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# Guide on Transnational Education Partnerships in Mexico

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# Introduction



This guide aims to provide Mexican universities with a market, regulatory and practical overview of the process for developing successful international partnerships. The guide starts with an overview of the key definition and models of transnational education and a risks/benefits assessment. This is followed by a snapshot of the Transnational Education (TNE) landscape in Mexico with a set of recommendations for development opportunities. Next is a section on the regulatory context for the development and operation of TNE partnerships.

There are two sections that provide practical advice on how to develop and manage international partnerships. First, there is a section on “The process for developing successful TNE partnerships” which outlines the steps to overcome the most common challenges in international collaboration in higher education . Second, the “checklist” section reflects on evidence from the literature and practitioner experience to summarise the key points involved across all stages in developing, managing, and reviewing international partnerships.

The guide concludes with a case study as an example of a successful TNE partnership.

## 1. What is meant by TNE?

According to the Universities UK “Transnational Education (TNE) is the delivery of degrees in a country other than where the awarding provider is based. It can include, but is not limited to, branch campuses, distance learning, online provision, joint and dual degree programmes, double awards, ‘fly-in’ faculty, and mixed models, traditionally referred to as blended learning<sup>1</sup>.”

Model of Transnational Education		Characteristics	Risks	Benefits
Autonomous	Branch Campus	A physical campus established in a foreign country by a foreign institution, offering programmes that lead to a degree or qualification from the home institution.	High costs, regulatory compliance, cultural differences, potential for exploitation	Access to high-quality education, exposure to different cultures, increased institutional reputation
	Distance Learning and Online Provision	Programmes delivered online or through other forms of remote learning, allowing students to study from anywhere in the world without physically attending classes.	Limited face-to-face interaction, potential for cheating, lack of motivation.	Flexible learning options, access to diverse academic resources, reduced costs
Locally supported	Franchise	Local institutions in a foreign country licence the name and academic programs of a foreign institution, delivering these programs to students under the foreign institution's branding.	Lack of institutional control, quality assurance challenges, potential for exploitation	Access to high-quality education, exposure to different cultures, increased institutional reputation
	Blended learning	A foreign institution offering its programmes through a blended learning model supported by local institution(s)	Limited control over quality of tutorial/teaching support, challenges in the coordination of blended learning model	Improved student engagement and experience in comparison to standalone distance learning/online provision
Collaborative	Joint Degree Program	Partnership between two or more institutions in different countries, where students earn a single degree that is awarded jointly by the participating institutions.	Quality assurance challenges, compatibility of academic systems, resource constraints	Access to diverse academic resources, exposure to different cultures, increased employability
	Dual Degree Program	A programme that allows students to earn two degrees from different institutions in different countries, often requiring them to spend time studying at both institutions.	Resource constraints, compatibility of academic systems, quality assurance challenges	Exposure to diverse academic resources, increased employability, enhanced language skills

**Table 1.** Models of transnational education

<sup>1</sup> UUKi Scale of UK HE TNE 2020-21 updated.pdf (universitiesuk.ac.uk) (p5)

## 2. The TNE landscape in Mexico

### International teaching partnerships

As in other Latin American countries, there is no central data in Mexico for the number of students who study on international collaborative programmes in the country. Also, the majority of the countries of foreign universities (e.g., Germany, USA, France, Canada) that engage in international collaborations do not collect data on TNE programmes. UK and Australia are the countries that maintain a more detailed account of the students who study across the different types of international partnerships.

Based on the UK TNE data, provided by the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)<sup>2</sup>, Mexico had a total of 840 students on TNE programmes that involve UK Higher Education Institutions. This represents a 25 per cent increase since 2018-19, but the number of students in UK TNE programmes remained consistently below 1,000 in the past decade<sup>3</sup>.

As shown in Figure 1, the UK TNE provision in Mexico is equally split between distance, flexible and distributed learning and validation<sup>4</sup> programmes. Around six out of ten (56%) UK TNE students in Mexico study at the undergraduate level. Also, as summarised in Figure 2, around four out of ten study at postgraduate level. This is in line with the overall outlook of UK TNE activity worldwide where the majority (~61%) is at the undergraduate level<sup>5</sup>.

