



LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD: A FIRST VISIT (OF SEVERAL?) TO BRAZIL

INTERNATIONALISATION

Universities are centres of international collaboration. Aiming for and sustaining excellence in research and teaching involves partnerships and co-operation, and the drive to develop international alliances is very much part of this. In February this year I had the privilege to go as a Visiting Professor to the College of Pharmacy, Nursing and Dentistry at the Federal University of Ceará [UFC], and following this visit my own university (Dundee in Scotland) and UFC plan to sign a memorandum of understanding that will reaffirm links between the two institutions. This article describes some of my experience in travelling to UFC, and discusses how the University of Dundee and UFC plan to develop partnership for the future -which includes a formal Visiting Professorship at UFC.

Universities look to develop sustainable links such as this in order to attract high-calibre students and staff, and as a means of showcasing what they do to the wider world. The process and the benefits are two-way: each partner institution should profit from the sharing of ideas and expertise. In addition, educational programmes delivered by staff with international experience helps to prepare graduates to work in a world that is increasingly globalised. International partnerships promote excellence in research as well, by maximising capacity and resources to create a critical mass, and through the dissemination of newly-derived knowledge. Such partnerships can operate on a variety of levels, involving staff from different departments or colleges. In my own case the partnership arose out of the sharing of a new quality of life instrument, originally developed in Scotland, and its translation and use in Brazil. The plan for the on-going partnership revolves around joint research, PhD supervision, and some teaching. Other partnerships will have their own needs and so will develop their own characters.

What, then, are some of the challenges with planning such arrangements?

LANGUAGE

Perhaps the most obvious issue is language. During my visit to Fortaleza I was entirely reliant on other people speaking to me in English, as I have no Portuguese. A distant memory of learning Spanish at school helped me to read some signs, but not understand spoken Portuguese. The small phrase book I took with me helped a little, but sustainable partnerships will require a great deal of thought about this. For my teaching sessions we had a professional translator who did an excellent job – but even so, there were times when difficulties arose. Sometimes these were because of cultural differences: when I spoke of 'midwives' I meant midwives working in Scotland or the United Kingdom. 'Parteras' is the literal translation, but semantically the word conveys a different meaning because the tradition of 'midwifery' in Brazil is not the same as in Scotland.

The issue of language will also affect how we conduct supervision of a PhD student.

PhD SUPERVISION

The quality of life tool we developed here in Scotland was used by a Masters student at UFC who will now go on to study for her doctorate. I examined a professionally translated version of her Masters dissertation, but this would clearly be an expensive option if multiple drafts of thesis chapters require review and comment.

Language is just one of the issues that need to be addressed when planning PhD supervision: it is also essential to negotiate a common understanding of what is expected or required at the outset. Even within the same institution (never mind the same country) there are variations in practice – such as how often meetings should occur, and by which means; how often drafts of writing should be produced and commented upon, *etc.* As with any joint supervision, clarity of approach is required. This is especially important when the supervisors work for different universities, because regulations vary. The language issue provides an additional layer of complexity. It is vital that the amount of work expected of each participant is understood: being accountable to their employer, employees cannot accept completely open-ended arrangements with other institutions. With skype and other online facilities much work can be done at a distance, but some face-to-face meetings will clearly be needed, and so the question of travel arises.

TRAVEL AND MONEY

“Travel broadens the mind”, as the saying goes, and it was a great privilege to be invited to Brazil to share knowledge and experiences. Obviously, travel involves money, but it also takes time. How much time can a university employee devote to the work of another university? As noted above, the benefits of international partnership arrangements should be enjoyed by all parties, but there are practical issues to negotiate, not least in the case of Brazil and Scotland because the distance is great, and travel is not always straightforward (I had three flights on my 27-hour trip home). The generous funding of CAPES allows for the costs of flights and accommodation to be covered, but there are also staff time costs to be considered.

Travel is two-way: one of the virtues of the CAPES scheme is that it will fund the visits of Brazilian staff and students to other countries. This can include a ‘Sandwich programme’ for a PhD student, whereby several months in the second year of study can be spent at the partner institution, which should (if appropriate) provide language support as part of the arrangement. These visits should also encourage the sharing of research ideas, with visitors able to make contact with many different people at the host institution. I am pleased to report that with the University of Dundee hosting an undergraduate nursing student from Brazil last year, the model has already been shown to work.

CONCLUSION

As a personal account, this brief article has discussed some of the issues relevant to setting up international partnership arrangements. It cannot provide answers for others - clearly each arrangement will have its own requirements – but it can help to highlight some of the issues which need to be discussed.

I greatly valued my two-week visit to Fortaleza. I look forward to more visits, and to welcoming staff and students from UFC to Dundee. This kind of collaboration offers huge potential for sharing knowledge and understanding, and for providing our students with a rich educational experience. I would like to thank all the staff at UFC who made

me so welcome, and CAPES for the funding which made the visit possible. I am sure that we will develop the formal partnership between the two universities to create a sustainable and profitable relationship.

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