TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION: AN AUSTRALIAN APPROACH TO ASSURING QUALITY AND ENGAGING OFFSHORE STAFF

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally and despite the growth and increased importance of transnational education (TNE) staff development and induction in offshore locations are undertaken from afar with sporadic actual engagement. As a long time TNE provider, in an often complex environment, the Curtin Business School (CBS) at Curtin University, in Perth, Western Australia has developed and is implementing a multi-faceted approach to the induction of offshore staff. The article reflects on the context, roll-out and results of a newly developed residential staff induction program. The program facilitated skill development and understanding but more importantly established an unanticipated depth of connectedness and commitment.

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KEYWORDS: Multinational Education; Offshore Staff; Quality Assurance

INTRODUCTION

In the current climate of continuous assessment of a range of quality assurance assessments, most prominently in the Australian tertiary education environment the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and AACSB, Australian education providers have little choice but to put measures in place that provide evidence of quality assurance measures on all fronts. This requires that the matter of staff at offshore locations being well versed and trained to achieve equivalence of delivery, governance and service must be addressed.

While the delivery of Australian education in offshore locations has grown exponentially from about 12560 students in 1996 to about 73000 students in 2004, the number of courses offered has grown from 441 programs to 1569 programs over the same period of time (Chapman and Pyvis. 2006). In 2004 all Australian public universities had an established presence in an offshore location (National Tertiary Education Union, 2004). Although the notion of international education has been gaining research attention over the past twenty or so years, little research has been undertaken on the delivery of education in an offshore location and the subsequent impact on quality assurance and delivery standards. The focus of this paper is to reflect on the intended and unintended consequences of an initiative aimed at assisting to quality assure the transnational education (TNE) activities of the Curtin Business School. As part of efforts to enhance continuous improvements across its TNE locations CBS developed and implemented a new program aimed at bringing targeted staff from each TNE location to the Perth campus for an intensive and comprehensive residential induction program. The paper starts by providing a concise context of TNE before moving to aspects of staffing and reputation and the Australian and subject environment. While the data and methodology section explains the rationale and participants to the study the discussion considers immediate feedback, strengths, improvements and the long term assessment. The paper ends with concluding comments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TNE – Context and Trends

TNE has historically followed a clearly identifiable route whereby students flow from a range of middle income developing countries, mostly in the Asian region, into a small number of predominantly Anglophone industrialised nations. As demand for English based education outstrips supply, tertiary education providers in English language countries have exploited the situation, particularly through the financial premium it commands. McBurnie and Ziguras (2007) establish that this is particularly the case in Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur and in recent days also China. In Hong Kong and Singapore a range of Western universities have established a strong presence through partnering or branch campus arrangements. At the supply side the market is dominated by the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States whose competitive position in the TNE market is strengthened by the potential of migration options and the overall attraction of society. In some instances the countries that initially sent students abroad have now evolved as providers of Anglo-education as TNE education providers have shifted their presence (Altbach, 2003). More recently TNE has evolved and includes a range of other countries such as Vietnam, India and Sri Lanka at the demand side and Canada at the supply side.

McBurnie and Ziguras (2007) content that the development of TNE can be classified into four stages: The first stage would see counties with an outward orientation send student abroad to address the excess local demand for public tertiary education. This was evident in Singapore and Hong Kong in the 1980's and more recently for China and Vietnam in the early 2000's. In the second stage local providers take initiative to enter the private education market in partnership with a reputed foreign institution to provide an affordable alternative for international education and curb outward student flows. Private colleges in Singapore and Malaysia established in the 1990's and offering Australian or United Kingdom tertiary education reflect this stage. During the third stage the domestic market matures through an increased focus on quality and competition and shakes out sub-par providers across the sector. The presence of and association with an international TNE provider translates in an opportunity for capacity development and a source of income alongside the availability of affordable expertise (Lee, 2003).The fourth and final stage sees the emergence of an education export capacity by attracting foreign students from other (often neighboring) developing countries. The establishment of a number of Australian university campuses in Malaysia is indicative of this stage.

