

Review of UK transnational education in China: University of Liverpool and Xi'an Jiaotong- Liverpool University

November 2012

Executive summary

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) is the product of a collaboration between Xi'an Jiaotong University and the University of Liverpool (Liverpool) and was established in 2006 as a new independent university. Under a partnership agreement with Liverpool, XJTLU is accredited to develop and deliver programmes that involve the award of a Liverpool degree. In most cases, students on undergraduate programmes are eligible for a double degree: an award from Liverpool and an award from XJTLU. The method of collaboration employed by Liverpool has allowed it to find a secure pathway through the complex regulatory environment in China. By working through institutions that understand the rules and procedures, Liverpool has been able to ensure that XJTLU students receiving its awards can be confident that these are recognised by the relevant Chinese authorities.

XJTLU aims to blend the strengths of the Chinese and UK higher education systems. It has been conceived as a partnership of equals such that neither side can dominate or undermine the other in practice, but within this scheme, XJTLU has adopted many characteristics of the UK higher education system. Its longer-term vision is to become a 'research-led international university in China and a Chinese university recognised internationally for its unique features in learning and teaching, research, service to society, and education management'.

A core characteristic of most UK awards is that they are studied, taught and assessed in English. Except for some elements of the foundation year, all the XJTLU programmes are delivered in English, and have been from the outset. XJTLU is aware that the English language skills of students vary considerably on entry. Recent improvements in English language teaching and support have focused on closer integration of the Language Centre with the academic departments and on more subject-related teaching in English during the foundation year. The Language Centre is well staffed and provides support to students throughout their courses, with clear methods in place for measuring their progress.

Assessment, grading, moderation and the effective use of external examiners are areas where UK provision is likely to encounter tensions with the well established approaches used in China. Even a new institution like XJTLU, with no history of its own practices to contend with, has experienced difficulty in making these activities work smoothly. This demonstrates the risk in assuming that UK practices can be easily introduced and sustained. However, these issues are not being avoided: they have been firmly and explicitly dealt with in external examiner reports, and the responses of XJTLU are equally clearly articulated. The key obstacle is less that the staff are applying established indigenous methods - after all, XJTLU is a new institution; rather, it is the high proportion of newly appointed staff involved in assessment who are unfamiliar with the methods and procedures. An institutional action plan for assessment is being developed by XJTLU, although its implementation is an area Liverpool will be monitoring closely.

Against a background of rapid expansion, there is increasing awareness at Liverpool that it needs to rethink its current arrangements for the oversight of the accreditation of XJTLU in order to take account of the size of the institution and the scale of its activities. Within six years, the number of students studying for Liverpool degrees at XJTLU has reached 5,800, plus a further 1,600 studying at Liverpool, following transfer from XJTLU. These numbers are expected to rise to almost 10,000 and 2,000 respectively by 2014-15. However, under any changed methodology, Liverpool will need to be sure that XJTLU's internal quality assurance processes are firmly embedded in that institution, and that they can be relied upon to provide a strong foundation for Liverpool's ongoing accreditation of XJTLU.

Report

Introduction

1 Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) was established in 2006 as an entirely new independent university. As the name suggests, it was the product of a collaboration between Xi'an Jiaotong University, one of China's elite 'C9' group of universities, and the University of Liverpool (Liverpool), one of the UK's largest research-intensive universities. The relationship between the two institutions is longstanding, having involved cooperation for some 30 years, mainly on research matters. The creation of XJTLU was obviously a step-change in the relationship, and this review is concerned with the partnership between Liverpool and this new university. Under the partnership, XJTLU is accredited by Liverpool to develop and deliver programmes that involve the award of a Liverpool degree. In most cases, students on undergraduate programmes are eligible for a double degree: a Chinese degree awarded by XJTLU as well as the degree awarded by Liverpool.

2 Founded in 1881 as University College, Liverpool, a constituent college of the federal Victoria University, Liverpool was granted its own royal charter as a separate university in 1903. Until the creation of XJTLU, Liverpool's overseas collaborative activity had been relatively modest, centred mainly on articulation agreements with partner institutions in the Cayman Islands, Chile, China, France, Malaysia, Spain and Turkey. These typically involve small numbers of students transferring into the later stages of Liverpool's degree courses in the UK, in some cases becoming eligible for a double degree. Liverpool also works with Laureate, a private-sector US company, to deliver a number of master's programmes via online distance learning. In its current Strategic Plan, 2009-14, Liverpool has stated an ambition to position itself as a global university and to increase the number of students studying overseas for its degrees to more than 25,000 within the period of the plan.

