

Environment for Transnational Education  
Partnerships and UK Qualifications:  
Challenges and Opportunities

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# Mexico and the UK

Findings and recommendations  
from primary research

Part of Going Global Partnerships



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# 1. Introduction

This report is set in the context of the emerging global challenges. These include the global pandemic, the drive for sustainability, and the future of work, as well as the wider shift of the international higher education market from the 'Global North' to the 'Global South'

Within this context, the report considers opportunities and challenges for higher education institutions (HEIs) in Mexico and the UK to develop and extend collaborative transnational education partnerships (TNE), particularly in support of Mexico's ambitious higher education (HE) agenda. TNE includes the provision of programmes from undergraduate to doctoral level.

The report aims to provide an updated understanding of the current environment for such partnerships. Data has been drawn from four sources:

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1. A review of the legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks for international higher education. This research updates the British Council's Global Gauge of Higher Education Policy <sup>1</sup>.
2. Research reports providing information on the Mexico HE context (referenced in the report).
3. Interviews with stakeholders.
4. The UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Aggregate Offshore Record (AOR) for 2022, providing information on the current position of transnational education provision for the academic year 2020-21. Data from all these sources informs the recommendations.

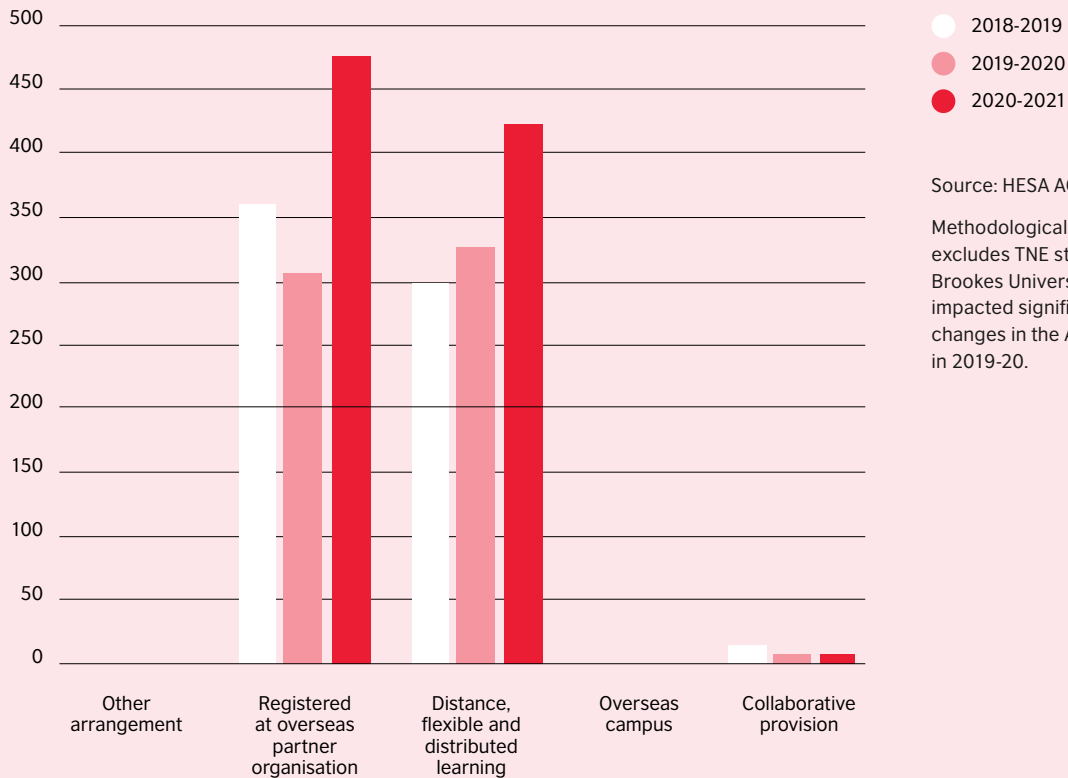
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/he-science/knowledge-centre/global-landscape/global-gauge>.

