

Going Global

Inclusion, innovation, impact
Volume 4

Edited by Mary Stiasny
and Tim Gore



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When quoting from this chapter please use the following citation:

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Hearn, J., Fenwick, B., Halevi, G., Lawton, W., and Chicherina, N. (2015)  
'Teamwork time: Experiments in international co-operation'. In M. Stiasny  
and T. Gore (eds), *Going Global: Inclusion, innovation, impact*. London:  
British Council and Institute of Education Press.

Institute of Education Press

First published in 2015 by the Institute of Education Press,  
20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL

[ioepress.co.uk](http://ioepress.co.uk)

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBNs

978-0-86355-772-9 (paperback)

978-0-86355-771-2 (ePub eBook)

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Typeset by Quadrant Infotech (India) Pvt Ltd

Printed by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

# Teamwork time: Experiments in international co-operation

*John Hearn, Brad Fenwick, Gali Halevi, William Lawton, and Natalia Chicherina*

## Past and now fast

In these days of the daily media cycle, the corporate university, the shifting balances of academic and managerial priorities, the rise of analyses and evaluations, the influence of rankings, and the reduction in resources in many countries consequent on the global financial crisis, there is often little time to think. Yet considerations of the lessons of history and their driving impact for the future are still vital in setting the framework of international engagement and internationalization in reform of higher education and research. Efficient synthesis and integration are required, as in the past, to focus and impact on the future.

On reflection, it was ever thus. There is little new in the powers of research and discovery to innovate and to transform economies. The debates on learning and teaching go back – albeit with interruptions – to Plato, Confucius, Socrates, and Aquinas. The communication of new knowledge and experience, either through the equivalent of visiting professorships or roving scholars, was common in medieval times and before. Transmission of thought, in philosophy, religion, and science, set global challenges of the past. Trade, education, health, diplomacy, and dominance all created crises that led to innovations, solutions, and failures.

What is new in the twenty-first century is the speed of development, often omitting large areas of the planet. The emergence of easy travel, the internet, and the World Wide Web provide access and opportunity for which the realization of potential are in the early stages. While reserving the fundamentals in peer review and experimental method, the vast torrents of information and opinion swirling around and available in seconds from social media and related sources provide enormous opportunity for initiative, and some risks to balance. The overall challenge is to seek joined-up approaches and expert teams who can resolve global challenges.

In this paper, itself a collaboration of international individuals, institutions, and experiences, catalysed by the Going Global meeting place or forum being developed by the British Council, we attempt to draw just a few conclusions and outcomes to propose further thought and action. Our thesis is that international co-operation can be harnessed with expertise, infrastructure, and knowledge management, including through partnership and networks, to serve as an experimental laboratory for innovation in higher education and research. When successful, such experiments lead to enduring education and economic diplomacy, and sometimes to rapid adoption. Even when a failure, there are always useful lessons learned.

Our objectives are to assess some of the convenient and inconvenient truths that might engender alarm or complacency; examine some new technologies and applications that can build confidence in data and context for analysis and assessment of progress in international co-operation that works or may not; and present a few models of alliance and networks that bring together expert groups to address specific global or regional challenges. In doing so, we identify further questions, benefits, and risks that can be considered as the pace of change demands sophisticated tools to be able to appreciate platforms for progress.

### **Convenient and inconvenient truths**

The fundamental need and demand for higher education is rock solid. The demographics of demand from the young; the realization that good education translates to strong economies; the lengthening life span of humans that requires lifelong learning and training for several careers; and the huge populations in less developed or disrupted economies still crying out for the development of their talent and skills can all induce some rightful complacency that education demand is inexhaustible to mid-century and beyond. International student numbers have nearly doubled every decade for four decades and are set to do so again, reaching 7.3 million or more by 2020 as estimated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In this environment, many universities have performed extremely well in adapting to international opportunities in their engagement and responsibilities for current and coming generations. This should be recognized before we move on to constructive critique, which is a purpose of this paper.