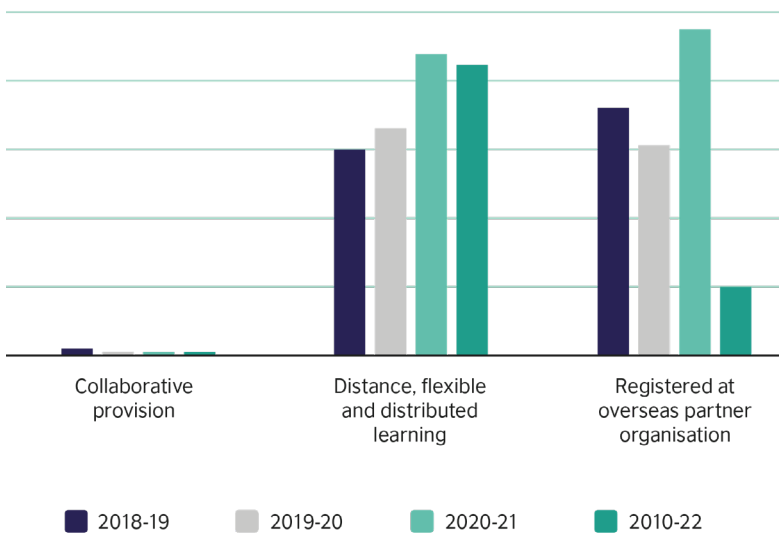


Figure 1. Number of UK TNE students

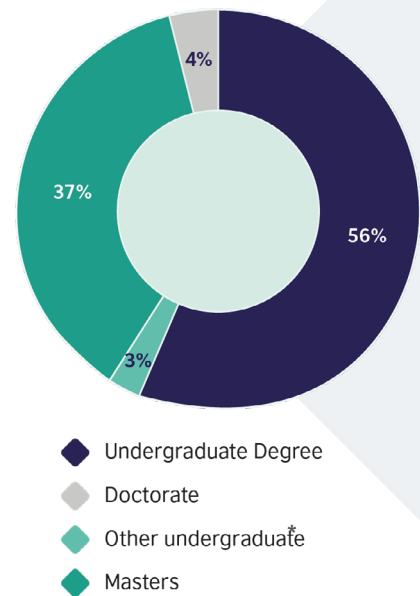


Figure 2. UK TNE in Mexico by level of study

\*"Other undergraduate" refers to undergraduate study that does not lead to a first degree (e.g., examples are foundation degrees, diploma and certificates, higher national diplomas (HND)).

2 The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), established in 1993, gathers information on students, staff, finance, and graduate outcomes from all publicly funded UK higher education institutions. Following a 2022 merger, HESA now operates as a directorate of Jisc.  
 3 The data is available via HESA Aggregate Offshore Record (AOR). A visual representation of data for each host country, including Mexico, is available here: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/universities-uk-international/insights-and-publications/uuki-insights/scale-uk-transnational-education>  
 4 The type "registered at overseas partner organisation" represents validation arrangements or other TNE arrangements with the majority of the teaching taking place in-country.  
 5 HESA UK TNE data. Also available here: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/universities-uk-international/insights-and-publications/uuki-insights/scale-uk-transnational-education>

## International research collaboration of Mexican Universities<sup>6</sup>

The presence of international research collaboration is a precursor of international teaching partnerships<sup>7</sup>. The analysis of 25 years (1996-2021) of bibliographic data, summarised in Figure 3, showed that Mexican universities have developed their internationally co-authored research outputs from 5,000 in 1996 to 34,000 in 2021. This makes Mexico the second largest country in terms of internationally co-authored publications amongst Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Peru<sup>8</sup>.

	1996	2021	CHANGE
Argentina	4,308	17,446	305%
Brazil	9,403	101,318	978%
Mexico	4,978	34,020	583%
Peru	209	7,867	3664%