## 2. Current Mexico-UK higher education links and collaboration

The HESA AOR 2022<sup>2</sup> provides data on students studying on UK TNE programmes in Mexico. Figure 1 shows students who were either studying for an award of the UK reporting provider (university) or studying by distance, flexible or distributed learning. The figures show that there is a very low level of collaborative provision and that this has decreased in 2019-21. There is no provision through overseas campuses. The number of students studying UK programmes through registration with UK partner organisations in Mexico, as well as of those on distance learning programmes, is relatively small. However, both have seen increases in 2020-21, with the number of distance learning students growing from 300 in 2018-19 to 420 in 2020-21.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c21052>.

**Figure 1: Number of TNE students from 2018-19 to 2020-21**

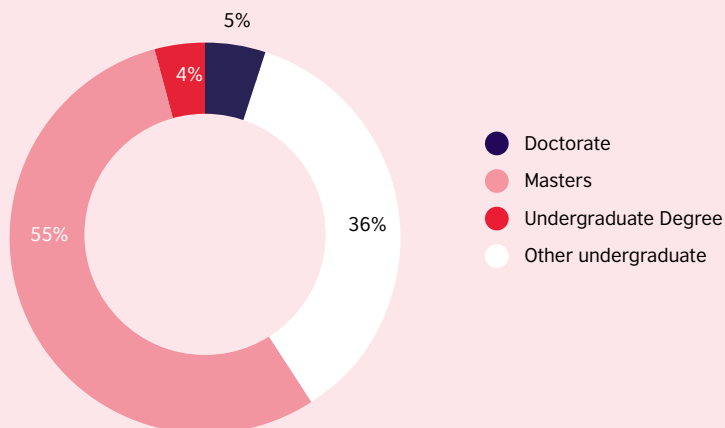


Source: HESA AOR 2022.

Methodological note: The data excludes TNE students at Oxford Brookes University, which was impacted significantly by the changes in the AOR methodology in 2019-20.

Figure 2 shows that 55 per cent of students in 2020-21 were studying towards an undergraduate degree. A further 36 per cent were studying towards a masters' level qualification. At doctorate level, 41 students were studying on research doctorate programmes and four on taught doctorate programmes.

**Figure 2: The level of study of TNE students in 2020-21**



Source: HESA AOR 2022.

Methodological note: The data excludes TNE students at Oxford Brookes University, which was impacted significantly by the changes in the AOR methodology in 2019-20.

In 2020-21 there were 20 UK HEIs with more than five Mexican students on TNE programmes, however half of these students are concentrated in just two institutions (Middlesex University and Coventry University).

While Mexico-UK TNE collaborations are relatively few at present, Mexican and UK HEIs do have a long history of collaboration, notably in research. For Mexico, research collaboration with UK HEIs has increased the impact of Mexican-led research. While the international average field-weighted citation impact for Mexico is 0.90, the figure for co-authored papers with UK authors is 4.21. In terms of the number of co-authored papers, the UK is Mexico's fourth most frequent collaborator globally and third in Europe (after Spain and France), with 1,528 co-authored publications by Mexico and the UK (with 10 or fewer co-authors) between 2015 and 2017. The most significant research areas are physics and astronomy, medicine, agricultural and biological science, earth and planetary sciences, biochemistry, genetics and molecular biology and engineering.<sup>3</sup>

There are a number of collaborations between UK and Mexican HEIs which seek to extend research links to teaching collaborations, faculty-student exchange and joint cultural activities. These include:

- The Centre for Mexico-Southampton Cooperation, focusing on teaching and exchange activities as well as research.<sup>4</sup>

- The Mexico-UK Visiting Chair, involving a group of 12 UK and an equivalent number of Mexican universities, which aims to strengthen academic links between the two countries, by spending up to two weeks each year working collaboratively to explore new links in both research and teaching. Participating universities from the UK are Birmingham, Bristol, Durham, Edinburgh, King's College London, Leeds, Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield, Southampton, University College London and Warwick. Participating Mexican HEIs are Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Instituto Politécnico Nacional, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Universidad de Guadalajara and Universidad de Guanajuato. Collaboration spans the arts and humanities, social sciences, health and natural and mathematical sciences.
- The Centre for Mexican Studies in the United Kingdom, hosted by King's College London. The centre is an academic outpost of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Its objective is to promote academic and cultural exchange between UNAM and British higher education institutions.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/UUKi%20reports/collaborating\\_with\\_mexico.pdf](https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/UUKi%20reports/collaborating_with_mexico.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/mexsu>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://unitedkingdom.unam.mx/?Lang>.