3 XJTLU is what is commonly called a CFCRS, which stands for Chinese-foreign co-operatively run school, falling within the Chinese government regulations applicable to educational partnerships between Chinese and foreign institutions. It was set up as a private university, operating on a not-for-profit basis, with the support of Suzhou Industrial Park (Jiangsu province), which financed the initial building of the campus and leases it to XJTLU on favourable terms. XJTLU awarded its first degrees in 2010 having, in line with the Chinese system, obtained the necessary approval at the point the first student cohort reached graduation. XJTLU has been successful in gaining approval on the same basis for programmes introduced in subsequent years.

4 The XJTLU campus is situated in a new 'Education Town' of over 80,000 students, set alongside the rapidly growing industrial park, which accommodates a range of hi-tech industries. In addition to having its own campus and education facilities, XJTLU also has access to the shared facilities of the Education Town. In 2012, there were 5,800 students at

XJTLU on a campus with the capacity to support 10,000 students. The pace of construction has been rapid and XJTLU now has, or is currently building, state-of-the-art facilities including well equipped science laboratories, engineering buildings able to accommodate heavy industrial equipment, and architectural studio spaces. A new building that will house substantial library facilities and study space for 2,500 students is nearing completion.

5 Students at XJTLU could, in 2012, choose from one of 26 undergraduate programmes, delivered in English, in the fields of science, engineering, business and culture. Additional programmes are planned by 2016, some in new areas, such as Chinese studies, law, public health and demography. Recruitment of mainland students is now pitched at tier 1 - that is at students with top-level scores in the national higher education entrance examination (gaokao).

6 The undergraduate programmes are validated as four-year bachelor degrees. Students take a common first year that is designed to meet specific requirements of the Chinese degree and includes English language. In terms of the Liverpool degree, it is equivalent to a foundation year, with years two, three and four corresponding to a three-year undergraduate degree at Liverpool. With the exception of three undergraduate programmes, available only at XJTLU, all the Liverpool bachelor degrees can be achieved either by completing all years of the programme at XJTLU, or by transferring to Liverpool for the final two years through a '2+2' articulation route, which still allows students to obtain a double degree. The curriculum studied during the second year at XJTLU is designed to provide suitable preparation for years two and three of the degree course studied at Liverpool. Students can also opt to complete their bachelor degree at XJTLU and then transfer to Liverpool for postgraduate study.

7 Postgraduate taught degrees became available at XJTLU from 2011-12 as 18-month (three-semester) master's programmes. So far, these are validated only for a Liverpool award, but it is intended that they should lead to a double degree. Although the programmes are recognised by the Chinese Ministry of Education, XJTLU will need an additional approval to award the degree. Application for such approval must await the point when the first cohort of students on the course is nearing completion; however, it may be some years before approval is awarded. Students based at XJTLU can register for a postgraduate research degree as 'off-site' students of Liverpool, and are allocated supervisors at both Liverpool and XJTLU. Again, the arrangement is recognised by the Ministry of Education and there are currently 32 doctoral students registered as 'off-site'.

8 XJTLU aims to blend the strengths of the Chinese and UK higher education systems. It has been conceived as a partnership of equals such that neither side can dominate or undermine the other in practice. But within this scheme, XJTLU has adopted many characteristics of the UK higher education system. Its longer-term vision is to become a 'research-led international university in China and a Chinese university recognised internationally for its unique features in learning and teaching, research, service to society, and education management'.

Part A: Set-up and operation

Establishing the link

9 As mentioned in paragraph 3, XJTLU was established as a CFCRS. The relevant government permit was issued in May 2006, but was preceded by preliminary agreements between the two 'parent' universities, dating back to 2004, which facilitated the necessary due diligence on both sides. It was agreed in the first instance that the degree programmes delivered at XJTLU would lead to Liverpool awards, but in spite of the fact that they now also

lead to XJTLU awards, the availability of the Liverpool degree continues to be important for recruitment to XJTLU, as students value the opportunity to gain both a Chinese and a UK award.

10 The method of collaboration employed by Liverpool - contributing to the creation of an entirely new, but independent, Chinese university - has allowed it to find a secure pathway through the complex regulatory environment in China. By working through institutions that understand the rules and procedures (first Xi'an Jiaotong University and later XJTLU), Liverpool has been able to ensure that XJTLU students receiving its awards can be confident that these are recognised by the relevant Chinese authorities. Indeed the students themselves were very clear about the status and recognition of the awards they would receive on graduation. The achievement of secure arrangements for recognition of the double-degree model in China is identified as a **positive feature** of the partnership.

11 In approving its partnership with XJTLU, Liverpool based its approach on the one that applied to its former affiliated institutions in the UK (until such time as these ceased to offer Liverpool degrees, having obtained their own degree-awarding powers). The process entailed accrediting XJTLU to deliver programmes leading to Liverpool awards and then validating the individual programmes. Following a successful accreditation visit in 2007, the partnership between Liverpool and XJTLU was formalised in an Institutional Agreement signed in December 2008. This provided for an annual monitoring visit each academic year to discuss developments over the previous twelve months and to ensure that the conditions for accreditation continued to be met by XJTLU.

