ranked as one of the top 30 business schools in India and delivers postgraduate management programmes to over 600 full-time students on a purpose-built campus in Mumbai and a satellite campus in Bangalore which mainly supports an e-business programme. Welingkar is registered as a charitable, non-profit-making, autonomous and self-financing organisation and was established in 1977 as part of Shikshana Prasaraka Mandali, a charitable trust founded in 1888.

3 The collaboration began with an articulation agreement in December 2004, relating to progression from Welingkar's Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration to appropriate master's programmes in NBS. At that time, Welingkar's main focus was on postgraduate delivery, but it was interested in expanding into the undergraduate market as there was limited provision in business education at that level in India. It wanted to be able to offer an international programme with specialist options for undergraduate students who wished to study in Mumbai rather than incur the expense of studying abroad. For its part, NBS was looking for a broad and deep partnership, with the possibility later of a collaboration at master's level and the opportunity for students from Welingkar to study at postgraduate level at NBS. In July 2005, Welingkar, through its parent body Shikshana Prasaraka Mandali, entered into a legal agreement with the University for the delivery in Mumbai of three of the University's undergraduate business programmes.

4 The link with Welingkar is the University's only collaborative arrangement in India involving programme delivery, but is typical of the University's overseas partnerships. Although in 2005 the current risk assessment procedure was not in place, the link was considered to be consistent with the NBS academic development plan and the proposal was progressed through the University's procedures for approving new partnerships. A partnership review was undertaken in February 2005 to investigate Welingkar's academic, financial and legal status. The report of the review confirmed Welingkar's suitability as a partner for the University to deliver its programmes under a collaborative arrangement. It was recognised that entering the undergraduate market would require a step change in the nature and level of teaching, and the format of quality assurance processes that the University would require Welingkar to operate. Hence, it was recommended that a report on the impact of the programmes, in terms of Welingkar's ability to maintain its current levels of support and inclusive approach and extend them into the undergraduate context, should be considered by the University after two years of operation.

5 A programme approval event took place in March 2005 which recommended the approval for three years from September 2005 of the following programmes to be delivered at Welingkar: BA (Hons) Business with Finance, BA (Hons) Business with Human Resource Management, and BA (Hons) Business with Marketing. Although the programmes were treated as separate when they were approved, they have common elements and are organised on a major/minor model with three different pathways. Students have the option of completing the whole programme (comprising levels 4, 5 and 6) in India, or transferring to the University after either level 4 or 5 in order to complete the remainder of the programme in the UK. All three programmes were approved on the basis of two student intakes a year (September and January). Maximum annual intakes for each programme were set at 60 students during the first year of

operation, 90 students during the second year, and 120 students during the third year, thereby building up to a steady-state target of 1,080 students by January 2010. A condition of approval was the submission of a full resource project plan, identifying the physical and learning resources and human resource strategies to cope with this projected growth in student numbers.

6 The first intake of students in September 2005 fell short of expectations: 21 students were admitted - Marketing (16), Finance (four), and Human Resource Management (one). The planned intake of students in January 2006 did not take place, but recruitment more than doubled in September 2006 when 49 students were admitted: Finance (28), Marketing (16) and Human Resource Management (five). Due to the small numbers on the Business with Human Resource Management programme any further recruitment to that programme was felt to be unlikely, and the students already recruited to the programme have opted to change pathways to Finance or Marketing. In the 2007 annual report on the partnership, it was noted that overall student numbers were likely to increase.

7 In terms of progression, all the students in the first cohort (21) progressed to level 5 at the end of their first year and were joined by a further five students admitted directly to that level. In the following year, 24 out of the total (26) progressed to level 6 (19 at Welingkar and five at the University). For the second cohort, again all students (49) progressed from level 4 to level 5 in September 2007, and 46 of the cohort progressed to level 6 in September 2008 (32 at Welingkar and 14 at the University). The 2006 annual report, charting progress against the resource plan for the operation of the collaboration, noted that it was anticipated that 'a good 80 per cent' of the students enrolled on the programme would wish to take up the option of completing their studies in the UK; in the event, only five students transferred to NBS in September 2007 (graduating in July 2008), and a further 14 students transferred to NBS in September 2008. This represents an average over the two years of 27 per cent of those eligible to complete their studies at the University.

8 However, in September 2007, although there were 1,000 qualified applicants for the programmes, no students were admitted at this point as a result of the decision by the partners to suspend recruitment, pending recognition of the programmes by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). The University's quality assurance arrangements require that any necessary in-country approval for its overseas collaborative provision should be obtained (normally as part of the approval process). The conclusion in 2005 was that such approval was not required; the report of the partnership review noted that Welingkar had been the first management institute to gain accreditation for its programmes by the Indian National Board of Accreditation (NBA) and that it also had AICTE accreditation. The report of the approval event noted that Welingkar was a self-financing institution and received no funding from the Indian Government; there was therefore no need to seek government approval for starting the new programmes. NBA, however, required information on the approval process in order to safeguard the interests of students and Welingkar undertook to provide NBA with the necessary documentation.

9 After the partnership got under way, Welingkar became aware of changes in policy relating to the requirement for government approval. In November 2005, a senior representative from Welingkar delivered relevant documentation in person to the AICTE offices, but was told that as the partnership related to undergraduate programmes, these would need recognition from the Association of Indian Universities (AIU). On making enquiries with AIU, Welingkar was informed that as the programmes were in collaboration with a foreign university, approval must be obtained from AICTE. Documentation on the programmes was resubmitted to AICTE in February 2006, but to date there has been no response. In the absence of AICTE approval, Welingkar agreed to suspend recruitment to the programmes and there have been no intakes since September 2006. Advertising and promotion of the programmes in India have also been suspended.

10 Although initial recruitment did not reach the anticipated levels, there were indications that it was beginning to improve significantly at the point recruitment was suspended. Welingkar has made a substantial investment in staff and other resources in order to ensure equivalence between the student experience in Newcastle and Mumbai. The shift from postgraduate to undergraduate teaching has been successfully accomplished and an analysis of 2005-06 results has shown that the Welingkar students have performed as well as their NBS equivalents and, in some cases, significantly better. There have been no problems associated with students' language skills as Welingkar's admission processes ensure that students are well qualified in the English language.

11 Welingkar is regarded by the University as a high quality partner, both in terms of its partnership performance and its external reputation. Although at the time recruitment was halted it would have been possible for the University either to suspend the operation of the programmes or to extend their validation period beyond the original three years, it was decided to re-approve the programmes for delivery at Welingkar, as normal, in 2008, to demonstrate good faith in the partnership. The process incorporated the current risk assessment procedure, involving an initial risk assessment by a school, followed by a second risk assessment by a University committee. Re-approval was a valuable exercise as it enabled the approval panel to meet students and to receive feedback on the programmes. Both partners are cautiously optimistic that it will be possible to resume the collaboration in the near future.

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