

# Australian Transnational Educational Leadership Roles: Challenges, Opportunities and Experiences

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## Abstract

The establishment of higher educational hubs in Malaysia and Singapore has spurred the growth of transnational education (TNE) offerings in Asia, and attracted several Australian higher education providers to set up branch campuses in these countries. In Malaysia, TNE is seen as contributing to economic targets by helping to decrease the outflow of students and currency, and by attracting international students to Malaysian shores (British Council 2012). The provision of higher education through TNE raises issues somewhat distinct from those arising with local provision of higher education. These include the balance of local and foreign educational decision making and its implications for academic staff and for the learning experiences of students. This paper is informed by '*Learning without Borders: Leadership in transnational education and internationalization of curriculum*', an Australian Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) funded project undertaken at Curtin University and Swinburne University of Technology, involving Australian campuses and branch campuses. The project investigated staff experiences, expectations and preferences on TNE issues including career path opportunities, teaching and learning implications. The project focused particularly on the development of recognition and support for leadership roles in transnational education and on internationalization of curriculum. The paper highlights some of the TNE and internationalization measures that might enhance staff experiences and student learning.

*Keywords-* transnational education, leadership roles, staff experiences, and opportunities for career progression.

## Context

The establishment of higher educational hubs in Malaysia and Singapore has spurred the growth of transnational education (TNE) offerings in Asia, and attracted several Australian higher education providers to set up branch campuses in these countries. In Malaysia, TNE is seen as contributing to economic targets by helping to decrease the outflow of students and currency, and by attracting international students to Malaysian shores (British Council 2012).

By TNE we mean an arrangement for provision of higher education where students acquire an award in one country, which has been issued by a higher education institution based in another country.

### **The issues**

The provision of higher education through TNE raises issues somewhat distinct from those arising with local provision of higher education. These include the balance of local and foreign educational decision making and its implications for:

1. Academic staff; and
2. The learning experiences of students.

Implications of models of TNE employed along with approaches to internationalization are the subjects addressed in this paper.

### **Issues addressed and the research base**

#### ***Issues***

This paper is informed by '*Learning without Borders: Leadership in transnational education and internationalization of curriculum*', an Australian Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) funded project undertaken at Curtin University and Swinburne University of Technology, involving Australian campuses and branch campuses.

The project investigated staff experiences, expectations and preferences on TNE issues including career path opportunities and the extent to which local staff engaged in professional decision-making regarding teaching and learning.

#### ***Research Methods Employed***

##### **Surveys**

A survey was conducted at Curtin University directed at academics involved in TNE which elicited how confident academics felt about working with staff and students who are from cultures other than their own. The surveys also attempted to comprehend what preparations academics receive for working in cross-cultural settings, their understandings of internationalisation of the curriculum, and what support or information staff would like to receive in relation to TNE and internationalisation of curriculum. The survey generated fifty responses (n=50).

In addition, an online survey using 'Opinio' addressed understandings of TNE and international education practices. The survey was designed for Swinburne and Curtin staff who were already in co-ordinator roles or were likely to become program co-ordinators and unit convenors for programs offered both at the home campuses and in TNE situations. Sixty four (n=64) responses were received.

## **Interviews and focus groups**

Individual interviews were conducted identifying how TNE and internationalisation policies and procedures can best support academics undertaking program co-ordination or unit convening roles. Interviews were conducted with Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) and Deans/Associate Deans (International), and Australian and Sarawak based program co-ordinators and unit convenors for programs and units of study offered both on home campuses and TNE situations.

Focus group interviews were conducted in conjunction with project workshops to investigate how TNE and internationalisation policies and procedures could best support academics undertaking program co-ordination or unit convening roles.

## **Findings**

The project focused particularly on the development of recognition and support for leadership roles in transnational education and on internationalization of curriculum. As stated previously, TNE is defined in this project as an arrangement for provision of higher education where students in one country acquire an award which has been issued by a higher education institution based in another country. Program coordinators and unit coordinators leaderships on both the home campus and branch campus play a vital role in ensuring that standards and the student experience are appropriate to the award.

Program coordinators and unit convenors involved in transnational education (TNE) represent a distributed group of leaders who often take on TNE coordination roles that can be challenging in cross-cultural settings. In their roles they are involved with colleagues from offshore branch campuses or partner institutions in the curriculum, delivery, and assessment and moderation of programmes. Both parties are concerned with achieving the intended learning outcomes of the programme while negotiating cultural and social contexts of learning in different campuses and countries. Therefore, the issue of recognition and reward for academics in TNE roles at home campuses and branch campuses is integral to the pedagogical and managerial success of the courses offered.

