

International collaboration presents both opportunity and challenge. **Simon Mercado** and **Julie Perrin Halot** show how it can be managed and add value to organisations and their stakeholders



Making international collaboration work

International Collaborative Provision (ICP) is an increasingly prominent feature within higher education. Linked to the international mobility of students and the expansion of “Transnational Education” (TNE), ICP presents both opportunity and challenge to higher-education institutions and their leaders. It raises financial, academic and quality considerations that may be of considerable weight.

For some institutions ICP is integral to mission and positioning while for others it is an activity rife with complication and risk. This polarity is underscored by instances of institutional brand building and failure linked to collaborative engagements.

Nevertheless, the rapid growth in the number and diversity of international educational provisions establishes ICP as an area of preoccupation for providers, regulators and accrediting bodies. All major stakeholders can benefit from a clearer understanding of the complexities of ICP and its place within the accreditation standards.

This article seeks to demystify the phenomenon and reassure those with responsibility that ICP is both manageable and adds value to organisations and their stakeholders. Building on an original taxonomy of collaborative provision, our endeavour here is to provide a framework for quality management of new and existing ICP engagements. We draw on our direct experience in cross-border education, engagement with peers and the latest information on comparative and international quality management.

Defining ICP

From the perspective of an awarding institution, collaborative provision refers to an educational offering delivered, supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with an external partner organisation or a number of such partners. This arrangement normally leads to an award (or to specific credit towards an award) of the institution. In certain instances, awards may be made jointly with the partner(s) or as a part of a “mix” of qualifications.

Collaboration may be undertaken with a range of external parties including higher-education institutions, other educational providers, public bodies and business firms. By definition, ICP is international in scope and our focus is on

collaborations involving partner higher-education institutions or wider educational providers.

Table 1 (over the page) presents eight principal forms of ICP. They are either instances of Principal or Joint Partner Provision (where the partner does the bulk of delivery or at least a matching share) or instances of Minor or Supporting Partner Provision (where the partner plays a minor or supporting role to the activity of the awarding institution).

Many of these arrangements are traditionally included in typologies of TNE where TNE is assumed to refer to an institution’s delivery of one or more of its academic programmes to learners located in a different country. Here we include collaborative arrangements typically omitted from such classification including those facilitating study abroad and student exchange.

Our aim is to fully represent the collaborative continuum running from arrangements supporting international student mobility (ISM) to those based on service or programme mobility. This is the real spectrum of collaborative activity as most of us experience it.

Drivers and benefits

From the perspective of an awarding institution, ICPs offer numerous advantages in supporting institutional development and mission. Such collaborations allow educational institutions to extend their geographic reach and/or to broaden their offer. This is often with reduced set-up cost relative to direct foreign market entry and reduced financial risk.

Under certain types of arrangement, opportunities exist to access local market knowledge and share operational resources with local partners. Students and participants can benefit from engagement with different education systems and experiencing international learning opportunities.

Through ties with similar bodies, higher-education institutes can offer and deliver experiences for their students otherwise unachievable (for example, study in another part of the world and competing study options). Other drivers include: revenue generation, risk diversification, capacity building and reputational gain. Whatever the strategic driver(s), it is essential that any ICP has strategic intent and fits a long-term development strategy.

Challenges and risks

As stated above, ICP is also an activity associated with a certain number of challenges and risks. These apply both to the awarding institution and/or its partner(s). If an ICP is not constructed and maintained in alignment with prevailing quality standards then reputational capital and accreditation are at potential risk. Moreover, there may be a negative impact on financial performance and on the satisfaction and support of a broad spectrum of participants both at home and in the host country.

Awarding institutions must act responsibly, recognising that ICP is a domain where there is often an asymmetry of power between institutions. At the extreme, institutions from one educational system can transpose practices and demands upon institutions in another and this has led some authors to interpret the often dominant role of high-power institutions (and higher-education sectors) as a form of academic imperialism.

Our experience tells us that collaborative provision can be a valuable asset to a school and can be supportive of mission and accreditation. Risk can be mitigated and benefits enjoyed when ICP is well designed and executed. So what does it take to get it right and what are some of the primary issues from the point of view of accreditation standards and status?

Getting it right

We feel that good practice in ICP comes down to good governance, organisation and management. Formalised and well-communicated policies and processes are equally important in ensuring smooth and efficient operations.

The starting point must always be a sense of understanding of what the institution is trying to achieve and why. Collaboration is a means to an end. This implies a clearly articulated (international) strategy in which the place and function of ICPs is clear and in which the identification and selection of partners reflects primary goals and objectives.

ICP should be an integrated part of an educational institution's strategy for development and internationalisation. As such, objectives and indicators concerning these activities must be fully incorporated in the process of strategic planning and renewal. This includes risk assessment and contingency planning at this level.



In terms of ensuring the necessary framework for running these provisions, a starting point for each institution would be the identification and categorisation of its collaborative agreements. Our own eight-point framework may be of some assistance here. This will enable identification of the relative weight and importance of each type of provision as well as any points of intersection.

Specifications of governance arrangements and appropriate levels of oversight must be established. It is also recommended that a centralised structure has responsibility for the range of collaborative provisions. Roles and responsibilities within that structure must be clearly defined.

The next step is to establish a catalogue of processes by which the ICPs are operated. It is recommended that institutions document and ensure the following processes:

- Programme development and approval
- Due diligence
- Risk assessment and contingency planning
- Faculty deployment (both home faculty and local/site faculty if applicable)
- Faculty development and management of qualifications
- Equivalency of content, delivery and assessment
- Programme review and revision
- Assessment of achievement against learning outcomes
- Continuous quality assurance and improvement
- Periodic audit and external examination
- Student engagement and feedback

The centrality of each policy/process will vary for each of the different kinds of collaboration but a broad portfolio consisting of one or more of our ICP types will require a core of clear policies and processes.