12 Ahead of the expiry of the initial accreditation period in 2010-11, Liverpool carried out a review visit to XJTLU to consider its suitability for reaccreditation. The panel recommended in its report that XJTLU should be reaccredited to deliver undergraduate programmes. It also recommended that the scope of XJTLU's accreditation should be extended to cover the delivery of postgraduate taught programmes, subject to demonstrating capacity within the relevant subject area, through the validation process. From the report it is apparent that a thorough process was undertaken. Among the matters to be addressed were the appointment of heads of department; representation on departmental learning and teaching committees; a review of processes for moderation of assessment and external examining; and the development of longer-term resource planning, including expansion of library provision. XJTLU has subsequently been making steady progress with these recommendations.

13 Following reaccreditation, a new Institutional Agreement for the period 2011 to 2016 was signed, together with a new accreditation agreement for the delivery of taught programmes (Agreement on Accreditation (Taught Programmes)) and several other supplementary agreements governing specific areas of the collaboration: student transfer to Liverpool; recruitment to the Liverpool degree only; work and study placements for Liverpool students; and research degree supervision. Importantly, written agreements explicitly state that serial arrangements involving further sub-contracting by XJTLU are precluded and also contain provisions for termination and the resolution of disputes.

14 Liverpool's current mainstream procedure for partnership approval post-dates the accreditation of XJTLU and is not specifically geared to addressing such a large-scale partnership. However, it does confirm the pivotal role of the Collaborative Provision Sub-committee (which reports to Liverpool's Senate, or senior academic committee, through the Academic Quality and Standards Committee) in approving partnership proposals and overseeing the quality assurance, monitoring and review of collaborative arrangements for learning and teaching. In relation to XJTLU, it is this sub-committee that considers programme validation proposals, as well as the reports and recommendations resulting from

accreditation and annual monitoring visits. The processes followed are particular to the arrangement with XJTLU and are considered further below (paragraphs 30 and 38).

Making the link work

15 As an independent institution, XJTLU has its own regulatory framework and management structures. The committee system has been established to meet the requirements of the Chinese Ministry of Education for a CFCRS, but there are many similarities to the UK model (for example, there is a University Learning and Teaching Committee reporting to an Academic Board). Through its accreditation of XJTLU to deliver programmes leading to its awards, Liverpool is recognising that XJTLU has policies, procedures and processes that are fit for purpose; indeed many of XJTLU's quality assurance processes have been modelled on those of Liverpool (paragraphs 32-35).

16 Under the terms of the Institutional Agreement, Liverpool is represented on XJTLU's Board of Directors and the Executive President of XJTLU is a member ex officio of Liverpool's Senate (senior academic committee). Liverpool has facilitated the secondment of appropriate members of staff to XJTLU to assist with the delivery of programmes and with the development and training of staff. Moreover, since the foundation of XJTLU a Liverpool senior manager has been seconded to the post of Vice-President (Academic Affairs). An XJTLU-Liverpool Joint Liaison Group, with senior representatives from each institution, meets by videoconference and acts as a channel of communication on all aspects of the relationship, except those matters which can more effectively be dealt with through direct contact between academic departments and subject areas.

17 The Agreement on Accreditation (Taught Programmes) sets out broad expectations for communication on academic and administrative matters. There are 'virtual' department-to-department meetings between the two universities, as well as email contact between individual staff to deal with programme development, approval and enhancement. The Teaching Quality Support Division at Liverpool and the Centre for Academic Affairs at XJTLU liaise over the administration of programme validation, programme amendments, appointment of external examiners and other aspects of quality assurance. The recent establishment of a Programme Management Team at XJTLU (within the Centre for Academic Affairs) has facilitated faster and more interactive engagement between the two universities.

18 Administrative staff at XJTLU confirmed that there was frequent, largely email-based, communication with Liverpool and that this included consultation on procedures and on the provision of appropriate advice to XJTLU students transferring to Liverpool. A number of staff had visited Liverpool and met their counterparts. However, on the academic side, many of the staff at XJTLU have been appointed only very recently and, with the heavy pressure of work in their first months, they have not had the opportunity to visit Liverpool or to meet visiting Liverpool staff.

