

UK collaboration in Malaysia: institutional case studies

University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus

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Developing an overseas campus: managing the demands of multiple agents of quality assurance, and relationships with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and local stakeholders

1 This case study is about the operation of the University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus (UNMC), a fully integrated campus of the University of Nottingham (the University). It may provide signposts for other institutions considering overseas campuses and/or providing programmes overseas that are subject to professional accreditation locally and in the UK.

2 The University began as an adult school in 1798, becoming University College, Nottingham, in 1881. In 1948, the University College was awarded a Royal Charter and became the University of Nottingham. Most of the University's provision is located on University Park, three miles west of Nottingham city centre. The University has another campus in Nottingham, a medical school based at campuses in Nottingham and Derby, and a campus at Sutton Bonington, 10 miles south of University Park. The University also operates a campus in China, which opened in 2004.

3 According to the *University Plan 2007-2010*, the University aspires to be among the world's greatest universities and distinguished for its international reach, commitment to learning, and world-class research. As a UK higher education institution the University is subject to periodic Institutional audit by the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). QAA is an independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges and through contracts with higher education funding bodies. A team from QAA visited UNMC in March 2010 to talk to staff and students about the operation of the branch campus.

4 The project to develop a campus in Malaysia was initiated in 1998 by an invitation to the University from the then Education Minister for Malaysia to open a branch campus of the University in Malaysia. The Malaysian *Private Higher Education Institutions Act 1996* sets out the provisions that allowed the University to establish the branch campus. It was a requirement of Malaysian law that a joint venture company be set up in Malaysia to operate a branch campus. The joint venture company had to be approved by the Malaysian Foreign Investment Committee (FIC). The FIC guidelines require that Bumiputera (indigenous Malay) participation be maintained to at least 30 per cent, with the remaining 70 per cent held by foreign interests or together with local interests. In addition, the 1996 Act requires application for approval and licence by the Minister for Higher Education. As with all private universities in Malaysia, the University of Nottingham in Malaysia Sdn Bhd is a private company. The University of Nottingham owns a 29 per cent stake in the company, but the joint venture agreement gives the University total control over all academic matters.

5 The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) now has responsibility for the local accreditation of higher education programmes and qualifications, and for supervising and regulating quality and standards in education providers. When the University launched the campus it had to seek approval to operate from the Ministry of Higher Education. Individual programmes were subject to approval by the National Accreditation Board (LAN is its Malaysian acronym). The licence from the Ministry of Higher Education permits the University to operate any programme that is approved in the UK on UNMC. In addition, UNMC is permitted to develop local provision provided that they have been approved by the University in the UK: for example there are programmes in mechatronic engineering. Thus, although the University was invited to establish the branch campus, the invitation did not obviate the need to meet local requirements for recognition of the local campus and awards. The latter is critical for graduates who wished to seek employment in the public sector in Malaysia, but it was important for all graduates who were Malaysian nationals.

6 The University's original Malaysian campus was in premises in central Kuala Lumpur. The first student intake was in September 2000: the first postgraduate students graduated on the campus in January 2002 and the first undergraduate students in January 2004. In August 2005, most of the University's Malaysian provision moved to an out-of-town campus, with the first students starting there in September 2005. The campus was purpose built on a 125-acre site and was the first such campus of a British university outside the UK. The University describes the campus as a 'self-contained and self-sufficient neighbourhood community in a garden environment. It combines a high quality living environment with state of the art learning and teaching facilities'. The University retains a city centre teaching facility at which it delivers some postgraduate programmes, particularly in business and management and education.

7 With Ministry of Higher Education support, the University applied to the MQA in 2009 for self-accreditation status, a facility available to mature higher education institutions with well-established quality assurance mechanisms. The application for self-accreditation entails an institutional audit by MQA, which took place before the QAA team visit. Subsequent to the QAA visit the University received confirmation that it had been granted self-accreditation status, which means that all of the qualifications offered at UNMC are registered in the Malaysian Qualifications Register subject to providing evidence of an internal accreditation process. Prior to self-accreditation the operation of each individual programme was subject to individual accreditation by the MQA.

