



Review of UK Transnational Education in Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China): De Montfort University and CityU SCOPE

May 2018

Executive summary

De Montfort University (the University) has been working with the Hong Kong City University (CityU) School of Continuing Professional Education (SCOPE) for over 20 years. Currently the University and SCOPE offer a top-up degree in Public Administration and Management, (BAPAM), which started in 1995 and led to the development of a three year degree in 2018, and a top-up degree in Business Administration and Management (BABAM), which started in 1997 and led to the development of a three year degree starting in 2016. The long-standing programmes have a strong reputation in the Hong Kong market, in particular those in public administration. All programmes are accredited by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ).

The programmes are franchised and managed by the University's Faculty of Business and Law. They are managed in line with the University's general academic governance and arrangements for collaborative provision. A Programme Management Board brings together staff from both institutions. Programmes are overseen by faculty committees and at university level. Processes are well defined and documented for example in the Guide to Managing Collaborative Provision and the Collaborative Link Tutor Handbook.

The academic frameworks of the University including external examining ensure that academic standards are equivalent to those in the UK while programme content and assessment is contextualised to Hong Kong. Programmes are subject to the University's monitoring and review processes, as well as those in SCOPE. Teaching staff are well qualified and bring a depth of both teaching and professional experience. Staff and students have support from both the University and SCOPE. Student feedback mechanisms are similar to those in the UK.

The University seeks to provide student mobility and has done so with UK students visiting Hong Kong but outward mobility from Hong Kong has been more limited. While the University's quality assurance processes are sound, the environment in Hong Kong is changing. As a result, annual review and other processes need to enable continued adaptation of programmes. Information provided to students is generally of high quality, though with some specific areas for improvement.

Overall, the cooperation between De Montfort University and CityU SCOPE provides an educational experience that meets UK academic standards and requirements for the student experience with well-established teaching and administrative teams linking the two institutions.

Introduction

1 De Montfort University's vision is: 'By 2020, our unsurpassed commitment to the public good and transformational scholarship will position us as the definition of a twenty-first century global university.' Its strategy has five themes, one of which is to 'strengthen our global reach and influence'. This is defined in an International Strategy. This includes the goal to 'develop innovative transnational education (TNE) partnerships in key countries to make DMU a truly global university'. A further goal is to embed overseas and UK-based international experiences at every level in all academic partnerships. Currently the University has 23 partnerships, including 10 overseas.

2 The University has been working with CityU SCOPE for over 20 years. The cooperation started in 1995 with the BA (Hons) Public Administration and Management top-up degree (BAPAM), part-time. The BA (Hons) Business Administration and Management (BABAM) was added in 1997, again a top-up degree, both part-time and full-time. In 2016, a full three year BA (Hons) Business Administration and Management was added and in 2018 a three year BA (Hons) Public Administration and Management will be offered. SCOPE is the University's only partnership in Hong Kong.

3 According to University staff, the goal of partnerships is to have a two-way relationship that covers teaching, learning, research and the student experience. Students see themselves as students of both the University and SCOPE, indicating a strong recognition of the University and its programmes in Hong Kong.

4 The SCOPE partnership is categorised as faculty-based in the University's definitions of collaborative provision. It is franchised provision in that the programmes have been designed by the University and delivered by a partner. The relevant faculty is the Faculty of Business and Law. Faculty-based collaborative provision means that the programmes form part of the faculty's academic provision but are delivered and assessed at the partner institution.

5 SCOPE was established as the Centre for Continuing Education in 1991 in CityU to serve the lifelong learning needs of the community. SCOPE offers several categories of programmes: programmes leading to international degree awards (foundation degree to doctoral level); programmes leading to Hong Kong continuing education awards; government-initiated programmes and short courses. SCOPE has around 30,000 degree programme graduates. It currently offers top-up degrees with awards from seven UK universities and full degrees from four UK universities. Master's programmes are offered with awards from three UK universities.

Developing, agreeing and managing arrangements for setting up and operating the link

6 The University has defined processes for the approval and management of international partnerships. The University considers itself responsible for the academic standards and quality of all its awards. In parallel, SCOPE operates its own processes for developing, agreeing and managing arrangements with UK and other international universities.