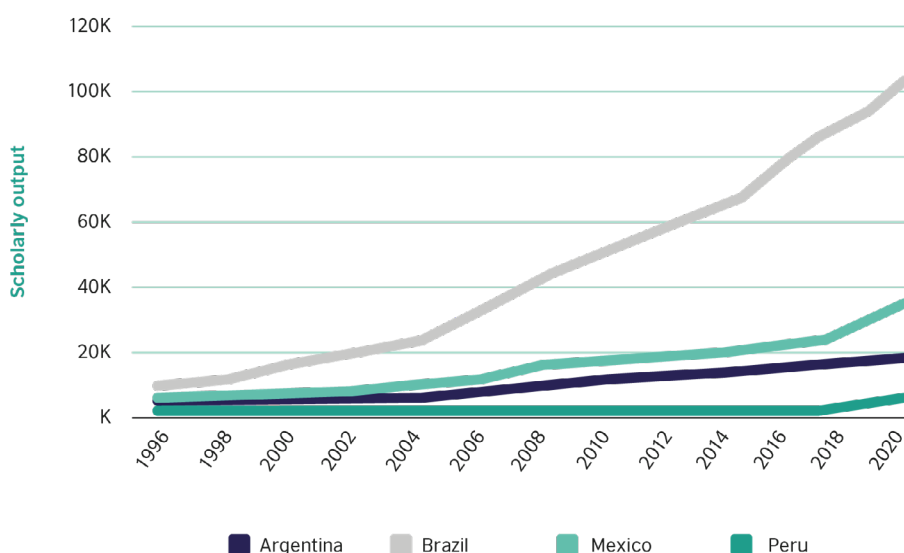


Figure 3. Scholarly output (all types)

As shown in figure 2, in 2021 around 4 out of 10 (41%) research publications in Mexico involve an international co-author. This has grown from 31% in 1996. The top 5 research collaborator countries for Mexico are the USA, Spain, UK, France and Brazil. There is a balanced international collaboration activity that includes regional (e.g., Brazil, Colombia) as well as broader (e.g., USA, UK, Germany, China) focus.

COUNTRY	CO-AUTHORED PUBLICATIONS
USA	15419
Spain	8111
UK	4847
France	4093
Brazil	4062
Germany	3886
Italy	3618
Canada	3461
Colombia	3345
China	2971

<sup>6</sup> The data in this section is from Scopus/Scival.

<sup>7</sup> Ilieva, J., Killingley, P., Tsiligiris, V., & Usher, A. (2019). The Shape of Global Higher Education: International comparisons with Europe (pp. 1–56). British Council and NAFSA.

<sup>8</sup> SciVal is a bibliometric analysis tool developed by Elsevier, which provides data and metrics related to scholarly publications. SciVal covers a wide range of scientific disciplines and includes publications from various languages, not limited to English only.

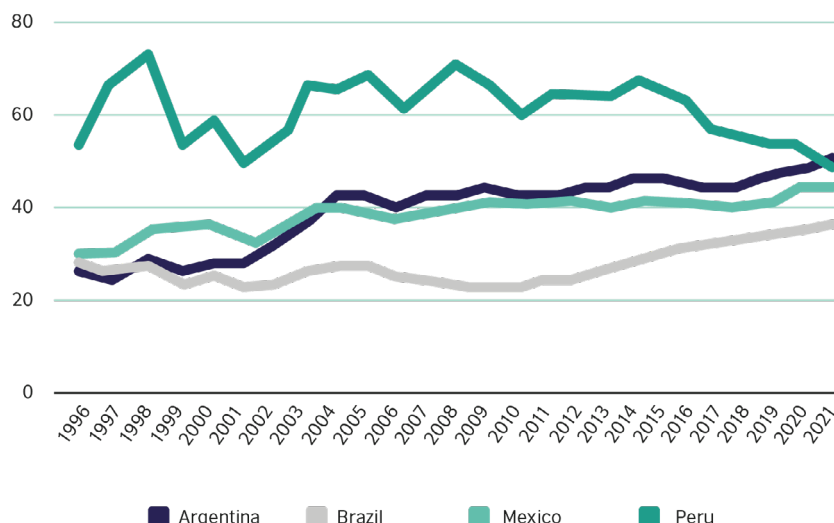


Figure 4. International collaboration (% of total publications)

The above evidence can be useful to Mexican universities in identifying potential partners for teaching collaborations. Exploring the existing links with institutions in countries with high research collaboration activity with Mexico is a suitable way to initiate sustainable teaching partnerships.

