

# Education Futures Mini Conference: THINK TNE Webinar Series 2020

*Reshaping UK - East Asia Transnational Education in the face of Covid-19*

As the Covid-19 crisis continues to halt travel and impact learning, transnational education (TNE) faces unprecedented challenges. The sector faces immense pressure to swiftly and efficiently adapt, making way for new opportunities and strategies to improve the quality of and access to international, borderless learning. TNE has so far done well to meet these challenges, quickly transitioning to online learning, deepening trust and communication between partners, and developing alternative methods for success. The lessons learned from this crisis will prove to be a platform for a revolution in transnational programmes for the future.

## Adaptation & challenges

The original outbreak of the novel coronavirus in early 2020 launched a cascade of crises. For transnational education, the challenges were many: how could campuses ensure that students could get home safely? How could institutions fly in faculty while international travel is banned? How could institutes keep their students learning away from campus? How could institutions ensure that their new teaching methods were in compliance with local laws and regulations?

Responding to these challenges required an enormous amount of work from administrators, academics and students. Learning transitioned online. Communication between home campuses, branch campuses and local authorities increased. Institutions extended training programmes to help academics adapt their courses to a digital setting.

Institutions that had previously invested heavily into online learning management systems, training and trials had an easier time with the digital transition. Now, everyone sees the value of hardwiring technology into the core of the programmes and faculty feel more inspired to engage with these new teaching methods. As institutions, faculty, staff, lecturers and even students learn to embrace online programmes, the better their delivery will be.

However, one of the major obstacles for fully digital programmes is ensuring that students have the appropriate connectivity, bandwidth and space for learning. Many students are unable to access wireless internet, making participation next to impossible, and further disconnecting them from their peers. In some countries, governments are more resistant to the expansion of online learning, making this adaptation more difficult. If the coming semesters are to continue online TNE institutes will need to determine how they will ensure equity of access while complying with local regulations.

When the pandemic struck, higher education institutes took extraordinary measures to ensure that their students were still learning and staying engaged. One method for this was through

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simply asking for feedback. In Indonesia, 60 per cent of 682 survey respondents agreed that online learning was of good quality. However, only 55 per cent of these students agreed that more than half of courses can be delivered through online learning. Because of the need to make the transition quickly – sometimes without adequate infrastructure – it is hoped that these proportions will increase with more experience on digital learning platforms.

While many students are reluctant to pay the same level of tuition for online courses, HEIs are short on options. The additional training and re-organisation of lesson plans and curricula – plus the challenges that arise along the way – requires an immense effort from academics, faculty and staff. Funding is also an issue for institutions amid lower enrolments and cuts to scholarships and subsidies.

Universities must ensure that they are able to create a sense of community online, increase communication between faculty and students, among faculty in different countries and among students. There must be strategies in place to ensure quality and return on investment for students who may no longer be able to afford TNE programmes. This will only work if HE partners are on equal footing in the partnership, have mutual respect, are abiding to the same standards and have the same mission in mind: expanding access to higher education.

### Models for the future

Amid these new and unforeseen challenges is a huge opportunity to embrace the new normal of higher education. Transnational education can play a major role in the development of new models, new styles and new shifts in focus.

The travel restrictions have posed a significant challenge to many TNE programme models. The reduced ability to send fly-in lecturers is an opportunity for home institutions to develop greater trust in their partners abroad, allowing for local faculty and staff to take on more of the teaching responsibility. This will also elevate the equality of the partnership and foster greater trust. Quality assurance is essential, but through open communication and clear standards, host campus faculty will not feel that they are under surveillance.

Operating norms may remain fundamentally the same, but TNE has the chance to morph into having a more strategic approach with more sophisticated, richer models as institutions embrace the benefits of online learning. This could include shifting away from the traditional hub-and-spokes model to a “global university” model, which would have greater integration between partner institutions. Already, there is a trend of greater collaboration between partners, especially in understanding local needs.

This could also move forward the shift from destination-focussed programmes to discipline-focussed programmes. Students may be able to take classes from other branches of the university in other countries to make way for a “multi-campus experience.” Students could also have the ability to mix and match programmes from different branches and institutions – or even different universities – to design their own degree programme and paving the way for ‘micro-credentials’. This development may still be a long way in the future and will require greater infrastructure both physically and online, specialists to support students and teachers and an advanced level of integration and communication between HEIs.