7 The initial approval/validation event for the SCOPE partnership took place in 1995 under previous processes. The current contract runs from 2015 to 2019 covering the main areas required by a collaborative provision contract together with appendices such as an operational agreement that includes specific obligations, for example visits to/from the UK and the financial arrangements between the University and SCOPE. It was updated in 2017 and 2018 to cover extensions to the programmes being offered. The long-standing cooperation of the University and CityU SCOPE is a **positive feature**.

8 The University's current *Guide to Managing Collaborative Provision* provides a comprehensive framework that covers:

- partnership and programme approval
- monitoring of collaborative provision
- changes to collaborative provision
- periodic review of partnerships
- closure of collaborative partnerships
- university and partner roles and responsibilities.

9 Two roles are emphasised: a University Account Manager who is a member of the Global Partnerships Unit responsible for the long-term relationship and non-academic support for the partner and a Link Tutor responsible for the academic relationship with the partner and their students, as well as assuring programme quality. A detailed role profile is defined together with a *Collaborative link tutor handbook*. Overall, the University considers that Link Tutors have a key role in ensuring the partner upholds its expectations for quality assurance to safeguard the student experience and the University's reputation. The Link Tutor visits Hong Kong regularly. Teaching staff also commented positively on the strong relationship between University and SCOPE administration teams. The University Global Partnerships Unit also supports international partnerships.

10 Programme Management Boards (PMBs) meet regularly to oversee the running of the programmes in Hong Kong, involving University and SCOPE staff. According to their formal terms of reference, a PMB is formally responsible for overall academic management, development and quality assurance of the programme. Minutes showed that these reviewed the teaching and learning on the programme as well as other aspects such as admissions, student performance and assessment practice.

11 The approval of changes to the curriculum and assessment are approved through the faculty's Development and Review Committee (DARC). The Faculty Collaborative Provision Committee (FCPC) maintains an overview of all collaborative provision associated with the faculty. This in turn reports to the Faculty Academic Committee (FAC) and to the University Collaborative Provision Committee (UCPC).

12 Partner collaborative review focuses on the partnership at institutional and strategic level rather than programme level. These reviews are conducted to re-visit the strategic reasons for the partnership, ensure the continued satisfactory operation of collaborative

arrangements and to identify and address major issues that may have arisen. The last collaborative review was in May 2014 and the next will take place in 2018/19. Review outcomes are considered and actions monitored by the UCPC.

13 Students and staff both commented on the recognition of the degrees offered through the University's partnership with CityU SCOPE, in particular those in the field of public administration and management, which is a **positive feature**.

Quality assurance

Academic standards

14 In relation to programmes offered in Hong Kong, the University first approves the programme internally, then applies for registration in Hong Kong, and finally applies for programme accreditation from HKCAAVQ. The programmes in Hong Kong lead to the same award as in the UK with the same learning outcomes and syllabus. The top-up programmes for the BABAM route have a duration of three trimesters in one year (full-time) and five trimesters over two years (part-time) and are of 180 credits. For the BAPAM route, students are offered either 180, 195 or 210 credits depending on their prior level of learning, which is typical of a UK top-up degree offered in Hong Kong. The full degrees take the equivalent of three years of full-time study as in the UK. However, the pattern of study differs as the first year includes 'preparatory modules' in academic writing and business. The final year is more intensive than in a typical UK degree as it uses three trimesters.

15 As franchised programmes, the programme learning outcomes, syllabus and module specifications are essentially the same as in the UK. As noted below, specific aspects of programme content and assessment are contextualised to Hong Kong while maintaining identical learning outcomes and external examining arrangements.

16 To obtain accreditation in Hong Kong, the University submitted programme-level applications for HKCAAVQ accreditation through SCOPE in a standard format together with detailed information. The range and depth of information on programmes for HKCAAVQ accreditation is comparable to that used by internal validation panels in many UK higher education institutions; for example programme and module specifications and information on staff and other resources. As well as the University's internal programme approval process, the HKCAAVQ provides further external assurance of the academic standards of the programmes from a local panel with international participation.

17 University programmes are registered in Hong Kong and also accredited by HKCAAVQ. The BABAM three-year full programme was accredited by HKCAAVQ in 2012. The accreditation event for the BAPAM full degree (360 credits) took place in January 2013 and the programme reaccredited including the full three-year programme in April 2018.

