

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

Brazil and the UK

Findings and recommendations
from primary research

Part of Going Global Partnerships



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1. Introduction

This report reviews Brazil's international higher education environment and identifies challenges and opportunities for developing international partnerships between Brazilian and UK universities. The report provides actionable recommendations and strategic pathways for designing interventions to overcome these challenges.

The report considers the emerging global challenges, such as the recent pandemic, the drive for sustainability, the future of work and the shift of focus from the 'Global North' to the 'Global South'.¹

Data in this report are drawn from the following sources:

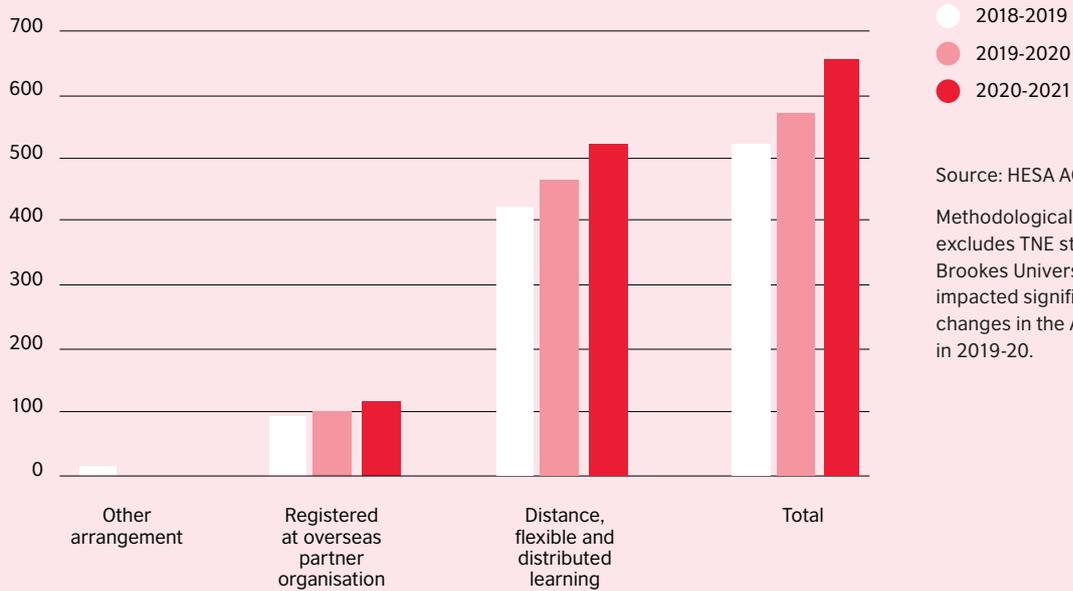
1. Desk research into reports and other publications regarding international higher education, focusing on Brazil, the UK, and Latin America.
2. Primary research conducted for this project in March and April 2022. This comprises in-depth interviews with Brazilian and UK stakeholders.
3. Analysis of the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Aggregate Offshore Record (AOR) for 2022, to provide information on the current position of transnational education (TNE) provision for the academic year 2020-21.

2. Current position

2.1 UK TNE in Brazil

In 2020-21 Brazil hosted 660 students on UK TNE programmes. There has been a 23 per cent increase since 2018-19, but the student numbers remained relatively low compared with other countries. Figure 1 shows 535 students, almost the entirety (81 per cent) of UK TNE provision in Brazil, including distance study and flexible and distributed learning programmes.

