

**Establishing a benchmark for best practice in collaborative provision:
an Australia-Vietnam Case Study
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Abstract

Collaborating with an overseas partner in the provision of education offers many universities a way to achieve growth in student numbers, and provides students with a choice in pace and place of study that is affordable. Such initiatives usually involve twinning partnerships in different countries. However, this paper presents a critique of a different model of offshore delivery. RMIT University was the first foreign university to be licenced to open a campus in Vietnam and has established RMIT International University in Ho Chi Minh City. It is now operating in ways which seek, in a demonstrable fashion, to meet the highest quality standards for collaborative educational provision while remaining accessible to the students it seeks to recruit. The quality assurance implications of these arrangements are particularly challenging as they are generally premised on the key principle (QAA 2003 (a)) that the partnership should widen opportunities without prejudice either to the standard of the award, or qualification, or the quality of what is offered to the student. It is based on arrangements which are as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programs provided wholly within the responsibility of a RMIT. This paper looks in depth at how such arrangements have been put in place in the context of a unique collaboration between Australia and Vietnam.

Section 1: Introduction

Collaborating with an overseas partner in the provision of education offers many universities a way to achieve growth in student numbers, and provides students with a choice in pace and place of study that is affordable, while remaining sustainable in a business sense for both partners. Such initiatives usually involve twinning partnerships in different countries. However, this paper presents a critique of a different model of offshore delivery. RMIT University was the first foreign university to be licenced to open a campus in Vietnam and has established RMIT International University in Ho Chi Minh City. The quality assurance implications are particularly challenging as they are generally premised on the key principle (QAA 2003 (a)) that the initiative should widen opportunities without prejudice either to the standard of the award, or qualification, or the quality of what is offered to the student. It is based, therefore, on arrangements which are as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programs provided wholly within the responsibility of a RMIT. This paper looks in depth at how such arrangements have been put in place to assure the quality of the education and training in the context of this unique collaboration between Australia and Vietnam.

The paper consists of four sections: it starts with a general introduction while Section Two contains a literature review that sets out the main issues which impact on quality in collaborative provision of education and describes the challenges which research suggests have to be overcome in achieving high quality outcomes. The next Section describes RMIT International University in Vietnam (RMIT Vietnam) and its relationship with RMIT in Australia, and the final Section contains an analysis of the relationship and its operations and how well the challenges of offering high quality education in a collaborative partnership have been addressed.

Section 2: Definitions of Quality

Much of the literature indicates that quality is held to exist by those involved in higher education insofar as the process provides them with the outcomes to which they ascribe value. It is generally agreed that quality has no meaning except in relation to purpose or function (Ball 1985, Reynolds 1986). In describing the difficulties in addressing issues of quality, Ball argues that, intellectually and academically, this is one of the most challenging ventures that might be undertaken. He also suggests that while this is a sensitive issue it is still of critical importance. Other experts avoid precise definitions of quality. Barnett (1987) emphasises two key aspects of maintaining quality, namely critical self reflection by those involved, and evaluation as part of a continuing process of critical self reflection rather than simply a spasmodic response to external demands. P.R. Williams (1991) also avoids defining quality explicitly and prefers to take the approach of seeing whether quality assurance systems are appropriate for the purposes for

which they are designed and used, and whether they work effectively. Warnock (1990) chose to emphasise the *importance* of quality. Warnock's contribution to the debate about quality is echoed in those of Moodie (1986), de Weert (1990), Ball (1985) and Reynolds (1986). The Warnock Report says that teaching quality "will be judged good by whether or not it contributes to the achievement of purpose"; and that "higher education has a variety of purposes". There is thus a substantial agreement that quality is defined by fitness for purpose and this paper will use that simple definition in its analysis.

Quality in partnerships

The principles underpinning overseas partnerships have been well articulated in the work of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the UK, (Fallshaw 2003 [a], [b], [c], QAA 2003 (a)) and continue to be explored through the audit work of the QAA and reported on their web site (QAA 2003 (b)). Similar work is emerging from the reports being published by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) as it moves through its first full year of operations (AUQA 2003). These generally indicate a strong current belief that higher education should be an actively self-regulating, academically autonomous community. However, universities have learnt over the years that quality is not an accident but is always the result of intelligent effort (Williams 2002).