The Unit Coordinator (UC) is seen as a pivotal role in the university, according to the Curtin University UC handbook which outlines that UCs connect students to their learning, and to the aims and values of the university, and are responsible for facilitating best learning experiences for students, rewarding experiences for the teaching team, and compliance with relevant policies and procedures to ensure a satisfying and equitable experience for all (The Unit Coordinator Handbook, 2012).

The project involved identifying issues relating to recognition and support for staff in TNE roles and identifying what policies, procedures, and professional development are needed to assist academics function in their roles better. Data gathered from academics in the four campuses (two home campuses and two branch campuses) suggest that most of the academics in TNE roles receive little training, instruction or mentoring on working in cross-cultural contexts. Nevertheless, many Australian-based staff members have had experience working outside Australia, and are confident about their ability to work with staff from other cultures. Indeed many respondents to surveys and interviews reported very positively on their experiences with TNE and saw it as enriching. Some reported that their experiences

with TNE help their approaches to teaching and to internationalisation of curriculum generally. On the other hand TNE leaders at the program coordinators and unit convenors level do not expect their involvement in TNE to have a positive impact on their careers.

### TNE Roles and their consequences

In Australian universities, the unit coordinators take on managerial and coordinating roles for their units of study in the courses. They are also largely responsible for building collaborative networks with program leaders, “setting the example in disciplinary practice, adopting scholarly teaching practices, developing and continually refining units, maintaining unit quality and disciplinary integrity, and looking after the interests of students” ( Roberts, Butcher & Brooker 2010). However, these activities and leadership roles that they assume can lead to competing with time for other academic responsibilities such as research. The criteria for academic promotions often do not account for the academic engagement and efforts in TNE unit leader roles. Studies on unit coordinator roles maintain that numerous responsibilities taken on with an offshore position alongside teaching, such as course co-ordination, moderation and ensuring offshore unit quality, can add additional demands that impact self through disruption of lifestyle and a lack of emotional support from friends, family and missing participation at the home university (Debowski, 2003).

### Forms of TNE

The International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) identified five broad categories of TNE. The fifth category was provision through distance education, which is not pertinent to this paper. Features of the first four categories are indicated in Table 1.

EIAA Categories of TNE	Description
1. Full delivery transnational campus	Delivered by home institution staff, possibly supplemented by local staff.
2. Articulation	Units of study offered by a local institution and accepted as equivalent by the home institution.
3. Franchising	An overseas institution authorised to offer an award of the home institution.
4. Branch campus	A transnational campus established to offer programs and qualifications of the home institution.

Table 1. IEAA categories of TNE and their characteristics

Within these categories differing arrangements for the balance between home campus control and local control of programmes is possible. In the project the balance adopted was referred to as ‘the locus of control’. In the project arrangements for control of elements of programmes were classified as fitting one of four broad models as indicated in Table 2 below. Elements of programmes considered were the determination of programme content, learning and teaching resources, learning and teaching activities, assessment items, and grading. The model adopted – who determines which elements – has consequences for the professional decision-making roles of staff and for their career opportunities. The model adopted also had consequences for appropriateness of curriculum content, teaching and learning resources and activities, and assessment to experiences and circumstances of TNE students.

## Models

The models adopted cover arrangements from all learning and teaching decisions residing with home campus staff to programs and units being devised and taught only by local staff.

1 Home campus control	2 Limited transnational campus control	3 Distributed control	4 Transnational campus control
E.G.: Curriculum design and assessment determined home campus only. Maybe fly-in-fly-out delivery.	E.G.: Opportunities for contextualisation of learning activities &/or assessment items. Assessment or sample moderated by home campus	E.G.: Transnational campus decisions constrained only by attaining the same learning outcomes. May include sample assessment moderation by the home campus.	E.G.: Units of study or programs offer only on transnational campus but with the qualification awarded by the home campus institution.
<b>Key features:</b> The unit, learning activities and assessment are the same whoever delivers the unit	<b>Key features:</b> The unit and assessment are the same whoever delivers the unit. Learning and teaching activities may be contextualised	<b>Key features:</b> Unit learning outcomes are the same. Learning and teaching activities and assessment are contextualised	<b>Key features:</b> The program/unit is subject to QA processes consistent with Australian national protocols
<b>Usually adopted where:</b> The program is offered through multiple providers OR a unit is offered transnational campus for the first time or with new staff.	<b>Usually adopted where:</b> There is continuity of unit staffing and a unit has been offered successfully on a TNE campus for a few semesters	<b>Usually adopted where:</b> There is continuity of unit staffing and a unit has been offered successfully on a TNE campus for a number of years	<b>Usually adopted where:</b> The unit is offered only transnational campus, though it might be taken by home campus students

Table 2. Models of TNE: The locus of control

Where transnational education is essentially delivered by home campus staff, perhaps supplemented with local tutors, then the first model usually applies. Where TNE arrangements involve articulation there are two possibilities. For those involving twinning arrangements model 1 or 2 may be adopted. For those based on mutual recognition model 3 or 4 usually applies. For franchising arrangements model 1 usually applies though there may be scope for some local input as in model 2. In the case of branch campuses each of the models was encountered in the project.

