Going Global
A guide to developing colleges’ international work
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**Foreword**

Colleges are looking to develop international opportunities for educational and commercial reasons.

International links make an important commercial contribution to colleges. The Association of Colleges (AoC) estimates that colleges generate over £100 million a year from international activity and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) put this at a considerably higher figure. This allows colleges to hire extra staff, provide better resources and run courses – which are of benefit to all students.

International students also make a major financial contribution to local communities through extra revenue for families and businesses – the financial contribution of £13 billion per year to the UK made by the export of education is acknowledged by all political parties. Despite the concerns of Migration Watch and the protests of the most ardent UK Independence Party (UKIP) supporter, the majority would agree that the UK would be poorer, in every sense, without the contribution made by our international students.

Through going ‘global’ colleges can also enhance their educational offer. The most successful workers of the future will be those with the flexibility and confidence to work in a global marketplace. Colleges can provide the type of learning environment that best inculcates these skills through contact with international students, exchanges and partnerships.

Building networks overseas helps develop the sector’s reputation. When a group of AoC member colleges formed a partnership to establish the sector’s first overseas office in Delhi, it brought the UK colleges’ offer to the vast Indian skills market. Through the UK China Partners in Education scheme, colleges are establishing sustainable partnerships with Chinese vocational providers. Colleges have enthusiastically embraced the new Erasmus Plus programme to develop Europe-wide networks. The sector is also building strong partnerships in emerging Latin American markets. The students will have an affinity for the colleges and communities where they have studied which will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Working internationally when supported by robust strategic planning can support the quality, finances, education and reputation of our colleges. It enriches our campuses, in every sense, and our sector would be poorer without it. We need to celebrate, not question, our sector’s excellent international activity and the benefits it brings.

**John Mountford**

*International Director*

*Association of Colleges*
Introduction

Further education (FE) and sixth form colleges have a long tradition in educating and training people – in some cases going back to the 19th century. From their beginnings, colleges have focused on helping people gain an education, work productively and contribute to society and this has always had an international dimension. From these origins, there is a growing acceptance of the important value international work brings to colleges.

International activity in colleges is a vital and long-standing part of their work which ranges from teaching full-time students in this country to building new colleges in the Middle East and India.

Colleges’ international work previously focused on student recruitment but has now diversified into other areas including:

- international partnerships;
- overseas projects;
- staff and student exchanges; and
- overseas delivery – Transnational Education (TNE).

Colleges are increasingly utilising their international work to help develop their students’ global skills and citizenship through overseas partnerships and exchange programmes.

Over 100 FE colleges hold UK Visa and Immigration’s (UKVI) Highly Trusted Sponsor (HTS) status, which gives an indication of the number which have established international operations. Income generated from international work for the sector is estimated to be over £100 million per year, with international student fee income at around £60 million per year. There are approximately 50,000 to 60,000 overseas students studying at FE colleges, which include around 30,000 from outside the EU and 23,000 European Union (EU) students studying on fee courses. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has put this figure even higher quoting that international links are worth £350 million to the FE sector.¹

The aim of this guide is to provide colleges with an overview of the benefits of working internationally, some of the challenges which could be faced and how to overcome them. A template International Strategy has been included, which colleges are able to use and adapt for their local work. This guide is supported by returns from a survey of colleges’ international work conducted in October 2014.
Reasons for delivering international education and training

Why does your college deliver international education and training?

International activity helps colleges to develop new commercial opportunities whilst enhancing the student experience for all learners.

Business development remains an important driver for colleges' international work. Colleges also look to international work for the educational value it brings – in the survey this was cited as their main motivation. One college commented that promoting ‘Global Citizenship’ was one of their core values and another said that international helps the ‘cultural mix of the college’. Sixth form colleges, in particular, highlighted the opportunity to internationalise their students’ experience as an important motivation for international. This focus is demonstrated by the number of international partnerships and exchange programmes that offer the opportunity for UK students to have an overseas experience.

Working internationally can help to raise a college's profile locally, nationally and internationally. Meeting the needs of international students and partners allows colleges to improve the quality of their provision. International work also exposes them to new approaches and techniques in key areas of delivery that helps them to develop as institutions.