Since various countries are in different stages of participating in the TNE process, there remains a significant amount of opportunity for TNE providers to expand. Expansion is naturally subject to opportunities and limitations, both internal and external to the institution.

TNE Drivers

Tertiary education in general and the TNE education sector in particular has gradually taken on the characteristics of a commodity subject to purchasing laws with universities as producers and students as consumers. The industry is characterised by high levels of competitiveness through high pricing and brand exposure (Stephenson, 2006). The export side of the TNE industry is further fuelled by ongoing funding restrictions and reductions in most developed markets such as Australia and the United Kingdom. The export nature of the Australian TNE is evidenced through a Monash University campus in South Africa, a Curtin University campus in Malaysia and a RMIT campus in Vietnam. According to Meares (2003) universities tend to see a transnational presence in the light of expansion and as a means to compensate for the financial shortfall resulting from funding restrictions. In addition, the presence assists greatly in brand building and profiling the institution. Similarly, Hackett (2001) argues that the key motivation for providing offshore programs was initially to generate income and subsequently to achieve internationalization and build a solid international profile. MacDonald (2006) agrees that offshore

campuses hold enormous potential for promotion while realistically presenting a quality assurance risk with direct links to the brand of the university. Indeed, Smith (2010) labels the establishment of a branch campus as 'risky business'. The global commercialization of the education industry, and particularly in a TNE context, explains why recruitment of international students, both onshore and offshore, is predominantly seen as an income generating exercise. According to Stephenson (2006) initiatives to tap into the ever lucrative TNE market drive growth and competitiveness and result in a sector predominantly driven by commercial drivers.

Education providers are required to both manage their transnational presence but also to understand what students' value and expect from the education experience. In researching the decision making process of international students Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino (2006) determined that two of the five decision making factors are directly managed by or related to the institution. These are the perceived quality of the program and the image of the university. Despite the actual or relative importance of these factors not being determined it appears that universities playing in the TNE sphere would derive value from building and protecting both program and institutional images to understand and maintain a competitive position in the industry.

McBurnie and Ziguras (2007) label quality expectations as crucial in that it is one of the prime facets impacting on student choice of education provider while remaining the most prominent challenge in TNE regulations and controls. In addition, the success of an international program and its ongoing presence is dependent on the quality of the overall TNE experience of the student. Quality content delivery is paramount in ensuring that the educational value of the TNE delivery is on par with its domestic equivalent. The development and maintenance of a quality TNE program therefore pivots on the ability to attract retain and develop highly qualified staff at the offshore locations (MacDonald, 2006). Similarly, the quality assessment of a program is a function of the quality of students as reflected in, inter alia, the equivalence of entry requirements. In essence Desoff (2006) argues that the delivery of a TNE program is likely to be successful and attract students as long as the international education exercise provides an opportunity for learning and development. Overall though, the quality of TNE is captured in both administrative or non-academic and academic aspects of interaction and service delivery.

The establishment of a competitive advantage or edge in the highly competitive TNE environment can be achieved through both external positions and associations of the institution or internal competencies. Mazzarol (1997) postulates that successful institutions in a TNE environment use their alumni to enhance their reputation and image as quality provider.

In the highly competitive international education environment a competitive advantage can be established on the back of both internal competencies and external perceived positions and associations from the institution. Successful institutions traditionally enhance their image and reputation as quality service providers through their alumni (Mazzarol, 1997). As an example of the importance of external association institutions in the United Kingdom are aiming to retain a leading position as international education provider through the national pursuit of a framework for postgraduate research (O'Malley, 2009).

