



UK collaboration in Singapore: institutional case study

Loughborough University and PSB Academy, Singapore

**The joint delivery and assessment of undergraduate programmes
with an international collaborative partner**

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1 This case study examines the joint delivery and assessment of Loughborough University's (the University) BSc Business Studies and BSc Business Studies with Human Resource Management (HRM) programmes which are delivered in Singapore in collaboration with PSB Academy, Singapore (PSB). It highlights some of the challenges and options in adopting this model of delivery when working with local tutors.

2 The partnership between Loughborough University's Business School and PSB to deliver the BSc Business Studies commenced in 2000. In validating this partnership, the University felt that the PSB ethos aligned with its own approach to research and research-informed teaching, which in turn has an impact on partnership developments at Loughborough University. Following on from the success of the Business Studies programme, the BSc Business Studies with HRM was added to the programmes offered by the University at PSB. This led to a revised agreement between the parties to recognise this development, dated August 2006. The partnership is due for renewal in 2011, and the new contract has already been prepared for signing by the parties.

3 PSB was taken over by the TUV SUD group in 2007, although both Loughborough University and PSB Academy reported that this had little impact on the operation of the programmes. PSB Academy PTE was created and moved to its present location, which provides up-to-date teaching facilities as well as a library, canteen, bookshop and IT laboratories and a full range of student services, including counselling and careers. PSB Academy was awarded EduTrust accreditation in May 2010 and was one of the first HE providers to achieve this accreditation.

4 Both programmes offered at PSB are based on modules from the Business School's suite of undergraduate programmes. The programmes at PSB are offered part-time over three years and have a common structure, with shared modules in the first year. Specialist modules are offered at different stages in the programme for students on the HRM programme; however, overall there is a limited choice of options.

5 The programmes offered in partnership with PSB Academy are delivered entirely at PSB Academy, Singapore. Delivery of teaching and assessment on the programmes is shared between tutors employed by PSB and tutors who are members of staff within Loughborough University's Business School. Loughborough University staff deliver 50 per cent of the teaching at PSB in years one and two and 75 per cent of the teaching in year three.

The programme is taught and assessed in English and the students are registered students of the University. There are now three intakes onto the programmes per year: August, November and March.

6 The original Memorandum of Agreement with PSB Corporation was signed in 2000 and the BSc Business Studies commenced in September of the same year. As previously mentioned, a new agreement was drawn up with the TUV SUD group in August 2006 in recognition of the development of the BSc with HRM. The Agreement is comprehensive and relates specifically to the joint delivery of the Loughborough University programmes with TUV SUD PSB Corporation PTE Ltd. The Agreement lays down the obligations and responsibilities of PSB in supporting the programmes, as well as the obligations and responsibilities of the University. The University explicitly retains overall responsibility for the academic quality of the programmes. However, there is a corresponding expectation that PSB will contribute to the maintenance of the academic quality of the programmes and comply with Loughborough University's quality procedures.

7 Loughborough University has a Programme Director who has overall responsibility for the day-to-day management of the programme, as well as curriculum and programme development. There are clear reporting lines within the Business School through tutors on the programme to the Programme Director, who in turn reports to the Head of Undergraduate Studies within the Business School. There is no equivalent programme director at PSB. However, the programmes are supported by a Programme Executive Administrator, who reports to the Head of Operations. PSB has a number of overseas partners and there is a dedicated administrative team for each partner. The Operations team at PSB are in regular email contact with the Programme Director and tutors at Loughborough University. The team is responsible for scheduling meetings, such as the staff-student liaison meeting, as well as disseminating course materials. The Programme Director, together with PSB, produces the teaching timetable. PSB maintains its own student database; this includes student attendance information.

8 The Programme Director normally makes four visits per year to PSB to carry out a variety of activities, including teaching, student recruitment and induction, the chairing of the staff-student liaison meeting with local tutors and students, inducting/orientating new students, and holding discussions regarding management and operational issues with staff at PSB.

9 The University appoints from among its staff a Responsible Examiner (RE) for each of the modules delivered in Singapore. The role of the RE is a recognised role within Loughborough University and all modules are led by an RE. The role of the RE is to provide curriculum content and development, set and moderate assessments, with an agreed input from the PSB tutor, and generally oversee the quality and standards of their module. In most cases the RE also teaches on the programme in Singapore, although this is not mandatory as teaching on these programmes is voluntary. The Programme Director also produces a schedule of teaching commitments, which is then reviewed by the Research Performance Committee to ensure that workloads are manageable and that research and other Loughborough University commitments are not compromised. At the time of writing, there are two modules which are delivered entirely by local tutors, although an RE supports the module through oversight of module content, and the approval and moderation of assessments. PSB generally requires two local tutors to be allocated to support the delivery of each module at PSB as one of their key performance indicators. All tutors, including the Loughborough University tutors, have to be registered with the Council for Private Education as part of the EduTrust requirements.

10 There is a staff-student liaison committee which meets in Singapore at least twice per year and is attended by student representatives, PSB staff, local tutors and Loughborough tutors if their teaching is taking place at the same time. Student representatives are expected to feed back to their group on the outcomes of these meetings. The minutes from these meetings feed into the annual programme review. However, minutes are not widely disseminated and students on the programmes do not receive them so are not necessarily aware of any action taken. The issue of providing feedback to the students has been raised by students at the staff-student liaison committee. While representatives of the University at these meetings have attempted to reassure students that the University takes student feedback seriously, the University needs to address how it might effectively report actions taken to the students. The University acknowledges that the level of attendance at, and engagement with, this committee by the students and part-time tutors can be problematic, given that this is a part-time programme and both staff and students are likely to have other work or family commitments.

