

UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM AND PROVIDER MOBILITY IN THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC MOBILITY (INTERVIEWED BY LAURA BAUMVOL)

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Introduction

This article focuses on International Program and Provider Mobility (IPPM) which is an increasingly important but understudied aspect of Internationalization. This interview was conducted by Dr. Laura K. Baumvol with Dr. Jane Knight on September 2, 2019. References for further reading on IPPM are provided at the end of the article.

Professor Dr. Knight of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto and Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of Johannesburg, focuses her research on the international dimension of higher education at the institutional, national, regional and international levels. Her work in over 70 countries brings a comparative, development and international perspective to her research, teaching and policy work. She is the author of numerous publications and sits on the advisory boards of international organizations, universities, and journals. She is the recipient of several international awards and two honorary doctorates for her contribution to higher education internationalization.



Interview

Ed Review: How is the landscape of international academic mobility changing?

Dr. Knight: During the last two decades there has been an exponential increase in all forms of international academic mobility – student and scholar, programs and providers, policies and regulations, and the universal exchange of knowledge, ideas, values and culture. The diversity in the modes and forms of mobility is unprecedented. It is no longer just students who are moving across borders, so are higher education programs and providers. This has brought new opportunities and innovation to international higher education and has also raised new issues and potential risks. At the same time, it has introduced a new lexicon to international academic mobility as more terms are being created to try to capture the evolution and many changes. All this points to the dynamism, responsiveness and innovation of the international higher education landscape; but it is also contributing to mass confusion and misunderstanding of the different forms of mobility.

Ed Review: What kind of confusion are you referring to?

Dr. Knight: To date there are four generic terms which are used in referring to international academic mobility. They are crossborder, transnational, offshore and borderless education. These terms are most often used interchangeably even though they mean different things to higher education actors and stakeholders. For many, transnational education is understood to cover higher education programs and providers moving across international borders. This differs from crossborder education which is wider in scope and includes student and scholar mobility, as well as program and provider mobility. Borderless, was once thought to include new developments in distance and online education but has since broadened and is used in a general sense to include any and all kind of academic mobility in terms of space, time, discipline etc. Offshore education is a well-known terms but landlocked countries do not see it being relevant to them. Thus, the terms are becoming broader in concept but less meaningful in practice. The challenge is to have clarity and a common understanding of the terms, without trying to standardize definitions - thus ignoring local context, policies and language orientation. One solution is to use the terms international program and provider mobility (IPPM) and International Student and Scholar Mobility (ISSM) to clearly delineate that these are two fundamentally different types of international academic mobility.

Ed Review: What kinds of strategies does International Program and Provider Mobility include?

Dr. Knight: International Program and Provider Mobility (IPPM) includes higher education programs and providers moving to the home country of the student to offer their programs and qualifications. This involves diverse strategies or modes such as international branch campuses, franchise programs, distance education, partnership programs and international joint universities. The common feature is that a sending country HEI/ provider offers its programs in a host country. Thus, the host country is the recipient -or a collaborating partner- with a foreign sending HEI/provider offering programs in the host country.

Ed Review: *Where and how has IPPM been increasing?*

Dr. Knight: The increasing enrolment rates and diversity of IPPM activities provides convincing evidence that it is necessary to focus more attention and analysis on this phenomenon. In 2019, according to the new report *'International Facts and Figures, 2019'* by Universities UK International there were 693,695 international students from 225 countries who were pursuing a UK program and qualification outside of the UK in 2027/2018. This is 1.5 times the number of international students studying in the UK. This is unprecedented and an indicator of the future growth of IPPM.

In terms of countries hosting IPPM, the enrolments are equally convincing. In 2016 for example, approximately 43 percent of local tertiary students in Mauritius were enrolled in some type of IPPM program. This means that without IPPM provision a hard number of local students would not have access to higher education. In Botswana, IPPM students represent about 30 percent of all HE enrolments. In countries with a long history of IPPM such as Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong between 10-20 percent of HE provision is through IPPM. In Dubai, higher education enrolments through IPPM is around 50%, primarily in international branch campuses (IBCs).