Reputation and Staff

The reputation of a provider is recognised as instrumental to the success of any branding and marketing exercise in the services industry (Yoon, Guffey and Kijewski, 1993). Reputation is argued to reflect and carry valuable information about the capability and level of the service in the context of the industry and other competitors. Its mere existence allows companies to not only indirectly interact with potential customers but on a more subtle base to influence the buyer intentions. In the TNE context of learning settings, this translates into institutions marketing methods signalling high entry level requirement and

premium prices as a means to attaining a superior reputation for service delivery (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990).

In the modern TNE environment academic reputation is increasingly captured in a range of rankings and accreditation exercises in which institutions participate. These tend to reflect a critical assessment of academic measures, administrative and other support activities. According to Gardner (1998) the reflection of service quality as experienced and expressed by students, forms a core component of an effective assessment of quality. Findings by Ben-Ami (2005) indicate that almost a third of tertiary enrolled students are dissatisfied with their experience and reported expectations not being met, which leaves room for improvement for universities in enhancing the level of service delivery in the first instance and arguably their reputation in the longer term. Cloete and Bunning (2005) posit that the efficiency of a university is best served by a high percentage of highly qualified staff, arguably implying quality. This is echoed by Ben-Ami (2005) confirming the importance of highly skilled and qualified staff to deliver programs. Tait, Van Eeden and Tait (2002) furthermore established that the level of satisfaction and value of learning by students is significantly correlated to the actual interaction of lecturers during classes. In essence the quality of lecturing staff is crucial to the student experience and indirectly to the university experience and reputation. In the context of TNE delivery of content this highlights the importance of induction and ongoing training to ensure equivalent quality across locations.

Australian Providers

Australia is not only a pioneer of providing international education, initially through the Colombo plan, but has strengthened and maintained a leading provider role alongside the United Kingdom and the United States. Australian tertiary education claims characteristics such as, a truly international experience; innovation in research; research and scholarly associations; superior academic staff; an international reputation and a worldwide respect (IDP, n.d.). A distinct advantage in both attracting foreign students onshore and facilitating the delivery of courses in Asia is its geographic location at the Southeast Asian rim. The three primary reasons listed by international students studying an Australian qualification are quality, reputation and employability (Universities Australia, 2007). Its persistence and commitment to provide a quality educational experience is reported as being an underlying factor contributing to Australia's ability to remain at the forefront of internationalization. This is confirmed by Pimpa (2008) in a study of decision making drivers of Southeast Asian students studying as Australian institutions, reporting a belief and perception that studying at a prestigious institution enhances the individuals' social standing and respect. These parameters and principles are argued to be relevant to the delivery of Australian university education in a TNE environment.

The provision of international education is important to the Australian government as it is a major export industry. In view of this, the government has taken steps to strengthen and protect 'brand Australia', predominantly through regulating the sector. The first step in this direction was the establishment of Australian Universities Quality Auditor (AUQA) in 2000 and its subsequent transformation into the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in 2011 (Tertiary Education Quality Assurance 2011). The TEQSA brief as a natural expansion of quality assurances on a national scale is to ensure that the reputation and quality of the Australian higher education sector is protected into the future. This brief is based on the government position that Australia cannot risk its international quality reputation to be exposed to inferior service providers (Gillard, 2009). The Australian government is conscious of the increasingly competitive marketplace and need to ensure quality delivery of its TNE providers.

TNE and the Curtin Business School

The Curtin Business School mostly through personal contacts, opportunities and an entrepreneurial spirit became a pioneer of providing education in offshore locations as early as the 1980's. In retrospect the relationships in the Southeast Asian region and their subsequent importance has complemented the relative opportunistic approach over time and resulted in almost three decades of successful business associations. At the start of providing international education CBS provided in country education complemented by local lectures, through private providers, mostly professional bodies, in Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia. Over time, and as the TNE sector expanded, CBS adopted a range of delivery models to enter new markets such as Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Vietnam.