The QAA has a useful checklist for collaborative arrangements overseas (QAA 2003(a)) which it emphasises are particularly challenging. This warning is based on an awareness that the arrangements for assuring the quality and standards in partnerships must be as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programs provided wholly within the responsibility of the host institution. The quality precepts which RMIT has adopted in establishing its campus in Vietnam, align with those set out by the QAA.

These are that:

1. RMIT is responsible for the academic standards of all awards granted in its name
2. The academic standards of RMIT awards studied in Vietnam will be equivalent to those delivered by RMIT in Australia
3. The collaborative arrangements between RMIT and RMIT Vietnam will be negotiated and managed in accordance with the policies and procedures of RMIT
4. An up to date register of collaborative arrangements will be maintained

In 2001 Buckingham and Channon (2002) conducted a survey of collaborative partnerships in Hong Kong. The teaching models in their survey generally adopted the fly-in-fly-out approach. This is where academics from the host university fly in for a brief period to deliver an intensive series of lectures followed by support being given to the students over the next few weeks or months by local tutors in a variety of ways. The results of the survey indicated that joint teaching by overseas and local tutors provided the greatest scope to jeopardize the quality of the program, despite the provision of both overseas and local support also being seen as very positive by students. Most of the problems,

".. hinged around views of the role of the local tutor as seen by the provider, the student and the tutor, views which appeared rarely to be in harmony. The provider may see the local tutor as having a low level, academic support role but the tutor, if an experienced academic, finds it difficult to stay within the boundaries imposed by that role and neither do the students expect them to. What appears to be happening is an 'expectation drift', which the provider might encourage at first in the hope that this will enhance the student's experience."

The outcomes of the Buckingham and Channon survey suggest that consideration of how quality and standards are maintained in the separate elements of delivery, assessment and learner support, might be a more practical way of approaching the quality assurance of all kinds of off-campus provision. As is discussed in Section 3, RMIT has developed a practical approach to the implementation of these ideas.

The cultural dimension

Organisational theory tends to be similar whether espoused from London, Sydney or New York. It has general international currency and consistency. There is probably little which is unique, for example, in Australia's business structures (Robbins et al. 1994) due to the dominance of management theorists from the United States and the UK. Where Australians differ, however, is in their expertise in the administration of universities over a large geographical area. Collaborative provision is concerned with partnership arrangements which universities enter into with other institutions or organisations, in the same country, or overseas. However, while organisational theory may be said to be largely internationally consistent,

Redding (1990) describes the potential impact of local Asian culture on professional bureaucracies such as universities. He suggests that organisations are so embedded in a cultural matrix that they imperceptibly absorb its influence. The way this works in practice is that universities import their local societal norms and values simply through employing people holding these norms and beliefs. When we employ people in an international business, such as at the offshore campus of an Australian university, we also import, along with them, international perspectives. Thus, without a great deal of effort, we are internationalising our business as managers from different countries and different cultures discuss and negotiate electronically and in face to face meetings how best to deliver goods or services to customers and students.

Like virtually all Asian cultures, that of Vietnam displays high obligation-bonding and rests on sensitively perceived hierarchies. In contrast, Western organisations - and Australian Universities are no exception - tend to stress principles of objectivity and openness of communication and fairness. The dangers Redding sees for universities operating in Asia lie in the need to allow for academics to practice their profession without the direct control of their institutions, and the requirement that their surrounding support system is managed bureaucratically. He describes an Asian cultural tendency towards excessively tight control and high levels of deference which are not conducive to open debate, and advises of the need for Asian universities to keep decision making open and widely shared.