There is much talk in international fora, strategy think tanks, and media commentary about the coming higher education revolution. The availability of, and access to, new technologies and improved practice will shake the ways in which research, teaching, community engagement, and thought

leadership are developed and communicated. The move to online courses and training may neutralize some of the value or monopoly of universities while dispensing with face-to-face teaching – other than for tutorials. The rise of privatization to cope with demand for higher education that is now rising to 40–60 per cent in some countries brings new dynamics in national strategies for public and private support – with public support diminishing further since the global financial crisis. The engagement of industry and business, often with autonomous universities and training groups, is an experiment in progress. The renewed emphasis on skills and employability resurrects the questions around higher and technical education – and the most efficient investments, balances, and links between them.

There is little question that trust in many institutions in our societies is at a low ebb. The global financial crisis, with its epicentre in banks and ‘sliced’ derivatives, mega and unsustainable mortgages, junk bonds, and buried assets, quickly brought the previous decade of greed to a reality check. When societies looked for solutions from government or major institutions, trust was again rattled by corruption and covert practices, the subsidies provided to those institutions ‘too big to fail’, and the negligible amounts of tax paid by massive corporations, loading national tax burdens disproportionately on the middle and working classes. But are we different in higher education and research? Surely there can be trust in the hallowed halls of learning and scholarship?

Maybe not. Look at the spiralling costs of degrees, diplomas, and student debt well above the rise of inflation. Look at the ‘dinosaur’ curricula taught for a generation without needed revision. As with banks and finance, the regulators of quality and fitness in higher education and research can show gaps in their data and assessment. How about the global competition to fill the money gap caused by retreating government/public funding through the recruitment of international students – bringing the benefits of diversity but sometimes with inadequate student support and sophistication that betrays students who go abroad with the hopes of their families in international education, only to return disgraced by circumstances outside their control? In research, playing the system that results in safe research grant proposals from established groups, as has already been done, to plan for the next funding cycle; and the exclusion of new ideas and individuals – a kind of non-intellectual dumbing down with chosen winners?

The global financial crisis was an opportunity to return to fundamentals, in education as in other fields, and to use the reality check to clarify commitment and conscience. There is a global framework, moving to include UN Sustainable Development Goals, that builds on knowledge

discovery and transfer. Curricula can be revised each year to emphasize the fundamentals, the current frontiers of knowledge, and the future applications to life. The balance between abstract and fundamental thought, with more strategic learning for global challenges, can be met. The role and influence of the rankings, positive in providing (as yet flawed) data and real opportunity through learning benefit and risk, and negative in risking culture and character because of a slavish drive to imitate the few perceived world leaders, can become useful instruments.

## **International networks and partnerships**

Over the past 15 years, more than 50 recognized international networks and partnerships have been established. Only a few of these are mentioned here. In general, they go beyond the extensive collaboration between individuals and groups through restricted academic societies, to multiple institutions who commit to focus on challenges that are beyond the reach of each of the partners. These networks are diverse, with different objectives and ambitions. Some, like the World Wide Universities Network and the Australia-Africa Network, focus on research, mobility, policy, and resources to build capacity in addressing selected global challenges. Some, like the Northern Arctic Network of Universities, with 130 member institutions, focus on distinct regional challenges, often in difficult environments. These three examples are summarized below. Among other examples are Universitas 21, focused on student learning, mobility, and exchange; the Association of Pacific Rim Universities, building co-operation around the Pacific; and the many national or regional networks (League of Research Universities, Europe; Group of Eight, Australia; Russell Group, UK; American Association of Universities, USA) that combine academic and lobbying objectives. There are also well-established and large networks, such as the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the International Association of Universities, that share international ideas, benchmarking, and meetings. In addition, there is the rising success of the regional associations for international education (Asia, Europe, USA, Australia) and international fora including Going Global of the British Council, the World Forum of OECD, and the Boao (BFA) Forum for Asia, which look at integration of higher education and research with politics, economics, business, and society. Communication is king, perhaps built on sand, but common-sense translation and implementation are often slow because team building takes time. Leadership and service are adapting to this framework. The sun never sets on international conferences and web engagements in higher education, and this passionate debate on reform bodes well for the future.

