

International Branch Campuses: Success Factors of Mature IBCs, 2017



Over the past half century of International Branch Campus (IBC) activity, hundreds of campuses have opened and dozens have closed their doors, often with little publicly shared understanding of why they have succeeded or failed. This is the second of a two-part report examining the phenomenon of IBCs. Part 1 of the report, published in November 2016, included data on IBC activity, locations, and characteristics. Part 2 of the report builds on this, showing 263 international branch campuses in existence and interviewing leaders of “mature” campuses in operation for over a decade to reveal what has proven influential in their success¹. Common themes include:

INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRATION

- **Support and integration.** In all cases, the IBC has strong support from the highest levels of the university and is integrated into the academic and administrative functions of the institution.
- **Collaborative leadership.** There is a close relationship between home and branch campus leaders with constant contact between the two. Decision-making is often a collaborative process with some IBC autonomy.
- **Measuring Success.** Progress is tracked, monitored, and supported by the home campus, though the IBC is allowed to operate with a certain degree of autonomy in order to achieve goals.

HOST COUNTRY SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

- **Evolving Relationship.** The relationship with the local partner and/or government of the host country evolves over time.
- **Finances and Resources.** The focus of the home and branch is on quality over profit. To this end, some campuses were operated at a loss or subsidized by the home institution during certain periods if necessary.
- **Location Matters.** IBCs tend to be located near other IBCs or have specific justifications for locating elsewhere, such as local connections or mission-focused rationales.

REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT AND ACADEMICS

- **Cooperation.** Leaders of mature campuses emphasize the importance of having positive working relationships with local regulators and complying with local regulations.
- **Research.** If conducted, research is a function of the needs and capabilities of local, regional, and national contexts. There is active collaboration between the parent and branch campuses that do research.
- **Faculty and Staff.** There is a clear preference to use faculty based in the country, and an avoidance of the “flying faculty” model. Academic staff development and elements of home country academic practices, especially around pedagogy and assessment of student learning, have been introduced.

¹ The home institutions included are: Heriot-Watt University (Heriot-Watt University Dubai); University of Nottingham (University of Nottingham Ningbo China; University of Nottingham, Malaysia Campus); Curtin University (Curtin University, Malaysia); University of Kent (Brussels School of International Studies, University of Kent); Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT Vietnam); Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech-Lorraine); ESSEC Business School (ESSEC Asia-Pacific); Webster University (Webster University Vienna Campus; Webster University, Geneva Campus)

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

- **Replication.** Institutions ensure that consistent academic practices exist at the home campus and all IBCs. Other areas (student experience, program offerings, fee structures, staffing models) have little to no impact on successful operation.
- **Student Mobility.** While student mobility between institutional sites is usually a pillar of IBC strategy, it is not always as active as desired and is often skewed in one direction.
- **Online.** The potential to use online technologies to link students and academic programs is acknowledged but remains a relatively small component of current delivery models.

OBHE and C-BERT

The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) is a higher education think tank with institutional members across 30 countries. The OBHE provides strategic intelligence for education leaders and policymakers attempting to navigate the opportunities and threats of borderless higher education.

Originally a collaborative initiative between the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) and Universities UK, The Observatory joined the International Graduate Insight Group (i-graduate) in August 2010.

The Cross-Border Education Research Team (C-BERT), based at the State University of New York at Albany (SUNY Albany) and Pennsylvania State University (Penn State), was founded in 2010 and is co-directed by Kevin Kinser (Professor and Department Head of Education Policy Studies at Penn State) and Jason Lane (Department Chair & Associate Professor, SUNY Albany and Executive Director of SUNY's Strategic, Academic, & Innovative Leadership (SAIL) Institute).

C-BERT researches cross-border higher education from organizational, sociological, economic, and political perspectives. The group maintains a website (CBERT.org) detailing cross-border ventures of higher education institutions, and serves as a clearinghouse of relevant news, current events, information, and research.

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What to expect in the report

The report examines institutional integration and leadership, host country support and resources, regulatory environment and academics, and student experience to reveal what elements have proven influential in sustaining some IBCs for an extended period.

Growth historically has been driven by a core group of home countries: 99 (76%) of the 130 "mature" IBCs come from institutions based in the US, the UK, Russia, France, and Australia; and 94 (70%) of the 133 "young" IBCs (founded since 2007) come from institutions based in the same five countries.

IBCs are hosted by 77 countries. The top five host countries are China (34), the United Arab Emirates (33), Malaysia (12), Qatar (12), and Singapore (11), which together host 102 IBCs, or 39% of the world's total. Forty-six of the 130 (35%) mature branch campuses are in these countries, indicating that their share of newer campuses is somewhat larger.

The full report will be available from December and is free to Observatory members. If you're not a member and would like to purchase the full report or become a member, please visit www.obhe.ac.uk or email info@obhe.ac.uk for more information.

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