In summary

In summary, in considering the quality of RMIT's operations in Vietnam, the key issues in the literature then revolve around the following areas:

1. Quality is defined by fitness for purpose. The stakeholders and their key purposes in the context of this case study will be described in Section 3.
2. There are likely to be cultural differences in managing a university in Australia and in Vietnam
3. Assuring quality in the provision of education through a partnership involves adherence to certain key principles
4. The role and responsibilities of the local tutors are likely to present a particular challenge

Section 3 RMIT Vietnam and its relationship with RMIT

Vietnam has a long history of university development. To help bridge a wide gap between demand and supply for education, particularly tertiary education, Vietnam has opened its market to direct foreign providers and RMIT International University Vietnam is now operating from its City campus in Ho Chi Minh City, developing a second campus in Saigon South and a possible third in the city, and planning a network of learning resource centres with other universities (Wilmoth 2002, 2003).¹ The RMIT Vietnam connections are substantial. After establishing a number of university partnerships in Vietnam and providing a building on the campus of Vietnam National University Hanoi, donating computers, scholarships and books to other universities in Vietnam, RMIT found itself the leading destination world-wide for Vietnam tertiary students studying offshore, albeit in modest numbers. Initially the Government of Vietnam accepted RMIT's proposal for an international university and after a feasibility study, in 1998 a provisional licence to operate a foreign owned university in Ho Chi Minh City was granted. After further work, in April 2000 an Investment Licence was issued to RMIT for a period of 50 years. RMIT then developed detailed academic, financial and other plans which were appraised by private and multilateral financiers and by Vietnamese and Australian government authorities. A Board of Management is the governing authority of the university, and RMIT in Australia is the accrediting body for the institution and its academic programs.

The objectives of RMIT Vietnam are to:

- provide professional and vocational education and training programs
- provide outcome related research and consultancy services
- contribute to economic, social and environmentally sustainable development

¹ Wilmoth (2002 and 2003) gives an excellent description of the background to the establishment of RMIT Vietnam which has been used as the basis for the abbreviated details provided here and to which the reader is referred for a much fuller picture.

- provide appropriate levels of return on investment.

However, this paper focuses on the first objective for establishing this new international university, namely to provide greater access to programs of an internationally recognised standard.² While RMIT Vietnam enjoys independence of control for program accreditation, it must demonstrate to the government of Vietnam that its standards of provision are equivalent to RMIT Australia. To that extent the broad and underpinning requirement of the Vietnamese Government in licensing RMIT to establish RMIT Vietnam was predicated on a key requirement – to offer degrees in Vietnam of an equivalent quality to those RMIT provides everywhere else.

Students attend scheduled classes run by RMIT Vietnam academic staff, and make use of on-line learning resources, developed and produced by RMIT, which substantially enhance the courses they are undertaking. The learning outcomes and design of the curriculum is done at RMIT and is approved through the normal processes by RMIT's Academic Board. The same programs run in Australia and in Vietnam. However, class sizes at RMIT Vietnam are limited to a maximum of 24 and RMIT Vietnam operates 3 fifteen-week terms per year with no significant breaks in between. By mid 2003 RMIT Vietnam had 700 students, 100 staff and two active campuses in Ho Chi Minh City, with three more campuses to follow within a year. It offers a number of programs including a University Preparation Program, the Bachelor of Commerce, the Bachelor of Applied Science with a number of specialisms, the Master of Education Studies and a Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching and Learning.

In all its Teaching and Learning activities RMIT strongly promotes student centeredness and flexibility. The primary driver for investment and planning in online learning enhancement has been the RMIT Teaching and Learning Strategy (RMIT 2001) which includes as one of its key priorities:

"to introduce cost-effective flexible learning modes using a range of educational technologies which expand students' learning opportunities and encourage staff to become facilitators of learning."

RMIT was therefore a good choice for the Vietnamese Government in seeking to provide in their own country increased access to high quality courses, enriched by appropriate use of technology. In choosing to enrol at RMIT Vietnam the Vietnamese students have consistently emphasised their expectations of gaining access to a high quality Australian education which, in all significant respects, is the same as if they were able to attend RMIT in Melbourne which were mirrored in RMIT's intentions in accepting the invitation to establish a Vietnam campus. RMIT has for many years been an extremely successful exporter of educational services into China and South East Asia. It has gained enormous expertise in working in collaborative partnerships across Asia. It also has an unbending commitment to quality in its programs. Given its wealth of experience in collaborations, plus its commitment to quality, the key intention underlying RMIT's agreement to enter into such a venture with the Vietnamese Government was on the basis that it would provide programs of an equivalent standard on and offshore.