Figure 1: Number of UK TNE students in Brazil from 2018-19 to 2020-21

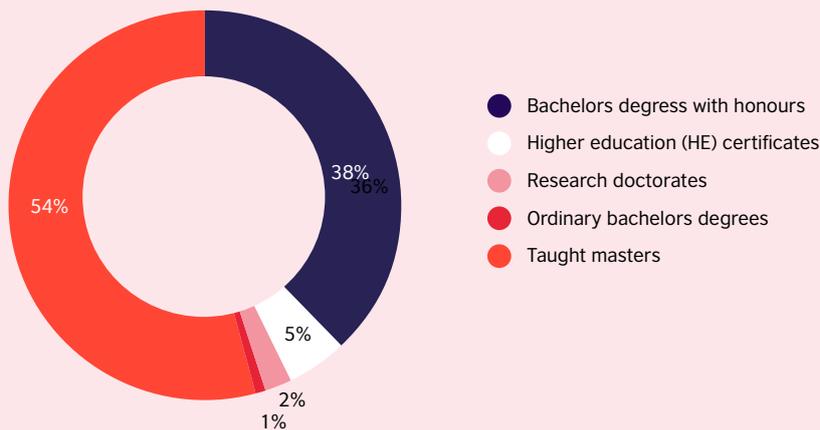


Source: HESA AOR 2022.

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.

Most (54 per cent) of UK TNE students in Brazil study taught masters programmes, and 38 per cent study at the undergraduate level. This contrasts with other partner countries for UK TNE, where the bachelor’s degree students constitute the majority of the UK TNE provision.

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.

2.2 The relative position of the UK as study abroad destination and research collaborator for Brazil

Our analysis of outbound mobility shows a preference for regional mobility, with most outbound Brazilian students studying in Argentina. This is similar to the outbound mobility of other countries in the region (e.g. Peru). Portugal is in second place, which confirms that language plays an essential role in outbound students' choice of study destination. In the context of this study, it is essential to note the relatively low position of the UK compared with other traditional destination

countries of international students – especially the non-Spanish speaking countries: the USA, Australia, Germany, France, and Canada. This is a similar finding to the outbound mobility patterns of other countries in the region (e.g., Peru). Also, it is notable that Germany and USA – two countries that offer higher education (HE) programmes in English² – have achieved substantially higher increases in the number of inbound students from Brazil than the UK. This suggests that there is an active outbound mobility market in Brazil that UK higher education institutions (HEIs) have not been able to tap into as effectively as HEIs from other countries.

Table 1: Top 10 destination countries for outbound students from Brazil (latest year available)

	Country	2020	Change 2019-20
1	Argentina	20,515	10%
2	Portugal	18,081	18%
3	USA	16,086	15%
4	Australia	9,538	-0.1%
5	Germany	4,868	28%
6	France	3,432	-0.5%
7	Canada	5,151	8%
8	Spain	2,068	5%
9	UK	1,627	4%
10	Italy	887	6%

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

² Germany has adopted a targeted strategy to increase the provision of HE programmes using English as the language of instruction: <https://thepienews.com/news/germany-success-intl-students-at-heart-of-daad-2025-strategy/>.

According to the Scopus/Scival database, as summarised in Table 2, the UK ranks second as a research collaborator country for Brazil. Overall, the UK typically ranks second as a research collaborator country for most UK TNE partner countries (Scival, 2022). For example, as summarised in Table 3, for the top 10 UK TNE host countries, the UK ranks as a research collaborator country as follows: 1st for Malaysia; 2nd for China;

3rd for Sri Lanka, ; 3rd for Singapore; 3rd for Hong Kong; 1st for Greece; 4th for Egypt; 2nd for Oman; 2nd for United Arab Emirates; 2nd for Cyprus (Scival, 2022).

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.

Table 2: Top 10 countries for international research collaboration in Brazil by number of co-authored publications (2018-2021)

	Country or Region	Co-authored publications	Share of total co-authored publications	Co-authored publications growth (%)
1	United States	43,473	14%	23%
2	United Kingdom	19,483	6%	29%
3	Spain	14,763	5%	24%
4	Germany	14,648	5%	24%
5	France	13,434	4%	14%
6	Portugal	13,038	4%	26%
7	Italy	12,664	4%	28%
8	Canada	12,279	4%	28%
9	Australia	9,601	3%	37%
10	China	7,370	2%	29%

Source: Scopus/Scival

Table 3: Position of the UK as an international research collaborator in the top 10 UK TNE host countries (2018-2021)

