"ACE will focus on academic excellence and the synergy between research and education in order to better prepare the next generation of executives. The basis of the joint project is the premise that there is much to share and to learn from very diverse institutional experiences

The new EFMD-backed Alliance of Chinese and European business schools (ACE) offers increased opportunities for mutual understanding and co-operation says **Martine Plompen**

ACE PROJECT OFFERS NEW OPPORTUNITIES

There is a new kid on the management education and development block. At the end of May this year (2013) 20 leading business schools came together to create the Alliance of Chinese and European and business schools (ACE), a body supported by EFMD.

Since 2012, Wei Shen (Associate Dean for China and Jean Monnet Chair at ESSCA School of Management in France) and Chong Li (Director EFMD Asia) have been working to establish this joint project to share experiences of globalisation, encourage the internationalisation of business students, and, particularly, exchange ideas on management and business teaching and research.

The cultural richness of both China and Europe provides an ideal context for helping young people to develop a global awareness, though they will need a solid base of knowledge and multicultural understanding to be able to make connections.

"The sharing of experiences and exchanges around internationalisation and the future development of teaching and research are the keystones," says Catherine Leblanc, Dean of ESSCA, which hosted the May event in Angers, France.

Dean Leblanc emphasises that people-to-people exchanges and integrated thinking will be a major influence on students in the future.

ACE will focus on academic excellence and the synergy between research and education in order to better prepare the next generation of executives. The basis of the joint project is the premise that there is much to share and to learn from very diverse institutional experiences. Planned activities include exchanges of students and professors as well as research conferences and the development of international skills modules.

The further roll-out of the initiative will be closely linked to EFMD activities, with a commitment to quality improvement. Eric Cornuel, CEO and Director General of EFMD, underlined at the ACE launch that for over 40 years EFMD has been involved in raising the standards of management education around the globe, stressing his support for the project.

Through accreditation, conferences, seminars and research, EFMD has been a key player in the internationalisation of business education.

More particularly, EFMD has long-standing experience and expertise in co-operation with China. In 1984 it launched the China-EEC Management Programme in Beijing, administered by EFMD, and ten years later, the joint-venture China Europe International Business School(CEIBS) came into being.

"We will now take this mutual understanding to a new level", Professor Cornuel says.

One of the founding members is the Southwestern University of Finance and Economics (SWUFE), based in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China.

Dan Yang, Vice-President and Dean, is clear about why this new alliance is very important to his own institution.

"It is about the quality of the partners," he says, and stresses his commitment and enthusiasm by paraphrasing President John F Kennedy's historic words: "Ask not what this initiative can do for you – ask what you can do for it".

In practical terms, SWUFE is offering to support the secretarial office of the ACA alliance, including office space, staff, website and much more.

The Faculty of International Relations (FIR) of the University of Economics in Prague, Czech Republic, is also proud to be a founding member of the ACE Alliance.

Stephan Mueller, the dean, explains that the invitation to join the ACE could not have come at a more appropriate time as the school opened a new Centre for Asian Studies in January 2013 and newly established contacts with Chinese business schools will greatly enhance the possibilities for joint research and international co-operation. In addition, faculty will benefit from the exchange of scholars and students.

Teachers and students at FIR are looking forward to the forthcoming co-operation among the ACE member schools and to the opening up of new ways of internationalising academic life.

Dean Mueller underlines the fact that FIR has been dedicated to internationalisation for many years because of a strong belief in the positive effects of exchanging ideas on the quality of education and better understanding among people.

After the launch ceremony, the Chinese delegation visited VSE University of Economics Prague in the Czech Republic as a start in gaining a deeper understanding about ACE partner schools. Similar visits to Chinese partners are also being planned.

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In May 2013 20 leading business schools came together to create the Alliance of Chinese and European business schools (ACE)

Taiwan's National Tsing Hua University is another partner institution. Established in 1956 and with a common origin with the institution of the same name in mainland China, its initial focus was on science and technology. Now the university is more active in humanities, social sciences and management.

The university's College of Technology Management (which provides most of the university's management education programmes) was founded in 2000 and has 1,400 students (800 of whom are undergraduates) and 65 full-time faculty members.

Dean Chao-Hsi Huang says that the main reason for involvement in ACE is to give students more opportunities for internationalisation. The university is based in Taiwan's "Silicon Valley" and there is a huge demand for internationally aware graduates.

Currently, National Tsing Hua has a small MBA programme with room for expansion. All courses are taught in English and by faculty members with PhDs obtained in the US or Europe.

The university is aiming at student exchanges at various levels. It already has the accommodation capacity and hopes to speed-up current exchange procedures.

Many Taiwanese students are eager for exchange visits to so-called advanced countries in the northern hemisphere. Although Taiwan has evolved enormously in the last few decades, attracting foreign students is proving to be less straightforward. In addition, the Ministry of Education (MoE) regulations impose limits on these kinds of initiatives, though Dean Huang underlines the distinction between MoE recognition and market recognition in general.

Dean Huang recognises that the ACE partnership is also a highly cost-effective way to identify potential exchange partners.

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This view is shared by the non-Asian schools within ACE. Italian ACE partner Politecnico di Milano and particularly its School of Management, for example, has successfully developed partnerships in China over the years. But President Gianluca Spina believes that ACE will meet the need to further strengthen its presence and capability in East Asia.

There are two areas the Milan team particularly appreciate in the ACE project.

First is the co-ordinated effort of several distinguished European business schools to share experiences and joint efforts to better explore the opportunities in China.

And second, the access offered to a group of highly esteemed Asian business schools, which though not yet highly internationalised are eager to become international players.

This is a huge opportunity for all schools. President Spina expects that by joining ACE , Politecnico di Milano can enhance and strengthen its presence in the region, gaining scale and impact.

Professor Cheng Siwei, a former Vice President of the People's Congress of China, and current Dean of the School of Management at the University of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (UCAS), an ACE founding member, believes firmly that Chinese business schools need to be more global.

He suggests that management must be related to the cultural context and must release the creativity within people and that management based on people is the future.

Education, especially management education, needs to be broader and to include cultural awareness and philosophy and more innovation, he adds. This is why the ACE alliance is so important, he says. We have to establish mutual trust and learn from each other.

The in-depth exchanges among ACE partner schools are a process with a very promising future.

Acting in a collaborative manner, having the flexibility to expect the unexpected and gaining institutional commitment at all levels, the ACE project will be able to address the challenges and opportunities of globalisation.

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ACE Founding Members

ANTWERP MANAGEMENT SCHOOL
BEIJING JIAO TONG UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF CHINESE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
EBS BUSINESS SCHOOL
ESSCA SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
GOTHENBURG UNIVERSITY
HARBIN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
LEEDS UNIVERSITY
NATIONAL TSING HUA UNIVERSITY
NORTHWESTERN POLYTECHNICAL UNIVERSITY (CHINA)
MIP POLITECNICO DI MILANO
ROTTERDAM SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT ERASMUS UNIVERSITY
SHANGHAI UNIVERSITY OF FINANCE AND ECONOMICS
SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY OF FINANCE AND ECONOMICS
UNIVERSIDADE CATOLICA LISBON
UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
UNIVERSITY OF MACAU
VSE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS PRAGUE
XIAMEN UNIVERSITY

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