### 3. The regulatory framework for international partnerships in Mexico

The regulatory environment in Mexico provides opportunities for international collaboration, primarily in the areas of dual degrees<sup>9</sup>. The existence of agreements for the mutual recognition of qualifications is also another factor that can facilitate international collaboration. Also, at the national level, there is a streamlined and efficient policy and process for the recognition of foreign qualifications. Notably, the recognition process includes professional qualifications without the need for these to be submitted to professional bodies.

Model of Transnational Education		Characteristics
Autonomous	Branch Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Mexican university can create a branch campus abroad. This will be subject to the regulations of the host country.</li> <li>A foreign university is allowed to create a campus in Mexico subject to compliance with the investment laws and authorisation by the Ministry of Public Education (SEP).</li> </ul>
	Distance Learning and Online Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Mexican university can provide its programmes fully online. A foreign university can provide fully online (no local support) programmes in Mexico without the need for licensing.</li> </ul>
Locally supported	Franchise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For a franchise, blended learning, or validation collaboration with a foreign university, it needs to be authorised by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP).</li> </ul>
	Blended learning	
Collaborative	Joint Degree Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Mexican and a foreign university are allowed to establish a joint degree however this should be licensed by the Ministry of Public Education (SEP).</li> </ul>
	Dual Degree Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Mexican university is allowed to establish a dual degree with a foreign university.</li> </ul>

9 Universities UK. (2019). *Collaborating with Mexico: Policy, Context, Opportunities* (pp. 1–15). Universities UK International.

## 4. The process for developing successful TNE partnerships

Before going on to outline a suggested process for developing successful international partnerships, it is important to define what success means in a higher education context.

Teaching and research are the two key operations of universities. The success of universities is considered in the context of the outputs of these core activities and how these are perceived by internal (e.g., students, academics, and administrators) and external (e.g., regulators, businesses, and society) stakeholders<sup>10</sup>. Beyond the outputs-based success, universities need to be financially and operationally efficient. Additionally, universities are evaluated on their societal impact locally, regionally, and globally.

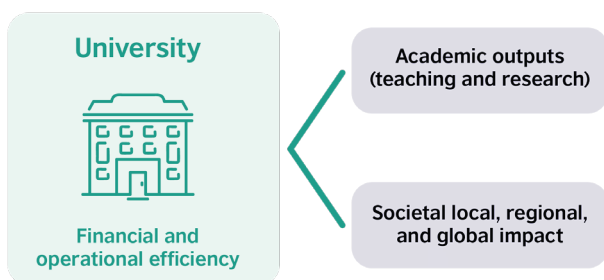


Figure 5. University success factors

Hence, a critical starting point for the development of successful international partnerships is how well they address the core principles of university success outlined above.

Research<sup>11</sup> has suggested that the key reasons why international partnerships fail include: a lack of strategic vision and integration into the broader internationalisation plan, limited resources, faculty lack of interest (buy-in), and no clear evaluation objectives/measures.

In this context, aiming to address these

common failure factors, the process for developing successful TNE partnerships should start with an internal and external environment analysis. Examples on how this can be implemented include the application of tools such as: the Resource-based View (RBV), SWOT, PESTEL, and Porter five forces.

Figure 6 below outlines the process of linking strategy to specific internationalisation actions, such as international partnerships. At the centre of the model is the governance structure which reflects the ongoing need for active management of international activities during all phases of this process. The governance process is the implementation of the university academic policies and quality assurance processes across all stages of the partnership lifecycle. This is outlined in the checklist provided later in the document.

### Why do we strive to internationalise?

International partnerships should emerge as specific actions of a broader internationalisation strategy. This is important to reassure that international partnerships are allocated appropriate resources and supported by the governance structures of the university. Also, a clear rationale about why international partnerships are pursued allows us to define specific objectives and therefore measures, that will be used to evaluate success. To define the internationalisation strategy, universities need to conduct an external environment analysis exploring and appreciating the trends in the local and global context.

### What type of internationalisation and international partnerships do we want?

Internationalisation includes a broad range of activities that take place abroad or at home and with and without external partners<sup>12</sup>. Also, universities, like any other

<sup>10</sup> Goldman, C. A., & Salem, H. (2015). Getting the Most Out of University Strategic Planning: Essential Guidance for Success and Obstacles to Avoid. RAND Corporation. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE157.html>

Hawawini, G. (2011). The Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions: A Critical

<sup>11</sup> Gao, Catherine Yuan. 2019. Measuring University Internationalization: Indicators across National Contexts. 1st ed. 2019 edition. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Stafford, Sally, and John Taylor. 2016. "Transnational Education as an Internationalisation Strategy: Meeting the Institutional Management Challenges." *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 38 (6): 625–36.