The purpose of the all key stakeholders in this venture was therefore the same. It was to increase access to RMIT programs. In sharing this common purpose, the Vietnamese Government and the RMIT Vietnam students and RMIT all defined equivalence of standards as their main determinant of quality in education. That was a common and overarching purpose shared by them all in establishing and participating in the RMIT Vietnam venture.

Teaching and Learning

RMIT Vietnam aims to provide a model for Vietnamese institutions in terms of curriculum; teaching and learning methods; setting educational and training standards; and monitoring learning outcomes. Clearly the paths to learning are in both directions, as RMIT learns to provide programs in Vietnam's cross-cultural setting. The learning model for RMIT Vietnam is based on the principle that program materials are developed by or with RMIT academics and delivered through online courseware. Students in Vietnam access the materials under the guidance of RMIT Vietnam academic staff, who in turn are mentored and guided by relevant academic staff in Australia and considered part of the overall program team for quality assurance purposes. The staff at RMIT Vietnam are about 30% expatriates and 70% local. Both the

² Wilmoth (2003) provides an excellent account of how all four priorities are being pursued.

expatriate and the local staff are well educated, holding Masters and often PhD degrees, mainly from Australia, the USA and Europe, and in addition are mostly highly experienced professionals. The pool of human talent in Vietnam has provided RMIT Vietnam with a rich local resource on which to draw. RMIT Vietnam has therefore been able to recruit a very impressive group of staff locally. A former Australian Ambassador to Vietnam has been appointed Foundation President and a senior RMIT academic has been appointed to provide leadership in Teaching and Learning. Any lack of teaching experience in locally recruited staff has been addressed by providing a practice based research program to develop and enhance their skills in tertiary teaching and learning and this has had an immediate impact on the experience of students in the classroom.

All course materials are provided by RMIT but this still requires RMIT Vietnam staff to do a considerable amount of preparation before the courses are delivered. RMIT and RMIT Vietnam continue to collaborate closely on the best way to provide courseware for delivery in RMIT Vietnam, which takes account of the expertise, and opportunity for contextualisation offered by the availability of excellent RMIT Vietnam staff, while still ensuring that the students at RMIT Vietnam and at RMIT reach the same standards in all the courses. Classes at RMIT Vietnam are smaller than in RMIT so the teaching methods can be different in both locations. However, the breaks between terms at RMIT Vietnam are very short and there has to be very close cooperation between RMIT and RMIT Vietnam to finalise marking and moderation and ensure students have confirmed results before starting the next term.

Early issues, like problems with students photocopying textbooks instead of purchasing them, been tackled creatively. Students now pay for legitimate copies of required books as part of their fees and are already reporting their delight in owning their own books which they plan to use as the basis for their own personal library. All students entering programs are soon to be provided with a laptop for personal use and the RMIT Vietnam campus is to be wireless enabled to allow students to work anywhere, anytime. The RMIT - RMIT Vietnam Learning and Teaching model continues to evolve in negotiation with RMIT Melbourne and aims to foster closer collaboration between RMIT and RMIT Vietnam staff.

Assessment

An example of how detailed this planning approach needs to be is illustrated in the following table. This is just a partial description of some of the steps taken to ensure RMIT Vietnam assessments and exams are carefully moderated by RMIT.

