Transformational transnational education can help us achieve our SDG commitments

Manjeet Ridon and **Stuart Lawson,** De Montfort University Leicester, United Kingdom

Summary

Global universities must serve the regions and societies in which they are embedded. They must be instrumental as agents of change and through their programmes of engagement, academic practice, and graduate advocacy work to achieve Net Zero and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Introduction

As we face unprecedented societal and environmental challenges, Partnerships for the Goals must grow exponentially – as must the inculcation and advocacy of the SDGs by our youth.

Whilst Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are understood to have a significant role in implementing sustainable development, there is a need for this impact and influence to extend beyond the home campuses in a way that is unified and measurable.

Key recommendations

- **Transnational education campuses should amplify SDG advocacy and impact through partnerships.**
- **Embed Sustainability, Employability and EDI and Decolonisation strategies connected to SDGs through Nexus interlinkages.**
- **Establish a culture of integrated, collaborative working around SDG 17 Partnership for the Goals.**
- **Orientate curricula to examine cultural difference, identity, relevance, and regional specifics.**

About the project

Transnational Education (TNE) must become transformational more than transactional – through Partnerships for the Goals. By developing partnerships with local businesses, governments, and NGOs, overseas faculties and partners can commune around the SDGs and integrate these goals into programmes of outreach, employability, and internship that mutually serve all involved and deliver on the SDGs.
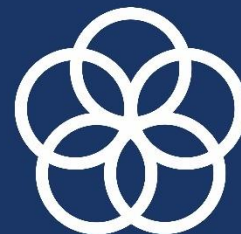
By inculcating in its students, a 'trans-disciplinary perspective that is universal, integrated, and transformative' (Vaughter, P. UNU, IASS 2018), universities can encourage behavioural change, bolster civil society. and meaningfully work towards sustainable futures.

This was trialled at the De Montfort University's Dubai Campus (DMU's first full branch campus), where the conference Achieving the TNE Strategy Objective was hosted with 70+ regional and international speakers, at the first UN PRME conference focussed on SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals

In parallel with the DMU strategic goals, a model is proposed, which incorporates four TNE strategy objectives.
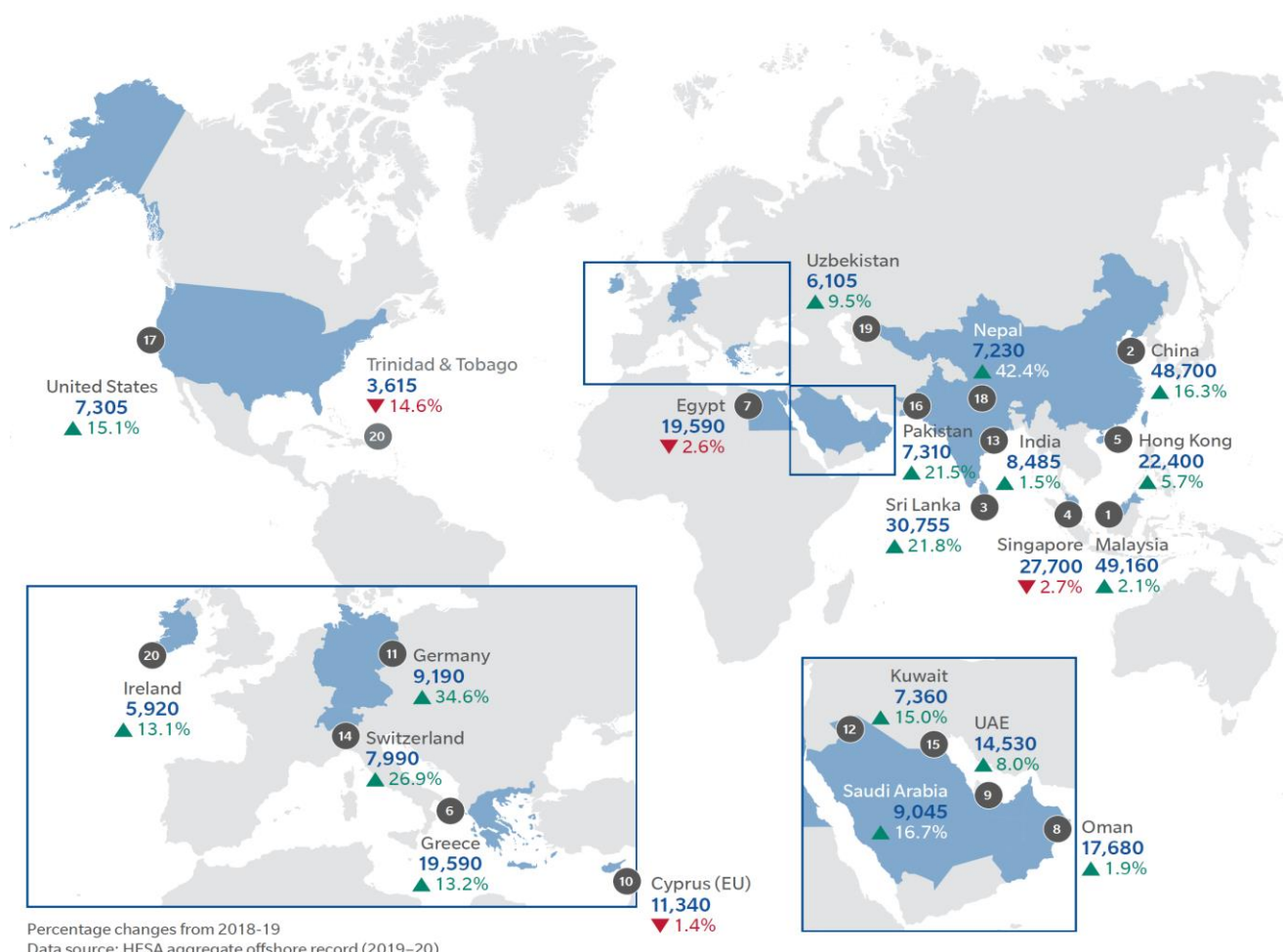
1. Networks (Partnerships with Purpose): Partnerships for the goals. Creating narratives, opportunities for students and research and reputational capital through partnerships.

