

# UK–US Higher Education Partnerships: Realising the Potential

Executive Summary

PM12 Partnerships Connect  
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## Foreword by Martin Davidson



The various league tables on Higher Education all confirm that the US and the UK are still the world leaders in research excellence, with a global reputation for high quality of teaching and learning in Higher Education. This hard won reputation for global excellence is underpinned by a strong bi-lateral relationship, which allows for the free exchange of knowledge and ideas through our Higher Education institutions. In order to maintain this status in an increasingly complex international environment, the UK and the US will both need to develop new strategies and new partnerships, ones which take into account the increasing influence of new educational centres of excellence in, for example, India and China. The transatlantic education relationship will ultimately need to develop into one which is much more global in its outlook.

As this helpful and timely report, commissioned through the PMI2 Partnerships Project shows, the number and variety of partnerships between the UK and the US is already considerable and reflects the close historic ties between the two countries' education systems. The report also, rightly, cautions against complacency and if we are to see academic ties grow stronger and benefit both our countries in the future, we will need to invest in

refreshing these links at all levels. This means nurturing and supporting the partnerships which give our academic staff and students the opportunities which exposure to the international study environment afford. It means we need to work harder to ensure that policy makers, educators and students on both sides of the Atlantic are clear on the value of education partnerships.

The report highlights the strengths in existing collaborations and it is on these strengths that we need to build. Through programmes such as the UK government funded PMI2 Programme and the US Fulbright programme, we need to ensure that partnerships continue to flourish and that they develop in tune with the changing environment. At the British Council, we look forward to working with our partners in the US and particularly with the International Institute of Education to make this a reality.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Martin Davidson'.

**Martin Davidson CMG**

Chief Executive, British Council



## Foreword by Allan E Goodman

The world in 2010 is very different from the world of 1941, when Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt set out their shared hopes for the future in the Atlantic Charter. But through the years, the UK and the U.S. have maintained a 'special relationship' deeply rooted in history and demonstrated through business links, cultural exchange, and recognition of shared challenges.

Reflecting these ties, the UK remains far and away the most sought-after study abroad destination for U.S. higher education students. According to IIE's Open Doors report published with State Department support, the UK hosts more than 33,000 students from U.S. colleges and universities for study abroad; and more American students are enrolled directly in UK universities. Conversely, many of the 8,700 UK students who studied in the U.S. last year were enrolled in degree-granting programs. The nearly 3,000 scholars who taught and conducted research in the United States further strengthened the academic ties between our countries.

We can also see that governments on both sides are committed to this relationship, particularly through the Fulbright program, the flagship educational exchange program of the U.S.

government, which IIE has the honor to administer. The U.S. student exchange program with the UK remains one of the strongest and most competitive in the program, and enjoys strong binational support.

One of the first publications of IIE's new Center for International Partnerships in Higher Education, which assists U.S. colleges and universities in developing and sustaining international institutional partnerships, was a report on transatlantic joint and dual degree programs. The report showed that U.S. institutions are eager to expand transatlantic links.

The Institute of International Education is delighted to support the British Council in this new U.S.-UK initiative, and I trust that it will further generate new dialogue and new partnerships between our nations. We look forward to working in partnership to ensure that transatlantic ties remain strong.



**Allan E Goodman**

CEO, Institute of International Education





## Executive Summary

### Overview

The US is the UK's most important partner in higher education and there have been excellent successes achieved through close co-operation that have been of benefit to both nations. These activities have brought about 45,000 US students to the UK each year and attracted significant investment resulting in an annual turnover from UK-US higher education co-operation of over \$1 billion.

However, the global higher education market is changing and this is likely to impact on the primacy of the UK-US relationship. This applies to all co-operative activities including research, student mobility and recruitment, collaborative degrees and staff exchanges.

Only a limited number of UK institutions have been successful at growing excellent and high profile strategic partnerships, particularly with US research led universities. Yet these relationships are vital for both the UK's research delivery and for enhancing its reputation as a provider of high quality higher education. Overall across the UK sector, activities with the US tend to be ad hoc. Evidence demonstrates that compared to other key countries, the UK and its institutions are under-investing in the US relationship.

The international higher education landscape in the US is changing:

- More countries are investing and competing to grow US education and research partnerships
- The US is keen to diversify and enhance its international outreach and co-operation, particularly in the Asia Pacific region
- Many of the next generation of academic and research leaders in US universities, particularly in STEM disciplines, will have stronger ties with Asia than with Europe

The research to support this study was undertaken in 2009 and involved literature reviews, online surveys of UK and US universities and UK researchers, interviews, and focus groups in UK and US. From the responses the following were identified as the top activities in priority order:

**For US universities:** Study abroad placements in UK, receiving UK exchange students, growing staff/faculty exchanges, and research co-operation.