	Country or Region	Position of the UK as international research collaborator country
1	Malaysia	1st
2	China	2nd
3	Sri Lanka	3rd
4	Singapore	3rd
5	Hong Kong	3rd
6	Greece	1st
7	Egypt	4th
8	Oman	2nd
9	UAE	2nd
10	Cyprus	2nd

Source: Scopus/Scival

The volume of co-authored publications illustrates a notable level of research collaboration between the UK and Brazil; however, this does not generate TNE activity (there are still low numbers for UK TNE in Brazil) or outbound mobility to the UK (which is the ninth destination for students from Brazil, as

seen in Table 1). This suggests extensive links at individual and institutional levels, with untapped potential for producing further collaboration around teaching partnerships and student mobility.

3. Value of transnational education partnerships

International cooperation and input by international organisations and academics have influenced the creation and development of the Brazilian higher education sector.³ Also, in recent years, the internationalisation of HE has emerged as a critical policy objective for government bodies and public and private universities.

Several international cooperation initiatives have aimed at strengthening the internationalisation of the Brazilian sector. Central to this aim is Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) (the Foundation for the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel),⁴ the Brazilian government agency that facilitates the international mobility of students through graduate scholarship grants. In 2022, CAPES supported 1,500 Brazilian students pursuing graduate programmes abroad.⁵

Under the ‘Science without Borders’ programme,⁶ Brazil improved its participation in the mobility of students compared with other Latin American and Portuguese-speaking countries. The evidence suggests that this has contributed to enhancing academic excellence and internationalisation in Brazil.⁷

Additionally, there are programmes of bilateral cooperation between Brazil and other countries, to promote internationalisation and partnerships. For example, since the late 1970s, there have been projects with France (Comité Français d’Évaluation de la Coopération Universitaire et Scientifique avec le Brésil -COFECUB 1978), the UK (British Council 1988) and Germany (PROBRAL/German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) 1994), targeting the development of joint research projects and mutual exchanges of academics and postgraduate students.

There have been several initiatives to promote the international research collaboration of Brazilian HEIs with researchers and universities from other countries. Some examples of such programmes are the Sao Paulo Researchers in International Collaboration, the Inter-American Collaboration in Materials, the China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellites Programme, the Proafrica, and Prosul.

In the area of programme mobility, there is evidence of dual degree arrangements between Brazilian HEIs and universities from the USA, France, Germany, Portugal and other countries. However, there is no centrally maintained list or repository of these courses. Notably, there is no substantial activity with UK universities.

Despite the range of initiatives to promote student mobility and research collaboration, there is no extensive transnational education activity in Brazil in the form of teaching partnerships.

3 <https://www.scielo.br/j/soc/a/vd6H5x6RB56rrXkYzKDyGVB/?lang=en>.

4 CAPES is a foundation within the Ministry of Education in Brazil, whose central purpose is to coordinate efforts to improve the quality of Brazil’s faculty and staff in higher education through grant programmes. CAPES is particularly concerned with the training of doctoral candidates, pre-doctoral short-term researchers, and postdoctoral scholars.

5 <https://www.iie.org/programs/capes>.

6 This programme was created on 26 July 2011 and ended on 2 April 2017; it made laudable contributions to the Brazilian educational ecosystem.

7 Neves, C. E. B., & Barbosa, M. L. D. O. (2020). Internationalization of higher education in Brazil: advances, obstacles, and challenges. *Sociologias*, 22, 144-175.

4. Overview of the regulatory and policy frameworks and challenges to international collaboration and partnerships

4.1 Overview of the regulatory and policy frameworks

There are two types of HEIs in Brazil;⁸ university and non-university institutions. University institutions are divided into:

- universities
- specialised universities
- university centres.

Non-university institutions include:

- Federal Technological Education Centers
- Technological Education Centers
- integrated faculties
- isolated faculties
- higher education institutes.

In terms of their ownership and legal status, HEIs in Brazil are classified as public and private. The public institutions are federal, state and municipal, and are government-funded. Public institutions do not charge students fees. Privately owned HEIs can be either for profit or non-profit.⁹

The majority of the higher education institutions in Brazil are private. The public HEIs are small and focus on research and excellence, and hence impose higher admission criteria than the private HEIs. Private higher education institutions are focused on meeting the professional requirements of the labour market and have developed flexible programmes to meet the working population's needs.