18 DARC is responsible for programme approval and substantive modifications to programmes as well as overseeing validations and revalidations of programmes. The most recent programme validation undertaken with SCOPE was for the BAPAM (360 credits) in October 2017. The documentation for this and the 2015-16 BABAM (360 credits) event were provided. Validation processes are documented and supported by a formal guide. Collaborative programmes are approved by the UCPC.

19 The programme specification is approved at the point of validation and forms the definitive record of the programme. Any subsequent changes to the programme or its modules are considered and approved through DARC. Programme specifications were customised to the Hong Kong programme, for example admissions requirements and the delivery mode that uses trimesters. While reference is made to QAA Subject Benchmark

Statements, an out-of-date version was specified in one programme specification and this was missing from another. Admission requirements are specified in varying levels of detail across programme specifications though they are clear in published marketing information.

20 Admission requirements are clearly specified in relation to Hong Kong educated entrants. For example, the BAPAM requires an Associate Degree or Higher Diploma in Public Administration and Management, Social Science or equivalent qualification for entry into the 180 credit top-up with additional credits required for holders of an Associate Degree or Higher Diploma in other disciplines. Entry onto the full three-year programme requires school leaving qualifications, the SCOPE 'Diploma in International Degree Foundation' or equivalent. Bridging modules are available where there is a close but not full match between prior education and the requirements for entry into a top-up programme.

21 English language requirements for those following the above Hong Kong entry requirements are clear. While no alternative English language requirement is explicitly specified in any written documentation, SCOPE operates a policy of face-to-face interviews to determine English competency in areas where there is a lack of certainty. The University's overall *Student Admissions Policy* provides overall requirements.

22 External examiner reports confirm that the academic standards of the programme meet UK threshold standards and are equivalent to those of the UK programme. Action had been taken in response to issues raised by external examiners. External examiners appointed by the University for the SCOPE programmes are required to have relevant regional experience of Hong Kong/China. Student performance in some respects is superior to UK students.

23 The programmes are subject to the University's monitoring and review processes, as well as those in SCOPE. These had been undertaken regularly including consideration of external examiner reports and student feedback.

24 Overall the review considered that the University's management of multiple partners combining both consistency and local contextualisation is a **positive feature**.

Assessment

25 SCOPE is required to adhere to the University's academic regulations for taught programmes, general student regulations, which include academic misconduct and appeals, and the assessment and feedback policy.

26 Assessments are specified in module handbooks which are available on a virtual learning environment (VLE). SCOPE teaching staff propose assessments that are internally moderated and then approved by the University.

27 First and second marking is undertaken at SCOPE with a second stage of moderation conducted by University staff. A sample is then sent to the external examiner. A Programme Assessment Board (PAB) is held specifically for each Hong Kong programme that includes University and SCOPE teaching staff as well as external examiners. The PAB now covers both full-time and part-time modes of delivery. PABs are held over two locations (UK and Hong Kong) by videoconferencing. The PAB chair is a member of DMU staff and attends the July boards in Hong Kong in person, along with the external examiner.

28 Assessment details of each module are outlined in Module Descriptors with more details on the VLE. Students reported that guidance was given by teaching staff on expectations for assessed work and the criteria used in grading. While feedback was normally within a few weeks, all marks are provisional until assessment board ratification.

Quality of learning opportunities

29 The modules taught in Hong Kong are contextualised for the local region/market by the creation of SCOPE's own module guides. In-term assessments and examinations are delivered by SCOPE staff. Examples of contextualisation are different political and public administration practices in Hong Kong (BAPAM) and the difference between digital strategies in Asia and the UK (BABAM). All materials are overseen and approved by the Link Tutor/Programme Leader as well as the external examiner. While SCOPE staff had not been involved in University approval processes directly, input from Hong Kong had been considered in the updating of programmes. This contributes to the University's management of multiple partners combining both consistency and local contextualisation, which is a **positive feature**.

30 The completion of a full-time degree in three years and the pace of part-time study was seen by students to involve a relatively fast pace of study compared with a four-year degree. It also limited opportunities for internships and overseas study. While part-time students were already employed, typically in relevant roles, full-time students, in particular, top-up students have a relatively intensive learning experience and those without prior work experience do not have the same opportunities to understand how they could apply their learning as part-time students or those with prior work experience. To enhance the student experience, the University is **recommended** to review how to enhance the experience of full-time top-up degree students who do not have prior work experience.