Time	Action	Responsibility
At least one month prior to start of term	RMIT Vietnam submits any proposed changes to RMIT for approval	RMIT Vietnam teaching staff
At least two weeks prior to start of term	RMIT approves any changes to assessment activities and finalises course guide	RMIT Course coordinator
At least one week prior to start of term	RMIT Course coordinator edits and upload official course guide to web	RMIT Course coordinator
Week prior to start of term	RMIT Vietnam sends RMIT proposed interim assignments, marking scheme, model answer	RMIT Vietnam teaching staff
Week prior to start of term	RMIT approves assessment tasks and gives advice on marking scheme	RMIT Course coordinator
First half of term	RMIT Vietnam and RMIT collaborate on setting final exam including solution and marking scheme	RMIT Vietnam teaching staff and RMIT Course coordinator
By Week 8 of term	Final exam finalised	RMIT Course coordinator

Within 2 days of completion of exams	RMIT Vietnam couriers papers to RMIT	RMIT Vietnam staff
On completion of marking	RMIT inputs results to RMIT Student System and advises RMIT Vietnam Registrar	RMIT Administrative officer

Table 1: Moderation of assessments

Details have also been agreed on a number of additional procedures including the moderation of interim pieces of assessment, what is to be done if discrepancies become evident, and the release of results.

The quality of assessment and the equivalence of standards at RMIT Vietnam and at RMIT are of the utmost importance. However, this also means there has to be respect on both sides for the professionalism of the staff at RMIT Vietnam with their local knowledge, and the need for the RMIT staff to fully exercise their duty of care in assuring the quality and standards at RMIT Vietnam are demonstrably as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programs provided wholly within the responsibility of RMIT.

There has been considerable robust discussion between RMIT Vietnam course coordinators and their counterparts in Melbourne over the style of assessment, the possibility of having an RMIT Vietnam exam paper which is different from that taken by students taking the same course at RMIT, the grades awarded for interim assignments, the desirability of awarding marks for class participation or even on issues like taking attendance. In Vietnam, with its small classes, staff develop a much more personal relationship with the students than is possible in Melbourne where class sizes can often be over 100. It is feasible to take attendance and perhaps prevent students from taking final exams if they have not shown up to class in Vietnam. However, in Melbourne there are no attendance requirements for degree programs. Instead students are treated as responsible adults who are expected to take charge of managing their own learning. In negotiating appropriate outcomes over issues such as this it has been important to recall the quality precepts which RMIT has adopted in establishing its campus in Vietnam. Ultimately RMIT is responsible for the academic standards of all awards granted in its name and the academic standards of RMIT awards studied in Vietnam must be demonstrably equivalent to those delivered by RMIT in Australia. Some variations to take account of local needs are highly desirable and there is certainly learning going on from both sides but ultimately the testamur awarded to RMIT Vietnam students is exactly the same as that awarded in Melbourne.

The outcomes of the Buckingham and Channon survey referred to above have to some extent been mirrored in the RMIT – RMIT Vietnam relationship. Working together has required staff in RMIT to thoroughly discuss their views of the role of the local tutor and there have certainly been instances when the students in Vietnam, supported by the local RMIT Vietnam tutors favoured a decision which was not supported in Melbourne. While this was not unexpected, it does require considerable maturity from colleagues on both sides to ensure agreements are reached calmly and in a manner which keeps the students' best interests in the foreground. This is made considerably easier if processes for discussion and communication are kept open with the aim of maintaining a mutually supportive relationship. In the planning stages academic staff at RMIT expected local tutors in Vietnam to have a relatively low level, academic support role. However, once the calibre of the staff who had actually been recruited became known, this view has changed. From their perspective the RMIT Vietnam academics often do find it difficult to stay within the boundaries imposed by their role and neither do the students expect them to. This 'expectation drift' is something which has had to be carefully managed to ensure the students benefit as much as possible from the expertise of the RMIT Vietnam staff while nevertheless following an RMIT program curriculum.

Policy and process

It has been equally challenging to ensure that the RMIT approach is adopted across all policies and procedures which impact on the student. The adoption of a Teaching and Learning Service Agreement between RMIT and RMIT Vietnam has proved a good way to cover all the key components of a student's life with the University and to describe how this works at RMIT Vietnam to reflect a truly RMIT experience.

