

## **Chapter 8**

### **Curtin University's Development of a Campus in Singapore (Case Study I)**

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Education is a journey, not only for students, but for institutions and governments as well. Most journeys start with high excitement and considerable planning; however, there is always an element of the unknown or unexpected. Perhaps the most memorable journeys include a satisfying mix of challenge and achievement. Launching a new international endeavour certainly has the potential to provide lots of excitement and feelings of accomplishment.

This case describes the salient features of Curtin University's (Curtin's) development of a new campus in Singapore. It begins with a brief description of Curtin and its international experience, followed by some thoughts concerning changes in international education that were influencing Curtin's offshore operations. These trends, and the fact that Singapore was a well-established market for Curtin, encouraged the University to think about developing a campus in that nation. The intent, key features, student benefits and notable milestones are discussed in this case study. The case study concludes by highlighting the importance of surfacing stakeholder expectations and building upon institutional strengths.

#### **A Brief History of Curtin University**

Curtin is Western Australia's largest and most multicultural university, and has a strong commitment to international engagement. With Australia's third largest international student population, Curtin maintains international campuses in Sarawak (Malaysia) and Singapore, as well as conducting face-to-face teaching in many other countries. Curtin is widely recognised for the practical and applied nature of its courses. The courses equip graduates with essential skills through exposure to industry and research programs that are focused on solving real world problems.

In 2009, Curtin enrolled 44,471 students and employed 6,522 staff (Curtin University 2010). However, the genesis of the University can be traced back to May 1900, when the Perth Technical School opened in St Georges Terrace. This school offered classes for trade apprentices and provided university courses under licence from the University of Adelaide (until the University of Western Australia was established in 1914). The early fortunes of technical education in Western Australia ebbed and flowed. However, by 1956 the idea of creating the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT) was born, and in 1966 the state government established WAIT.

During 1969, the Western Australian School of Mines, the Muresk Agricultural College, the School of Occupational Therapy and the School of Physiotherapy were merged with WAIT. Between 1966 and 1976 WAIT experienced an incredible expansion from 2,000 to 10,000 students. WAIT emerged as one of Australia's largest and most innovative institutes in the non-university higher education sector.

In January 1987, twenty years from its inception, WAIT was reborn as Curtin University of Technology. After an extended period of consultation and development, the vision was to establish Curtin as a world-class university of technology. The words, 'look ever forward', taken from the writings of John Curtin in 1932 about the role of universities, became its new motto. Curtin continued its international focus with the opening of the Sarawak campus in 1999, and the Singapore campus in 2009.

Curtin has come a long way since its inception, from its roots in technical education through to its evolution as an institute and its rebirth as a university. For more detailed historical descriptions, see <<http://about.curtin.edu.au/index.cfm>>.

### **Curtin International**

By focusing its activities on countries that are regionally close to Australia, Curtin has earned substantial respect as an international institution, attracting people from many countries to participate in the learning, research and employment experiences it offers. In turn, these people add a wealth of diverse perspectives to the Curtin experience. While Curtin's internationalisation brings with it great opportunities, the marketplace itself is very competitive; international markets are highly attractive to global institutions. Fellow Australian institutions, North American and European universities, as well as Asian universities, are all competing internationally for students and staff.

Curtin's response to this competition is to enhance its international reputation by continually improving the quality of its graduates, researchers and services. At the same time, the University intends that all international activities will contribute positive outcomes to the region. Therefore, Curtin is prepared to collaboratively address new regional opportunities guided by the knowledge of previous experience. As an international university shaping the future, Curtin aims to contribute to regional development by:

- building partnerships that enhance international reputation
- optimising international outcomes
- continuously improving internationalisation quality.

A key indicator of success in international education is growth in the size of international student enrolment. The following table illustrates how Curtin has increased enrolment and maintained its international student population proportion at approximately 42%, since 2004.

*Table 8.1: Curtin University enrolment numbers 2003–09*

Students (headcount)	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Curtin total</b>	36,032	37,116	39,562	40,360	41,348	42,252	44,471
<b>International onshore</b>	6,375	6,846	7,553	8,269	8,809	9,735	10,310
<b>International offshore</b>	7,560	8,377	9,226	8,768	8,602	7,792	8,606
<b>International total</b>	13,935	15,223	16,779	17,037	17,162	17,524	18,916
<b>International %</b>	38.7%	41.0%	42.4%	42.2%	41.5%	41.5%	42.5

Source: Curtin University 2010.