8 There are four faculties at UNMC. Engineering offers 14 programmes and has departments of chemical and environmental engineering; civil engineering; mechanical, materials and manufacturing engineering; electrical and electronic engineering; and applied mathematics. Science offers 12 programmes and has schools of pharmacy; bioscience; computer science; and psychology. Arts and Education offers 16 programmes and has schools of education, English language education; and modern languages and cultures. Social science offers 18 programmes and comprises the Business School; the Institute of Work, Health and Organisation; and law. Most of the students are in the engineering faculty and the Business School, though there are also growing numbers of students in the science faculty. The University plans to expand its portfolio over the next few years, bringing in new subject areas including economics, international communications studies and international relations with languages.

9 The provision at UNMC consists of foundation courses and programmes at undergraduate, master's and doctoral level. Student numbers have expanded rapidly from 650 in September 2003 to 3,520 in September 2009, with particularly significant growth following the move to the new campus (1,400 students in 2005 to 3,520 students in 2009). The University is anticipating continuing growth in student numbers, initially international students made up 25 per cent of the student body with the proportion rising steadily and approaching 40 per cent at the time of writing. About half of first-year undergraduate students have studied on the foundation programmes at UNMC.

10 In the academic year 2008-09 there were 211 academic staff, 117 local staff and 94 foreign staff at UNMC. In more detail, there were 152 full-time staff, 28 part-time staff, and 31 'flying faculty' from the University's UK campus. There were also 144 administrative and support staff posts, and 66 research assistants.

11 There is a UNMC Management Group with membership drawn from senior academic and management staff based at UNMC. The Group has overarching responsibility for the running of the Malaysia Campus, including strategic planning and operational policy development. The Group is linked to the University in the UK through its reporting lines to University committees; it reports to the University's Management Board (which is a committee of University Council) and also to the University Senate. The Chair of the Management Group is the Provost and Chief Executive Officer of the Malaysia Campus and is a member of the University's Senate.

Faculties, schools and committees at UNMC report directly to the relevant committees at the University. There is representation from UNMC on all key committees at the University in Nottingham: Research and Knowledge Transfer Board; Postgraduate Strategy Committee; Teaching and Learning Board; Information Services Strategy Board; Transnational Education Committee; and Operations Group. Meetings of University committees with representation from the overseas campuses are scheduled to take into account time differences and overseas staff participate through video conference links. The Management Group for UNMC delegates authority to a series of sub-committees and groups. The sub-committee structure is an Operations Group, Learning and Teaching Committee, Postgraduate Committee, Student Services Committee, Safety Committee, Information Services Committee and IT Users Group - all of which include student representation where relevant - and a Marketing Committee and Research Strategy Group.

12 All quality assurance arrangements at UNMC are governed by those of the University in the UK. A fundamental principle that the University adopted from the outset of operating overseas campuses was that the ways in which the University conducted quality assurance and safeguarded academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities for students would be the same in all locations. The *University of Nottingham Quality Manual* (the *Quality Manual*) is the central source of information on policies and procedures for staff at all campuses of the University. Any procedures particular to local requirements at an international campus are incorporated into the *Quality Manual*. The procedures set out in the *Quality Manual* are applied with equal and appropriate rigour to all campuses of the University, in the UK and overseas.

13 The *Quality Manual* was developed by the University in the UK, and draws strongly on the UK Academic Infrastructure. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points, which give all institutions a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the quality and standards of their higher education courses. The Academic Infrastructure has four inter-related elements: the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ); programme specifications; subject benchmark statements; and the QAA *Code of practice for the assurance of academic standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*). The *Code of practice* is concerned with the management of quality and the other three elements give advice to institutions about setting standards.

14 There is also a Malaysian Qualifications Framework (the MQF) designed to be a unified system of qualifications offered by all education and training institutions, public and private sector, and to secure the standards of qualifications and ensure accuracy and consistency of qualifications. Implementation of the MQF is overseen by the MQA. The MQA has also developed a code of practice, which provides guidance on a range of areas including vision, mission and learning outcomes; curriculum design and delivery; student selection and support services; assessment of students; academic staff; educational resources; programme monitoring and review; leadership, governance and administration; and continual quality approval. In preparing the extensive self-evaluation document to support its application for self-accreditation status, the University had to respond to all areas of the MQA code of practice.