International work also allows colleges to take advantage of funding opportunities such as Erasmus Plus. For many colleges, international is a logical extension of their strategic direction, mission and organisational development, as illustrated by colleges utilising their work through skills competitions to develop international partnerships. It also allows colleges to take advantage of their provision, location or to respond to a particular opportunity.
Models of international delivery

How does your college deliver international education and training?

Teaching international students in the UK and, increasingly, overseas remains the standard model for colleges’ international delivery. This can be either through infilling students onto existing programmes or putting on bespoke courses. Colleges also run teacher training programmes (often in English language teaching) and ‘train the trainer’ programmes. These can be delivered both in the UK and in overseas markets.

Alongside more commercial activities, colleges run student and staff exchange programmes, often funded by EU projects. Similar exchange partnerships have been established with community colleges in the USA and Canada and through the World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics.
A number of colleges work through international partnerships, which are often linked to specific projects and programmes. Some of these partnerships have been funded through the EU or the British Council's Skills for Employability programme.

Colleges have also worked on major international capacity building programmes, a current example of this is the Saudi Arabian Colleges for Excellence programme. Colleges have also looked to commercialise their international activity through consultancy services to international partners and governments. Interestingly, only a few colleges work with employers to develop international opportunities and this is possibly a delivery model the sector is underutilising.

Saudi Arabian Technical Vocational Training Colleges

The Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC) was established by the Saudi Government to plan and supervise vocational education and training. It focuses on technical colleges and vocational institutes. Its work and courses help to decrease the gap between training programmes in technical colleges and the needs of the labour market.

International cooperation agreements have been signed with a number of advanced countries to benefit from their experience. Countries such as the United States, Germany, Japan, Great Britain and Australia have been helping the TVTC with development programmes, curricula, educational media and training methods, in addition to the training of Saudis.
**Curriculum offer**

What programmes does your college deliver to international students?

The breadth and depth of the FE curriculum offer is reflected in the number of different international programmes offered by the sector. Colleges often choose a particular course that they feel they are best positioned to deliver to international markets. However, there are some courses that figure more heavily in the sector’s international offer, including:

**English language courses**, and in particular:

- English Language Plus (ELP),
- preparation for English language exams and
- English as a Foreign Language (EFL) short courses.

Colleges that have a strong EFL offer are often members of [English UK](https://www.englishuk.com) and are accredited by the [British Council’s Accreditation UK scheme](https://www.britishcouncil.org/education-accreditation/). A strong EFL offer also allows colleges to support international students studying on mainstream programmes, as well as enrolling students before they start a mainstream programme. However this needs to be done in line with UKVI’s student visa requirements.

Colleges have also been successful in promoting [AS and A2 courses](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/as-and-a-level-standards) and one year [International Foundation (Access) Year programmes (IFY)](https://www.englishuk.com) to international students. IFY programmes are often run in collaboration with university partners who offer a guaranteed entry onto their undergraduate programmes. A number of private college providers also offer foundation year programmes and this has become an increasingly challenging course for colleges to recruit to.
There has also been a growing interest in **Higher National Diplomas (HNDs)** and **Foundation Degrees (FDs)** from international students. Colleges often emphasise the progression and top-up opportunities that go with their higher education (HE) offer. Colleges are increasingly looking to develop international work on the back of their HE work and there is growing international interest in higher technician level programmes. Higher vocational education and training (HVET) is now the second most common area for colleges’ international work after English language.

In regards to curriculum focus the most popular sectors for international students are **Business/Management, Creative/Media, Engineering and Healthcare**. Level 3 programmes are the most popular for international students followed by Level 4/5 (HNDs, FDs).

A number of colleges also run summer programmes and short courses.
Key countries

This is a summary of the countries where colleges work:

Key international markets for colleges include; India/South Asia, China, EU, Latin America, Saudi Arabia, Japan and Korea, Middle East and North Africa, Kazakhstan and South East Asia. Other markets mentioned in the survey included: Russia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and African markets.

The Indian Government has a target to train up to 500 million skilled workers in the next 20 years. India is looking to international training partners to help them to reach this target. Colleges have established Indian partnerships through the UK India Education Research Initiative (UKIERI). There are opportunities to set up training centres and work in partnership with Indian Community Colleges, although it can be difficult to secure funding. Colleges have successfully recruited Indian students, although this has now been restricted by student immigration legislation. India is a large and complicated market that demands a careful strategic, long term approach.