As the TNE industry matured and in response to an increasingly regulated and monitored environment it became clear that some ventures did not have long term viability. As part of an externally driven quality assurance exercise CBS made the decision to disengage from a number of TNE engagements by the mid 2000's. In retrospect and with the embedded international focus of the 2008 AUQA (Curtin University of Technology, 2008) audit the discontinuation of these weaker programs, on multiple grounds, proved to be timely and appropriate. By 2009 the CBS offshore presence included the three joint venture type university branch campuses in Miri, Singapore and Sydney as well as substantial ongoing offerings through private providers in Hong Kong, Mauritius, Kuala Lumpur and Penang.

The implications of alliance type arrangements in TNE included sharing external risks and uncertainties, accessing distinct capabilities, enhancing reputation, capturing cross-business synergies in pursuing customer value and attaining increased productivity and economies of scale through skill development (Dickie and Dickie, 2008). In the context of the to date 'command and control' approach of CBS and despite a favorable AUQA report the pursuit of continuous improvements led to initiatives to further support and integrate activities in the TNE environment. The notion of a higher level of engagement and commitment towards TNE resulted in initiatives and structural changes aimed at improving quality assurance and reputation.

Based on a parent university perspective, the proper induction of academic staff in TNE locations is core to both the quality and equivalence of teaching and learning (MacDonald, 2006). The induction should aim to cover both aspects of policy and practice to assist local academic staff in developing the required understanding and skills to both teach appropriately and guide students in studying an Australian university course. In this context CBS appointed an Academic Director as part of its TNE team to oversee and quality assure the delivery of CBS courses in its various locations. The underlying intent of engagement and induction initiatives was to invest in capacity development at its TNE locations. This capacity building approach is deemed to allow the partnership to move beyond mere financial sustainability and identify clear objectives for progression and clarify expectations (Dickie and Dickie, 2008).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The increased focus on quality assurance, accreditation expectations and ambitions, teaching and learning outcomes, refocused academic roles, and alignment of policies, practices and procedures, both in the TNE sector and internally in the university, resulted in the development of a pilot induction program (PIP) targeted at the TNE activities of CBS. The program aimed in the first instance to address a wide range of these requirements by bringing together senior staff of the various TNE locations, while also serving as a 'train the trainer' exercise. The program was aimed to address needs of both academic staff at the various TNE locations and those of the institution aimed at providing quality assurances in the academic and policy and procedures spheres. The program was offered over a seven day period in March 2010. The program tapped into a wide range of resources and delivered the targeted outcomes of strategic and

operational value but also unanticipated outcomes of association, commitment and personalised integration of the participating staff.

Rationale and Structure

At the outset of the program development the primary aim was to provide a number of interactive staff development sessions, clarify information, expose staff of the various locations to the 'whole of CBS' presence and equip them to repeat the program at their local campus, effectively along the lines of the 'train the trainer' principle. The targeted group was senior academics, mostly determined by the role and likely influence at their local campus. This was envisaged to both recognise the pivotal role of the staff while aimed to ensure some authority when the program was repeated at the local campus. The over-arching purpose of the PIP included to advance a common experience and understanding of CBS and its operations, the university policies, procedures and practices and to create a network of champions across the various locations. The undercurrent of equivalence in delivery, student experience and the overall quality assurance was woven through all activities and interactions.

The program itself consisted of a mix of networking opportunities, some social in nature; administrative policy and procedures; and more academic colored teaching and learning perspectives, all set in an interactive, consultative climate. The PIP included topics as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1: PIP Program Content

National accreditations (AUQA, ESOS, TEQSA)	Blackboard
Accreditation (AACSB, Equis)	What is blended learning
Students and staff codes of conduct	English language support
Interaction with academic and professional staff	Assessment
Admission, credit transfers, curriculum mapping and the appeals process	How to encourage students to participate in class
Online Academic Student Information System	Plagiarism and reporting
Library resources	Using Turnitin
Using technology and computer-based materials	Moderation process and reporting structure
CBS Communication Skills Centre services	Strategies for effective teaching and learning
Learning styles	Observations of a tutorial
Observations of a lecture	

This table lists the range of activities and topics that made up the PIP. The list confirms a wide variety of topics including regulatory requirements; policies, procedures and processes; support mechanisms; and teaching and learning principles and practices.