19 Students are admitted to XJTLU in accordance with its admissions policies. XJTLU provides Liverpool with a statement of its overall policy and the admissions requirements for each validated programme. XJTLU seeks to recruit tier 1 gaokao students to all programmes but, in order to fill the government quota for Jiangsu province, also admits some students from the higher end of tier 2. All students admitted 'on-quota' are eligible for a double degree. Students who opt for the 2+2 articulation route apply during their second year for admission to Liverpool for the remaining two years of the degree programme. Students admitted 'off-quota', who are eligible for a Liverpool degree only by means of the 2+2 route, must meet the same high gaokao scores as 'on-quota' students. Liverpool students undertaking placements at the Suzhou Industrial Park or at XJTLU itself are classed as 'visiting students'. The first cohort of graduates from XJTLU embarking on

postgraduate taught programmes at Liverpool began their programmes in 2010. There are, as yet, no formal articulation routes and applicants from XJTLU are subject to the same entry requirements as other international applicants.

20 There has been rapid growth in student recruitment since XJTLU was first established. The first student intake, in 2006, numbered 164. Six years later, in 2012, this had reached more than 2,300. Thus the population of students studying for Liverpool degrees at XJTLU in 2012-13 totalled 5,800, with a further 1,600 studying at Liverpool, following transfer from XJTLU. The number at XJTLU is forecast to grow to almost 10,000 by 2014-15, with another 2,500 plus studying at Liverpool.

21 When the partnership was first established, approximate limits on student numbers had been agreed between the two universities for each subject area. In light of its strategic aim to increase the proportion of international students, Liverpool subsequently decided that such limits were counter-productive. However, the rapid growth in student numbers and the difficulty of predicting in advance students' choice of programmes has caused problems both for XJTLU, in terms of staff-student ratios and recruiting sufficient academic staff, and for Liverpool, in terms of the impact of large numbers of students transferring from XJTLU on the overall student experience in some subject areas. It is anticipated that numbers transferring from XJTLU will eventually stabilise and become more predictable, but in the meantime some aspects of the arrangements between the two institutions are showing signs of stress (paragraphs 25-26 and 44). During 2011-12, a new student records system (which is widely used in the UK) has been implemented at XJTLU, providing an improved platform for records management and data exchange with Liverpool on student progress (paragraph 49).

22 XJTLU tests students' English language skills on entry and this has revealed considerable variation that is not reflected in gaokao scores. Following a review of the foundation year, more subject-related teaching in English has been included in the curriculum, alongside the necessary English for academic purposes. The Language Centre has been more closely integrated into the academic structure: its staff have offices located in each subject area of the campus and it is represented at most departmental learning and teaching committees. The Centre has been given generous staffing and it is evidently well led. It provides continuing support throughout the four-year degree (beyond the scheduled teaching in the foundation year and early stages) and has in place clear methods for measuring the progress of the students it supports. Systematic improvements in English language teaching and support are identified as a **positive feature** of the partnership.

23 Students transferring from XJTLU to Liverpool are not required to take an IELTS test; instead, previous study at XJTLU is sufficient to satisfy the English language criterion for admission. They are provided with information and pre-departure briefings while at XJTLU, including advice on applying for a visa and arranging accommodation. There is a 'meet and greet' service at Manchester airport and a 'welcome week' induction for international students. Students are informed that there is a thriving XJTLU student society and a Chinese student society, but are advised to join other societies as well, to enable them to gain as much as possible from their time at Liverpool.

24 Students at XJTLU have the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience through questionnaires, staff-student liaison committees and routine review processes. Even so, they have still needed to be encouraged to raise any concerns that they have; it is generally recognised that obtaining formal critical feedback from students in China can be difficult. XJTLU has recently introduced training for members of staff-student liaison committees and extended student representation to a wider range of institutional and departmental committees.

25 The students confirmed that they completed module questionnaires at the end of each semester, although they appeared to regard these as evaluations of their teachers rather than of the programmes more broadly. They also indicated that 'instant feedback' to the staff who taught them was the most common method employed. The staff too confirmed that they were accessible to support students, which was facilitated by small class sizes during a time when many newly established departments were still building up numbers. However, these forms of contact were becoming more difficult to sustain as numbers have grown, especially in the larger subject areas, such as Mathematical Sciences and the Business School.

26 Liverpool has conducted its own satisfaction survey of students transferring from XJTLU (February 2011), being concerned that, as numbers have grown, with concentrations in particular subject areas, dissatisfaction may also have increased. Most students (85 per cent) were found to be satisfied with their experience and 75 per cent said they would recommend Liverpool to others. Among the aspects perceived to be least satisfactory were large class sizes, limited opportunities to practise English, and a lack of interaction with some tutors.

27 Operational matters at XJTLU are highly visible to Liverpool through its system of annual monitoring visits, reports and action plans (paragraph 38). However, there is an increasing awareness at Liverpool that it needs to rethink the arrangements for oversight of the accreditation of XJTLU in order to take account of the size of the institution and the increasing range of its activities. Thus Liverpool has the challenge of striking an appropriate balance between a need to monitor operations at XJTLU and a need to respect the autonomy of XJTLU as its own internal quality assurance processes mature.