There are a smaller number of collaborations that focus primarily on education and student mobility. These include:

- International House Mexico and the British universities in the NCUK, with a joint programme for Mexican undergraduates. This initiative enables students to start their university studies in Mexico with International House Mexico and then continue their degrees in the UK, at one of a number of British universities.<sup>6</sup>
- The Internationalization at Home programme implemented by the Autonomous University of Baja California (UABC). UABC runs the United Kingdom Initiative, which supports outstanding students from higher education institutions in Mexico, with support from Fomento Social Banamex through the Pro-University Foundation. In this project, bilingual engineering students with an upper-intermediate level of English are able to participate in an eight-week intensive course at the UABC, Campus Ensenada, which gives them the level of English required to enter a postgraduate degree in the participating British universities, including the University of Durham, Queen Mary University of London and the University of Leeds.<sup>7</sup>
- Longstanding relationships and agreements between many UK universities and the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACyT)<sup>8</sup> to receive funded graduate students (often augmenting CONACyT's funding with their own scholarships).<sup>9</sup>
- The UK's Newton Fund, in which Mexico was a partner country, and which has been instrumental in strengthening links.<sup>10</sup> Up to 2021, the two countries invested £74 million in international research and innovation collaborations.
- A delegation of 11 UK universities to Mexico in 2019, organised by Universities UK International (UUKi) and the British Council.<sup>11</sup> The aim was to understand the new administration's emerging priorities for higher education, to reaffirm links with Mexican HE stakeholders and to underline the potential for UK-Mexico higher education collaboration to contribute to Mexico's national priorities.<sup>12</sup>

## Note 2x Number 9 footnotes

6 <https://ihworld.com/news-blog/ih-blog/ih-mexico-and-ncuk-partnership/>.

7 <http://gaceta.uabc.mx/notas/academia/sera-uabc-sede-de-la-iniciativa-reino-unido-en-mexico>.

8 <https://conacyt.mx/>.

9 <https://conacyt.mx/>.

10 <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/he-science/newton-fund>.

11 <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/universities-uk-international>.

12 <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk>.



# 3. Overview of the regulatory and policy frameworks for transnational education partnerships

While the UK higher education sector is one of the largest providers of transnational education, the regulatory and policy frameworks of countries affect the feasibility of TNE provision as well as the type and focus of partnerships.

## 3.1 Internationalisation of Higher Education

In many countries, government strategies on the internationalisation of higher education (IHE) are an important component of the policy framework that enables and supports TNE. While Mexico does not have a comprehensive federal strategy on IHE, its national strategy to promote the country's productivity and competitiveness could be an important instrument for the evolution of bilateral relations and TNE partnerships. This includes the opening of the market to private investments in industries such as telecommunications, energy and petroleum, as well as creating national strategic plans for industries with productive potential such as the automotive industry, agroindustry, the space industry, and the electronic industry. Strategic plans for the strengthening of the service sectors and small and medium enterprises, characterised by high percentages of informality and low qualifications, are also part of the strategy.<sup>13</sup>

## 3.2 Government departments and agencies

At federal government level, there are a number of key departments and agencies with an interest in IHE. These either play, or could potentially play, roles in supporting TNE partnerships. They include the Secretariat of Public Education, National Council for Research and Technology,<sup>14</sup> CONACyT,<sup>15</sup> the Network for Internationalisation and Academic and Scientific Mobility<sup>16</sup> and the National Accreditation Agency (COPAES).<sup>17</sup> Other stakeholders are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>18</sup> and the Agency for Development Cooperation<sup>19</sup> and, at sector level, the Mexican Association for International Education<sup>20</sup> and the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions<sup>21</sup>.

13 <https://www.gob.mx/shcp/prensa/hacienda-publico-programa-especial-para-productividad-y-competitividad-2020-2024>.

