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Chapter 3

Expatriate academics and transnational teaching: the need for quality assurance and quality enhancement to go hand in hand

Abstract

In the past two decades transnational education has been increasing, and so has the need for staff to teach on these programmes. This study sought the views of non-Anglophone expatriate academics teaching transnationally in Oman by means of a survey and follow-up interviews. It highlights the challenges that they face in a teaching and learning environment that is academically and culturally new to them. These challenges relate mostly to the students as they need extensive structured guidance and to maintaining programme quality in meeting the learning outcomes, particularly critical thinking and writing in English. Teaching adaptation and quality assurance were less challenging. Findings indicate that for a more enhanced teaching and learning environment, both the provider and host institution need to continuously invest in face-to-face professional development addressing the challenges expatriate academics experience, and that the sole focus on quality assurance by provider universities is not sufficient to create this.

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agreement that the quality of the teaching and learning environment in the host institution is a challenging aspect.

Considering that the survey results did not differ much between 2015 and 2018 when staff numbers had almost doubled, this underlines the need for continuous quality enhancement in the form of an extensive in-house professional development programme and good support during the induction period in the host institution. Foci for professional development are often decided upon by the UK university (quality assurance), or in response to quality audits (teaching quality), but not so much in response to the challenges perceived by the academics concerned. In such a programme more attention needs to be paid to what they consider the most challenging aspects, namely those related to students and maintaining programme quality.

The quality assurance of the whole assessment cycle of the programmes offered, whilst absolutely necessary, is in itself not sufficient for guaranteeing a teaching and learning environment which is comparable to that of the provider institution. We therefore recommend academic registry, quality assurance and quality enhancement to be an integrated team with institutional data and learning analytics continuously informing professional development needs. Thus quality enhancement at an individual level through professional development is reinforced by quality enhancement at an institutional level (Williams, 2016), thus leading to a more equivalent teaching and learning environment.

We also recommend that transnational education providers move more explicitly from providing programmes and quality assurance towards supporting quality enhancement as well. Particularly if the higher education system of the provider and its tacit assumptions of the academic culture are alien to both staff and students, support in terms of professional development and quality enhancement embedded in the host institution is essential for the quality of the teaching and learning environment, and provisions for this should be included in the contract. The Quality Assurance Agency states in their UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2011) that

.... the fundamental principle underpinning all arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with others is that the degree awarding body has ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, regardless of where these opportunities are delivered and who provides them.

Echoing the British Council report (2016), in a context such as the one described here, we argue in favour of a champion of the provider university within the host institution, somebody with enough seniority, expertise and credibility to drive change and continuous quality enhancement of teaching, learning and assessments. If the ultimate aim of quality assurance by the provider university and in-country quality audits is to achieve equivalence in the learning opportunities for TNE students, there is a need for a clear contractual provision for such a champion to be embedded in the host institution with clearly defined responsibilities. A single provider cannot enforce this, so here lies a task ahead for the worldwide sector as a whole.