

Partnership and Action: SQA and Scotland's Colleges

In the last edition we reported on progress by Scottish universities in attracting Chinese students. In this we profile partnership work by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Scotland's colleges which complements and supports Scottish Executive strategy and developments in the university sector.

Over the past two years a quiet, iterative process has been underway in China and Scotland as the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the Scottish Executive have been developing a strategy of collaboration with the Ministry of Education in China and its agencies. One of the principal purposes of this work is to support the objectives of the Scottish Executive's International Strategy which aims to create opportunities with Scotland's colleges to deliver Scottish educational products and services in China.

The good progress made in the highly competitive Chinese market was recognised and formalised earlier this year by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Scotland and China by the then Deputy First Minister, Jim Wallace, MSP. The Memorandum records the intention:

'To facilitate and promote exchange and collaboration between Scottish and Chinese educational institutions and to improve mutual understanding between the peoples of the two countries.'

The first phase of the programme has focused on the promotion of SQA's flagship Higher National Diploma (HND) to Chinese universities and an articulation programme which will lead students to study towards honours and masters degrees at UK universities. In partnership with CSCSE, an agency of the Ministry of Education in China, SQA designed a small-scale pilot which launched six HNDs in September 2004. The initial target of 12 Chinese universities and 500 students was however easily exceeded and with the assistance of the Ministry a programme of investment led to 20 universities and over 900 students becoming involved. Good working relationships with UK Universities has led also to the securing of conditional places for all of the first cohort who will come to the UK in September 2006. As a consequence, this September sees the launch of a further seven HNDs with over 2000 students and an anticipated 2500 students from 2007 onwards with a potential value of over £50 million per year to the UK economy.

In support of its HND programme in partnership with Scotland's colleges, SQA is providing underpinning support through the provision of Continuous Professional

Development (CPD), teacher training in partnership with Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), assessment and moderation, student and lecturer learning materials and the introduction of the Scottish, 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' (ESOL) programme, as an alternative to IELTS. Work is also underway to position SQA qualifications to assist in the development of the workforce and lifelong learning in China through a separate agreement signed with an agency of the Chinese Ministry of Labour and Social Security. Here the HND will be used — as they are in Scotland — as a medium to high level workforce entry qualification, as a mechanism for improving knowledge and skills within the workforce, and as a mechanism for articulation to higher levels of study within the UK and China.

Although Scotland's colleges have developed as mature, independent and confident education and training providers, the opportunity to work in partnership with each other, Higher Education Institutions and SQA should not be underestimated. In particular, the promotional work being undertaken to date has increased the profile of the Scottish Education brand, and the partnerships established by SQA at Chinese government level — and associated support — will provide a marketing advantage for Scottish products and may assist Scottish learning providers to attract and secure contracts.

Among the opportunities which immediately present themselves are:

- ◆ the provision of additional HND programmes
- ◆ programmes of Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers
- ◆ new product streams in non-advanced and workplace qualifications
- ◆ the provision of training and development to increase the skills of Chinese centres in relation to quality assurance systems

Secondments and staff exchange programmes are also becoming available, allowing a low risk entry to the market. The development of an International Bi-lingual Teaching Qualification by SQA (which is the subject of a separate formal SQA-Ministry agreement, in partnership with colleges), with a TEI offering in-country articulation to education degree and masters programmes, offers colleges additional opportunity for delivery in China with partner Chinese universities.

There are considerable opportunities for Scottish education and training providers to generate income through offering education and training services outwith Scotland and to attract people to study in Scotland. SQA welcomes a partnership with Scotland's colleges, UK universities and agencies to develop a plan to secure income streams from international business. This co-ordinated approach will undoubtedly increase UK ability to capture significant business in the future.