Part B: Quality Assurance

Academic standards and the quality of programmes

28 All Liverpool awards are subject to its academic regulations and quality assurance procedures, and XJTLU has undertaken to comply with these. Both institutions have sought to align their respective regulations and modular frameworks for taught programmes. Since most XJTLU programmes also lead to Liverpool degrees and in most cases students registered for those degrees are entitled to transfer from XJTLU to Liverpool, programme outcomes are expected to reflect UK threshold academic standards (as described in the framework for higher education qualifications and relevant subject benchmark statements). Similarly, in keeping with normal practice in the UK, external advisers are involved in programme development (paragraph 29) and external examiners are involved in the moderation of assessment and the award of degrees (paragraph 41). In both cases, they are appointed by XJTLU but approved by Liverpool, and bring knowledge and experience of the application of UK standards. It should be noted that in the recent revision of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), applicable to QAA reviews from January 2014, the appointment of external examiners is no longer regarded as an activity that an awarding institution should delegate to a partner, although formerly this was deemed to be appropriate in some circumstances.

29 Much of the process of developing a programme and preparing for its validation is now undertaken by XJTLU, although previously (up until 2011-12) Liverpool had a more substantial role. The internal procedure at XJTLU is typical in the UK. An outline proposal addressing the implications for staffing, and physical and learning resources must first obtain approval in principle to proceed. Once this is given, the proposal is developed in detail involving the preparation of programme and module specifications, for review by external advisers. While exact equivalence with the Liverpool provision is not required, early

discussions are held with the relevant academic subject area at Liverpool to identify the progression route to Liverpool and any requirements for accreditation by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs). None of the programmes delivered entirely at XJTLU currently have PSRB accreditation, although obtaining accreditation for business, architecture and civil engineering programmes is a current priority.

30 In accordance with the Liverpool validation procedure, the final programme proposal comprises a programme specification, module specifications, external adviser reports and a report from the relevant subject area at Liverpool. Proposals are considered by the Collaborative Provision Sub-committee, which decides whether a programme should be validated as presented, or if any conditions should be attached which require a response from XJTLU. When it is satisfied that the programme is of a suitable academic standard for a Liverpool award, that it has been subject to adequate external scrutiny and that all key issues raised through the process have been appropriately addressed, it makes a positive recommendation for validation. The Collaborative Provision Sub-committee also deals with the approval of programme modifications.

31 In principle, this substantial process, involving consideration first by XJTLU and then by Liverpool, provides a robust assurance that new programmes will be designed and resourced in ways consistent with Liverpool's standards and expectations. For instance, for the new postgraduate programmes, evidence was required to demonstrate the department's capacity to cope with the additional demands entailed, including curricula vitae for staff involved in the delivery, as well as departmental research plans and outputs. Between 2013 and 2016, XJTLU is planning to introduce a minimum of 11 new taught degree programmes (including five master's programmes). While this is likely to impose a significant regulatory burden on the Collaborative Provision Sub-committee, programme validation is clearly something over which Liverpool will wish to retain a high level of control, since it is the key point in the standards-setting process.

32 The regular monitoring of programmes is conducted by XJTLU through its own procedures for annual programme review and departmental periodic review, which are modelled on Liverpool's. Reports are considered through its internal committee structure and sent to Liverpool as part of the documentation supplied for the annual monitoring visit.

33 Annual programme review is concerned with making improvements to programmes based on feedback from external examiners and students. It is also the vehicle for identifying modifications that need to be made to programme specifications. The review is undertaken either during a single meeting, or a short series of meetings, attended by key staff from the department and student representatives. All relevant aspects of the review are dealt with and recorded using a template. Although XJTLU provides guidance for academic departments on the process, as yet it does not seem to be well embedded. Many academic staff knew little of the process and few had apparently been involved in it. Students participate through their completion of feedback questionnaires and through their representatives on departmental committees. However, most students were unaware of the process in an explicit way (as is often the case in the UK).

34 It seems likely that annual programme review is largely a desk-based process which is not yet creating a sufficient opportunity for evaluation of learning, teaching and assessment by academic staff operating at programme level. It appears to be driven by the need to prepare for Liverpool's annual monitoring visit. The template-style reports, which (among other things) consider student performance and feedback from students and staff, are made available to the visiting panel, together with a considerable volume of supporting material (paragraph 38). They provide a useful basis for the panel in conducting meetings with XJTLU staff and students and in preparing its report. Liverpool is **recommended** to consider the interaction between its annual monitoring visit and the XJTLU annual

programme review process, with a view to ensuring that the latter can be firmly established at XJTLU as the core process for regularly monitoring the standard and quality of programmes.