14 <https://fundit.fr/en/institutions/secretariat-public-education-mexico-sep>.

15 <https://conacyt.mx/>.

16 <https://rimac.cinvestav.mx/>.

17 <https://www.copaes.org/>.

18 <https://www.gob.mx/sre>.

19 <https://fundit.fr/en/institutions/agencia-mexicana-cooperacion-internacional-para-el-desarrollo-amexcid>

20 <https://ampei.org.mx/>.

21 <http://www.anuies.mx/anuies/instituciones-de-educacion-superior/>.

### 3.3 Foreign higher education providers in Mexico

While the UK does not have campuses in Mexico, the regulations do not prevent this possibility. Foreign providers are allowed to set up and operate in the country, providing they comply with foreign investment controls. These require organisations with over 49 per cent of foreign ownership to obtain authorisation from the National Commission of Foreign Investment. A number of Spanish universities operate through either campus or online operations. Among them are Mondragon Mexico<sup>22</sup>, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia,<sup>23</sup> Universitat Oberta de Catalunya,<sup>24</sup> La Universidad Internacional de La Rioja<sup>25</sup> offer courses online, IE University,<sup>26</sup> Universidad de Navarra,<sup>27</sup> Universidad Pontificia Comillas,<sup>28</sup> Universidad Deusto,<sup>29</sup> Universitat de Barcelona,<sup>30</sup> ESIC University,<sup>31</sup> Nebrija University,<sup>32</sup>

Universidad Francisco de Vitoria,<sup>33</sup> Universitat Ramon Llull,<sup>34</sup> online and in-person Universidad de Jaen,<sup>35</sup> ENAE Business School,<sup>36</sup> ESERP Business School,<sup>37</sup> European Sport Business School,<sup>38</sup> Spain Business School,<sup>39</sup> Barcelona School of Design and Engineering,<sup>40</sup> TAI Escuela de Artes.<sup>41</sup> In addition, Cross-Border Education Research Team data shows that at least three North American universities have operations in Mexico – St Luke School of Medicine by Alliant International University, Alliant International University Mexico City Campus, and Arkansas State, Campus Querétaro.<sup>42</sup> Laureate International operates two universities in Mexico – the Universidad del Valle de México – Mexico’s largest private university, with more than 120,000 students on 38 campuses – and the Universidad Tecnológica de México with over 90,000 students on 10 campuses.<sup>43</sup>

22 <https://mondragonmexico.edu.mx/>.

23 <https://www.uned.es/universidad/inicio.html>.

24 <https://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/index.html>.

25 <https://www.unir.net/>.

26 <https://www.ie.edu/university/>.

27 <https://en.unav.edu/web/institute-of-modern-languages>.

28 <https://www.comillas.edu/en/the-university>.

29 <https://www.deusto.es/cs/Satellite/deusto/es/universidad-deusto>.

30 <https://www.ub.edu/web/portal/en/>.

31 <https://www.esic.edu/en>.

32 <https://www.nebrija.com/>.

33 <http://www.ufvinternacional.com/en/>.

34 <https://www.salleurl.edu/en/url>.

35 <https://www.ujaen.es/en>.

36 [https://www.enaes.es/?\\_adin=02021864894#gref](https://www.enaes.es/?_adin=02021864894#gref).

37 <https://en.eserp.com/>.

38 <https://www.esbs-spain.com/en/esbs.html>.

39 <https://www.spainbs.com/>.

40 <https://www.elisava.net/en/node/13375>.

41 [https://taiarts.com/?utm\\_source=Google&utm\\_medium=GMB&utm\\_campaign=FichaLocal](https://taiarts.com/?utm_source=Google&utm_medium=GMB&utm_campaign=FichaLocal).

42 <https://cbert.org/resources-data/intl-campus/>.

43 <https://www.laureate.net/our-network/>.

### 3.4 Quality assurance

The regulatory framework on validation and quality assurance of overseas provision can be either a primary enabler or a significant barrier for TNE partnerships. In Mexico, dual degrees with US and European universities are common and appear to face few barriers. There is an understanding (although no clear regulations) that foreign-owned institutions operating in Mexico are subject to the same quality assurance framework as Mexican universities.