A group of FE colleges working through the AoC India partnership have established an office in Delhi to help them to better access the market.


**AoC India**

AoC India is a business, established by AoC, of partner UK FE colleges to build mutually beneficial UK and Indian partnerships that promote joint interests.

Set up in 2013, AoC India helps to promote and represent the partner colleges to key Indian and UK stakeholders. The office finds and develops business opportunities for UK colleges in the Indian skills market, including consultancy for skills training and development, industry-led programmes, higher education qualifications, bespoke training programmes for employers and English language training.

**China** is the strongest student recruitment market for colleges, especially for:

- English Language Plus (ELP);
- A Levels ([Hong Kong](#));
- International Foundation Year; and
- HE (HND/Foundation Degree).

Colleges have successfully arranged articulation programmes with Chinese partners to allow students to come onto the second year of programmes. Chinese students often look to FE as a progression route to HE, and colleges with a large Chinese student group often work in partnership with universities. The majority of Chinese students who study in the UK come via an agent. UK colleges are beginning to deliver programmes in China, where colleges have had success in working in emerging cities such as Shenzhen, Chanchiang and Chengdu.

AoC runs the UK China Partners in Education (UKCPIE) programme, which includes a grant to support a principal shadowing scheme. We are looking to extend this programme to support institutional partnerships and staff exchanges.

In **Saudi Arabia**, a number of colleges submitted successful tenders, often in consortiums, to run a Saudi college through the [Colleges for Excellence](#) programme run by the Saudi Government. Colleges have also worked through [Education UKTI](#) to access the Saudi market.

Colleges recruit a number of EU students onto fee generating courses, often EFL programmes. Colleges also work through EU funded programmes such as Erasmus Plus and on EU initiatives such as [ECVET](#) that promote student and staff exchanges.

Latin America, Brazil and Colombia present some interesting emerging opportunities for colleges and they represent some of the fastest growing international markets. There are an increasing number of Latin American students coming to study in the UK to study on programmes such as EFL and HE programmes. Colleges have bid to work on Brazilian Government funded programmes, including with the Ministry of Tourism. Links have also been established in Mexico and Chile and AoC hopes to establish a partnership with the Chilean Government to send students to the UK to study ELP through the ‘Penguins without Borders’ programme. AoC has led a UK Brazil Principal Shadowing Scheme which is likely
to grow in the future. AoC also runs a Latin America special interest group for colleges who would like to share and exchange approaches to the markets. The UK Government has a strong interest in developing links with Brazil in particular, and Latin America in general.

A number of Korean and Japanese students study on ELP, HND and A Level programmes. Japan and South Korea tend to be agent dominated and students will choose to take an academic or vocational programme with a primary study aim of improving their English. Some colleges have been successful in delivering HNDs and college certificate programmes in Korea.

Colleges with a strong engineering or related offer have been successful in working in Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This includes a number of programmes around the oil industry including in areas such as health and safety and bespoke EFL courses.

Colleges have established good links in Kazakhstan including working in partnership with private providers such as Pearson on developing curriculum contents for the new Kasipkor colleges and running bespoke programmes for Kazak students. Colleges have also recruited Kazak A Level and ELP students. A number of colleges have worked closely with TVETUK in establishing a market presence in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is planning to announce another 10 new funded college partnerships in 2015.

Colleges have established links in South East Asia markets, including recruiting a number of ELP and A Level students from Vietnam. There are growing opportunities in Indonesia around the development of their new community college sector and there is also a strong interest in UK colleges in Malaysia, especially with establishing articulation links with Malaysian providers.
Challenges

Colleges need to consider some of the challenges they face in reaching their international objectives.

Meeting the requirements of student visas is an important consideration for all colleges looking to recruit international students, who have to be compliant with immigration legislation. Students from outside the EU studying on programmes for more than six months (11 months English language) need to apply for a Student Visa. To get a visa they need a Certificate of Acceptance of Study (CAS) from a Highly Trusted Sponsor (HTS), meaning that education providers, who want to recruit international students, need to hold HTS. Colleges can acquire HTS by applying to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). Highly Trusted Sponsors’ performance is monitored based on the students they sponsor. Students from the EU do not need to be sponsored and students studying on courses that are shorter than six months can apply for a student visitor visa (this is extended to 11 months for students studying on EFL programmes).