**For UK universities:** Recruitment of US study abroad students, growing research co-operation, recruiting young researchers (particularly doctoral students) and recruiting masters and undergraduate students.

Interviews confirmed many of the above priorities, however there were some inconsistencies in the current range of activities, for example:

- UK institutions gave priority to study abroad recruitment but had been slow to respond to the changing requirements and international competition.
- UK institutions gave low priority to dual degrees yet other surveys indicated how much energy US institutions are putting into finding partners for international delivery.

Across the activities that contribute to the UK-US relationship, there appears to be a clear virtuous circle: UK interest in US studies, research partnerships or individual faculty links new forms of teaching collaboration and study abroad registrations, and these could lead to full degree registration or postdoctoral exchanges. These in turn strengthen future research, faculty links and teaching partnerships. Partnerships have the potential to deliver new forms of co-operation that might operate successfully across all types of collaborative activities.

## US and UK higher education

Total US domestic enrolments in comparable US higher education institutions are about five times greater than those for the UK, this is proportionate, given the relative UK and US population sizes.

Internationalisation is a priority for US institutions and many are investing their own funds to grow partnerships, including many with UK universities.

Partnerships are central to all UK higher education and research relationships. This is more true in partnering with the US than any other country the UK works with. However, UK-US partnerships are concentrated in a limited number of US states. A greater number of UK HE institutions need to become involved if the UK is to maintain its strategic position with the US.

## Research co-operation

The UK and US have a strong tradition of high quality research partnerships with global impact. The UK remains the lead partner for US researchers, but it can only maintain this position through sustained effort, given that more countries are investing in US research relationships. The problems previously identified by Gareth Roberts – such as the so-called ‘double jeopardy’ of partners’ research proposals being reviewed by funding agencies in two different countries – are being thoroughly addressed, aided by the activities of the RCUK Office, Washington D.C. and the British Embassy’s Science and Innovation Network (S&I Network). The US authorities have commended the work of these teams. The UK has been very successful at securing funding for both individual and partnership projects from US federal sources and in particular the National Institutes of Health.

The priority subject areas identified by US universities and academics for joint research with the UK were led by social studies (politics, economics), followed by physical and biosciences, humanities and arts. While for UK universities, social studies were first priority, biosciences, medicine and STEM were also important.

The UK is a popular destination for US research students. They are the second largest international group in the UK (after Chinese researchers).

However, US researchers are mainly concentrated in social studies and the humanities with only thirty per cent in STEM subjects and medicine.

## Staff and Student mobility


The willingness of UK academic staff to engage with their US counterparts is key to all types of partnership, encouraging greater academic staff mobility is vital. There is evidence of a decline in the mobility of postdoctoral scholars and young academic staff between the two countries and this needs to be addressed given their prime importance as instigators of future partnerships.

UK–US student mobility depends on strong institutional partnerships. There remains a net gain to the UK in the recruitment of students registered on full degree undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. However, last year new enrolments of US research students failed to maintain the growth pattern of previous years. The UK’s need to sustain and extend US recruitment for intellectual advantage, ranking, income generation and diversity is well understood. However, the strength of the competition from other interested nations is not as well recognised. Increased marketing, to the level invested in other countries, could help, especially if tied to enhanced partnership strategies.

UK institutions need to develop a better understanding of US higher education, institutional policies and requirements; and engage with a broader spread of US institutions (both geographically and by type). A co-ordinated involvement of all UK university groups is highly desirable.

Study abroad programmes were the priority identified by US and UK institutions and these currently account for more than 33,000 US students in the UK. However, the UK share of US study abroad students has declined and the UK could lose its lead destination status. Study abroad successes derive from robust trans-Atlantic partnerships, but a perception is growing in the US that UK institutions have been lacking in responsiveness to their changing requirements and have under-rated the competition.





The possibilities for greater UK institutional co-operation with US 'Island Campuses' and summer schools on offer in the UK should be considered as should more flexible approaches to delivery and content for study abroad programmes, including at postgraduate levels.

The outward mobility of UK students needs to be encouraged and supported. Of the 8,000 UK students in the US about half are estimated to be on exchange programmes.