15 While development of the MQA code of practice drew on recognised international good practice, it is not identical to the UK Academic Infrastructure - so there is potential for difficulty in reconciling aspects of the external quality assurance frameworks that apply to the provision. As noted above, the University's fundamental guiding principle is that all delivery sites are part of the University and therefore the same regulatory framework must govern their operation. The University also holds that programmes should be the same across campuses and that the curricula should not be manipulated to meet local requirements. In practice, these tenets have been interpreted so that modules delivered across multiple campuses must have the same learning outcomes and cover the same core subject matter; but the content of teaching programmes does not have to be identical, rather equivalent, between campuses. This pragmatic approach allows for differing needs specific to local contexts to be accommodated.

16 Heads of school have primary responsibility for the implementation of the requirements of the *Quality Manual*, including where schools have provision on both the UK and international campuses. The organisation is structured so that staff in the same subject area on the home University campus and the international campuses are members of the same school. Staff at UNMC spoke eloquently of the demands placed on their management of the University's operations in Malaysia by observing the requirements of a range of external quality assurance regimes.

17 An example of the University's responsiveness to local imperatives while maintaining the integrity of its own requirements may be seen in its response to the importance of industrial training in Malaysia - as an integral part of the curriculum in securing recognition of awards. MEng students must undertake a period of industrial training to secure Board of Engineers Malaysia accreditation. Initially the University did not appreciate fully the significance of this requirement for the employability of students but subsequently took the action necessary to meet the Board of Engineers' requirements. The programme of study at UNMC was reviewed and adapted to incorporate the required element of industrial training. The University is considering whether there might be an advantage in taking this approach back to the UK campus and providing industrial experience opportunities there.

18 Modules delivered across multiple campuses must have the same learning outcomes and cover the same core subject matter. New course initiatives and course changes may be proposed by the international campuses, but proposals must be routed through the cognate school and university systems on the UK campus. The five-yearly School Course Review process reviews academic units at the international campuses as part of the home school in the UK. There are also separate international campus reviews, which focus on broader matters of context and environment rather than specific units of academic provision. Only programmes that have been approved in the UK are delivered at UNMC and the degrees awarded in Malaysia are undifferentiated from any other University of Nottingham degree. The degree certificate and transcripts issued to students who graduate from UNMC are identical to those provided to students graduating in the UK and do not record where the programme was delivered.

19 As a significant proportion of the course offering at UNMC has a vocational and professional development element, external recognition and exemptions against external professional qualifications are important. Understandably, Malaysian students are particularly interested in gaining professional recognition, normally through accreditation by Malaysian PSRBs, which will give them an advantage in the local employment market. International students and students who aspire to work internationally are often more interested in UK and sometimes American or Australian-based professional accreditations. It follows that the University's commitment to obtaining the recognitions that will most benefit its students presents a significant challenge in the operation of UNMC. Some programmes at UNMC are accredited by Malaysian professional bodies, some by UK professional bodies in conjunction with their accreditation of the UK campus-based provision, and some by UK professional bodies but with the accreditation independent of the UK programme.

20 In its self-evaluation to support its application to MQA for self-accreditation status, the University noted that, since the same degrees were undifferentiated between campuses of the University in terms of curriculum, there had been difficulties with respect to accreditation of programmes. A particular example was the sometimes conflicting demands in relation to the engineering provision at UNMC, with the UK Engineering Council, the Engineering Accreditation Council Malaysia (Board of Engineers Malaysia) and the MQA, all specifying different requirements. The challenges faced in meeting these requirements and the ways in which the University has responded may be illustrated through consideration of examples of PSRB accreditations at UNMC.

21 The pharmacy provision at UNMC was the first delivered outside the UK to be accredited by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB). Accreditation requires that students undertake the first two years of their programme of studies at UNMC but then transfer to the University's UK campus to complete their studies. The RPSGB accreditation means that pharmacy graduates have professional recognition in both the UK and in Malaysia. Staff at UNMC are currently developing a pharmacy programme in which students will spend all four years at UNMC to avoid the demands of transfer to the UK. The University will seek accreditation for the programme from the Malaysian Pharmacy Board (MPB); in order to achieve this, it will need to continue to comply with an MPB accreditation requirement that the Dean of the Faculty of Science be a pharmacist. Students graduating from this programme would have professional recognition in Malaysia, but should they wish to practise in the UK they would need to undertake a conversion to practise programme.

22 The Institution of Chemical Engineers (IChemE) accredits chemical engineering programmes on behalf of the Engineering Council UK, both in the UK and worldwide. In 2007, the IChemE undertook a simultaneous accreditation of provision both in the UK and at UNMC through two separate accreditation visits with a common chair. The chemical engineering programmes are also audited and accredited by the Engineering Accreditation Council Malaysia, with the most recent accreditation event in May 2009.