Currently, however, Mexico does not have a mandatory national system of external accreditation and quality assurance for higher education programmes.<sup>44</sup> COPAES is a non-governmental body that organises quality assurance processes at undergraduate level, overseeing 30 smaller programme accreditation bodies in different disciplines, e.g., social sciences, law and medicine. Quality assurance policies and accreditation focus on programmes rather than the development of institutional capabilities and responsibilities for quality. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that accreditation bodies are involved with international quality assurance networks.<sup>45</sup> COPAES also collaborates with Spanish counterparts, such as the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain. At postgraduate level, CONACyT's 'Sistema Nacional de Posgrados' (National System of Postgraduate) is a quality assurance programme that is well recognised in Mexico.<sup>46</sup>

### 3.5 Recognition of foreign qualifications

Mutual recognition of qualifications (MRQ) is an important enabler of TNE. Since 2014 the Mexican government has signed bilateral MRQ agreements with Cuba, France and the UK. The last was signed in 2015<sup>47</sup> as part of the Mexico-UK dual year, and detailed work on implementation is progressing. Other agreements relating to higher education have been signed with Slovakia, Jordan and Morocco.<sup>48</sup>

As well as bilateral agreements, Mexico is a signatory to the UNESCO Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. As yet, it is not a signatory to the code of good practice in the provision of transnational education.

At individual level, Mexico has a relatively open, cost effective and simplified policy for recognising foreign qualifications. There is a 'fast-track' strategy that offers recognition in an average of 45 days. The government also recognises professional qualifications without having to apply to any professional body.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/education/the-future-of-mexican-higher-education-9789264309371-en.htm>.

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.copaes.org/>.

<sup>46</sup> <https://conacyt.mx/videos/el-sistema-nacional-de-posgrados-del-conacyt/>.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cs-mexico-no12015-ukmexico-mutual-recognition-of-higher-education-awards>.

<sup>48</sup> [https://www.sep.gob.mx/es/sep1/XIII\\_Tratados\\_y\\_Convenios\\_Internacionales?page=1](https://www.sep.gob.mx/es/sep1/XIII_Tratados_y_Convenios_Internacionales?page=1).

## 4. Environment for transnational education partnerships and Mexico's ambition for higher education

The British Council's recent research 'The Value of Transnational Education'<sup>49</sup> found significant evidence that, for many countries' governments, TNE is a major tool in meeting national economic and development agendas. Mexico's ambitions for higher education are an important part of the environment for the UK transnational partnerships and, in particular, the contribution these could make.

In April 2021 the Senate of the Republic approved a modified General Law on Higher Education. This confirms the principles that:

- University education should be free
- Higher education institutions should link their provision to the needs of the social, productive and economic sectors.

The government's goals are to guarantee access to universities for all young people by 2024, and to ensure 100 per cent geographical coverage of higher education across the country. Targeting students from low income families and the indigenous population is a government priority.

Currently, only 24 per cent of the Mexican population have a higher education degree<sup>50</sup> (compared with the OECD member country average of 44 per cent). Higher education coverage is 38.4 per cent (compared with Chile at 90.3 per cent, Argentina 85.7 per cent, Colombia

58.7 per cent, Uruguay 55.6 per cent, Costa Rica 54.0 per cent and Ecuador 45.5 per cent). In terms of students enrolling for higher education, there are large disparities between the different states in Mexico, in terms of both access and quality, with those in south having significantly lower rates than the rest of the country. The government aims to develop 100 new universities (Universidades para el Bienestar Benito Juárez García) offering curricula orientated to local development needs while providing an additional 32,000 higher education places and education opportunities to the most disadvantaged young people in the poorest regions of Mexico.

There are some major challenges in achieving these ambitions. The British Council's recent research points to ways in which UK TNE might be used to support these, particularly in the following areas:

- growing the HE system
- HE quality
- HE alignment with labour market needs and the government's development and growth strategy.<sup>51</sup>

49 <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/he-science/knowledge-centre/transnational-education/value-transnational-education>

50 <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/2a39f90d-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/2a39f90d-ento>. The OECD member country average is 44%.