AoC works closely with the UK Government to support colleges’ international opportunities, including, lobbying the Home Office on issues relating to student immigration. Key lines include:

- A better understanding of FE colleges and our students to help promote more informed decision making from UKVI and in country Entry Clearance Officers (ECOs).
- Parity between universities and FE colleges in the use of English language tests, post study work and work placements.
- Holistic approach to be taken towards smaller sponsors who are more vulnerable to HTS revocation.
- The removal of students from net migration figures.

Breaking into international markets can take time, and returns are often seen in the medium to long term. Colleges need to be aware that return on investment (ROI) is not always immediate and a long term, strategic approach is required. It can also demand a long term budgetary commitment.

Another challenge facing colleges is acquiring the specialist expertise they need to develop an effective international offer. These skills in developing international opportunities and markets are not always available internally and colleges need to consider how to find and develop the right staff to successful drive their international operations.

Successful international operations have to be supported by an institution wide commitment. This demands strong leadership and buy-in from all staff and student bodies to help create the right environment.
What are the biggest challenges to your college’s international work?

A number of colleges also cited obstacles such as:

- the need for long term commitment and vision;
- the challenge of working with non-English speakers;
- issues with the UK’s reputation as a study destination;
- competition from the private sector;
- lack of campus accommodation;
- working with agents; and
- a lack of understanding and value of vocational education.

Another major challenge facing colleges as they decide whether or not to work internationally is the concern that it will be distraction to the core work they are doing with their local communities. As Sir Michael Wilshaw asked, ‘should colleges concentrate on Deptford not Delhi?’ Colleges who are deterred for this reason should also consider that it makes some assumptions that could be challenged.

It assumes that international work somehow causes colleges and staff to lose their grip on quality, but on closer inspection, it appears colleges that have a sizable international offer also typically achieve higher Ofsted grades. International provision is not a hindrance to quality; it actually helps develop an institution’s ability to deliver outstanding teaching and learning. Meeting international students’ needs and expectations can help drive up standards for all students. International exchange and partnerships can inspire our UK staff. You only have to listen to the feedback from college principals who have joined the Chinese Principal Shadowing Scheme, or a lecturer inspired by an EU partnership, to appreciate the benefits that international programmes can bring.

To answer Sir Michael’s question, it is not a case of Deptford not Delhi, but rather Delhi for Deptford.
Student recruitment

Colleges looking to establish effective student recruitment operations should consider the following features:

- Ensure that they have a good understanding of immigration legislation and HTS requirements and embed effective monitoring and reporting systems for their international students.
- Develop and plan for focused and strategically considered market visits.
- As the majority of international students studying in the UK come via an agent it is important to establish an effective agent network that will successfully market the college to genuine students. This includes the need for an agent strategy that considers:
  - overseas visits to agents;
  - commission;
  - joint marketing;
  - newsletters; and
  - familiarisation activities.

Agents need to be kept informed on what is happening in the college to help them to represent it to students and partners.

- Establish links with international partner institutions, including the mutual recognition of courses through which student recruitment opportunities can be developed.
- Work with UK partners, including universities to develop International Foundation Year programmes and other progression options.
- Create a clear marketing message that includes information on:
  - entry and English requirements;
  - course outcomes;
  - dates;
  - pastoral support;
  - accommodation;
  - tutorial support;
  - airport pick up;
  - social activities;
  - information about the region;
  - extra curricula activities;
  - alumni destinations; and
  - opportunities to integrate with UK students.
- Robust financial management including budgeting and pricing.
- Internationally focused marketing which would typically include an international student prospectus and website.
- Utilise your EFL offer both as an attractive course offer and to support international students on mainstream courses.
• Ensure that you have embedded effective student support at all stages of the students’ journey, including:
  • pre arrival information;
  • airport pickup;
  • international enrolment and induction;
  • on course tutorial;
  • accommodation; and
  • alumni engagement.
• Recruiting international students requires ‘buy in’ from the whole college so that students feel valued in and out of the classroom.
Developing an international strategy

An international strategy would typically focus on the following:

- **Market entry:**
  - Working through UK stakeholders including British Council, UKTI and AoC.
  - Agent strategy.
  - Using exhibitions and fairs.
  - Linking with partner institutions to establish progression routes.
  - Working on government projects and programmes.

