

ThinkTNE Forum 2024

Progressive Partnerships in Transnational Education - Key Takeaways

27 February 2024
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



Context

Post Covid-19, governments in East Asia are increasingly seeking innovative and cost-effective ways to boost their higher education capabilities by investing in their countries' education infrastructure, boosting local capacity, and expanding access to quality local and global education to their students. They also have ambitious plans to create regional education hubs to attract top talent and educational resources to their countries. Universities are encouraged to develop partnerships, exchanges and relationships with overseas counterparts, with transnational education (TNE) partnerships being one of the key outcomes.

In addition, TNE now features prominently in the global ambitions of major universities, worldwide. What are the different approaches of institutions towards building TNE at scale and in progressing such partnerships, and how have these evolved in the face of major global challenges?

The Think TNE Forum 2024 builds on the success of Think TNE 2018 and the virtual series in 2020, complements discussions at the Going Global Asia Pacific Conference in 2022, and is a response to current research, analysis and advice on transnational education.

Progressing TNE Partnerships

The key focus of the 2024 forum was on encouraging higher education institutions to move from purely 'teaching franchises' to institutional collaborations that encapsulate progressive ambitions for students, academics and TNE management in-country. A combination of keynote speeches, case studies and panel discussions were held during the forum to explore the following questions:

- What are the metrics to measure successful student and academic experiences at TNE institutions?
- How can academic mobility and research collaborations be encouraged and promoted through TNE partnerships?
- How can TNE partnerships support academic professional development?
- How can TNE partnerships scale up undergraduate and develop post-graduate teaching?
- What can be done to engage industries, local government and regional partners to catalyse opportunities for research, students internships and entrepreneurship?

Key discussion points from the forum

- Transnational education (TNE) can play a major role in the development of new models, new styles and new shifts in focus in delivering higher education. TNE has the chance to morph into a strategic form of higher education delivery boasting richer and more sophisticated models, as institutions embrace the benefits of the 'hybrid' approach to learning and teaching, while at the same time, take efforts to bring students together for collaborative projects through various initiatives. This could mean shifting away from the traditional hub-and-spokes model to a "global university" model, with greater integration between partner institutions all over the world. Already, there is evidence of strong collaboration between successful TNE partners, especially in understanding the local needs and context.
- TNE, however, still faces difficulties and challenges amid gaps in policies and difficulties in programme accreditation; strict KPIs such as student recruitment targets set by the home campus; exchange rate fluctuations and economic uncertainty; a lack of autonomy for franchised programmes that make it more difficult for programmes to address local needs; and a lack of foresight in decision making. Another challenge facing the HE sector more broadly is the changing behaviour of students who may not necessarily believe in the 'traditional mode' of learning or may not want to pursue 'traditional' career paths.
- The value of mutual trust between partners as well as the importance of taking an honest and open approach to potential problems were emphasised at the forum. Understanding each other's goals was seen as critical for building this foundation of trust. There was a strong consensus in favour of elevating the equality of TNE partnership and fostering greater trust so that the host campus faculty would not feel like the lesser partner or that they are under surveillance.
- Institutions should aim for both depth and breadth in partnerships - potential benefits may include revenue, increased inbound and outbound mobility, research collaboration and a boost to an institution's global reputation, but it is important to aim for financial sustainability with a thorough understanding of what the real costs will be. Participants at the forum noted that financial sustainability for both the host and overseas providers should be considered when thinking about the future of TNE.
- The development of productive and progressive TNE partnerships between UK-EA institutions will be essential for the global knowledge economy to flourish. These partnerships will advance our knowledge through collaboration and reform agendas, build capacity to address global challenges, support access to quality international education for students, provide exposure to diverse teaching environments and teaching experiences for UK academics, and expand UK institutional footprint globally.
- Successful TNE partnerships are ones which are progressive in their approaches starting with capacity building of their local staff to investing in collaborative academic development, research and strategic investment for the mutual benefit of both the foreign and local partner. It is also one where partners are able to leverage and engage local government, cities and regional partners to catalyse opportunities in graduate employability, research and entrepreneurship, widening participations as well as contributing to discussions and research on solving global and local issues.