The key HE regulatory bodies in Brazil are:

- 1 The Ministry of Education, which is responsible for the overall oversight of the HE sector.
- 2 The Comissão Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior (National Commission of HE Evaluation), which is an autonomous council that regulates directives and mechanisms, as well as providing analysis and tools for improving the quality of HE institutions.
- 3 The Secretaria de Regulação e Supervisão da Educação Superior (HE Regulation and Supervision Secretariat), which is in charge of 'top-down regulations', being responsible for establishing of national curricular standards and quality directives for courses and institutions.

There is a national system for the quality evaluation of the HE sector (Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior). Postgraduate and research programmes are subject to a separate external quality assurance process, which is conducted by CAPES and overseen by the Ministry of Education. All new 'stricto-sensu' programmes (which include master and doctoral level programmes) need to be assessed and approved by an external academic panel. These programmes are subject to re-evaluation every four years.

There is no centralised process for recognising foreign HE qualifications in Brazil. Instead, this is conducted by Brazilian HEIs and includes a process of 'degree revalidation' for undergraduate degrees and 'title recognition' for postgraduate degrees.¹⁰ This process is facilitated by the Carolina Bori website,¹¹ which has been established to streamline the recognition of foreign qualifications.

8 10.13058/raep.2021.v22n1.1939.

9 https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/blar.13133?saml_referrer.

10 <https://www.unifal-mg.edu.br/revalidacao/en/what-are-they/>.

11 <https://carolinabori.mec.gov.br/?pagina=tramitacaoSimplificada>.

The responsibility of each key stakeholder according to the Caroline Bori portal is summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Roles and responsibilities in the process of revalidation and recognition of foreign HE qualifications in Brazil

Paper	Responsibility
Applicant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires revalidation or recognition of the diploma. • Submit supporting documentation of the degree obtained abroad.
Federal, state and municipal public universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform screening and analyse documentation for purposes of revalidation or recognition of undergraduate and postgraduate diplomas. • Issue the revalidation or recognition document.
Private universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out screening and analyse documentation for recognition of postgraduate diplomas. Sri Lanka • Issue the revalidation or recognition document. • Inform the ministry of its norms, decisions and international cooperation and double-degree agreements.
National Council of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide on the norms referring to the revalidation of undergraduate diplomas and recognition of <i>stricto sensu</i> postgraduate diplomas. • Analyse resources.
Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish general guidelines and procedures related to the revalidation and recognition of <i>stricto sensu</i> undergraduate and graduate degrees. • Administer the Carolina Bori portal. • Administer the Carolina Bori platform. • Keep up to date the lists of courses and programmes that are subject to the simplified procedure.
CAPES	Establish general guidelines and procedures regarding the recognition of <i>stricto sensu</i> postgraduate diplomas.

4.2 Challenges for education collaborations and transnational education partnerships

4.2.1 There is no regulatory framework to promote and facilitate international partnerships

Despite the recent emergence of the internationalisation of HE as a key component of Brazilian HEIs' strategic aspirations, there is no specific regulatory framework to facilitate international partnership. Historically, there has been substantial mobility of academics and students, but there is little activity on the programme and institution mobility front.

One of the reasons for the slow progress of internationalisation in Brazil is held to be resistance on the part of certain parts of the HE sector, particularly public HEIs . The development of targeted regulatory initiatives, as a way of easing the obstacles imposed by different stakeholder groups, could be important in promoting the development of international partnerships.

4.2.2 Lack of clearly defined institutional strategy for internationalisation

The evidence indicate that the majority of Brazilian HEIs lack a well-defined internationalisation strategy . For example, in research by CAPES (2017), half of the HEIs that responded had no such strategy and 71 per cent had no dedicated unit or office dealing with internationalisation. Brazilian HEIs recognise the need to have a strategic plan for internationalisation as a way of improving the diversification of their internationalisation activities .