51 'The value of transnational education'.

## 4.1 Growing the HE system

It is estimated that achieving the government's goal of universal access by 2024 would require 1,912,982 additional places – an average of 300,000 new places per year.<sup>52</sup> The current growth rate is 150,000. Achieving that number would need all federal, state and local higher education institutions to deliver a huge growth in programmes, increasing variety of education provision and reducing coverage gaps. Beyond the obvious challenge of funding, there is also a significant challenge of institutional capacity, both in existing institutions and in the proposed new institutions.

## 4.2 HE quality

As HE systems grow, ensuring quality is of paramount importance. The British Council research found that the rapid growth across the world of HE systems that were not supported by appropriate regulatory quality assurance frameworks mostly had limited impact on national agendas. The OECD notes that Mexico has taken major steps to promote the quality and accessibility of higher education.<sup>53</sup> In public state universities, in which more than a quarter of all students are enrolled, more than 80 per cent of undergraduate students are on programmes whose quality has been externally accredited. Nevertheless, the OECD recommends that an external quality accreditation should be put in place for all universities. The OECD also notes that there are significant challenges in tackling **inequality**, particularly along ethnic lines. In 2015, only 6.6 per cent of indigenous 25- to 64-year-olds had completed tertiary education, compared with almost 19 per cent in the rest of the population.

## 4.3 HE alignment with labour market needs and the government's development and growth strategy

Higher education alignment with labour market needs and the government's development and growth strategy are also major priorities for the government. The OECD report 'Higher Education in Mexico: Labour Market Relevance and Outcomes' notes that Mexico faces significant challenges in matching its higher education system to the labour market and that, as long as this is the case, the potential benefits of higher education for the country will remain limited.<sup>54</sup> It points to nearly half of graduates working in jobs for which no higher education qualification is required, with more than one in four in informal jobs. Young women are particularly disadvantaged and, while they outnumber young men graduating from higher education, their employment rate is 14 percent lower. At the same time, more than half of businesses report difficulties in filling vacancies.

The report points to the need for greater engagement by HE institutions with employers to understand their needs, and also for employers to be engaged in the design and delivery of programmes. The report concludes that 'raising productivity in the Mexican labour market will require higher-level competencies, skills and abilities'. It suggests that there needs to be better support for students to connect to the labour market, plus more flexibility in programme design, with greater emphasis on lifelong learning and updating. To achieve these, the report recommends that all faculty should have access to professional training, including student-focused approaches.

52 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333600033\\_Mexico\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Under\\_Populism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333600033_Mexico_Higher_Education_Under_Populism).

53 <https://www.oecd.org/about/secretary-general/challenges-and-opportunities-of-higher-education-in-mexico-january-2020.htm>.

54 [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/higher-education-in-mexico\\_9789264309432-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/higher-education-in-mexico_9789264309432-en).

## 5. How can TNE partnerships help to support Mexico's ambition?

The British's Council's research 'The Value of Transnational Education' <sup>55</sup> presents significant evidence of the major contribution made by UK TNE partnerships to national economic and development agendas in countries across the world, as well as to the UN's Sustainability Development Goals.<sup>56</sup> With particular relevance to Mexico's priorities, the research provides strong evidence of TNE successfully supporting the growth of higher education systems, providing large numbers of HE places for students where countries have been unable to meet demand. UK TNE has enabled countries such as Malaysia and Singapore to meet immediate demand while, at the same time, rapidly growing their own systems. In some countries with limited capacity to build diverse higher education systems, UK TNE still provides over one-fifth of HE places.

Mexico proposes a huge growth of higher places within a short time period. Distance and online learning programmes have potential to be a very effective solution, alleviating strain on the current HE system. These are already a component of UK programmes delivered to students in Mexico. While the numbers are relatively small, they are, nevertheless growing.

The OECD reports that the recent development of distance learning in Mexico means that the supply of higher education is becoming more diverse and better aligned, both to different student profiles and to labour market needs. In terms of UK TNE's flexible and distance provision, the British Council's research supports this finding across a wide range of countries. It provides evidence of how UK distance and online learning, together with collaborative provision through partner institutions in-country, has made major contributions to improving the quality and diversity of higher education. It has also widened access for students from underrepresented socioeconomic groups.