To counteract the risk of information overload and in order to create a more personalised and engaging program the PIP was consciously developed to include a weekend in Perth. This facilitated not only a number of opportunities for social interaction and sigh seeing – translating in a different layer of appreciation for the main campus, but also allowed a personal exposure to the city, and Australia in a stress free environment. It was remarkable to note that all participants, including the two Perth based participants participated in all social events, translating in a very cohesive group during the program and a strong connectedness and high level of engagement throughout the program offerings. The collegiality that emerged from this contributed to a lasting network well past the programs timeline as reported later.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants

In order to ensure participation by all TNE locations CBS and the university funded one participant from each TNE location, including transport and on ground expenses. All TNE partner locations were invited to nominate and self-fund a second participant, an option that was taken up by Hong Kong and Penang, Malaysia partner locations. The Sydney branch campus also proposed two candidates to attend the

program but this did not eventuate due to unforeseen circumstances. In an announcement to executive management of all TNE arrangements, an invitation was extended to nominate senior staff, preferably academic, to attend the program. The staff was expected to be solely or predominantly committed to the CBS program and deemed most appropriate to execute the expectation to repeat the program to colleagues at the TNE location.

Table 2: Distribution of Program Participants

LOCATION	PARTICIPANT SENIORITY	PARTICIPANT ROLE
Mauritius	Senior Academic	Purely academic
Hong Kong	Two Senior administrators	Predominantly administrative
Singapore	Senior administrative manager	Purely administrative
Kuala Lumpur	Campus Director	Academic and administrative
Penang	Two Course Directors	Academic and administrative
Sarawak	Dean of Teaching and Learning	Predominantly academic
Sydney	Academic Director	Predominantly academic
Perth	Two Course Directors	Academic and administrative

This table lists the characteristics of the PIP program participants. While panel A shows the geographic location of the participants, panel B shows both the focus of the role and the number of participants. Panel C shows the composition of the role of the participant at the offshore location.

As a number of staff across TNE locations undertake both academic and administrative roles most the participants covered both spectrums. All locations nominated senior staff and nominations overlapped with initial intentions held by the organizing committee. Due to the nature of staffing, those locations that employ academic staff on an ongoing basis were able to nominate those while others that rely on fractional academic staff elected to send senior administrators that would undertake the induction of the academic staff. The participants were deemed to be the most appropriate target group to reach the larger amount of academics delivering the programs in the various TNE locations. In all eleven (11) staff participated with the following characteristics:

At the conclusion of the program and in recognition for their participation, the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic participated in a social function where certificates of attendance were issued to all participants.

Throughout the development of the PIP the desire for continuous improvement and the intention to establish this as an ongoing capacity development was kept in mind. In view of this the collection of feedback was integrated in the roll-out of the program.

Immediate Evaluation

In order to determine the actual value of the program to participants and in order to establish the future viability of the program a program evaluation was included in the wrap up session of the program on the last day. The evaluation included both qualitative and quantitative data. Table 2 below provides an overview of the quantitative data collected at the conclusion of the program. This is followed by a summary of responses to open-ended questions, seeking to ascertain the benefits and suggestions for subsequent programs.

The most notable aspect of Table 3 is that participants expressed high levels of satisfaction with the program approach and reported significant learning. All participants supported the notion of the program being repeated in the future.

Despite a significant amount of content and most likely due to the participatory and collaborative approach of the program the participants identify the main benefits of the program to be relationship and people based. Responses pointed in particular to 'being heard' and 'networking' as key strengths of the

program. Suggestions for improvements failed to point to program content or delivery but focussed on peripherals such as starting times, breaks and accommodation arrangements.