- **Course offer:**
  - Conduct an internal audit on where your curriculum offer could be best transferred to international markets.
  - Consider what parts of your offer would international students and partners want.
  - Discuss with curriculum colleagues to help ensure their support for developing an international offer in their area.
  - Consider how you are going to deliver your course offer: in country, student recruitment, online etc.

- **Markets:**
  - Research markets via: desk research, British Council, UKTI, other colleges, university partners and AoC are other possible sources of information.
  - Fully utilise MIS data.
  - Consider countries that the college already has relationships with or is already known in the market.
  - Which countries developing including in sectors where the college can offer value.
  - What delivery model would best meet your target markets' needs and institutional situation?
  - Is there funding available to support market entry in your target markets?
  - Are there the finances available in the market to make it viable and sustainable?
  - Are there any regulatory restraints that you should consider, including concerns about visas?

- **Competitors:**
  - Who are your market competitors? How does their offer compare to yours (including prices, courses and marketing)?

- **Partners:**
  - Work through networks via AoC, British Council, UKTI etc.
  - Develop links with universities to help build progression routes and joint marketing.
  - Enhance your offer through links with awarding bodies.
  - Establish articulation links with overseas providers to build pathways onto your programmes. Build a network of feeder institutions.
• Establish an effective agent strategy.
• Work with local partners including language schools.
• Make sure you are working with the right partners.

**Utilise unique selling points (USPs):**

• Consider ‘niche’ course offer or expertise that could be attractive to international partners and students.
• Location, campus, buildings.
• Successful international alumni.
• Local region and international reputation. Safe, historic, rural? Urban, exciting, busy?
• Do have special services, e.g. dedicated international student support staff, accommodation, EFL support etc?
**AoC International Charter**

AoC runs a charter scheme to help promote colleges' international excellence. The [International Charter](#) promotes the unique qualities and international reputation of UK colleges, enabling them to showcase their work to overseas governments, agencies, students and other stakeholders. It is for colleges that have made a commitment to: quality assurance, an ethical approach in all areas of their international activity and making the global agenda an ‘agenda for all’, including staff, students and the local communities served by the college.

**Conclusion**

International work is not without its challenges and risks but if it is done properly it can be extremely rewarding both from educational and commercial perspectives. International students and partners greatly enrich our campuses and students’ experience. We have a world class FE system in the UK and AoC encourages you to consider how you can best ‘go global.’

As a summary and a check list, if you are developing your college's international strategy or reviewing your current focus then it would be worth considering the following features:

- Ensuring whole college buy-in to international.
- Understanding of the need for a strategic and long term approach.
- Application of realistic budget and resourcing.
- Working with UK and international stakeholders and partners and not just as an individual college.
- Linking through government and related programmes.
- Getting the right people in the right jobs.
- Matching the college's offer and specific features to the right markets.
- Commitment to an ethical approach to marketing and recruitment.
- Getting each stage of the international student’s ‘journey’ right.
- Prioritising quality through schemes such as [AoC's International Charter](#).
- Resourcing international student support.
- **Commitment.**

Please contact [John Mountford](#) to discuss your international strategy and ambitions in more detail and to find out how AoC’s international team can support you.
References

1 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, July 2013. International *Education: Global Growth and Prosperity*.

Useful websites:

Erasmus Plus:  

World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics  

British Council  
[http://www.britishcouncil.org/education/skills-employability](http://www.britishcouncil.org/education/skills-employability)

English UK  

UK India Education Research Initiative (UKIERI)  

AoC India  
[http://www.aocindia.net](http://www.aocindia.net)

UK Trade and Industry (UKTI)  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-trade-investment](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-trade-investment)

Tier 4 (General) student visa information  
[https://www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa](https://www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa)

Visa and Immigration information  

AoC International Work  
[http://www.aoc.co.uk/about-colleges/international/international-charter](http://www.aoc.co.uk/about-colleges/international/international-charter)