35 Periodic departmental review takes place every four years. To date, reviews have been completed on each of the four founding departments (Mathematical Sciences; Electrical and Electronic Engineering; Computer Science and Software Engineering; and Business, Economics and Marketing), and there has also been a review of the foundation year. Others are scheduled in 2013. As an illustration, the review panel for Business, Economics and Marketing included two external experts and a student from the department under review. The report focused on programme-related matters, but also on broader issues, such as staffing, the department's teaching and learning strategy, and its plans to support XJTLU's vision to be research-led, international and distinctive. Periodic departmental review is evidently providing opportunities for reflection on a wide range of pedagogic and operational matters, in the context of rapid growth.

36 Leadership within academic departments is a recurring issue and a new selection process has been put in place for heads of department. Staff recruitment and staff development continue to be priorities for XJTLU, with staff being appointed at the rate of about 80 per year. Between 2010 and 2012 the number of academic staff increased from 120 to more than 300. There is a good international mix, with staff being drawn from over 40 countries, and many are at a relatively early stage of their career. This is both an asset and a potential vulnerability: many staff have limited or no direct experience of the UK model of higher education, and particularly of its methods of assessment (paragraph 47) and routine monitoring of programmes (paragraphs 33). Staff exchanges have been attempted, but have been problematic to arrange. Liverpool has found it difficult to release staff for whole semesters, so it has been suggested that staff might instead visit XJTLU for shorter teaching blocks.

37 Staff who teach on the validated programmes are granted 'recognised teacher' status by Liverpool and this gives them access to its electronic library resources and virtual learning environment. Academic staff who do not have an appropriate teaching qualification or substantial teaching experience are required to take the Liverpool Certificate in Professional Studies. This is currently delivered by Liverpool through block teaching, although XJTLU will start to co-deliver the programme from 2012-13 as it is gradually migrated in-house. At the request of the provincial education department, XJTLU is developing a 'variant' programme, specifically for the Chinese context, tailored to the requirements of academic staff at other universities in Jiangsu province.

38 For XJTLU, the annual monitoring visit by Liverpool may be seen as an endpoint for its own internal quality assurance processes. For Liverpool, the visit provides the opportunity to take a summative view of XJTLU's position in the context of the accreditation parameters. The standard documentation provided by XJTLU is substantial. As well as programme specifications, external examiner reports, student performance data, student evaluation outputs, routine monitoring and review reports, and details of newly appointed staff (all of which have been touched on previously), XJTLU provides complete sets of current policies, procedures and committee minutes. It also presents an update on progress against its current action plan (developed following the previous annual monitoring visit). Liverpool's visit leads to a report with recommendations; based on these, XJTLU draws up a revised action plan, which is monitored by the Collaborative Provision Sub-committee at Liverpool.

39 Against the background of XJTLU's continuing rapid expansion, Liverpool is **recommended** to undertake a review of the processes used to monitor the accreditation of XJTLU such that these can remain effective, while not placing an excessive strain on its capacity to operate them. Liverpool's awareness of the issues has already been

acknowledged (paragraph 27), but in considering this recommendation, Liverpool will wish to maximise the extent to which XJTLU's own quality assurance processes are embedded in that institution and can be relied upon to provide a strong foundation for Liverpool's ongoing accreditation of XJTLU.

40 Irrespective of any strains on the partnership associated with rising student numbers, performance data indicate that, to date, XJTLU students are achieving well. Retention rates are high: in 2011-12, the rate was over 95 per cent at the end of year one, and around 90 per cent at the end of year two and year three. Approximately 95 per cent of year four students graduated, 55 per cent of them with a first or upper-second class degree. Failure rates are very low (under 1 per cent in each of the four years). The majority of students (82 per cent) went on to postgraduate education; 59 per cent of these went to top-ranking universities, mostly in the US or UK. This is a developing trend and students clearly value the English language education at XJTLU for its capacity to gain them entry to postgraduate programmes in top universities.

Assessment and certification of awards

41 XJTLU has its own regulations and code of practice on assessment. Like Liverpool, it operates a two-stage system of examination boards, comprising module boards, where all academic decisions are taken, and a progression and award board, bound by rules and with no academic discretion. These arrangements are complemented by an external examiner system, comprising subject external examiners and a Chief External Examiner, who must be a senior academic from a UK university, or have significant experience of examining in the UK higher education system. Subject external examiners attend the relevant module board, while the Chief External Examiner attends as many module boards as feasible, and also the progression and award board. The role works in conjunction with an Institutional Moderator from Liverpool, who also attends end-of-year examination boards, in order to give assurance of the overall effectiveness of the assessment and external examining process across XJTLU. Liverpool reserves the right to be represented at all examination boards, whether in person or by videoconference.

