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Sheffield Hallam University and Tunku Abdul Rahman
College**

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY AND TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an outline of the strategic partnership between Tunku Abdul Rahman College and Sheffield Hallam University's Built Environment Department. Within the paper curriculum design and key course developments, with supporting rationale are established. The different cultural aspects of teaching international students are explored, noting how student engagement and behaviour has changed and developed over a 13 year relationship. The paper concludes with the identification of future collaborative ventures.

Keywords: Course Design, Cultural Change and Partnership Development

INTRODUCTION

The Tunku Abdul Rahman College (TARC) Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) collaborative relationship was initially founded in 1999 leading to the design of a bespoke curriculum offering a 60 credit final year Top Up award enabling students to build upon their prior award to achieve an undergraduate honours degree over a 12 week intensive programme of study undertaken at SHU.

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The Department now offers two courses and these have proven to be highly successful, and we are now running into our thirteen year, culminating in some 1800 graduates over the intervening period.

DEVELOPMENT

The initial award was designed using detailed curriculum mapping of the TARC Advanced Diploma (Technology) Building qualification, which is fully accredited by the Chartered Institute of Building and undertaken by the students over a four year period. This led to the development of the highly integrated award of BSc (Hons) Building Construction Management.

The 60 credit level 6 study of the BSc (Hons) Building Construction Management degree at SHU has the specific aim of drawing upon prior learning undertaken at TAR College, so as to challenge the students with holistic construction related problems.

In 2009 due to in country development and industrial demand the sister award of BSc (Hons) Quantity Surveying Studies was developed along similar lines, having been founded upon the newly developed TARC award of Advanced Diploma (Technology) Quantity Surveying. Again the 60 credit Top Up award has the specific aim of drawing upon prior learning but also serves to challenge students holistically from a quantity surveying and cost perspective.

Both awards share two common modules in the form of Integrated Project and Management Theory and Application, which has been highly successful since the emphasis is one of integrative working, which translated well in terms of industrial practices and employability skills.

The two remaining 20 credit modules are of specialist focus and application for each award which serves the students well in terms of their transition into employment. Bespoke specialist and industrial related software applications are employed within a number of such modules, and are very well received by our students.

In 2010 at the request of TAR College and due to local market intelligence a number of changes were made to the curriculum content to enable those students graduating with the BSc (Hons) award in Quantity Surveying Studies to progress to full professional membership of Institute of Surveyors Malaysia by the completion of a small number of professional examinations undertaken in Malaysia. The new curriculum provided the underpinning knowledge for them to take these examinations.

More recently the TARC Advanced Diploma (Technology) Quantity Surveying award is now professionally recognised by the Board of Quantity Surveyors Malaysia in terms of full professional recognition for successful students.

Over the thirteen-year term recruitment has remained strong within a competitive environment due to the broad appeal and overall educational and cultural experience gained by the students.

Upon inception the BSc (Hons) award in Quantity Surveying Studies was initially undertaken by 19 students but this has grown considerably in the intervening period

since 2009 and now recruitment is split equally with that of the BSc (Hons) Building Construction Management award, with an average of 80 students each on both courses.

In terms of more recent developments and founded upon in country demand and future growth the intention is to run a further award comprising of BSc (Hons) Real Estate using the same model and mode of delivery based upon close curriculum mapping of the TARC Advanced Diploma in Real Estate. This award will commence in June 2013.

ISSUES AND CHANGES

Over the duration of the thirteen-year period since inception of the programme a number of reflective changes have become evident.

In terms of cultural change and adaptation students have a clear expectation, mostly from their seniors of what they are to face when visiting the UK and Sheffield for the first time. They are very well prepared in terms of climate, geographical and cultural difference and adaptation to such changes seem easier year on year.

Levels of expectation in terms of the educational, social and cultural aspects of their stay are highly realistic and well known to them.

They appreciate and value the extensive cultural arrangements made for them, the extensive facilities on offer at SHU and the friendliness and security that Sheffield offers.

On a more localised level by exposure to their respective top up award the student skills set and behaviour have changed considerably over the years.

Presentational skills and the ability to work within a collective team environment have been significantly enhanced due to the greater level of exposure through the suite of top up modules.

From the annual feedback provided by the completing students particular value is attached the levels of exposure to a full range of academic staff within and across the module suite, enabling the students to benefit from a host of differing views and work sector related experiences. This is further enhanced by vocationally related hands on activities within modules and site visits designed to contextualise and enhance the learning experience.

Further informative feedback tells us that while happy to work within a team based environment which is reflective of our industry, the concept of autonomous learning is also well received, enabling the students to maximise the significant resource facilities available to them at SHU.

The students particularly enjoy the internationalisation of the curriculum and the vocational relevance that can be transferred ultimately to the workplace.

From the perspective of the academic staff, the students are very dedicated, hard working and committed to their studies. They are very respectful, well behaved and provide a very positive dynamic. This reflects very well in the number of students who complete their studies to a good honours level, which seems to grow year on year.

Upon reflection by contrast to thirteen years ago the students now come over as being more inquisitive and open with their lecturers. They are more vocal and willing to ask questions on an individual basis rather than in a group environment both of which are seen as being most positive developments.

Much of this improvement is directly due to the contribution and dedication of TAR College staff, who are to be congratulated for their excellent work

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Within the Malaysian construction market it is not surprising that the employability rate of completing students lies at over 95% with many working within the Middle and Far East. However employers are continuing to make even greater demands of their construction professionals in the expectation of study to postgraduate level. With this in mind and at the request of TARC, SHU are to launch a blended learning MSc postgraduate progression opportunity of an accredited nature through the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and a non-accredited option is also available, both from August 2012.