<sup>12</sup> For a full description of what internationalisation means and the range of different activities, refer to: Hénard, F., Diamond, L., & Roseveare, D. (2012). Approaches to Internationalisation and Their Implications for Strategic Management and Institutional Practice (pp. 1–51). OECD Higher Education Programme. <https://www.oecd.org/education/imhe/Approaches%20to%20internationalisation%20-%20final%20-%20web.pdf>



organisation, operate under limited resources. Hence, universities need to identify the type of internationalisation activities that is best suited to the objectives of their internationalisation strategy and are likely to achieve maximum results.

### How will we pursue our internationalisation objectives?

The availability of appropriate resources has been reported as the most common barrier to the development of international partnerships. Key resources, such as the availability of academic and administrative staff, financial support, and appropriate IT systems are some examples of key resources which are critical to facilitate international partnerships. Hence, before embarking on any international partnership projects, universities need to evaluate their internal readiness. Specific projects should then emerge to operationalise the internationalisation strategy. This is the stage where universities should consider the exact form of international partnerships they would like to pursue (see table 1 for examples), identify international partner(s), target specific market segments, and develop projects for internal (university-based) and external (country-regulator, professional bodies, etc) approval.

### How will we measure success?

There is the need for specific measures<sup>13</sup> for each international partnership linking back to the broader internationalisation strategy. The outputs of each internationalisation activity should lead to the achievement of the broader internationalisation objectives. One of the key challenges in developing successful international partnerships is faculty engagement. To overcome this, faculty commitment to international partnership should be formally acknowledged in the faculty workload. For example, the evaluation of administrative, academic and research staff should include internationalisation related objectives.

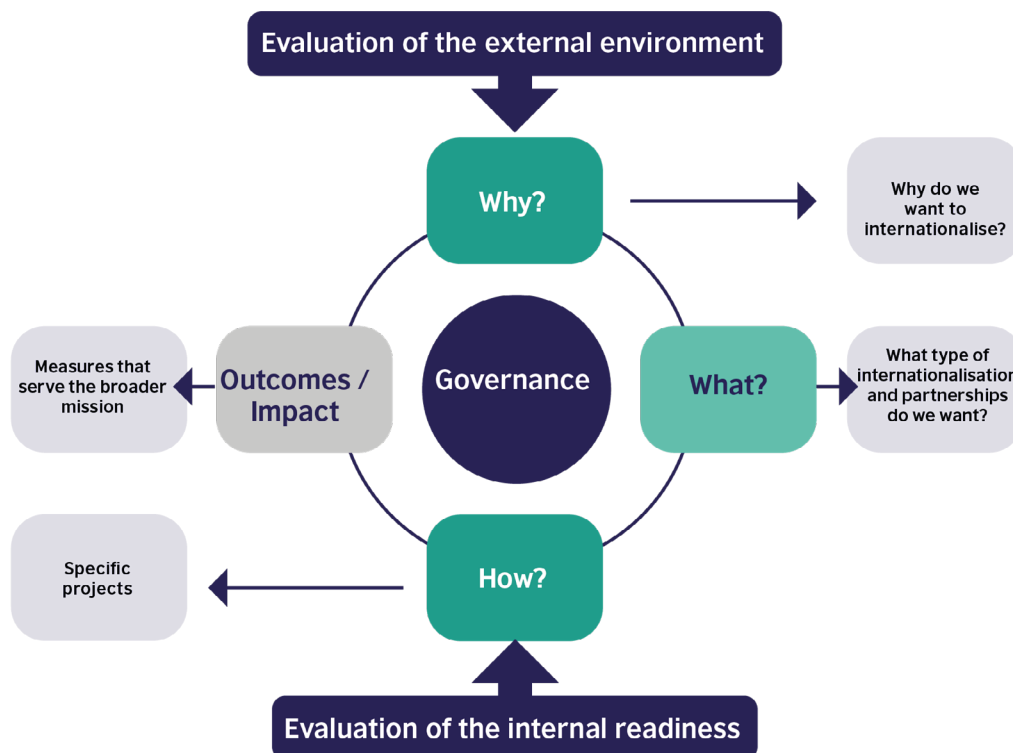


Figure 6. The process of linking strategy to specific and measurable internationalisation activities