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## Opportunity in crisis

While these six months of restricted mobility, never-ending challenges and mass adaptation have been stressful and have required an enormous amount of work for faculty and staff, there are positives to be drawn from the experience. First and foremost is the impressive level of commitment of professors and administrators – embracing new teaching styles and channels, providing around-the-clock support for students, increasing the amount of communication in all aspects and doing everything possible to adapt to a constantly changing and uncertain situation.

This crisis has also emphasised that TNE is primarily about partnership, student engagement and equality between partners. In many cases, increased communication has deepened trust between international partners, and international hosts will have to rely on local branches even more for the delivery of modules and content. Many universities have reported an increased appetite for partnership during this time, particularly in the virtual space.

Despite the challenges, this crisis must also be viewed as an opportunity to rethink and augment the core concepts of TNE. How can HEIs mix and match technology and face-to-face learning, online and offline opportunities? How can HEIs innovate to improve connectivity, build communities and otherwise contribute to an internationalised world of education? Moving forward, these pressing questions will guide the way to creating a more effective form of TNE that can enhance global connectivity, promote the freedom of knowledge and inquiring and solve global challenges, reaching further than ever before.

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

The British Council wishes to thank the speakers and panellists for their invaluable contributions to this series.

### Theme 1: TNE - Governance Policy and Management in Uncertain Times

In this session, TNE policy makers, experts and practitioners from the UK and East Asia outlined their thinking in response to the current crisis and best practice in the development of joint programmes and institutes.

**Host:** Cathy He, Head of Higher Education, British Council China

**Panellists:**

- Prof. Graham Kendall, Provost and CEO, University of Nottingham Malaysia
- Tom Buckley, Director, Recruitment, Admissions and International Development, University of Lancaster
- Dr David Pilsbury, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International Development), University of Coventry
- Prof. LIU Qin, Vice-Dean of Sino-British College, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology

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## Theme 2: TNE - Student Experience in a Post-Mobility Environment

Faced with a new generation of students with sophisticated demands and high expectations, how can TNE policy makers and providers meet the demands and changes to ensure positive student experience through virtual delivery and possibility of less face to face interactions with academics from home campus?

This session covered how current experiences will shape the future of student experience and well-being in post-mobility environment.

**Host:** Lotus Postrado, Head of Education, British Council Philippines

### **Panellists:**

- Dr John Cribbin, Deputy Director (Academic Services), Hong Kong University, School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE)
- Dr Ho Thuy Ngoc, Dean of International Education, Foreign Trade University, Vietnam
- Dr Maryam Malekigorji, Pharmaceutical Science Programme Director and Senior Lecturer in Pharmaceutical Science/Biotechnology (Education), China Medical University Queen's Joint College
- Dr Elizabeth Wilding, Director TNE Programmes, University of Reading

## Theme 3: TNE - Academics and Faculties engagement

**Host:** Prabha Sundram, Head of Education, British Council Malaysia

### **Panellists:**

- Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bundit Thipakorn, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Thailand and Adviser to the Deputy Minister of Education
- Prof Dr Kamila Ghazali, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & International), University of Malaya
- Dr Elisabeth Rukmini, Ph.D., Faculty Member, Department of Pharmacy, School of Medicine & Health Sciences, Atma Jaya Catholic University, Indonesia.
- Prof. Sue Welburn, UK Chair of UK-China TNE Joint Institute Alliance, Executive Dean, Zhejiang Edinburgh Institute, University of Edinburgh

## Theme 4: TNE – Directions of Travel

**Session Host:** Jazreel Goh, Director Education & Sports, British Council China

### **Panellists:**

- Atty. Lily Freida M Milla, Officer-in-Charge, Office of the Deputy Executive Director/Director III, International Affairs Staff, Commission on Higher Education, Philippines
- Prof. Colin Grant, Vice Principal (International), Queen Mary University of London
- Prof. Cillian Ryan, Pro Vice-Chancellor (International), Nottingham Trent University
- Caryn Nery, Director of TNE Partnerships, Future Students and Planning, Victoria University Australia