### Collaborative degree programmes

The development of joint and dual degrees between the US and the UK has been slow compared with US partnerships with other EU countries. Given the international lead roles of both UK and US institutions in delivering their programmes globally, this is a potential area for development. Some seed-corn funding combined with information sharing on best practice would help encourage UK and US institutions to collaborate.

Only a very limited number of UK-US collaborative programme partnerships involving distance learning (including on-line) were identified, however given the speed of change of technologies to support delivery, growth seems likely, although unpredictable.

### Third country activities

The number of third country partnerships for research or teaching identified through the surveys and interviews was disproportionately small. The development of these was considered to be a relatively low priority for both countries' HE institutions, particularly given current financial constraints. However, there is an aspiration for the UK and the US to develop inclusive programmes for third and multiple country partnerships. There was also strong interest in sharing best practice in co-operation for capacity building experiences in developing countries.

### Competition

The global competition across all forms of international education and research is increasing. Many countries want new partnerships with the US and similarly the US wants to extend its international outreach, particularly across Asia. Recent studies have shown that the UK has already fallen behind Germany, France, Mexico, China and South Korea in collaborative delivery of joint or double degrees with US institutions. The US sees China, India, Saudi Arabia and Japan as lead countries for student recruitment and some US institutions regard Germany as strongest for research in the sciences.

There is some inevitability that the UK's share of the US higher education and research market will decline. However, as total size of the activities continues to grow, with the correct investment the UK's partnership activity should not decline.

### Other partnerships

- There is scope to grow more broad based UK-US institutional partnerships, but these must be activity focused and based on institutions with similar strategic objectives.
- US and UK policy makers and heads of institutions repeated the need for a regular high-level UK-US strategic dialogue to address matters of shared concern.
- At the practitioner level the importance of sharing experiences, particularly through practical, focused workshops was stressed.
- There are a number of US institutions operating in the UK. Engagement and dialogue with them would help understand the potential for co-operation.
- There is a need for a comprehensive guide to UK higher education for current and potential US partners.

### Strategies

The long and deep understanding between the UK and US, the many collaborations, successes and ongoing relationships have led to a more relaxed attitude towards each other, in spite of shifting global alliances and competitive pressures.



Well-informed and maintained partnerships are the key to sustaining the relationship all share and value. Any new overarching UK strategy for US engagement must ensure that the UK maintains its lead position as partner of choice.

However, a significant increase in engagement will only be achieved through partnerships based on extended networks of universities (from both countries) and through stimulating those institutions currently involved.

The following are the three priority recommendations:

**Recommendation:** The UK must re-energise its higher education relationships with the US.

- i. Establishing a 'US Strategy Group' to define an over-arching approach for the UK's engagement with US HE. This should involve participants from across the UK HE sector, including Universities UK and Guild HE. It should work in close partnership with the British Council, RCUK, S&I Network and other members of British Embassy's Higher Education and Research Group
- ii. Establishing a 'UK-US HE Senior Policy Forum' to bring together on a regular basis higher education leaders from the UK and the US to address common concerns.
- iii. Delivering a series of practitioner workshops to develop activities, knowledge and skills.

**Recommendation:** To achieve growth in UK-US higher education and research partnerships new networks of institutions need to be stimulated.

- i. A wider variety of UK and US institutions to be involved in partnerships
- ii. Enhanced levels of engagement between existing partnerships
- iii. A wider geographic spread in partnerships both in the US and UK

To support this, it is recommended that seed-corn funding be offered to institutions as initial investment to stimulate new partnerships. Investment in workshops, visits to introduce new approaches and initiate new partnerships and sharing best practice should be implemented. Any such investment to support new UK-US partnership initiatives needs to be sustained over several years to have impact and to leverage additional support funds.

**Recommendation:** The UK must raise its higher education and research profile as the leading international partner for the US.

- i. Highlighting successes in undergraduate and postgraduate activities, in research co-operation and particularly in relation to STEM disciplines.
- ii. Greater investment in the promotion and marketing of the UK offer.
- iii. The efforts of Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, the British Council and UK institutions must be co-ordinated and as well resourced as for other major countries.

Possible initiatives to enhance marketing include:

- Working alongside S&I Network funded events and visits and RCUK Washington Office initiatives to provide better promotion
- Investing in market research to understand US student motivations including how they access information and communicate study and research opportunities
- Growing and exploiting new partnerships
- Monitoring the activities of the UK's main competitor countries
- Initiating a study of employer preferences and careers of US undergraduate and postgraduate students after graduating from the UK.





The UK means the United Kingdom and consists of England, Scotland, Wales (Great Britain) and Northern Ireland

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