31 As well as the University's internal programme approval process, HKCAAVQ provides further external assurance of the quality of learning opportunities in the programmes from a local panel with international participation. While specifically reviewing the programme's student experience and outcomes against Hong Kong expectations and requirements, this is equivalent to scrutiny against the Quality Code in all major respects.

32 All teaching staff must be approved by the University after a SCOPE selection process. Staff are well qualified and experienced. For example, the HKCAAVQ report on BABAM noted that 25 of the 29 teaching staff had over 10 years of teaching experience and 22 teaching staff had over 10 years of business experience. Nine of the 29 had doctorates and the remainder postgraduate qualifications. Students appreciated the practical experience of teaching staff as well as their emphasis on critical thinking. This was enhanced by the practical experience of part-time students who had a range of backgrounds. One staff member was appreciated for changing students' perceptions of mainland China. Students were also positive about external speakers.

33 Staff were positive about teaching at SCOPE, in particular their sharing of professional experience alongside their teaching and the connection made to current events. SCOPE and CityU have a range of staff development activities that are appreciated by teaching staff. The Link Tutor also provides staff development workshops during visits to SCOPE, for example on writing examination questions. This contributes to the **positive feature** of the long-standing cooperation of the University and CityU SCOPE with well-established teaching and administrative teams linking the two institutions.

34 The University is considering development of its strategy for teaching faculty in the light of requirements for the AACSB international business school accreditation being sought. This could include using more faculty from the UK in Hong Kong and using some Hong Kong faculty in the UK.

35 A range of student support is provided. This includes the opportunity to meet with a personal tutor. The majority of teaching staff were seen as accessible and responsive though students perceived that it was sometimes difficult to contact certain teaching staff.

36 Students are able to access online and face-to-face English language courses. Students appreciated the availability of a wide range of English and academic skills courses for which no extra fees were required.

37 The HKCAAVQ report recommended that a Dissertation Handbook be produced for supervisors and students and that standardised module templates be produced with input from the local teaching staff to be distributed through the University VLE. Students met by the team during the review did not yet have experience of the dissertation. This might have been because they did not choose the dissertation which is an elective module.

38 Library resources combined those of CityU with the electronic resources of the University. Students were aware of both but preferred the University resources as they were easier to access than those of CityU.

39 Students commented positively on their induction experience, for example teamwork exercises and the provision of useful information.

40 While two VLEs were used (from the University and SCOPE), their respective roles were clear. For example, the SCOPE VLE was used for learning materials, assignments and programme announcements. The University VLE was used as a portal to library resources and to obtain records of grades.

41 Student feedback is provided through a number of mechanisms. Student representatives are elected from each class. These class representatives attend a part of the PMB meeting. Module feedback is collected through a teaching and learning questionnaire. The Link Tutor meets with students during visits to SCOPE, offering further feedback opportunities. Student representatives see it as their role to collect feedback and gave examples, such as the pace of lecturing where students had differing views. Communication to and from the University was seen as good. Further informal channels are through personal tutors and programme leaders.

42 While the University reported that external examiner annual reports are shared with students via SCOPE VLE, students said that they were not aware of this.

43 In principle, students are permitted transfer from SCOPE to DMU, although this is not part of the programme design. The University's standard recognition of prior learning process would be followed according to its academic regulations. There has been no uptake to date.

44 DMU students have visited SCOPE including experiential learning activities undertaken together with SCOPE students. An initial pilot of SCOPE students visiting DMU is taking place in the summer of July 2018 that will inform future decisions. Some students have said that they would like to have such an opportunity. The University is therefore **recommended** to consider development of mechanisms to enable greater student mobility between Hong Kong and the UK, and vice versa.

45 The University uses a range of quality assurance mechanisms in relation to its provision in Hong Kong:

- a hierarchy of quality assurance committees for programme development, management and review of collaborative programmes
- external examiners
- student feedback from module surveys and meetings
- annual programme reports including module level reviews
- periodic review, updating and reapproval of the programmes.