Table 3: Participant Evaluation

General Overview of Program	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Unsure	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
I found the OSIO program useful?				2	9
I think that what I learned from this program will be helpful in my work at my home campus?				3	8
I think that what I learned from this program will be helpful to my colleagues at my home campus?				4	7
The material and handouts were useful?				4	7
I would recommend this program be offered again at the Bentley campus in Perth?				1	10
I would recommend a staff development program be offered at my home campus?		2	1	3	5

This table shows the participant evaluation of the PIP program based on a 5 point Likert scale assessment of a number of questions asked about the program. Questions prompted participants to reflect on the overall usefulness of the program, their learning, the program material and their attitude towards recommending the program. The number in the columns represents the amount of respondents nominating that response.

In essence the personal understanding and engagement in working out how and why the university and CBS operate in a certain manner resulted in an unanticipated level of ownership by all participants. The added bonus of engaging with like-minded people from similar backgrounds in other TNE locations translated in a state of belonging and acceptance.

Strengths: Networking, Belonging, Being Heard and Clarifications

An assessment of the qualitative open ended feedback gathered at the end of the PIP indicated an overall reflection that the networking with colleagues from Curtin University and CBS staff was deemed as one of the most prominent benefits of the program. Respondents confirmed that the opportunity to meet staff in a face to face environment after often having communicated and interacted extensively was extremely beneficial. Confirming this are answers to the question to point out the best aspect of the PIP that drew replies in relation to the best aspects of the program along the lines of … *meeting people with whom we have been working closely;* and *.. sharing session with the teaching staff;* and *...networking and the opportunity to provide feedback.*

Importantly though, the perceived benefit of the interaction and networking includes the newly found network of colleagues from other locations. The value of this was in a shared understanding and experience translating in a recognition and membership as being part of the CBS TNE operations. Comments on the question to identify the benefits of the program included aspects of … s*haring and comparing notes with other colleagues and finding out better ways to do things;* and *... networking with other campuses and partner;* and *... meeting with Curtin delegates enhanced relationship and probably can facilitate working effectiveness in the near future*

At the start of the PIP participants expressed some sense of frustration and isolation, mostly related to not understanding or not being understood. The sense of isolation also contributed to perceptions and misinterpretations of the implementation of policies and procedures, and expectations of interaction with the main campus. The PIP allowed all participants to clearly understand where and how they individually and collectively fit in the CBS TNE operations. The result of the contextualization exercise, alongside the interaction with colleagues from other locations translated in a sense of belonging and acceptance of each other. This, in turn, contributed to a strong sense of identity, as expressed by one participant as … *I feel as being part of 'Curtin Global'.*

A second theme that emerged from the post program feedback referred to the opportunity to put the case of the offshore location on the agenda. Due to the limited opportunities for interaction and the virtual absence of face to face interaction the value of being a contributor and participant in a forum of equals was significant for participants. In most instances these discussions highlighted the reality that difficulties and problems experienced at one location also exist at most other locations and levelled the frustrations often associated with managing these matters with the main campus. The mere opportunity to be heard was described as valuable, as was the notion of a willingness at the CBS to learn from the PIP as reflected in the comment that … *each location/country may have different needs which CBS may not be aware of.*

A large amount of value was seemingly extracted through the mode of the PIP delivery, enabling content to be enhanced and explained in an interactive and participative way. The mere opportunity to engage with colleagues, either those with whom relationships were already in place or those with whom shared perspectives and experiences became clear throughout the PIP assisted in a more accurate understanding of the realities and position of the TNE staff and contributed to a significant shift in mindset for all participants.

Another trend identified from the PIP immediate feedback is the value of engaging with policy makers and enforcers. Participants generally indicated being detached from policies and procedures as the meaning and intent are often difficult to ascertain and understand from a distance – geographical, language and educational context wise. The opportunity to engage up-close with staff and material in a focussed environment not only allowed a clearer understanding but also contributed to an acceptance and support of the matters at hand. In essence most participants joined the programs with underlying tones of being at opposite sides of the TNE delivery and gradually transitioned to subscribe to represent CBS in their respective locations. Comments like … *the program gives a better understanding of the happenings at CBS and CBSi;* and … *open communication, understanding of the direction in which CBSi is headed, & discussion of various issues with all partners* reflect this perspective best.

