

# Education Futures Mini Conference: Higher Education Partnerships Webinar Series 2020

## Reimagining the future of UK-East Asia Higher Education Partnerships

### **Context of the Higher Education Partnerships Webinar Series 2020**

Since the emergence of Covid-19, universities in the UK, East Asia and globally have been grappling with multiple issues which are critical to ensuring their viability and sustainability. Several key issues are emerging as the higher education sector begin to focus on the future: funding and financial implications; managing digital teaching and learning; student recruitment and pastoral care, and how to respond to critical research and innovation needs locally and globally.

Many UK and East Asia higher education institutions (HEIs) have a long history of strategic partnerships that bring mutual benefit, create new research opportunities, enhance students' cultural awareness, develop joint curricula and quality assurance, and upskill faculty. This inaugural higher education partnerships (HEP) webinar series brought together leaders and practitioners from the UK, East Asia and globally relevant government agencies, sector bodies and universities to explore the priorities, challenges and future opportunities for UK-East Asia Higher Education Partnerships. Through three correlated themes that align with the key missions of HEIs – Research, Teaching & Learning and Societal Engagement – the webinars involved in-depth discussions on key topics of global implications for the international education industry, with the overarching aim to support the UK and East Asia's strategic action planning and decision making, allowing the education sectors to better anticipate challenges, manage risks and respond to opportunities as we move forward.

### **Summary Report**

The first half of 2020 has been far from ideal for students, academics and higher education institutions (HEIs), but it would be remiss to not acknowledge the leaps in digital technology, collaboration and partnerships during this time. Universities took proactive measures to address the immediate challenges of strict lockdowns and online learning, finding creative and sustainable solutions. Researchers worked across disciplines and sectors to deliver solutions on both local and global levels. The sheer volume of international collaboration that was catalysed by the pandemic is astounding. Moving forward, there remain great challenges and obstacles for HEIs, students and academics, but there is also great opportunity for breaking down barriers, deepening partnerships and developing truly innovative solutions.

### **Immediate responses**

As the pandemic took hold, higher education institutions had to shut their campuses, researchers transitioned to working from home and students had to adjust to new learning environments. Faculty and lecturers had to quickly adapt to new teaching styles. The great digital transition brought about

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unfamiliar challenges for many in access, wellbeing and mental health, which became the first priorities for HEIs.

For some universities, the response was to utilise hardship funds in order to purchase equipment such as laptops, tablets and internet dongles. This could enable students to maintain their learning and solved the issue of getting online. To prioritise mental health of students and faculty, HEIs also broadened mental health support services and encouraged students to take part in online activities. These moves were welcomed by the students and staff because most universities understood that ensuring safety and wellbeing ought to be tackled on a case-by-case basis – not with a one-size-fits-all approach.

### **Emerging opportunities and innovation**

The incredible innovation that has occurred in online communication and learning was a boon for HEIs and researchers. As international research conferences moved to online platforms, academics were able to spend more time at work and less time in airports. Academic meetings have been found to be just as effective through a virtual medium and in East Asia, some institutional surveys indicate that the quality of online classes is as good as face-to-face learning.

The online shift has also encouraged greater collaboration between HEIs on local and international levels to support the necessary upskilling for the digital shift. Some universities in East Asia have shared resources for capacity building initiatives with government support, through consortium arrangements between public and private universities, where smaller universities with the least capacity were supported by larger universities.

In the UK, industry collaboration is already built into most of the courses at the institution, which can be a challenge for online programmes. This has spurred greater collaboration between UK universities and industry, faculty and students to determine what kind of online learning and online experiences are desired. Subsequently more inclusive and industry-relevant online training programmes are being developed. This includes welcoming industry speakers virtually, a “dragon’s den” with industry, as well as creative solutions from faculty in redeveloping curricula.

There is also greater awareness that universities and research organisations must actively contribute to social innovation in civil society through greater HEI-civil society interaction. There are already best practices of UK-East Asia collaboration in the area of research in social innovation, to identify key areas that universities can engage in and collaborate with governments and the corporate sector to develop focused funding streams which can drive greater societal impact. This is vital for supporting the traditionally disadvantaged in the world. HEIs must take this opportunity to recalibrate their fundamental missions to foster social innovation and problem-solving among students and academics through partnerships, research, funding and teaching.

### **Implications for partnerships and international collaboration**

While the pandemic has brought significant challenges, it has also spurred more joined-up responses though new funding models and greater opportunities for collaborative research and education. HEIs will need to work closely with students, industry partners and governments to harness technology and verify the quality of online learning and assessments.