It should be noted that Curtin is an international pioneer in the provision of offshore (transnational) education services. ‘The WAIT bachelor of business degree in Singapore commenced in 1985, well ahead of Commonwealth guidelines for enrolling overseas fee-paying students in Australian institutions.’ This course was ‘the pioneer program in Australia, having broken ranks before the race for overseas students began in earnest in 1986’ (White 1996, p. 274).

### **International Higher Education**

Progressive universities have reflected on how global drivers for change will impact their activities, and in this respect, a number of pressures have been identified. Knight (2005) has noted the multiple impacts of globalisation:

The impact of globalisation on the international dimension of education is significant. It includes:

- An increased demand for tertiary education given the role of the knowledge society and economy;
- The introduction of a market and trade approach to international education;
- A renewed emphasis on education mobility; and
- Advances in the use of information and communication technologies for delivery of education.

(Knight 2005, p. 5)

Higher education institutions operating globally will address change and opportunity by developing marketable programs. These courses are likely to be delivered using a sophisticated mixture of accelerated face-to-face teaching together with extensive self-paced learning. Both techniques will utilise advanced communications technologies. These flexible learning approaches may not require an institutional presence in the countries that have been targeted. Teaching staff could fly in for the face-to-face sessions, and flexible learning components could utilise the internet with online delivery of material. Consequently, some institutions may not pursue formal government approvals (though in an increasingly scrutinised and regulated sector, they do so at their peril). Nevertheless, the best international institutions will collaborate with local governments, confident in their ability to deliver locally applicable and top quality educational experiences. Governments will become more interested in the performance of global learning programs because cultural and national interests are intertwined with educational outcomes:

The more advanced HEIs which are emerging as world class centres in specialised areas are oriented more to the needs and competitive pressures of the global economy. Their operation transcends national boundaries and is the concern of multilevel governance from an equity and human and social development perspective. Similarly the delivery of distance courses to large numbers of students worldwide raises the need for multilevel governance scrutiny, regulation and support measures. (Georghiou & Cassingena Harper 2006, p. 10)

Knight (2005), in her paper on cross-border education, described a typology for 'cross-border provider mobility' (discussed in Chapter 1). Curtin has familiarity with most of the techniques described in this typology. With the establishment of the Singapore campus, the University decided to build upon a long established 'affiliation network' and develop a 'branch campus'. This was a direct strategic response to developments in the region, particularly as traditional importers of educational services, such as Singapore and Malaysia, were moving rapidly to build their capacity to compete as education exporters.

The rapid growth of international student mobility is part of a larger context in which tertiary education in general is expanding and indeed, as more and more students access tertiary education, more and more students access it overseas. Interestingly however, as overseas student numbers increase, market shares are stabilising, and in some cases decreasing, partly as a result of a diversification of market players. Importers of educational services are now also exporting them, prompting 'traditional' destinations to develop more targeted recruitment strategies aimed at new overseas student 'sources', as well as at older ones (Lasanowski 2009, p. 2).

As these competitive choices increase, not only will Curtin courses need to be of high quality and relevant, but the provision of study flexibility and award mobility will become increasingly important. In the future, it may be the case that Curtin more often goes to the students, rather than the students coming to Curtin.

## **Singapore**

On 9 August 1965, Singapore became an independent republic. From challenging beginnings, Singapore has gained worldwide respect as one of the world's prosperous nations built on hard work and cultural harmony. Singapore's highly developed free market economy and strong international linkages demonstrate an international point of view. By 2008, a population of nearly five million people had built an education system that achieves a literacy rate of 96% (Economic Development Board 2010b). This system includes world-class national institutions, while Singapore also welcomes the participation of private and international educational organisations.

Since its launch in 2002, the Global Schoolhouse initiative has helped to build up the Singapore Education brand-name, drawing world-class universities ... to set up operations here. Today, Singapore is home to 16 leading foreign tertiary institutions and 44 pre-tertiary schools offering international curricula ... Singapore aims to develop a vibrant community of tertiary, pre-tertiary and corporate training institutions. Supported by a diverse range of institutions, Singapore plans to attract even more students, faculty, researchers and professionals from all over the world to make the city-state a global talent hub (Economic Development Board, Singapore 2010a).

The *Private Education Act 2009* granted powers to Singapore's Council for Private Education to ensure the overall quality of the sector. The Act details various requirements for corporate governance, academic rigour and student protection. A number of registration formalities must be complied with before EduTrust processes can be completed. EduTrust is a voluntary certification scheme that ensures students receive appropriate consumer protection, and that private education institutions provide quality services (Ministry of Education 2010).

By announcing goals and expectations, the government is not only encouraging international participation in Singapore's education market, they are developing very useful guidelines and regulations. These are important for external investors considering entry to the Singapore educational market, because they must understand the roles, behaviours and contributions that local government expect them to provide.