23 Accreditations and exemptions in the areas of accountancy and finance are even more complex. Graduates from all but a limited number of public universities in Malaysia are not eligible to become members of the Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA). However, they may use their degrees to gain partial exemption from UK accountancy professional bodies, such as the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), and complete their professional examinations. Once qualified under ACCA, they are eligible to apply for membership to the MIA. Students studying accountancy and finance-related subjects at UNMC may also be eligible, depending on modules studied, for exemptions from the examinations of the UK Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW), CPA Australia and the American Chartered Financial Analyst Institute.

24 The MBA programme at UNMC has the same accreditation from the Association of MBAs (AMBA) and the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) as the University's MBA provision in the UK. The University has also applied for external accreditation of its MBA programme from the American-based Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). The University intends to achieve the same accreditation for the UK and all international campuses. Staff at UNMC participated in the AMBA accreditation event in the UK by video conference link. EQUIS undertook a three-day event covering the University in the UK, UNMC and the campus in China. At the time of the QAA visit to UNMC, the AACSB accreditation had not yet taken place.

25 The School of Education within the Faculty of Arts and Education offers only postgraduate courses and none are linked to qualified teacher status. UNMC is investigating the possibility of introducing undergraduate provision in education. The work is at a very early stage but it is clear that a major challenge will be the reconciliation of the different requirements for recognition in the UK and in Malaysia for qualified teacher status, relating to teaching practice as an integral part of the curriculum.

26 While the subject-specific programmes of study are common between the UK and UNMC, the student experience in Malaysia differs in one respect. Students who are Malaysian nationals, and not exempted through their earlier studies, are required to undertake study for four MQA compulsory subjects - National Language, Malaysian Studies, Islamic Studies for students professing the Islamic religion, and Moral Education for non-Muslim students. UNMC puts on additional classes on a Saturday to support students who are preparing to be assessed in the subjects. UNMC administers the assessment of these subjects, reporting the results to MQA. MQA

then confirms that the relevant students have met the requirements and would be eligible to seek public sector employment should they so wish. The requirement to undertake compulsory subjects applies to all private higher education institutions operating in Malaysia, but the UNMC solution illustrates the effectiveness of the University's approach to meeting local conditions while retaining the integrity of its fundamental principle that courses are the same irrespective of the campus on which they are studied.

27 In developing its provision in Malaysia, the University of Nottingham has eschewed the more conventional route of working with a Malaysian partner higher education institution, preferring to set up its own branch campus as an integral part of the University. In doing so, it has set and observed that it is the same University irrespective of location as a central and fundamental principle. The enactment of the principle is seen in the following requirements: programmes must be the same at all campus locations; subject areas in branch campuses must be integrated into the relevant department or school at the UK campus; the quality assurance regime must be identical at all locations and is codified in a single *Quality Manual*; and, as a consequence, all programmes at UNMC must have been approved to run in the UK. This approach has clear advantages to the University: it enables it to operate in the higher education market in Malaysia with the proposition that the qualification and learning experience are the same whether a student studies at UNMC or in the UK. It also allows the University to issue identical certification to students irrespective of the campus on which they study.

28 Notwithstanding the advantages, there are challenges consequent upon the University's approach. While the operation of any provision in Malaysia by a UK university working in partnership with a local higher education institution entails meeting local regulatory requirements, these are significantly more complex and of a higher order where the University has chosen to set up its own branch campus. There is potential for difficulties in meeting the different requirements from the range of agencies involved in accreditation or approval of the University's work in Malaysia, as the University acknowledges. A further complication is the need to secure professional recognition from both UK and Malaysian PSRBs for many of the programmes. Each of the PSRBs has very specific criteria for accreditation and procedures for achieving recognition, which may involve the University in reconciling conflicting requirements. The ongoing challenge for the University is to be adaptable without compromising its fundamental principle of the equivalence of its international campuses to the UK campus, to make informed decisions on when it is desirable to achieve local or UK recognitions, and to avoid those recognitions where the requirements would compromise its guiding principle. The staff from UNMC and the UK campus who met the QAA team are clear that there are lessons to be learned from the experience of meeting the requirements of local and national quality assurance and regulation. This provides valuable experience that can then be carried back to inform practice on the main UK campus.

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