42 External examiners submit their reports to XJTLU, and Liverpool is provided with copies as part of the documentation for the annual monitoring visit. XJTLU is responsible for responding to external examiners on the points made in their reports. In earlier years, this aspect of the process has not worked consistently well, although improvement has been evident more recently. In 2012-13, a date has been set in the second semester by which departmental status reports on follow-up action are to be sent to all external examiners.

43 Programme specifications set out the assessment methods for individual modules and most modules are assessed by a mixture of examination and coursework. Despite encouragement from external examiners, departments are making slow progress with the mapping of learning outcomes in order to show how programme outcomes are achieved through module outcomes and how these are demonstrated through assessment. Progress in developing marking criteria has also been slow; in most cases the criteria are not fully developed or available to all markers and moderators (something that XJTLU has undertaken to remedy in the 2012-13 assessment round). External examiners have noted a tendency for internal markers to reward students for factual recall, rather than expecting deeper comprehension and analysis, and have attributed this in part to the design of assessment.

44 Liverpool staff are involved in the moderation process, which is coordinated by a lead moderator in each subject area. They review assignments then, following marking and moderation of scripts by XJTLU, they review the marking on a sample basis, commenting on comparability with academic standards at Liverpool. Subject external examiners provide a

third tier of moderation. Through this process Liverpool both exercises responsibility for the academic standards of programmes delivered by XJTLU and supports XJTLU in developing and managing assessment. The process is time-consuming and the universities have considered whether there might be ways of making it less so. However, Liverpool is cautious about a reduction in its involvement with moderation and this would only be considered in subject areas where internal moderation by XJTLU was already working well.

45 The moderation process has not always operated smoothly and sometimes XJTLU staff had not seen the comments of either the Liverpool moderators or the external examiners before the meeting of the module board. In this sense, the complex three-tiered moderation process was not achieving its aim of reconciling possible different approaches to grading until very late in the process. Moreover, in some instances, staff attendance at module boards has been low, making it difficult to deal with the unresolved differences between markers, moderators and external examiners. Most of the above issues concerning moderation are drawn from the final report of the Chief External Examiner for 2011-12 (at the end of a four-year term of appointment). It should be noted that the report concludes that the assessment processes, as observed, are appropriate, rigorous, fair and fairly operated.

46 The report draws attention to the difficulties of establishing a UK approach in a highly developed, but different, educational culture. Assessment, grading, moderation and effective use of external examiners are all areas where UK systems are likely to encounter tensions with the well established systems used in China. Staff at XJTLU demonstrated a good understanding of the processes of grading and moderation in place, but recognised that there were differences between the UK and Chinese systems. The students also perceived differences in marking practice between XJTLU and Liverpool. In 2012, only nine out of a total of 16 external examiners attended XJTLU examination boards in person, while others communicated by internet-based videophone facilities. Even so, this represented a significant increase in attendance compared with previous years.

47 Nevertheless, it is evident that such issues are not being avoided. They have been firmly and explicitly dealt with in external examiner reports and the responses of XJTLU are equally clearly articulated. The key obstacle is not so much that the staff are applying established indigenous methods - after all, XJTLU is a new institution. But this newness and the very recent appointment of most of the staff, originating from a wide variety of countries, means that a high proportion of those involved in assessment are new to the methods and procedures. An institutional action plan for assessment is to be developed by XJTLU by October 2013, based on responses to points raised in the reports of the Chief External Examiner and the Liverpool Institutional Moderator. The vigour of XJTLU's approach to tackling issues as they arise is very apparent and is a considerable strength.

48 As a general observation, the fact that a new institution like XJTLU, with no history of its own practices to contend with, has issues to deal with in the areas of assessment grading, moderation, and the effective use of external examiners demonstrates the risk in assuming that UK practices can be easily introduced and sustained. Liverpool is **recommended** to monitor closely XJTLU's development and implementation of its action plan to improve the operation of grading, moderation and external examining processes.

49 Liverpool issues the certificate and associated transcript of student achievement (a diploma supplement) for all of its awards. The latter distinguishes between students who were registered on a degree programme delivered entirely at XJTLU and those who were registered on a degree programme delivered at both XJTLU and Liverpool. This practice of recording location of study is consistent with existing requirements, but (as explained in a recent revision of the Quality Code), institutions, in the interests of transparency, will, in future, be expected to make clear in the certificate or record of achievement whether a programme leads to a single award or to a double (or multiple) award. XJTLU holds and

maintains the academic records of all students at XJTLU and is expected to ensure that its student records systems are compatible with Liverpool's systems, in order to facilitate transfer of records where necessary.