This Teaching and Learning Service Agreement identifies specific services, responsibilities and support required to ensure and to provide evidence that a student's learning experience in the programs offered by both RMIT and RMIT Vietnam are of demonstrably equivalent standards. While RMIT retains overall responsibility for the maintenance, monitoring and evaluation of academic standards through the policies and procedures of the RMIT Academic Board, the Service Agreement sets out at an operational level how RMIT and RMIT Vietnam will collaborate to ensure that rigorous systems are in place to establish and maintain and provide evidence of this. In Table 2 below is given an abbreviated extract of the Service Agreement and how programs are managed, how support for learners is given, how information is provided to prospective students and how selection and admission are carried out.

Service	Service description	Responsible party	Evidence of responsibility/compliance
Program Management The responsibilities of the Program Managers are:	Direct liaison with RMIT and RMIT Vietnam Program Manager and personnel and providing a single point of contact for all matters related to the program	Program Manager RMIT Program Manager RMIT Vietnam	Individual workplans Numerous emails
Program Information	RMIT will provide Information about the program, including admission requirements, books and supplies, technical requirements	RMIT	RMIT Program Manager provides details to RMIT Vietnam RMIT Program Manager advises on wording of promotional materials Cross reference by RMIT Vietnam to VTAC guide and Melbourne published requirements to ensure consistency
Prospective Students	RMIT will provide Information about the Program structure and prerequisite requirements	RMIT Program Manager	Program documentation as approved by Academic Board provided to RMIT Vietnam
	Assisting prospective students with course/program selection	Registrar RMIT Vietnam	Publicity materials for programs in Vietnam based on materials prepared in Melbourne to ensure consistency
	Screening of applicants to ensure only those with complete applications proceed to the next step	Registrar RMIT Vietnam	Feedback from RMIT
Selection and admission	Directing students to information on: Programs, including admission requirements, tuition and fees, books and supplies, technical requirements, and student support service	Registrar RMIT Vietnam	RMIT Vietnam Web site Program related publications in Vn (also checked and filed in Melbourne)
	Ensuring that consistent, fair and reasonable entry requirements are implemented	Draft offer lists compiled by Registrar RMIT Vietnam; approved by RMIT	Student files open to be checked RMIT records indicate equivalent entry requirements met in all locations same program is offered

Service	Service description	Responsible party	Evidence of responsibility/compliance
Support for student learning	Monitoring week to week study progress of enrolled students	RMIT Vietnam Program Manager and course coordinators	
	Providing physical facilities such as classrooms, computer equipment, projectors etc.	IT Manager and Property Manager RMIT Vietnam	Good facilities provided in all teaching spaces Wireless network planned for implementation late 2003 Proposal for laptops to be rented to students with a view to purchase on graduation approved by Board of Management for implementation later in 2003
	Maintaining the security of all RMIT student records	Registrar RMIT Vietnam Registrar RMIT	RMIT Vietnam has locked cabinets for local records Other records are filed electronically on secure RMIT systems IT Manager RMIT Vietnam and IT RMIT responsible for data security

Table 2 Extract of Service Agreement

These tables (Tables 1 and 2 above) and the associated processes on how to handle emergent problems have proved the key to developing mutual understanding of the responsibilities of both RMIT and of RMIT Vietnam and in evidencing the same standards are upheld in both locations. Discussing the principles of how to collaborate well in advance of a contentious issue arising is vitally important to getting things right from the start, and ensuring staff in both places understand their role and that of their counterparts elsewhere. As the quality precepts adopted by RMIT foreshadowed, the collaborative arrangements between RMIT and RMIT Vietnam are being negotiated and managed in accordance with the policies and procedures of RMIT and the Service Agreement is one of the ways in which an up to date register of collaborative arrangements is being maintained.

Student learning

Sometimes students at RMIT Vietnam struggle to work independently, to work in teams, to communicate effectively in English, and to produce their own work. However, the challenge for students of their transition from school to university is well researched internationally. It is not unique to Ho Chi Minh City. Vietnamese students come to RMIT Vietnam as they want an international university experience, and plenty of contact with international staff. Students do remarkably well, enjoying the intensive face to face regime, but initially are fairly dependent on their teachers to tell them what to do and when to do it – as per the Vietnamese education system. RMIT Vietnam's program for the professional development of its staff is providing them with the necessary teaching skills to assist students in making the transition to becoming independent self-managed learners.