46 Annual programme quality monitoring is undertaken. With prior agreement, partners may use their own forms to minimise duplication of effort where reporting fulfils a number of purposes. An annual programme report is produced in a SCOPE format, which is also submitted to the HKCAAVQ. This included a review of student achievement, module level reviews, student and external examiner feedback, good practice and an action plan as well as an update on actions taken following the previous year's report.

47 Periodic review focuses on enhancement and student experience as well as quality and standards of a group of programmes. For faculty-based collaborative provision such as that in Hong Kong, the SCOPE programmes are included within the periodic review based on the UK campus. BAPAM was reviewed as part of the politics and public policy periodic review in February 2017, which included some consideration of the Hong Kong programme.

48 While the University's quality assurance processes are sound, SCOPE staff saw a changing environment in Hong Kong to which programmes would need to respond. The University is **recommended** to ensure annual review and other processes enable continued adaptation of programmes to the changing environment in Hong Kong, including demography and public sector changes.

Information on higher education provision

49 In general, information is prepared jointly by the University and SCOPE with final approval by the University. The Global Partnerships Unit helped enable consistency across partners.

50 Student handbooks include information about the programme, teaching and learning, regulations, academic appeals and complaints. Further information for students is provided through the SCOPE VLE. Information about learning support is provided in both the student handbook and a separate *Student Learning Support Guide*. It was noted that programme learning outcomes are not stated in the student handbooks. Student handbooks follow the University's guidance on content and are approved through the Link Tutor with endorsement from the PMB chair.

51 All public information relating to the University's awards is approved by the University. The University provides an *Accuracy of Collaborative Partner Public Information: Standard Checks Prompts List* to assist in checking public information. The guide to managing collaborative provision outlines the process and responsibilities for checking the range of materials produced by partners. Information about the programmes is held on both University and SCOPE websites.

52 The University issues degree certificates and transcripts, which are referred to as a Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). This report is based on the EU Diploma Transcript format. It includes the location of study and its language. However, no information is provided on extracurricular achievements, which is intended as a distinguishing feature of a HEAR versus a more traditional transcript. Some students would prefer a format that includes information in a more familiar format for Hong Kong employers such as a grade point average calculation. Staff recognised this issue and were prepared to provide supplementary information if needed. While DMU recognises the significance of the HEAR report for all students, because it is unable to fully verify activities at partner institutions the decision was taken that it was not possible to include localised extracurricular activities.

Conclusion

The long-standing cooperation between the University and SCOPE has led to programmes with a strong reputation in the Hong Kong market, in particular in public administration. All programmes are accredited by HKCAAVQ. The programmes are managed in line with the University's general academic governance and arrangements for collaborative provision. The academic frameworks of the University including external examining ensure that academic standards are equivalent to those in the UK while programme content and assessment is contextualised to Hong Kong.

Overall, the cooperation between De Montfort University and CityU SCOPE provides an educational experience that meets UK academic standards and requirements for the student experience with well-established teaching and administrative teams linking the two institutions.

Positive features

The following positive features are identified:

- the long-standing cooperation of the University and CityU SCOPE with well-established teaching and administrative teams linking the two institutions (paragraphs 7 and 33)
- the recognition of the degrees offered through the University's partnership with CityU SCOPE, in particular those in the field of public administration and management (paragraph 13)
- the University's management of multiple partners combining both consistency and local contextualisation (paragraphs 24 and 29).

Recommendations

De Montfort University is recommended to take the following action:

- review how to enhance the experience of full-time top-up degree students who do not have prior work experience (paragraph 30)
- consider development of mechanisms to enable greater student mobility between Hong Kong and the UK, and vice versa (paragraph 44)
- ensure annual review and other processes enable continued adaptation of programmes to the changing environment in Hong Kong, including demography and public sector changes (paragraph 48).

De Montfort University's response to the review report

DMU welcomes QAA's positive report regarding our partnership with CityU SCOPE including the supportive comments and the recognition of the identified positive features of the relationship and the programmes. We note the recommendations for further enhancement and will take them forward. We are particularly pleased that there was such appreciation of the strong working relationship between the two Universities and a recognition that the local contextualisation of the programmes was a particularly positive feature of the student experience. We were also pleased to see that the panel fully recognised that the provision was fully aligned to UK academic standards and benefited from well-established teaching and administrative teams.

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