An insight into the way that academic staff on the main campus interacts with students and material was also pointed out as a strength. The Australian delivery mode of mass lectures and tutorials is often not in place at TNE locations simply due to the smaller class sizes. Participants indicated that the insight provided into the practical delivery of a lecture and tutorial was an eye opener to them and of particular value. As one participant put it … *the class visit of Business Law 100 was enlightening.*

Throughout the program a number of workshops were highlighted for their value to individual participants. Commendations were made for the workshops explaining the library access, accreditation processes and implications and the teaching and learning sessions.

Improvements

The responses on possible program improvements for the future delivered an unanticipated angle. Some dissatisfaction was expressed with the accommodation with participants suggesting accommodation closer to campus. Although the campus is located in a suburban area and accommodation is not available nearby the time spent in traffic to and from the campus has most likely frustrated participants, most of whom are either used to highly efficient public transport or uncongested roads.

The scheduling of the seven day program also attracted some constructive feedback. The program was a full time residential program with a high intensity. In an attempt to expose participants to a significant volume and variety of content it is likely that the full days and the vast volume of information on the back of mostly tight travel schedules contributed to the experience. The organizing committee noted the suggestion and would take this into consideration for any future planning.

Under the recommendations for improvements, another suggestion was noted, namely the limited focus on teaching and learning. This feedback was likely a result of pre-program expectations from some participants combined with the strong focus on engaging and preparing students for an Australian education experiences. Overall none of the criticisms were substantial, nor do they pose an obstacle to being addressed in future versions of the program. Overall the challenge of any program will remain to strike a balance between the vast volume of content and the opportunity to engage and reap personal and institutional benefits from the induction program.

Reflection

As part of the immediate feedback and in line with the consultative approach to the PIP participants were asked to provide an indication of general comments and perspectives on the program aimed at any future versions of the program. While there was little overlap in suggestions forthcoming from this question some valuable topics that are tabled include the development of collaborative research, a TNE mentoring system, extended opportunity to further enhance existing relationships and targeted sessions to introduce university and CBS staff to participants.

In reflection of the PIP some generic comments reflect the experience by participants. In general, the sentiments of the value of the program are best captured through the feedback by participants that includes … *it has been a great week and it was so informative;* and … *very well organised program, would suggest that it becomes a regular/yearly event;* and … *thank you for initiating this developmental program. It has been very useful and informative.*

In an attempt to get a concise summary of the value of the program participants were also requested to describe what the program had meant to them in a single sentence. Not surprizingly the notion of networking, learning, being heard and belonging resurfaces in this section. The following quotes best summarise the single sentence feedback: *The program has bridged different ideas and brought everyone to the same understanding, it has helped to align our understanding of Curtin's values and how they work here;* and … *Informative and generates greater understanding and awareness about CBS and partner institutions;* and … *The program enabled me to discover Curtin (the campus and the people) as well as meet and discuss with people from other locations;* and finally … *It has been very informative and I am glad that I feel I am part of Curtin-CBS.*

Long Term Evaluation

In addition to the collection of data upon completion of the program as reported above the program organisers requested further feedback and reflection on the value of the program more than 9 months after the program. The reasoning for the collection of feedback was to establish if the feel-good nature of the experience and its actual value for the various TNE locations persisted over time. The feedback session was also aimed at establishing if the train the trainer exercise had delivered the intended outcome of spreading the information and content of the PIP program to a wider audience of academic staff in the different locations.