There are numerous opportunities for developing Vietnamese case studies for use in Melbourne and in other locations in which students are taking similar business courses. The fact that many of the courses are offered in the degree programs in Vietnam as are also common to other Business degrees at RMIT makes the possibilities of student exchanges easy to implement and attractive to many. The opportunities opened up for students in terms of bringing a greater international perspective to their education are immense.

The cultural dimension of the RMIT Vietnam activities and the possibilities foreshadowed by Redding of universities importing their local societal norms and values simply through employing people holding these norms and beliefs has definitely come about. When people are employed in an international business,

such as at RMIT Vietnam, they bring international perspectives. The RMIT Vietnam staff imbue a global perspective and an international approach to education. As an international university RMIT Vietnam stresses principles of objectivity and openness of communication and fairness and this is very explicit in its approach to Teaching and Learning. The need Redding suggested to keep decision making open and widely shared is being put into practice through discussion and debate and shared learning - between academics in Melbourne and in Vietnam and between students and their teachers. The cross cultural mix is being celebrated as a strength and not seen as a threat and this is a benefit to all the staff and students involved.

Section 4 Conclusions

In this final section each of the key issues identified from the literature in Section 2 is revisited and examined in the light of the discussion on how RMIT offers its programs in collaboration with RMIT Vietnam.

The original premise is that quality is defined by fitness for purpose. The stakeholders are clearly RMIT, operating through its wholly owned entity RMIT Vietnam, the Vietnamese Government and the RMIT Vietnam students. Their key purpose in establishing RMIT Vietnam was a shared desire to offer Australian qualifications in Vietnam to students who, for financial or other reasons did not wish, or could not afford, to leave Vietnam. The goal was to provide them with education of a standard equivalent to that available in Melbourne. The quality of the RMIT Vietnam initiative can be measured in terms of how successful it has been in achieving this goal.

Assuring quality in the provision of education through a partnership involves adherence to certain key principles and the evidence shows that RMIT is achieving this in ways which are practical and which can be clearly evidenced. While RMIT is responsible for the academic standards of all awards granted in its name, it is working closely with its staff at RMIT Vietnam to ensure that all parties understand and share a common set of understandings on the academic standards of RMIT awards studied in Vietnam. It has instituted a series of detailed and intensive processes to guarantee that these will be equivalent to those delivered by RMIT in Australia. The collaborative arrangements between RMIT and RMIT Vietnam are being negotiated and managed in accordance with the policies and procedures of RMIT and through Service Agreements, access to common web resources, weekly discussions, and face-to-face visits, and as a result a well established practice is building up of developing and documenting and maintaining and improving the register of collaborative arrangements.

The possibility of cultural differences in managing a university in Australia and in Vietnam has been actively managed through the recruitment of internationally educated staff with broad based work experience – both local and expatriate - the appointment of an experienced Australian President who speaks fluent Vietnamese and is well able to bridge cultural differences, and the appointment of a senior RMIT academic to develop an understanding of Teaching and Learning Principles in RMIT Vietnam consistent with those adopted by RMIT.

Experience has indeed shown that the role and responsibilities of the local tutors are likely to present a particular challenge in developing a collaborative venture, and ensuring staff skills and knowledge are used most effectively in the teaching process. However, adopting an approach which concentrates on developing approaches to the local RMIT Vietnam implementation of RMIT policies and strategies, rather than addressing crisis issues when they arise has provided an opportunity to develop a common approach which is a result of input from both sides, while still adhering consistently with the RMIT approach.

In the introduction it was stated that quality assurance implications of collaborative provision are generally premised on the principle that the partnership should widen opportunities without prejudice either to the standard of the award or the quality of what is offered to the student. The arrangements developed for its RMIT Vietnam operations are demonstrably as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programs provided wholly by RMIT. The RMIT initiative in Vietnam is a sound and well managed one, based on an in depth understanding of quality in educational practice and as such it is going a long way to establishing a benchmark for best practice in collaborative provision.

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