As indicated in the bottom row of Table 2 different arrangements for the locus of control suit different TNE circumstances. Tight home campus control can be suitable where programs are delivered from multiple sites or during periods when incoming transnational campus staff members are inexperienced. Where there confidence has been established about the capacity of the transnational campus staff to deliver programs or units of study with the same focus and to the same standard as those delivered home campus, there is scope for contextualisation and greater local responsibility. If the conditions allow local contextualisation and the academic outcomes and any professional requirements for the Australian award can still be met, then contextualisation can adapt to local resources and make local student learning more meaningful. A high degree of local control will apply where programs or units are devised the transnational campus for local offering only.

## Consequences

Behind the choice of models of TNE are a number of considerations that have consequences for both staff and students. Firstly, as the definition of TNE involves an award by a home institution a major consideration is assurance that the quality of learning outcomes is commensurate with the quality of the

learning outcomes for students studying on the home campus. Many Australian awards will also qualify students for recognition by professional associations in Australia and the standard of students graduating from TNE campuses needs to satisfy their requirements as well. This can suggest that a high level of home campus control is appropriate. On the other hand TNE offering must also meet the requirements of local regulatory authorities and sometimes local professional associations and this may require local input. For example in the context of the branch campuses involved in the project referred to here the Malaysian Qualifications Agency is looking for local educational decision-making (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2010, Section 2). Secondly there are issues for academics involved. With a high level of home control academics at the home campus have the opportunity to demonstrate capacity to assume high levels of responsibility; a career opportunity. On the other hand this may involve a high workload that could limit other valued academic pursuits, especially research. High levels of home campus control limit the opportunities for local academics to demonstrate experience in curriculum and assessment design and development of educational resources. Thirdly a high level of home determination of curriculum content, educational resources, teaching and learning activities, and assessment items and grading can disadvantage local students who are unfamiliar with Australia. From the point of view of transnational students some localised content and learning activities along with some local assessment items may be more pertinent allowing account to be taken of the experiences and context of local students, which is desirable if one adopts a constructivist understanding of learning processes. Some transnational campus adaptations may also prove pertinent to internationalisation of curriculum on the home campus. Selecting the appropriate model, then, involves balancing these considerations.

There is then for academics both on home campuses and local campuses a variety of consequences, opportunities and challenges associated with the model of TNE adopted as indicated in Table 3.

Decisions opportunities challenges	1 Home campus contro	2 Limited transnational campus control	3 Distributed control	4 Transnational campus control
<b>Home campus decisions</b>	Curriculum design. Learning and teaching resources and activities. Assessment design. Grading student performance.	In consultation with transnational campus personnel, home campus staff responsible for: – Curriculum design – Learning and teaching resources and activities – Assessment design – Moderation of grading of student performance	In consultation with transnational campus personnel, home campus staff usually responsible for stipulation of learning outcomes.  Usually responsible for moderation of grading of student performance.	Home campus staff has general oversight of curriculum design including appropriateness of learning outcomes.
<b>Home campus leadership and career development opportunities</b>	Home campus staff can demonstrate leadership in curriculum design and implementation in a TNE context and cross-cultural experience.	Home campus staff can demonstrate leadership in curriculum design and implementation in a TNE context.	Home campus staff can demonstrate an understanding of curriculum design and implementation in a TNE context.	Home campus staff can claim some understanding of curriculum design appropriate to an transnational campus context.
<b>Home campus leadership challenges</b>	Accommodating the contexts of curriculum implementation and	Allowing for some contextualisation of curriculum content, learning and teaching activities and assessment items whilst ensuring transnational campus students attain same learning outcomes as home campus students.		Demonstrating equivalence to home campus units and programs of learning