Part C: Information

Publicity and marketing

50 XJTLU as an independent institution is responsible for the preparation of information and publicity. This is organised centrally through a Marketing Department, whose role is to promote the XJTLU brand through the media, website and publications. The staff stated that there was a regular dialogue with the Corporate Communications department at Liverpool and that a high level of trust had developed between the two departments. As all XJTLU's teaching is in English, so too is most of the publicity and it can be easily monitored by Liverpool.

Student handbooks

51 XJTLU is responsible for the induction of students and for their academic and pastoral support and guidance. This includes providing students with information to enable them to undertake their studies successfully, in particular with a student handbook containing information about assessment criteria and procedures. The students confirmed that they were given adequate introductory lectures and a substantial amount of paper and web-based information, which they found accurate and useful. Academic and administrative staff were readily available to assist them.

Conclusion

Positive features

The following positive features of the partnership are identified:

- the achievement of secure arrangements for recognition of the double-degree model in China (paragraph 10)
- systematic improvements in English language teaching and support (paragraph 22).

Recommendations

The University of Liverpool is recommended to take the following action:

- consider the interaction between its annual monitoring visit and the XJTLU annual programme review process, with a view to ensuring that the latter can be firmly established at XJTLU as the core process for regularly monitoring the standard and quality of programmes (paragraph 34)
- undertake a review of the processes used to monitor the accreditation of XJTLU such that these can remain effective, while not placing an excessive strain on its capacity to operate them (paragraph 39)
- monitor closely XJTLU's development and implementation of its action plan to improve the operation of grading, moderation and external examining processes (paragraph 48).

Glossary

Academic Infrastructure The core guidance developed and maintained by QAA in partnership with the UK higher education community and used by QAA and higher education providers until 2011-12 for quality assurance of UK higher education. It has since been replaced by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (**Quality Code**).

accreditation of prior learning (APL) The identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of learning and achievement that occurred at some time in the past (perhaps as the result of a previous course, self-directed study, or active experience), which is taken into account when admitting a student to a programme of study.

articulation arrangement A process whereby all students who satisfy academic criteria on one programme are automatically entitled (on academic grounds) to be admitted with advanced standing to a subsequent part or year of a programme of a degree-awarding body. Arrangements, which are subject to formal agreements between the parties, normally involve credit accumulation and transfer schemes. Read more in the glossary of *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code.

C9 League A group of nine major research universities in China, established in 2009.

CET The College English Test, a national 'English as a foreign language test' in China.

CFCRS Initialism for Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools, denoting cooperation between foreign and Chinese educational institutions in order to establish educational institutions or educational programmes. The activities of CFCRS are governed by regulations introduced in 2003.

Code of practice A core element of the **Academic Infrastructure** (now superseded by the **Quality Code**).

collaborative provision or collaborative arrangement A term used to describe how institutions work together to provide higher education, including learning opportunities, student support, and assessment, resulting in a qualification from one or more awarding institutions.

comprehensive university A university in China that typically offers a full rather than a specialised curriculum, which includes a wide range of disciplines such as liberal arts, social sciences, science, technical and industrial studies.

dazhuan A three-year tertiary education diploma in China

due diligence Enquiries relating to the governance, ethos, status, capacity, reputation and general suitability of a potential delivery organisation or support provider to satisfy the requirements of a degree-awarding body for an arrangement to deliver learning opportunities.

flying faculty An arrangement whereby a programme is delivered by visiting staff from the UK institution. Support for students may be provided by local staff. Also known as 'fly-in fly-out faculty'.

gaokao National higher education entrance examination in China.

IELTS International English Language Testing System, an international standardised English test.

kaoyan Postgraduate degree entrance examination in China.

post-experience education A postgraduate programme that typically requires students, as a condition of entry, to have substantial and appropriate graduate-level work experience, in addition to an undergraduate degree; a programme of this nature is designed to draw on students' experience and practice.

pre-experience education A postgraduate programme that typically does not explicitly require students to have work experience, and is designed to be equally accessible to recent graduates and those who have some relevant experience.

Project 211 A Chinese government programme, initiated in 1995, that is aimed at strengthening institutions of higher education and key disciplinary areas as a national priority for the twenty-first century. The '21' and '1' within 211 refer to the 'twenty-first' century and 'one' hundred universities, respectively. To be included in the programme, universities had to meet scientific and technical standards and offer advanced degree programmes. It includes the **Project 985** universities.

Project 985 A project to promote the development of world-class universities in China, which was initiated in May 1998 and named after the date: year '98', month '5'. Much of its funding is devoted to academic exchanges whereby Chinese academics participate in conferences abroad and foreign lecturers visit China. It includes the **C9 League** universities.

QS World University Rankings Annual university rankings published by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS).

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of reference points for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the Expectations that all providers are required to meet.

TOEFL Test Of English as a Foreign Language, an English test by the Educational Testing Service.

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