Singapore represented a major market for Curtin in 2007; Singaporean students made up 7.5% of onshore enrolment and 18.2% of offshore enrolment. Curtin also has a very long history of collaboration in Singapore, with partnerships that have been very successful despite the increasing competition. However, after nearly twenty years of operation there was a need to re-energise its activities and Curtin was keen to participate in the Singapore Government's moves towards becoming a 'Global Schoolhouse'.

## **Developing Curtin's Singapore Campus**

In March 2008, Curtin decided to develop a branch campus in Singapore. The intent was to elevate the image and standing of Curtin in Singapore and regional South-East

Asia. Partnerships and collaboration were to provide a solid foundation for this campus. Existing partnerships with Singaporean professional bodies were to be nurtured, and new administrative support partnerships developed. Of course, close collaboration with Singaporean authorities was to be maintained.

The objective was to provide a comprehensive university facility that would enhance the student experience, encourage research, and strengthen industry engagement. Campus offices and services would be available to Curtin's professional partners, boosting their identification with the University. Students would have access to a high quality, purpose built campus environment, and academics would utilise the latest learning facilities.

Curtin's successful prior experience of developing an international campus (with a partner providing facilities and services for the Sarawak campus) influenced the University's decision to follow a similar approach in Singapore. Indeed, Curtin's campus in Malaysia was commended by the Australian University Quality Agency:

AUQA commends Curtin for the conceptualisation, establishment and successful development of the Curtin Sarawak Campus (AUQA 2009, p. 42).

Curtin's partner in Singapore, Navitas Limited (Navitas), is a corporation listed on the Australian stock exchange that specialises in collaborating with universities. After a long association in developing and operating the pathway college Curtin International College on Curtin's Bentley campus, Navitas proposed a partnership with Curtin to develop the Singapore campus in 2007.

After many months of negotiations, not only with Navitas, but also internally at Curtin, and in particular with Curtin's existing professional partners in Singapore, key features of this development were agreed:

- Partnership responsibilities for campus activities would be categorised into academic and operational tasks. Curtin would be responsible for academic tasks (for example, curriculum design and delivery, teaching and learning, assessment, etc.), and Navitas would be responsible for providing facilities and various administration processes, including specialised marketing services. These responsibilities would be encapsulated within a close working relationship, with the focus on producing top quality university experiences that would enhance Curtin's reputation.
- Navitas would acquire an appropriate venue and refurbish it to the standard expected of a high quality university campus.
- Curtin courses already available in Singapore would be augmented as market demand became apparent. Initially programs would continue Curtin Business School's long association with Singapore; however, health, engineering and humanities programs would expand the range of courses as demand rose.
- Curtin's professional partners (the Marketing Institute of Singapore, the Singapore Institute of Materials Management and the Singapore Humans Resources Institute) had opportunities to enhance their collaboration with

Curtin (e.g. through access to campus office facilities, and campus promotion of their affiliation with Curtin).

- A Curtin professor would be appointed Pro Vice-Chancellor of the Singapore campus. The task was to provide overall academic leadership, as well as facilitating coordination between the Singapore and Bentley (Perth, Western Australia) campuses. The Pro Vice-Chancellor would also facilitate campus collaboration with Curtin's professional partners and Singaporean authorities.
- The campus proposal would be presented to the Ministry of Education and the Economic Development Board (it subsequently received encouragement from both Singaporean departments).
- Cost-neutral financial projections were to be predicated for Curtin and the professional partners during the initial phase of campus development, with long-term estimates of financial and strategic benefits forecast for all stakeholders.
- Marketing investigations predicted an increase in Curtin's reputation and a consequential improvement in market positioning.

Curtin's students in Singapore were to benefit from:

- enhanced facilities (such as a library and information technology services, a food court, etc.) within one convenient location
- access to a traditional campus environment
- a stronger sense of association with Curtin
- improved student services
- increased international networking opportunities (as the campus student body expands to include regional participants)
- exposure to students from other disciplines (as the variety of programs increase)
- expanded graduate recognition (as Curtin's reputation grows).

Changing partnership arrangements that had been successful for twenty years was obviously a risk; however, Singapore's higher education environment was changing rapidly, especially as the government started promoting the nation as a regional education hub. As a result, Curtin's original twinning model was no longer considered competitive when compared against other quality institutions offering 'full' campus experiences. Curtin's risk analysis concluded that the collaborative development of the Singapore campus was the most appropriate way to manage these risks.