<sup>13</sup> Each institution should shape their Key Performance Indicators based on the specific internationalisation priorities. Some examples of commonly used KPIs for international partnerships are: 1) Number of International Partnerships: This is a straightforward metric that measures the total number of international partnerships a university has. It provides an indication of the global reach and influence of the university; 2) Quality of Partner Institutions: This metric assesses the quality of the partner institutions. It can be measured by looking at the rankings of the partner institutions in global university ranking systems; 3) Student Exchange Rates: This KPI measures the number of students participating in exchange programs with partner institutions.

## 5. Checklist

This section provides a focused and detailed checklist of the process to develop, manage and review international partnerships. The section reflects on the broader literature<sup>14</sup> and the experience of TNE practitioners. The section is organised into four sections, each representing one of the phases of the TNE lifecycle. These phases represent the typical process which applies in most collaborative international partnerships (e.g., dual/double & joint degrees, franchising/validation, articulation/progression). The checklist will be less applicable to independent types of TNE (distance/online delivery, branch campus).

### Pre-establishment and agreement stage

At this stage the priority is to achieve strategic alignment between the objectives of the Mexican university and those of the partner. Also, here the emphasis is on due diligence as way to minimise all types of risk (operational, financial, academic).

#### 1. Internationalisation strategy objectives

- What do you want to achieve through internationalisation?
- Who is the beneficiary of your internationalisation strategy?
- What are your measures of internationalisation success?

#### 2. Identify a suitable partner

- What are the key criteria for the selection of your international partners?
  - Geographical location
  - Rankings/reputation/global brand/local impact
  - Type/size of the organisation
  - Subjects of teaching provision/areas of research
  - Capacity/resources

- How does the internationalisation strategy of your international partners align with your internationalisation objectives?
  - What is the focus of their internationalisation strategy?
  - How likely is it that their strategy will change in the short/medium term (1-3 years)?

#### 3. Evaluate the regulatory context

- What are the local (own country) and foreign (country of your partner) regulatory requirements for the type of collaboration you wish to pursue?
- What are the implications for the recognition of the partnership award(s) in your country as well as other countries?
  - Existence of an agreement for the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications (MRQ) between the two(or more) countries involved in the partnership
  - Recognition of professional and academic rights
  - Implications for recognition by professional bodies

#### 4. Business case and financial evaluation

- Market analysis
  - Competition and demand of the proposed programmes
- Financial analysis
  - Detailed financial analysis including revenues, expenses, and cash flows budget.
  - Evaluation of financial risks and impact on all partners

#### 5. Academic evaluation

- What is the state of the presage factors that could affect the educational outcomes?
  - Cultural/social/economic factors that can influence/shape the preferred approaches to learning

<sup>14</sup> Transnational education toolkit | Advance HE (advance-he.ac.uk)

Transnational education (TNE) toolkit | Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (teqsa.gov.au)

- Other, student-related, factors that can impact the effectiveness of the teaching approach
- What are the key academic risks in the proposed collaboration?
- What can be done to minimise/mitigate the academic risks?

## 6. Due diligence as an independent process

### Operation

This stage relates to the design of the operational details of the partnership. This should include all aspects of the delivery and operation (e.g., recruitment of students, teaching, assessment, pastoral support and student services). The emphasis here is to consider all aspects of the partnership and the involvement of key stakeholders (e.g., universities, students, regulators).

#### 1. Design of programme(s)

- Design of programme(s) to reflect the academic standards and intended graduate attributes.
- The programme design shall aim to contribute towards the achievement of all partners' strategic objectives through the available (intended) resources.

#### 2. Academic staff

- Identify who will lead and teach the units of the programme making provision for the requirements that will emerge under different development scenarios of the collaboration.
- Develop a staff development plan that will consider the different phases and size of the collaboration.

#### 3. Assessment

- Create an assessment strategy that will reflect internal (e.g., assessment regulations of awarding institutions) and external (e.g., recognition requirements, professional bodies) requirements.