Quotes from Think TNE 2023



We have to be clear on why we're doing it [TNE], what the KPIs are, and learn from the experience we've had of the last 20 - 30 years of doing transnational education, to make it durable and to make it have lasting impact.

Matt Durnin, NOUS Consulting



Institutions need to provide access to higher education that gets people excited. It is not all about what an institution wants to achieve. We need to shift the focus to what people want.

Dr. Mien Wee Cheng, Sunway College



We have a role in opening up and welcoming human collaboration rather than building walls and boundaries around what we claim to be ours.

Prof. Mushtak Al-Atabi, Heriot-Watt University Malaysia Campus



There is a delicate balance between the potential risks and benefits of a TNE partnership, but institutions are advised not to operate only from a risk limitation perspective as this can inhibit international engagement.

Alexis Brown, Head of Global Insights Hub, British Council



The key is building a sense of belonging, with people engaged on both sides across all aspects of the partnership.

Prof. Sue Welburn, University of Edinburgh Zhejiang Edinburgh Institute



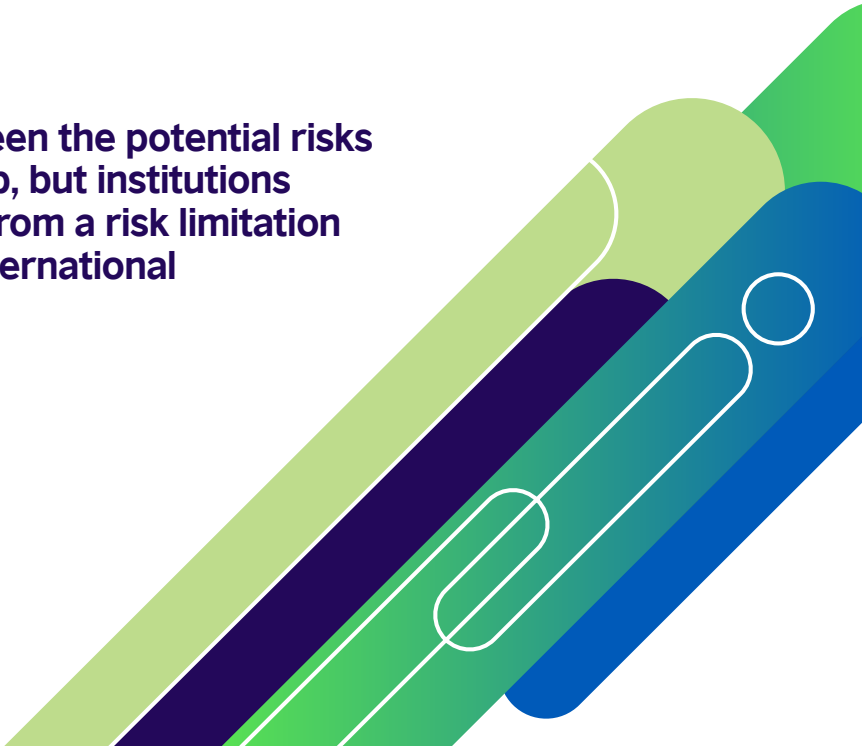
TNE is not about the great universities of the UK or elsewhere coming to the Global South to educate people, but about how TNE works both ways.

Prof. Mushtak Al-Atabi, Heriot-Watt University Malaysia Campus



What scares me is that the current financial model operating in UK universities is becoming unstuck. This will drive universities to be more introspective and risk averse in international education and pursue tactical rather than strategic goals.

Prof. Simon Guy, Lancaster University





Opportunities to collaborate and market insights

Opportunities and Insights (O&I) is British Council's portal for the UK's higher education sector. It houses market insights from across the globe and provides information on opportunities to collaborate with higher education providers overseas.

The platform provides:

- Opportunities (including funding opportunities) to collaborate with peers internationally
- Insights on international recruitment trends, partnership and research trends as well as policy developments globally

Check out the following tools:

- New transnational education data tool
- HESA data tool
- Market intelligence briefs



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