The trend of greater collaboration across disciplines was already beginning to take hold in international research, but the global health crisis furthered the breaking down of barriers between disciplines and sectors. This trans-disciplinary approach to research involves industry and local consumer research so

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that gaps in implementation can be anticipated and avoided. It may also pave the way for more creative funding opportunities to move beyond interdisciplinary research. Cooperation across disciplines is fundamental for tackling global issues, and this must be reflected in degree programmes and in principles of research.

HEIs, too, can be actively engaged in breaking down the walls between disciplines. Programmes and courses must adapt to create greater horizontal integration. Deeper partnerships between institutions in different countries will also enable more porous curriculum boundaries and lower the cost of international study – both for students and for the environment. As HEIs harness new technologies, they can develop consortium partnerships between UK and East Asia to share online learning resources that create truly global experiences and learning for all students.

This period of upheaval has resulted in opportunities for a massive upskilling of students and staff, an increased use of digital education and a better understanding as to how education can be delivered remotely. Moving forward, HEIs will need to be able to provide more courses, reach more students, foster greater collaboration and spur social innovation. For this to happen, HEIs must work with key stakeholders, including students, to design programmes that are inclusive and sustainable. On their part, students need to internalise that online learning is an active, not a passive, experience.

As universities become more willing to be hybrid entities, share data and become hubs for social innovation, this will enable greater collaboration between sectors (such as between government, NGOs, industry and the local community). This collaboration will foster social innovation and enable social, economic and environmental impact that is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

## Conclusion

As the world adjusts its way into a new normal, HEIs must take the opportunity to develop a different kind of higher education sector that is accessible, innovative and collaborative – and is ready to support the future economy.

Education remains as a powerful equaliser. The pandemic has rewired and reconnected the world in more meaningful ways than ever and has become a catalyst to spur new collaborative models in higher education. This crisis has ushered in a renaissance for UK-East Asia higher education partnerships and internationalisation that is rooted in a more humanistic vision, and that must respond innovatively and sustainably to global issues.

*The above is a summary of excerpts from the following seminars and was compiled by Olivia Ryan, Global Insights & Consultancy, British Council.*

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**The British Council wishes to thank all our panel speakers for their time and invaluable contributions to this webinar series:**

**Theme 1: Research Collaborations**

**Beyond the pandemic: the future of international research collaboration**

**26 June 2020**

**Recording:** <https://youtu.be/WamB9ld8qNU>

**Session Host:**

Chanya Tangsuk,  
Head Education and Science, British Council Thailand

**Panel Speakers:**

- Dr Rowena Cristina L Guevara, Undersecretary for Research and Development, Department of Science and Technology, Philippines
- Dr Richard Armour, Council Member, Research England – UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)
- Dr Guy Thwaites, Director, Oxford University Clinical Research Unit (OUCRU), Vietnam

**Theme 2: Teaching and Learning**

**Reimagining equitable access – Challenges and opportunities in online teaching and learning**

**10 July 2020**

**Recording:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnQtKSqPtzM>

**Session Host:**

Diane Hsu,  
Head of Education, British Council Taiwan

**Panel Speakers:**

- Professor Helen Marshall, Vice-Chancellor, University of Salford, UK
- Professor Frank Yung-Hsiang YING, Executive Vice President, National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU), Taiwan
- Helyn Gould, Deputy Associate Principal for Learning and Teaching, University of Strathclyde, UK
- Professor Edizon Angeles Fermin, PhD., Vice President for Academic Affairs, National Teachers College, Manila, Philippines

**Theme 3: Social Innovation**

**Fostering societal impact through social innovation and entrepreneurship across boundaries**

**17 July 2020**

**Recording:** <https://youtu.be/CJyqsmvbMyl>

**Session Host:**

Hoang Van Anh,  
Director of Education and Society, British Council Vietnam

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### Panel Speakers:

- Ms Suzanne Ling Co-Founder, PichaEats, Malaysia
- Professor Hyunsang Shin, Professor, Business and Social Innovation, Hanyang University, South Korea
- Dr Pongpisit Huyakorn, Thammasat University and Urban Studies Lab, Thailand
- Professor Richard Hazenberg, Professor of Social Innovation, Institute for Social Innovation and Impact, Directorate of Research, Impact and Enterprise, University of Northampton, UK
- Associate Professor Dr Truong Thi Nam Thang, Director, Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship National Economics University, Vietnam.