Notable milestones achieved during the campus's first year were:

- completion of building and refurbishments leading to the official opening of the campus by the HE Mr Doug Chester, Australian High Commissioner to Singapore, with the Honourable Mr S Iswaran, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Trade and Industry and Ministry of Education in November 2008
- successful conclusion of a transitional summer semester (November 2008 to February 2009)

- first full semester completed in June 2009
- collaborated in a trial Ministry of Education (Singapore) review of audit procedures for private educational institutions
- completed the first full year of academic operations for 1,817 students.

Examples of future priorities include:

- regular conformation that campus plans, policies, systems and procedures, comply with Singaporean authority expectations
- implementation of Curtin surveys, such as: staff feedback (VoiceIT), student satisfaction (such as the Course Experience Questionnaire), graduate employment (using the graduate employment survey), etc.
- commencement of new courses from humanities and health sciences
- enhancing locally appropriate student career and advisory services
- facilitating opportunities for student exchange and study abroad programs
- developing a Singapore campus culture
- augmenting Singaporean research linkages and activities
- providing international pathway students with English language competency programs
- expanding executive education and consultancy opportunities.

Like any campus, Curtin Singapore continues to develop and progress. In 2010, the campus successfully re-registered all courses. Of course, reaching a shared understanding of quality assurance amongst international organisations, professional partners, local authorities and Curtin University was always going to be challenging. The campus decided to use a widely respected external accreditation procedure to focus all parties upon standard definitions of quality as the way to overcome this challenge. Curtin is using its experience with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) accreditation to implement quality processes that are regularly audited. This activity should enable the campus to produce externally certified evidence that there will be regular conformance with recognised quality standards.

Another sign of recent progress has been the early growth of Curtin Singapore's nursing programs. Approximately 50 students enrolled in the programs and are benefitting (as at 2010) from access to specialist facilities (e.g. the campus nursing and physiotherapy venue that is equipped for inter-professional education). In 2011, these students will be joined by 350 other Curtin students who will transfer from a local partnership program. In addition, preparations are on-track for Master of Science programs to start in 2011. These types of courses attract the stringent scrutiny of local authorities, and were tailored by Curtin's Faculty of Health Sciences, in consultation with the Singapore Nursing Board and other leaders in Singaporean healthcare, to meet the specific postgraduate requirements of Singapore healthcare professionals.

## **Operating Across National Borders**

Curtin's international experience indicates that understanding stakeholder expectations in cross-border activities requires special attention. Normal assumptions about educational operations may not be valid in another country (e.g. tax exemption). Also, governments are naturally determined to achieve their own national education priorities. Therefore, foreign institutions should enhance their international investments by complying with these expectations.

University activities conducted away from the 'main' campus cannot provide exactly the same experience (especially if the distant campus is located in another country). Cultural and other environmental differences will impact the course experience. Even so, Curtin holds to the principle that its degrees impart equivalent educational outcomes, no matter where or how courses are studied. In other words, the University strives for educational equivalence between degrees studied at its Bentley campus and degrees studied at an international campus.

This principle is evident in Curtin's control over curricula, teaching quality and assessment. Curtin recognises the need for locally applicable knowledge and for nationally appropriate learning techniques; therefore, a request for curriculum adaption would be considered on its merit, for example, to comply with national education outcomes. However, Curtin highly values the quality of its degrees and would protect the coherent characteristics of its awards.

There is more chance of appreciating government expectations if they are described in legislative acts, procedural guidelines, accreditation processes, and the like. The Singapore Government has the *Private Education Act* and has appointed a Council for Private Education to oversee compliance with this Act. These types of services greatly assist external institutions, because clear compliance standards are defined.

Students, partners, employers, professional accreditation bodies and the University will all have expectations. Of course, preparatory descriptions and plans (for an international campus) would seek to surface and incorporate the expectations of all major stakeholders; however, this is not always as easy as it sounds, because some desires may not be widely disclosed. Inclusive and attentive communication is perhaps the best method of surfacing shared understandings that will successfully underpin collaboration. A clear vision for the future, long-term determination, and robust partnerships, will greatly assist with the successful resolution of the challenges that lay ahead.

Foreign institutions will take time to become accustomed to operating within a new environment, and this is where local partner support is valuable. Institutions with long established partnerships and a sizable alumnus will have a distinct advantage over institutions entering a 'green-field'. In this regard, Curtin was greatly assisted by its long association with Singapore.

Building on areas of strength is a strategy that has obviously served Curtin well. Also, a willingness to learn as a collaborative participant is an empowering attitude when developing an international operation. However, if there is a key collaborative strategy for developing an offshore campus it would be attempting to maximise outcomes that produce valuable benefits for the majority of stakeholders, and minimising outcomes that encourage division.

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