11 Each module is evaluated at the end of the teaching cycle. The evaluation is managed by the Operations team at PSB. The evaluation forms are completed manually and forwarded to the Programme Director in the first instance. Any issues are raised with the RE

and the Head of Operations at PSB and discussed with the local tutor before feeding into the annual review process. Where issues are identified as part of the module evaluation, they are discussed at the staff-student liaison committee.

12 The Singapore Programme Committee also meets three times per year at Loughborough, and includes all the Loughborough University staff teaching on the programme, plus the Head of Undergraduate Studies for the Business School. This committee is not attended by staff from PSB. However, the minutes are forwarded to the Dean at PSB, with the Programme Review paperwork

13 The local tutors are recruited and employed by PSB subject to written approval by the University. In practice, the Programme Director, together with the Director of Operations at PSB, interviews prospective candidates from a pool of existing PSB staff. Approval to teach on the programme is provided by the Associate Dean of Teaching from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. Local tutors are expected to have the equivalent academic qualifications and teaching experience as their Loughborough University counterparts but are not expected to have an equivalent research profile.

14 The appointment criteria set by the University is that any tutor appointed to the programme must have a higher qualification than the programme on which he/she is tutoring. Any change of tutor has to be approved by Loughborough University. From time to time the Programme Director undertakes teaching observations of the PSB tutors, although such observations are only triggered if an issue has been identified as part of the module feedback mentioned above. Where a tutor consistently underperforms, their contract is not renewed. The RE may also observe classes when visiting PSB. Local tutors receive feedback from the University on the evaluations and receive a consolidated report reflecting the students' individual evaluations. Staff development requirements may be identified through this process, but there are no formal requirements for staff development nor is there oversight by the University. However, part-time tutors are able to attend any staff development events organised by PSB.

15 In reality many of the tutors at PSB have taught on the programme since its inception and have established an excellent working relationship with their RE. Communication between the RE and the PSB tutors is via email. The RE meets with the local tutor when visiting PSB to undertake the teaching of their module, which is usually once per year. Local tutors are generally able to have an input into curriculum development of their modules in discussion with the RE. They may also produce their own materials to supplement those provided by the RE and to enhance delivery of the module, such as PowerPoint presentations. However, there can be some variability in the commitment and engagement of the REs with their local tutor, particularly where the RE is not involved in the delivery of the module at PSB.

16 There is a customised programme handbook produced for PSB students with an input from the programme executive at PSB. This contains teaching schedules, a programme specification, module descriptors and module feedback forms. Local tutors are expected to customise the curriculum to ensure that it is pertinent and relevant to local practice. Of the 48 contact hours per module, local tutors provide 24 contact hours in years one and two and 12 hours in year three. The Loughborough University virtual learning environment (VLE) provides some support for the PSB programmes; for example, module outlines, past examination papers and generic feedback are available on the VLE. Loughborough University has, however, developed an enhancement agenda which is intended to improve University staff's engagement with the VLE.

17 Not all local tutors will have an input into the assessment process; this is determined by the RE in discussion with the local tutor and is informed by how well

established the relationship is and the level of the module. Where there is local input, assessments are approved by the external examiners; marking guidelines are produced, and assessments are moderated, by the RE and second-marked by a Loughborough University tutor. However, local tutors do not receive information on the overall performance of their students and on whether they are able to progress to the next level of the programme.

18 Non-academic issues do not fall within the remit of the local tutors, and pastoral support is generally provided by the Head of Operations to year three students and by the programme executive to year one and year two students. Pastoral support is also available through Student Affairs.

19 There are four external examiners appointed to the programmes at PSB. They are not involved in examining any other undergraduate modules within the Business School at Loughborough. This decision was taken for logistical reasons relating to the three intakes per year, which require three boards per year. All boards are held at Loughborough University. There is no opportunity for external examiners to compare the performance of Loughborough University and PSB students. However, such comparisons are undertaken at the Programme Review Board. Local tutors do not receive copies of the external examiners' reports. The school is adopting a more integrated approach to these programmes to ensure that such comparisons between on-site and off-campus programmes can take place.

20 Students at PSB are aware that there are procedures covering academic dishonesty, including plagiarism and cheating, and that appeals and complaints can be made to the University. They are aware of the role of the programme leader at the University and that they are able to meet with her when she visits PSB. However, they are confident that they can raise any issues in the interim with PSB.

21 The role of the RE and the relationship between the RE and the local tutor is critical to the smooth running of this partnership. Equally, the dedicated programme leader at Loughborough is critical; this postholder not only teaches on the programme but is committed to engaging fully with staff and students through regular meetings at PSB as well as at the University. It is therefore essential that the University continue its commitment to the role of the RE so that they are fully supported in carrying out this role; this, in turn, will ensure that tutors continue to volunteer to undertake this role to ensure the effective delivery of and support for the programmes at PSB.

22 The partnership between Loughborough University and PSB is well established. It is founded on the commitment of Loughborough University tutors to the programme in Singapore and a sense of collegiality within the programme team and with local tutors. It is dependent on continuity of staff both at Loughborough University and PSB, as well as a partner that has a mutually aligned ethos and expectations. Loughborough University recognises that there are areas for further enhancement, such as developing further the VLE to support off-campus students, encouraging student representation and feedback, and ensuring that communication at a formal level between the University and the students and staff at PSB continues to be strengthened.

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