4.2.3 Low proficiency in English

The low proficiency in English of Brazilian HE stakeholders (both students and academics) has been identified as a barrier for internationalisation . Along with a broad preference for regional languages as medium of instruction, this imposes a barrier to international partnerships.

This is also reflected in the fact that the majority of HEIs in Brazil teach programmes in Portuguese.

4.2.4 Market complexity with various HE actors

Complex market with a range of provider types each servicing a particular segment of the market. For example, public universities aim at research and excellence and have limited capacity to meet growing demand. Thus the growing demand for tertiary education, especially among poorer students, has been met by the private providers: about 75 per cent of bachelor students in Brazil study in a private provider .

4.2.5 Lack of mutual recognition agreements with countries outside Latin America

The non-recognition of foreign university degrees and academic credits has been identified as a barrier to the education exports of other countries, such as the USA . Currently, there are no mutual recognition agreements with countries outside of the Latin America region. Such limited recognition agreements as there are, are only with countries in the region (e.g., the Cultural and Scientific Cooperation Agreement between the Republic of Chile and the Government of Brazil and the Convention about the Exercise of Liberal Professions between the two countries).

4.2.6 Affordability of transnational education courses and outbound mobility

The Brazilian economy has been facing substantial fluctuations in its growth, with GDP shrinking by 3.9 per cent in 2020 and then returning to growth of 4.6 per cent in 2021 . The recovery of the economy is uneven across different sectors, and the country is hard hit by high unemployment rates, inflation and the declining value of the national currency, the real, which depreciated against the US dollar by 76 per cent between 2018 and 2022 . A weak real means that paying the fees required by British academic institutions is more expensive for Brazilian students than attending local or regional universities (e.g. in Argentina). The evidence from the interviews with representatives of Brazilian HEIs suggests that cost considerations have negatively impacted the course of negotiations with UK HEIs to develop transnational education partnerships.

Additionally, the continued devaluation of the real is affecting the choice of study destination by outbound Brazilian students. In 2019, a survey by Brazilian Educational & Language Travel Association (BELTA) pointed out that the most influential factor when choosing to study abroad was the favourable exchange rate.

5. Recommendations

Implications

Over the past two decades, the Brazilian HE system opened for international engagement – a process accelerated by the country’s flagship ‘Science without Borders’ programme. Internationalisation is still gaining momentum but without significant tangible outcomes at the institutional level.

There is little understanding among HE stakeholders of the broader benefits TNE partnerships bring. A proactive approach, spearheaded by national agencies, can address this issue.

There is a strong research collaboration between Brazil and the UK. These relationships can be extended to include teaching partnerships.

5.1 All key stakeholders

Accelerate the adoption of online delivery to facilitate short courses and improve the English language proficiency of the population.

Focus on improving the English language proficiency of students and academic staff in Brazil. This will enable two-way international partnerships with institutions in English-speaking countries.

5.2 Brazilian universities

Seek to shape an internationalisation strategy with specific objectives across the following key areas:

- internationalisation of the curriculum
- international partnerships
- mobility of students and academic staff.

Identify internationalisation champions within each institution and across each faculty. This will support the diffusion of good practices of internationalisation and will facilitate institutional strategic goals relating to internationalisation.

5.3 Brazilian policymakers

Recognise the importance of international partnerships, and direct resources to support their development. Introducing a regulatory framework for international partnerships will help Brazilian HEIs navigate their way in developing partnerships with foreign HEIs.

Explore the benefit of establishing mutual recognition agreements with key countries (e.g., the major destinations of outbound students from Brazil and the top research collaborating countries with Brazil). Brazil is one of the few countries in Latin America without such agreements.

5.4 UK universities

Despite the UK being one of the top research collaborator countries for Brazil, it is lacking behind other English-speaking countries as a destination for Brazilian students. Similarly, there is no substantial UK TNE activity in Brazil. UK universities need to explore ways through which they can expand on their existing research links with Brazilian HEIs.

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