It was interesting to note that the initial value of face-to-face interaction and engagement had subsided significantly and the focus of the feedback was squarely on the value of the PIP content. This was reassuring for the program in that the ultimate aim was to ensure that quality assurance measures, systems and procedures were understood and embraced in the various TNE locations. Participants were asked to notify the value of the program and indicate to what extent the program had contributed to the learning experience of staff and students at the respective locations. Participants were also invited to share challenges and successes in implementing some of the learning's from the PIP program at their locations.

Despite the reflection of the actual PIP being a unique and enjoyable experience, overall the responses indicated a strong task focus. Positives reported as being implemented included the pursuit of more focussed and better quality feedback through the moderation process so as to ensure continuous improvement and better alignment of assessment. Along a similar line, staff in most TNE locations had embraced a change to electronic marking with curiosity and eagerness. Most frustration expressed by participants was associated with the compulsory use of a range of software that continued to cause technical difficulties. It remains unclear if this is a result of training or differences in information technology systems and capacity at the different locations.

An associated change in behavior was the uptake by students of the blended learning resources made available directly from the main campus through podcasts or i-lectures. This trend is encouraging in efforts to implement a blended learning model and has significant value in quality assurance efforts, particularly when focussing on the content of delivery and albeit passive engagement with the CBS academic staff member. The value was reported by one participant as … *the teaching faculty from Curtin provided us a refreshing look at how to improve our lecture delivery which I shared during my staff meeting.*

The dominant trend of networking related comments in the post induction feedback were subtly present as participants reported a significant improvement of operational interaction and being able to resolve matters. Core to this, according to the participants, was the knowledge of who to contact for a specific matter and the familiarity with the person derived from the actual face to face PIP interaction. The impact was labelled as significant to the extent that two participants claimed that their participation in PIP had a direct bearing on gaining national accreditation as it validated the role and association of the local operations back to the university.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This paper reflects on the outcomes of a newly developed program in the context of ongoing quality assurance changes in the Australian TNE environment. Data was collected from all participants in a newly established induction program aimed specifically at senior and experienced staff from the complete range of offshore locations where business programs are offered. Data collection took place in two stages – first immediately after and secondly 9 months after the conclusion of the program. A thematic analysis was undertaken to determine the value and contribution of the program to quality assurance of the offshore delivery of academic programs and university presence.

Upon analysis it is clear that the PIP program holds significant value through its content but, remarkably, an equally important value in the delivery mode and approach to the program. Despite initial intentions to develop a program aimed at assisting to ensure quality assurance at a faculty level and indirectly at the university level, the program has delivered a significant amount of unintended benefits. The interaction and engagement of the participants on the main campus, as peers in a residential forum not only validated their association but impacted positively on the working culture between the main campus and the different TNE locations. The newly found identity and belonging of participants has transformed them into CBS agents on their respective campuses who continue to facilitate interactions.

Although the paper reports on the experience of a targeted induction initiative of a relatively active Australian Business faculty the underlying limitation rests with the sample size of the respondents having limited representation at both the university level or for that matter for other education providers. In addition, the data set and therefore analysis is basic in nature and does not allow for a more rigorous interpretation of responses and experiences.

Nevertheless, the PIP proves to be an ideal tool to enhance ongoing efforts to develop capacity and align course material, delivery and teaching and learning approaches across the various TNE locations. CBS has decided to repeat the program biannually to ensure that its TNE offerings are kept engaged while pursuing the continuous improvement in its quality assurance activities. Yoon, Guffey and Kijewski (1993) confirm that a reputable and best practice provider in TNE has little choice but to establish and protect its reputation, through quality assurance measures that allows it to meet accreditation and auditing requirements.

This opens the door for possible future research, analysis and reflection of both ways and means in which universities, Australian and other, actively playing in the TNE environment can leverage their reputation and presence in offshore markets. With increasing pressures in the global TNE industry universities will benefit from stronger association with staff in the various locations to enable them to ensure the delivery of quality education in those locations but also to assist their product and services to be of the standard and nature as the university expects. Ultimately this reassurance will allow successful institutions to strengthen their position in the TNE environment and survive the increasingly competitive climate.

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