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Type	Principal or Joint Partner Provision	Minor or Supporting Partner Provision
<p>CREDIT Student Mobility</p>	<p>Articulation</p> <p>Programme credits are delivered at an affiliated centre or partner institution of the awarding institution.</p> <p>Credits are counted as accredited prior learning allowing for articulation onto latter stages of a degree programme of the awarding institution.</p> <p>Credit accumulation with transfer.</p> <p>Quality Assurance applies under the auspice of the awarding institution's quality assurance system.</p>	<p>Exchange / Study Abroad</p> <p>Study abroad on a formalised exchange or study abroad programme. Study is at an affiliated centre or partner institution of the awarding institution.</p> <p>Credits are counted as minor element to degree programme of the awarding institution.</p> <p>Credit accumulation with transfer.</p> <p>Quality Assurance applies under the auspice of the awarding institution's quality assurance system.</p>
<p>DEGREE Student Mobility</p>	<p>Joint/Dual programme</p> <p>Programme credits are delivered at an affiliated centre or partner institution of awarding institution within a joint or dual degree framework.</p> <p>Credit accumulation leading to degree award(s) based on study in at least two countries/ institutions.</p> <p>Quality Assurance applies under the auspice of the quality assurance systems of all awarding institutions.</p>	<p>Rotation programme</p> <p>Programme credits are delivered at an affiliated centre or partner institution of the awarding institution within the framework of a rotational degree programme.</p> <p>Collaboration may also apply in instance where an awarding institution's site/campus is hosted by a third-party institution.</p> <p>Credit accumulation leading to degree award(s) based on study in at least two countries/institutions.</p> <p>Quality Assurance applies under the auspice of the awarding institution's quality assurance system allowing for local variations and potential validation agreements.</p>
<p>DEGREE Programme or Service Mobility</p>	<p>Franchising</p> <p>The awarding institution permits a partner organisation to deliver its programme 'in country' under licence.</p> <p>The programme is typically derived/adapted from a programme taught on the home campus of the awarding institution.</p> <p>Quality Assurance applies under the auspice of the awarding institution's quality assurance system.</p>	<p>Off-shore ("Hosted")</p> <p>The awarding institution delivers its own programme 'in country' using its own faculty. This may be on a "fly-in" basis or through local appointments.</p> <p>Delivery may be at a Partner Academy, JV campus or in conjunction with a local organization providing local facilities and learning resources (IT, library and support tutors).</p> <p>Academic ownership and control rests with the awarding institution.</p> <p>Quality Assurance applies under the auspice of the awarding institution's quality assurance system.</p>
<p>DEGREE Programme or Service Mobility</p>	<p>Validation</p> <p>The awarding institution approves and gives "award" to a programme designed and delivered by a partner organisation.</p> <p>The programme is not taught on the home campus of the awarding institution but at the 'validated' partner.</p> <p>Quality Assurance applies under the auspice of the awarding institution's quality assurance system.</p>	<p>Distance</p> <p>Students study on-line using the awarding institution's distance learning materials and infrastructure.</p> <p>A local organisation may be engaged to provide learning resources (IT, facilities, local tutors) in a specific location. A learning partner may support content development and/or delivery 'platform'.</p> <p>Academic ownership and control rests with the awarding institution.</p> <p>Quality Assurance applies under the auspice of the awarding institution's quality assurance system.</p>

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Accreditation issues

International accreditation standards can assist institutions in asking the right questions as they put into place the steps and mechanisms we characterise here. Several accreditation frameworks (AACSB, EQUIS, EPAS and AMBA, for example) provide guidance and lay out tests and standards.

Given that collaborative provision implies that the institution or business school requesting accreditation or re-accreditation may be in a position of shared or delegated control over certain aspects of its degree programmes, the attention given to ICP is both predictable and justified.

Within the context of an EQUIS review, for example, it is normally judged necessary to assess how collaboration is impacting quality and therefore indirectly the EQUIS brand.

ICPs also fall within the activities chosen by institutions as they seek to boost their own internationalisation (EQUIS Chapter 8) and they must demonstrate that they are part of a plan for strategic development and subject to the same quality and continuous improvement requirements as any of the home-based activities.

We need to be cognisant of the meaning and translation of these standards in the context of each ICP type we pursue. For example, franchise agreements will not typically concern home faculty deployment but will require considerable efforts around faculty development at the collaborative partner as well as the verification of teaching and assessment standards.

Assessment of achievement against learning outcomes is pivotal in instances of “degree mobility” (such as joint and dual degrees) but is likely to be less exhaustive or granular in instances of lower-value “credit mobility”.

Beyond just the classroom experience for students enrolled in “offshore” programme offerings, the quality of the broader student experience and access to the same kinds of opportunities and services must also be an area of regular vigilance and quality control.



Emerging agendas

Moving forward, our feeling is that we should embrace and encourage the linkages and opportunities that arise through ICP. Management efficiencies and good governance can help to mitigate risks and maximise benefits. What we must never do is to confuse legitimate concern with poor practice in ICP with hostility to the principle of international collaboration. We should build on best practice and enhance quality assurance where there is scope and requirement.

A related challenge is to better map the diversity of ICP to prevailing accreditation frameworks and the reverse. One of our clearest messages is that different forms of collaboration raise different questions for accreditation bodies and for the participants themselves.

For additional guidance, we suggest you refer to the EQUAL Guidelines for Collaborative Provisions. This document is accessible on the EQUAL website:

www. EQUAL.network



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