Unfortunately, the research and monitoring of these new IPPM developments is not keeping pace with the accelerated rate of change. While opinion and anecdotal evidence reveal the benefits and risks attached to this burgeoning field, there continues to be a significant lack of robust data and analysis regarding the different IPPM modes of delivery especially in host countries.

Ed Review: *Are there differences among countries in how they use the term IPPM?*

Dr. Knight: Actually, there is major confusion about how to describe and differentiate between IPPM modes such as franchise programs, international branch campuses or partnership programs. While it is important that each country uses terms that fit into the domestic higher education landscape, it is equally important that there is a shared understanding and use of IPPM terms across countries. The lack of a common understanding of the terms raises serious issues related to appropriate quality assurance processes, qualification recognition procedures, registration of new providers or programs, completion rates and the collection of program level information and enrolment data. In addition, the inconsistency in the use of terms also makes comparisons of IPPM provision, data, policies and research within and across countries challenging and often inconclusive.

Ed Review: *What is being done to bring some clarity to this misunderstanding?*

Dr. Knight: This has led to the development of a proposed Classification Framework for IPPM. An important feature is that IPPM is divided into two major approaches. The *Independent Approach* involves the foreign sending HE provider being primarily responsible for the design, delivery and external quality assurance of their academic programs and qualifications being offered in another country. This is often referred to as an export/import model. The *Collaborative Approach* is very different. It involves a foreign sending HE provider and host

country HE provider working together on the design, delivery and/or external quality assurance of the academic programs.

Ed Review: *Can you provide a brief elaboration of the modes for both the independent and collaborative approach?*

Dr. Knight: The *Independent IPPM Approach* includes three modes: franchise programs, international branch campuses and self-study distance education. A franchise arrangement can be described as a program which is offered by a foreign sending HEI to students in the host country. The foreign sending HEI/provider has primary responsibility for the curriculum design, external quality assurance of academic programs and awards the qualification. An international branch campus is described as a satellite bricks and mortar campus of a sending country HEI which offers a selection of their academic programs and qualifications to students in a foreign host country. The sending country parent institution provides curriculum, ensures external quality assurance, and awards the qualification. There is no question that the number of IBCs has been increasing over the last 15 years. In 2005 there were 137 IBCs operational in 2005 around the world and by 2015 there were 249. The self-study distance education IPPM mode involves a foreign distance education HE provider offering their academic programs directly to host country students. Self-study is a fundamental part of the description as it means that no local academic partner is involved in designing the curriculum, ensuring quality and accreditation of programs, or awarding qualifications.

The *Collaborative IPPM Approach* includes three modes: Partnership Programs, International Joint Universities and Distance Education with a local academic partner. Partnership programs are described as academic programs which are jointly designed, delivered and quality assured through collaboration between partner HEIs/providers in host and sending countries. In these types of programs the qualifications can be awarded by one, both or multiple partner HEIs. There are countries where awarding a double/multiple degree is illegal. South Africa is one example and other countries are considering this because of the integrity and qualification recognition issues based on double counting the credits of one program for two qualifications- one by each partner. Partnership programs represent the majority of IPPM activity in terms of actual numbers of programs (perhaps not enrolments). While partnership programs can be labelled as the fastest growing category of IPPM, it can also be described as the 'messiest category' given the challenges attached to governance issues, qualification recognition and double counting of credits.

International joint universities are a rather interesting development in IPPM. A joint university is described as an HEI co-founded and established in the host country involving both local and foreign sending HEI/ providers who collaborate on academic program development and delivery. Qualifications can be awarded by either or both host and sending country HEIs. Important to note is that an international joint university is a newly established entity in the host country. It is not an international branch campus or a franchising university. The newly created joint university can be a public or private university and is guided and regulated by both host and partner country policies and regulations. International joint universities require close

collaboration and joint governance policies. The 22 IJUs operating around the world differ significantly with respect to mission and vision, funding models, curricular design, joint research and targeted students. That being said, this is a new dynamic mode of IPPM which bears further attention and analysis.