	operating a different cultural environment.			outcomes of transnational campus units and programs.
<b>Transnational campus decisions</b>	Means of implementation of curriculum and prescribe learning activities and assessment.	Make a limited contribution to: – Curriculum design – Learning and teaching resources and activities – Assessment design	In consultation with home campus counterpart transnational campus staff design: – Curriculum content – Learning and teaching resources and activities – Assessment instruments	Having regard to home campus standards transnational campus staff design: – Curriculum content – Learning and teaching resources and activities – Assessment instruments
<b>Transnational campus leadership and career development opportunities</b>	Demonstration of teaching ability. Possibly provision of curriculum design advice	Demonstration of teaching competence. Possibility of demonstration of contributing to curriculum design, learning and teaching activities and assessment items.	Demonstration of leadership in curriculum design, and in design and implementation of learning and teaching activities and assessment.	Demonstration of leadership in curriculum design, and in design and implementation of learning and teaching activities and assessment.
<b>Transnational campus leadership challenges</b>	Providing academics with experience and responsibilities that support career development.	Having advice on curriculum, learning activities and assessment adopted. Demonstrating effectiveness of branch campus contributions to curriculum, learning activities and assessment.	Demonstrating the same learning outcomes as those attained by students undertaking the same unit on the home campus.	Demonstrating equivalence of student learning outcomes to those stipulated in the curriculum for similar units or programs offer elsewhere in the university.

Table 3. Models of TNE: consequences for leadership and career development

## Internationalisation

### Understandings of internationalisation

Internationalisation of higher education is a complex concept and the term encompasses references to various facets of higher education teaching and learning and research. Knight (2004) defines internationalization of higher education as "the process of integrating an international dimension into the teaching/training, research, and service functions of a university or college or technical institute" (p.29). Healey (The internationalisation of higher education: myths and realities, n.d) refutes the more commonly accepted view that higher education with increasingly large numbers of international students around the world is akin to globalisation, and attempts to offer an alternate explanation and different prediction for the global higher education industry of 2020, by arguing that universities should have international bearings as scientific developments are often built upon the work of researchers from around the world, and that universities have in fact continued to foster ideas via academic conferences, and through visiting faculty to ensure a shared knowledge base. Others support the view that globalisation is the main driver of internationalisation in higher education and that internationalisation of higher education is an important policy and strategy for most universities (International Higher Education 2012).

However, if internationalisation of higher education is deemed to be synonymous with student mobility and large cohorts of international students in various programmes abroad in different host countries, then universities may look completely to the East for recruiting students in the future as indicated by Choudaha (2012) with reference to a McKinsey Global Institute report that said that more than twenty of the world's top fifty cities ranked by gross domestic product are predicted to be located in Asia by

2025 which is much higher than the eight present in 2007. The growth of TNE programs in Asia in the higher education sector is reasonably aligned to studies predicting the growth patterns.

### **Internationalisation of curriculum**

One aspect of internationalisation of higher education is internationalisation of curriculum. The OECD has defined internationalisation of the curriculum as:

Curricula with an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally/socially) in an international and multicultural context and designed for domestic students as well as foreign students. (Caruana & Hanstock, 2003, p. 4).

Going beyond curriculum content this can involve 'the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the preparation, delivery and outcomes of a program of study'. (Leask, 2009, p. 209)

With regard to internationalisation of curriculum the project included recommendations to the effect that:

- Curriculum design should provide room to move in terms of both content and learning activities to accommodate the likely range of the educational and social backgrounds of student cohorts and local needs including specific national and cultural requirements.
- Curriculum design should allow teachers to include their own local and international examples.
- Students from different backgrounds should be encouraged to contribute their experiences and perspectives and all students should be encouraged to explore and reflect on issues from different social and international perspectives.

Taking this approach provides for the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension in curriculum and associated learning and teaching activities. It also values the national and cultural contributions that academics and students in transnational locations can make to internationalising a curriculum designed to meet requirements for an Australian award.

### **Conclusion**

The paper highlights some of the TNE and internationalization measures that might enhance staff experiences and student learning.

With the definition of TNE adopted here there will always be a concern by the home university that it is the home university award that the TNE campus provides. The home university has a responsibility to ensure that student learning outcomes are equivalent at home and abroad. That does not mean that programs and learning experience need be identical. There are benefits for local staff in terms of opportunities to play a full professional role and consequently opportunities for career development where the TNE model adopted allows local staff to have input into curriculum content, design of learning and teaching resources and activities, and elements of assessment of student attainment. Local input into teaching and learning decision making allows the design learning experiences to be more appropriate to the students attending TNE campuses. Students on TNE campuses may even have an



advantage when it comes to internationalisation of curriculum. They experience a curriculum that meets the requirements of a foreign institution as well as one that satisfies local requirements.

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