2. 'SEED': The development of coordinated campus-specific Sustainability, Employability and EDI and Decolonisation (SEED) strategies that are embedded within contextualised curriculums, and activities.

3. Collaborative Working: Taking place across countries, campuses, faculties, and disciplines – specifically to create non-siloed, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary research and learning experiences for both staff and students.

4. Contextualised curriculums: Cultural difference and relevance, regional specifics, identity and background, network opportunities and USPs for publicity and recruitment.

The scale of UK higher education transnational education

United States
7,305
▲ 15.1%

Trinidad & Tobago
3,615
▼ 14.6%

Uzbekistan
6,105
▲ 9.5%

Nepal
7,230
▲ 42.4%

China
48,700
▲ 16.3%

Egypt
19,590
▼ 2.6%

Pakistan
7,310
▲ 21.5%

India
8,485
▲ 1.5%

Hong Kong
22,400
▲ 5.7%

Sri Lanka
30,755
▲ 21.8%

Singapore
27,700
▼ 2.7%

Malaysia
49,160
▲ 2.1%

Ireland
5,920
▲ 13.1%

Germany
9,190
▲ 34.6%

Switzerland
7,990
▲ 26.9%

Greece
19,590
▲ 13.2%

Cyprus (EU)
11,340
▼ 1.4%

Kuwait
7,360
▲ 15.0%

UAE
14,530
▲ 8.0%

Saudi Arabia
9,045
▲ 16.7%

Oman
17,680
▲ 1.9%

Percentage changes from 2018-19
Data source: HESA aggregate offshore record (2019–20)

Source: Universities UK 2020. UK TNE Worldwide 2019-20

Recommendations

1. Networks – partnerships with purpose

Develop regional networks with HEIs, business, NGOs, and Government. Seek the alignment of interests and mutual goals to bring these actors together. Utilise DMU's UN hub status for SDG 16, or Global Compact Signatory status, or simply act as a knowledge hub and venue for discussion and action for the SDGs. Integrate partners and opportunities for professional practice experience, placements, research, culture, and knowledge exchange.

2: 'SEED' – Sustainability, Employability and EDI and Decolonisation strategies

Develop and integrate SEED strategies:

- Sustainability: Embed carbon literacy and SDG knowledge and advocacy within the curriculum, extra-curricular activities, and campus operations.
- Employability: Embed employer insights, SDG advocacy, and future skills (McKinsey, 2021).
- Equality, diversity, and inclusion: Explore, embed, and share home and TNE campus-oriented perspectives for 'fair treatment and opportunities for all'.
- Decolonising: Explore, embed, and share TNE campus regional perspectives to discover 'new canons of knowledge' (Arshad, R. THE. 2021).

3. Collaborative working

Establish a non-siloed campus through integrated collaborative working – of both staff and students. Achieve and maintain this through the unifying SDGs. Integrate a culture around SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals – through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary student projects, staff research, and experiential learning. Create a campus identity and narrative around collaborative working – to recruit and perpetuate.

4. Contextualised curriculums

Orientate curricula to examine cultural difference, identity, relevance, regional specifics, and opportunities. Reflect and share home and TNE campus perspectives. Integrate both in each other's curricula and explore other contexts through the proposed TNE 'network'.

About the authors

Dr Manjeet Ridon is Associate Dean International and Cross-Institutional Lead for Sustainability and EDI at De Montfort University Leicester.

Stuart Lawson is Associate Professor of Design at De Montfort University Leicester and TNE in the School of Art, Design and Architecture and ADH Partnership Link for De Montfort University Dubai.

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