- Define the roles and responsibilities of different parties in relation to the preparation, delivery, marking of and feedback on assessment.

#### 4. Learning resources, premises, and IT systems

- Create a resources plan that considers all types of resources required for the delivery of the programme(s)
- Identify gaps in resources - considering the impact of potential growth of the provision - and create a resourcing plan

#### 5. Quality assurance

- Set out the process with key touch points and deliverables for the quality monitoring of units and programme
  - Unit reporting
  - Programme reporting
- Identify a system for the moderation of assessment/feedback
  - Internal and external moderation
  - External examiner/verifier

#### 6. Student support systems

- Identify the process/mechanisms through which students are supported for academic, pastoral, and other matters.

## Management

This stage involves the identification of the specific responsibilities of each collaborating party (university) as well as the specific people who would be leading the management of the partnership. By deciding on the exact governance structures and responsibilities, the emphasis in the stage is to ensure the smooth operation of the partnership and minimise the academic risks.

### 1. Structure of governance

- Identify the areas of responsibility between the partner institutions.
- Define and outline the key governance structures in the form of committees, task groups, etc.

### 2. Academic management

- Identify the process of managing unit and programme-level issues.
- Outline the academic responsibilities of each partner

### 3. Business management

- Identify the process to manage and evaluate the business side of the partnership with particular reference to the achievement of agreed revenue/ expenditure targets.

## Periodic quality assurance

This stage aims to introduce a set of checks-and-balances that will act as an unbiased process for the evaluation and continuous improvement of the partnership.

### 1. Periodic review

- Agree on a set of measures that will be used to evaluate the success of the partnership. These measures are important to be agreed upon before the start of the partnership and reviewed annually.
- Set out the process and time period to review all aspects of the partnership through a period review. The details of the process should include 1) areas to review and specific measures; 2) stakeholders to be involved; 3) potential outcomes for the continuation of the partnership.
- The period review process should state the key parameters of a teach-out/ termination of the partnership arrangement.

## 6. How does a successful international partnership look like

### Universidad de Guadalajara/Boston College

**Institutions:** *Universidad De Guadalajara (UdeG) And Boston College (BC)*

**Collaboration Type:** *Double Degree*

**SDG Goals:** *(04) Quality Education, (10) Reduced Inequality,*

**Countries:** *Mexico, United States*

**Authors:** *Dr Magdalena Bustos Aguirre*



Since 2018, the authorities of Universidad de Guadalajara and Boston College approved the Master of International Higher Education as a double degree that aims to widen the access of Mexican and Latin American students to high-quality education.

Universidad de Guadalajara, founded in 1782, is a comprehensive research, autonomous, secular and public university in the state of Jalisco, Mexico. It is the second oldest and largest university in the country. It meets the state's needs for secondary and tertiary education, to make a significant contribution to the sustainable and inclusive development of this society, respecting its cultural diversity and honouring the principles of social justice, democracy, coexistence, and prosperity for all. Boston College is a private Jesuit research university in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. Founded in 1863, it is today among the nation's foremost universities, a leader in the liberal arts, scientific inquiry, and student formation. It is committed to leading its students on a comprehensive journey of discovery, one that integrates their intellectual, personal, ethical, and religious formation.

Both institutions agreed on offering this Master program as it brings a positive impact to their communities. For Universidad de Guadalajara, the program is a mechanism

to strengthen its institutional capacity in terms of internationalization by being able to offer a postgraduate degree that enriches the profile of its administrative staff, it also increases the international visibility of the university in the region, particularly by attracting professionals from Latin American universities as its students.

For its part, for Boston College, the Master's in International Higher Education provides a diversity of voices and perspectives in the classroom. On a regular basis, in order to complete a master's program at BC, students are required to take 30 credits, while students are required to earn 75 credits to complete a master's program at UDG. In the case of the MESI, students obtain the double degree by completing 16 BC credits, as part of a degree of 88 credits at the UDG.

Professionals who graduated from this program are ready to meet the demands of the higher education sector in an international context, as well as to design and implement public policies and alternatives for improvement and solution to problems that contribute to increasing the quality and relevance of institutions and organizations dedicated to higher education in Mexico and Latin America. Their field of action will be higher education institutions and research centres, as well as other governmental and non-governmental entities directly related to higher education in the international context.

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# Further reading

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