Further, the evidence from other countries suggests that UK TNE (distance and online learning, but also collaborative partnerships) could play a valuable role in supporting greater alignment of Mexican higher education with labour market needs. In many countries TNE is providing innovative, industry-focused higher education programmes that respond directly to employers' needs by producing graduates with relevant high-level knowledge and competencies. The proportion of TNE graduates going into graduate-level jobs is generally higher than for graduates from local HE programmes. There are also examples across different countries of UK transnational education bringing a different approach to industry engagement, encouraging much closer links between higher education institutions and employers.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

As Mexico grows and refocuses its higher education system, major challenges will lie in ensuring institutional and staff capacity. Staff will need knowledge of different pedagogies relevant to different types of students and to the different development and economic needs of the country. They will also need different or updated skills to deliver these. Many institutions are likely to need to develop or strengthen internal systems (e.g., student support, quality assurance, assessment mechanisms, business links). A cost-effective way of developing both institutions and staff is through international collaboration – and UK TNE could make a very valuable contribution here. There is strong evidence of its developing teaching and institutional capacity, as well as strengthening the academic talent pool in countries. Many TNE partnerships are providing training for young faculty members, including through part-time and split-site PhD models. The British Council's research found that 'brain circulation' between UK TNE providers and local institutions exposes academics on both sides to new pedagogies, assessment methods and quality assurance systems.

As well as institution-to-institution partnerships, there is also potential for sector agency partnerships (e.g., on quality assurance and HE-business links), which could support Mexico's ambition for its HE system.

## 6. Challenges

While UK TNE could provide valuable support, there are some challenges that would need to be addressed in order to maximise that support. Important ones are listed below.

**Government support:** the 2015 Mexico-UK bilateral agreement on the **mutual recognition of qualifications** is extremely important in signalling government recognition of each country's HE qualifications. Once the details of this are finalised, it has potential to drive future collaboration. For TNE, in particular, government support is critical to its success. This includes proactively providing clear **policy and regulatory frameworks for TNE**. It may also include making bilateral funding agreements for specific initiatives. The British Council's research across countries found that lack of government support seriously limited TNE's potential impact on countries' growth and development strategies. While there are few restrictions on TNE operations in Mexico, there is also no clear and comprehensive policy framework.

**Language:** this is one of the challenges most commonly identified by interviewees from both Mexico and the UK. While TNE can be provided in Spanish, there is still a need for some English language proficiency, particularly for staff. There is also a wider cultural issue. So, despite the conventional understanding regarding the need for linguistic proficiency, the issue of reciprocity also emerges as an important challenge. Mexican stakeholders feel that this should not be about a unilateral need to master the English language, but that there should be an expectation of a similar effort by UK HEIs to familiarise themselves with the Spanish language. This should be about the creation of a new mindset based on reciprocity and recognition of peers' value.

**Affordability** is perceived as a major barrier to studying in the UK by Mexican students. While TNE would provide HE places in Mexico, these are still likely to involve the payment of fees – an important consideration when the government of Mexico's aim is for higher education to be free to all students. There is a particular challenge in using split masters' and PhD programmes for faculty development. This entails fee agreements between Mexican and UK universities. Also, where split or joint postgraduate programmes are used in other countries for faculty development, individuals often spend short periods of study in the UK university. This requires financial support for travel, accommodation and subsistence over and above fees.



**Lack of knowledge** about systems, priorities and approaches is seen as a challenge, for both HEIs and the governments of Mexico and the UK. The UK government has an international education strategy, and UK HEIs have institutional internationalisation strategies that set out their priorities. There is no such explicit Mexican government strategy and no clear internationalisation framework for institutions. The size and complexity of the Mexican higher education system (including public, private and autonomous institutions) and the roles of the federal and state governments are not as well understood by UK institutions as they could be. While differences in priorities and approaches are not necessarily seen as a barrier that cannot be overcome, understanding and taking account of these is seen as a critical factor in building successful transnational partnerships.