Distance Education with local partner academic collaboration is not a popular mode of IPPM. It can be described as a foreign distance education HEI/provider which offers programs to host country students in partnership with a local academic HEI partner. Curriculum can be jointly developed and the qualification awarded by one or both partners. External quality assurance is provided by foreign sending HEI/provider or both partners.

***Ed Review:** New developments in international academic mobility can involve both potential benefits and risks. What are they for IPPM?*

Dr. Knight: The possible benefits of IPPM are many and diverse. They include the potential to increase access to higher education, diversify program offer, internationalise the curriculum and teaching/learning process, offer new pedagogical approaches, share graduate supervision, exchange students and staff, decrease brain drain, and perhaps assist politically unstable and failing states to rebuild higher education programs and institutions.

But there are potential risks as well which much be considered. They can include low quality provision, inappropriate curriculum and pedagogy, sustainability, competition with local HEIs, duplication of program offers, qualifications not being recognised, and commercialization. As with all new developments there are twists and turns in the road and many pitfalls to avoid. However, there are also new opportunities and prospective benefits. It is critical that IPPM developments be informed by research and analysis.

***Ed Review:** How extensive is IPPM provision within Canada and by Canadian higher education institutions abroad?*

Dr. Knight: Unfortunately, there is no national source of information or data on the IPPM activities of Canadian universities and colleges or those of foreign providers operating in Canada. One reason is the relatively small scale of incoming and outgoing IPPM activities in Canada. Nevertheless, it is still a significant gap in our knowledge and also a trend which is likely to increase given the troubled world in which we live and the potential for further barriers to international student mobility. More data gathering and research is imperative on IPPM activities by Canadian HEIs.

***Ed Review:** What kind of research on IPPM is necessary?*

Dr. Knight: There are a number of topics, issues and challenges that need to be investigated. An important step is a mapping of existing provincial and institutional policies to enable, guide and regulate outgoing and incoming IPPM activity. There are a broad range of issues related to policy development including registration and licencing, quality assurance and accreditation procedures, availability of domestic scholarships for local students registered in foreign

programs, joint and double degree qualifications, funding mechanisms, governance of joint institutions and programs among others.

In comparison to student and scholar mobility, IPPM is a relatively new area of study in international education. A rough and modest estimate would suggest that there is 20 times more research on student mobility than IPPM. This needs to change. Macro issues which merit further investigation include the rationales and expected outcomes driving host and sending countries/institutions to pursue IPPM opportunities. Other questions include what are the academic, social, cultural, political and economic impacts of IPPM? Which higher education actors and stakeholders have the most to gain or lose from the growth in IPPM? Are there certain disciplines that are more appropriate for IPPM than others? How does IPPM contribute to shaping students' identities? Will independent IPPM provision become commercialised and affordable only by the elite? Will quality standards fall? What sort of governance and partnership models are more appropriate for collaborative IPPM provision?

Because IPPM focuses primarily on the design and delivery of academic programs across borders there is an enormous amount of research to do on issues related to curriculum design and the teaching/learning process. Can the academic sector be confident that imported programs are relevant to the needs, context and labour market of the host country? What are the implications both positive and negative of foreign faculty teaching or co-teaching classes? In partnership programs, how are credits counted, qualifications awarded and foreign, joint or double degrees recognised? What procedures are in place for co-supervision of students? How do learning outcomes address the issue of students' local and global competencies? These are but a few questions. The next generation of international education policy analysts, researchers and scholars, both in Canada and around the world, need to be convinced of the need for closer scrutiny and research on IPPM developments.

For further reading on IPPM

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