Think global, act local: establishing international collaborations
Jois Stansfield, Neil Carey, Christine Horrocks, Julie Wright
Manchester Metropolitan University

Think global
Manchester Metropolitan University has a mission statement which is ‘To be the UK’s leading university for world class professionals’. One of the University strategic aims, is to increase international collaboration. The University aims to have an international presence, building the reputation of the University through research, scholarship and teaching links.

Thinking globally entails opening up opportunities for collaboration with colleagues across the world and also to ensure that the University is marketed as a viable partner for international colleagues.

The Greek SLT context
Greece has a population of 11 million. Estimates of the need for speech and language therapy provision are around 26 SLTs per 10,000 population (RCSLT, 2006), thus Greece would require over 2600 full time equivalent SLTs to meet the needs of their population. Greek SLT education is relatively new, conducted in 3 state run organisations and in private colleges which collaborate with UK HEIs. The most recent available data indicates a total of around 2500 SLTs in the country (Netques, 2013).

Greek national issues

Political
The country is in the depth of a major depression and financial stringencies have been imposed by EU countries in exchange for financial support.

Educational
Until recently, degrees from private organisations, even if validated by external Universities, have not been recognised by the Greek State as qualifications for entering the professions.

Professional
The longest standing SLT professional body jealously guards its right to set professional standards and does not accept graduates from private colleges as members.

Act local: principles
The University has a range of standards and procedures with elements of the structure which act as loosely structured systems, with equally valid, but differing priorities, aims and agendas. These include research excellence, academic standards, financial and legal probity.

The initiatives
MMU has received approaches from two private Greek colleges for partnerships, especially focussing on speech and language therapy (SLT). MMU has well established SLT programmes and the SLT staff also have well established experience in international collaboration in research and programme development. As such, these initiatives were a good fit, complementary to existing expertise. There was potential to demonstrate the MMU culture that values diversity; builds international strategic partnerships for research and teaching; contributes to developing of graduates who are employable globally; and raises the university’s international profile.

Act local: practice
SLT team: attention to academic credibility, professional requirements; entry qualifications; English language standards. Senior academic staff: Exchange visits to explore curriculum, staffing and physical facilities. Academic standards department (CASQE): ensure MMU curriculum guidelines and regulations are adhered to. Collaborative partnerships office: ‘due diligence’ to incorporate initial status investigations of the colleges concerned. International office: establish colleges’ recognition by British Council and in-country regulation; liaison between academic and central University staff. Finance department: costing and pricings; negotiating financial aspects of contracts. Legal department: final contractual agreements.

Act local AND act global
Acting local is a key element for enhancing internationalisation for MMU. Global connections are best made by building upon existing expertise. In the current cases, scholarly reputation was the starting point for the approaches being made.

The initiatives were the first by this Faculty to engage in international collaboration through programme validation. In the first initiative, the local environment demonstrated that loose structures did not always connect fully. Finding our way was challenging but these experiences have contributed to ‘lessons learned’ discussions and the positive experiences are many. With the second initiative, ground rules were set early and clearly and systems have been sharper.

Benefits from both experiences have been: liaison with highly motivated teams; networking opportunities; and contacts well beyond the initial organisations, which have provided rich opportunities for research and academic collaborations in the future.