**The COVID-19 pandemic** has resulted in challenges for higher education globally. In common with those in other countries, for Mexican HEIs covid has adversely affected the physical mobility of faculty members, and volunteering and international work experience opportunities for students. There have been some positive impacts of the pandemic, particularly for well resourced HEIs that have been able to extend and use virtual and online platforms for teaching students, thereby building a strong basis for future online and flexible learning. However, HEIs with fewer resources in poorer areas have been much more negatively impacted. As in many other countries, the pandemic has increased differentiation between universities.

# 7. Recommendations

While the recommendations below are at policy, sector and institutional level, there are necessary overlaps. The recommendations focus specifically on transnational education partnerships and how these might better support Mexico's ambition for higher education.

## 7.1 Mexican and UK policymakers

Mexican policy makers should consider how they might clarify their policy framework relating specifically to TNE. There is strong evidence that clear and consistent frameworks provide an environment in which TNE can maximise its contribution to national economic and development strategies. One framework is provided by the revised UNESCO-OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Education.

Mexican and UK policymakers should consider jointly funding initiatives to encourage transnational education partnerships that will be of benefit to both countries and will directly support Mexico's higher education ambitions. The possibility of using existing initiatives as part of this should be investigated, including whether reciprocal funding can be agreed (for example to extend the UK's Turing Programme to enable two-way mobility). Policymakers should also consider how to build on the MRQ agreement to promote increased mobility between the two countries, for both staff and students.

## 7.2 Higher education sector agencies and organisations

Sector agencies and organisations in both countries should consider how they might cooperate to develop those HE systems needed to support the growth and refocusing of Mexico's higher education. These include the extension of consistent quality assurance systems to all universities (as recommended by the OECD). The British Council should consider facilitating connections between appropriate agencies through its Going Global Partnership Programme. (On quality assurance, the British Council's education teams in Mexico and Spain might also consider whether it would be valuable to include Spain's National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation.)

### 7.3 Higher education institutions

There are already a number of valuable HEI collaborations between the UK and Mexico, many of which focus on research collaborations. HEIs should consider how these partnerships can be extended beyond research collaboration to develop more transnational education partnerships, specifically to support Mexico's HE agenda. One focus here could be on joint doctoral studies to provide professional development for faculty members.

Mexican HEIs have dual degrees with both US and European universities. HEIs should look at the feasibility of developing these with the UK. This would need to include consideration of fee arrangements for Mexican students. Ways of building on existing scholarship schemes could also be investigated, particularly at postgraduate level in subjects that are of benefit to both countries.

UK HEIs involved in distance learning and online provision should consider extending their provision in Mexico. Clearly this will require an in-depth understanding of the market as well as the development of a rigorous business case. The British Council could provide market information and relevant contacts in Mexico to aid decision making.

There is potential for UK HEIs, the British Council and other organisations to support English language learning. While much of learning English has focused on students wanting to study abroad, there is now a need for academics to improve their English language skills. This is important in

supporting the growth of Mexico's higher education sector through engagement with international partners. It should be seen as a priority.

There is potential for UK HEIs to work with British companies to support greater alignment between HEIs and employers in Mexico. Many large UK companies operate in Mexico, including HSBC, GlaxoSmithKline, AstraZeneca, British American Tobacco and the InterContinental Hotels Group. The UK Department of International Trade, together with UK HEIs, should consider how to increase their engagement to support Mexico's higher education agenda and, in particular, to strengthen the role of UK-Mexico HE-business partnerships in this. The UK National Centre for Universities and Business could play a valuable role here.<sup>57</sup>

In general, there needs to be greater information and networking between Mexico and UK HEIs, with the aim of developing much better understanding of each other's systems and priorities and also of providing opportunities to explore areas of collaboration. In particular, there needs to be a much better understanding of UK transnational education and how partnerships might benefit both Mexico and the UK. Following the 2019 UK HE delegation visit to Mexico, UUKi has committed to increasing information and networking between HEIs in the two countries. It has also committed to providing advice to UK universities on opportunities for them to engage in Mexico. The British Council should consider how it can best support UUKi in achieving this.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.ncub.co.uk/>.

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