The University of the Arctic ([www.uarctic.org](http://www.uarctic.org)), with its circumpolar studies programme, builds thematic research programmes, exchange opportunities, and shared infrastructures in advancing the development of the northern polar region. These academic activities play an increasing role in social and economic development, as the geopolitics and economics of the region are set to change with the potential melting of the Arctic ice, the prolongation of ice-free seasons, new routes, and new resources, as well as new claims affecting sovereignty and access. The role of Arctic universities in developing the Circumpolar North as an international region presents a prime example of how international co-operation and competition can build teamwork while overcoming issues related to shared intellectual property and engaged transnational teaching and research. A fuller account of the University of the Arctic is presented by Natalia Chicherina on pages 60–68.

The Worldwide Universities Network (WUN; [www.wun.ac.uk](http://www.wun.ac.uk)) has 16 peer research universities from five continents and focuses on research in four major global challenges: environmental and food security; public health in non-communicable disease such as obesity, heart disease, and diabetes; global higher education and research reform; and understanding cultures, which includes regional programmes with the global China group and with selected African countries. There are 100 interdisciplinary research programmes, over 2,000 researchers, and collaboration with more than 200 other institutions where talent and infrastructures can help to accelerate progress towards objectives. The WUN has clear strategies to build world-leading and relevant research programmes; create international opportunities for emerging and established researchers and research-oriented graduate and undergraduate students; work with international agencies and governments in developing evidence-based policy options; and attract resources to support and sustain its work.

The Australia-Africa Universities Network ([www.aaun.edu.au](http://www.aaun.edu.au)) is a young, intercontinental co-operation with ten African and nine Australian universities co-operating in research, exchange, training, and alumni development in environment, food and nutrition security, health, education, natural resources, and public-sector reform. This network explores specific research strengths and applications based on equal partnership, reciprocal governance with its Australian and African wings, and joint research and exchange workshops in both continents. The network is supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Education, and agencies of the Australian government, and the South African National Research Council. As with the Arctic universities and the Worldwide Universities Network, a strategic approach is taken to identify and pursue

priority areas of research that can contribute to economic and social development, while building enduring teamwork and diplomacy.

The proposition that international research and education networks can operate as experimental laboratories for effective internationalization, and for approaching major mutual challenges that cannot be addressed alone, is well demonstrated through these and other networks. The culture of such co-operation is still in its early stages, and requires real shared vision, commitment for the middle to long term, engagement at all levels, and shared benefits and return on investment. The criteria for membership must include these characteristics, and also a sustained engagement in programmes and projects. When these factors are present, there are successes in building unique and effective teams. Where some members play on the field, while others sit in the stands as observers waiting for benefits, there is risk of failure: you get what you give, and much more.

### **Evaluation of success and failure**

As in any endeavour in research and education, especially where it entails the complexity of international co-operation, it is vital to have the tools that can assess and evaluate progress, success, and failure. This allows decisions and strategies to be adapted with appropriate speed to conserve and deploy human and financial resources. There is some way to go before the various dimensions and advantages of international co-operation can be monitored effectively, but the national and international research and education assessments, managed by quality-assurance agencies and others, have produced a wealth of approaches and models that can assist. A balance must be struck between the complexity and cost of assessment when international networks do not have large secretariats or bureaucracies, and the need for quantitative and qualitative outcomes with the data to clarify and confirm the contributions.

### **Elsevier SciVal analytics and informetrics research group**

([www.elsevier.com/research-intelligence](http://www.elsevier.com/research-intelligence)). The Scopus Elsevier database, with its many millions of publications and related records, can now be mined as a research instrument. The applications include productivity, regional and global communications and collaborations, bibliometric models for the state of scientific development, and disciplinary or interdisciplinary collaboration. Associated with this are data on doctoral enrolment and its influence on productivity, regional and international collaboration, and the multiplier effect on citations of international co-operation. The stages of scientific development broadly agree with the phases of economic development.

SciVal analytics are also a rapid and effective way for individual institutions to track the academic returns on investment from national or international research co-operation. In addition, the trends that emerge in clusters of countries who collaborate in STEM arenas with shared agendas, giving a lift to all concerned, are a testament to the rapid dissemination of knowledge and the establishment of platforms for further co-operation.

The applications for SciVal and Scopus can be of great value to individual institutions, partnerships, and networks, and also to chart national comparative performance of countries. Examples of the latter are recent reports on the International Comparative Performance of the UK Research Base; Comparative Benchmarking of European and US Research Collaboration and Researcher Mobility; and international regional collaborations, say of European and US institutions with China. These analytics can open up new areas for international networking and co-operation, as well as monitor and deliver annual checks on the progress of co-operation across disciplines and countries. There is a substantial advantage in being able to monitor progress and adapt policy accordingly, granted sufficient wisdom and understanding in the dynamics of research and the impact of research on discovery, translation, and application. This broader appreciation is essential, as without it statistics can be misleading. Importantly, the dimensions of humanities and social sciences, less easy to assess in interdisciplinary comparisons, must also be factored in to achieve an overall assessment of productivity, application, and impact.

Of importance to the assessment of networks and international alliances are the conclusions from SciVal that international collaboration has a positive correlation with quality; provides an indicator of national and international scale and scope; shows the attachment to geopolitical, historical, and linguistic ties; and gives a clear enhancement of citation value from international co-operation and publication. The analysis of the top ten international collaborations 2008–12 are enlightening. These are USA–China, USA–UK, USA–Germany, USA–Canada, USA–France, USA–Japan, USA–Italy, Germany–UK, USA–South Korea, and USA–Australia. The lessons are that collaboration is increasing; extended collaboration relates to better research and impact; and collaborations are complex systems that require inspired leadership, professional management, and interdisciplinary and international cultural engagement.

## **Local and global – core challenges**

In considering the future, we have taken a view of the international dynamics in higher education and research, along with some of the agents and catalysts

that may influence the next ten years to 2025. In doing so, we have suggested a reality check on what is right and what may be wrong in the current mindset and framework, a return to core values and competencies, and further focus on the potential contributions of international networks and partnerships as experimental laboratories for international engagement and internationalization. We have considered some of the criteria for successful partnerships of institutions, and highlighted the importance of real data and analytics in monitoring and improving leadership, management, and performance.

In concluding our provocation that international teamwork and cooperation have much more to do in the future, we hold that international networks are on the frontiers of international development building on the past. They hold enormous potential in addressing key global challenges, where teamwork can make the critical difference. In the fast-moving frameworks of higher education and research, reform and refreshment are essential, and must incorporate the challenges of the future as well as learning from the challenges of the past. We conclude with a few challenges that emerged from our presentations and discussions with our animated audience at Going Global 2014.

- **Relevance and distinctiveness.** What is your university's vision and mission, and how can innovation transform that delivery for your niche and community?
- **Sustainability.** Success requires both top-down and bottom-up engagement throughout the institution. Many articulate the vision but fail in leadership and buy-in, as well as in the smart investment of adequate resources that will achieve objectives and deliver return on investment.
- **Collaboration and competition.** Internationalization of higher education manifests the tension between collaboration and competitiveness. A trend is towards small and highly integrated university partnerships, increasingly engaging with government, business, and international agencies.
- **Commercial viability.** Partnerships can also be driven by commercial logic and the promise of broader market advantage (research funds, students, employment), which activates resources for sustainability of research and education across borders.
- **Benefits and risk.** A clear benefit of networks and partnerships is the spreading of risk, for example in major research endeavours, access to infrastructures, massive open online courses (MOOCs), and

experimental online learning and teaching. The opportunities to create and nurture talent are a humbling responsibility. The opportunity for better research and enhanced citations is significant.

At the start of this paper we noted the speed of change as both an opportunity and a risk. We conclude with some key change items arising from the Going Global discussions. These could be set within a framework of a proposed list of major factors from the earlier discussions of WUN presidents and experts. This listed the war for talent, privatization, interdisciplinarity, access and equity, curriculum reform, international engagement and internationalization, transfer and commercialization of knowledge, community engagement, and the shaping of future societies. With the move of universities from ivory towers towards engaged thought leaders with society, the challenge is bigger than ever. The need for informed choice in the pathways towards economic and social well-being for current and future generations, is an opportunity for global leadership and service.