

British Council China Higher Education Partnership Fund (2018-2025)

How to Build an Offshore Renewable Energy Alliance: Lessons from a UK-China- Philippines Partnership

Climate change and geopolitical instability are both driving an urgent need for clean energy solutions. This makes international academic collaboration even more crucial, and offshore renewables are no exception.

This unique sector demands a workforce equipped with global perspectives, cross-cultural competence and leading technical knowledge. Recognising this need, the **University of Exeter** in the United Kingdom, Dalian University of Technology in China, and De La Salle University in the Philippines formed the **‘Joint Offshore Energy Engineering and Innovation Partnership’**, better known as the JOIN project.

Supported by the British Council China Higher Education Partnership Fund, this trilateral initiative set out to improve connectivity and mobility between research institutions, helping to foster sector-wide innovation.

Despite operating against a backdrop of COVID-19 travel restrictions and subsequent changes to UK immigration rules, the JOIN project achieved a remarkable set of outcomes, including the development of a market-ready joint master’s degree programme, several successful events and a joint guest editor issue of *Frontiers in Marine Science*.



Three leading universities, one master's programme

The centrepiece of the JOIN project was the development of a comprehensive joint postgraduate programme in global renewable energy engineering.

A one-year, two-term course delivered entirely in English, the MSc is designed to prepare students for careers in the offshore energy industry. On completion of the course, graduates will be able to address real technical challenges in renewable energy and apply both engineering and project management principles to design clean energy solutions.

The project delivered far more than a programme outline, including:

- Detailed curriculum documentation.
- Module structure and descriptors.
- Administrative frameworks for programme delivery.
- Full marketing materials and advertisements.

On top of this, the course can act as a **blueprint for other transnational degrees, ready for any of the partner institutions to use across other areas and disciplines.**

Concrete academic output

Beyond curriculum development, the project produced meaningful academic research. The three universities jointly published four journal papers, contributing new knowledge to the field of offshore renewable energy.

Most significantly, the universities co-edited a special issue of *Frontiers in Marine Science* titled 'Innovation and System Integration for Offshore Renewable Energy Structures', with an accompanying editorial that further cemented their research credentials as a unit.

These outputs are not merely symbolic. They represent deep collaboration and the successful integration of expertise from multiple disciplines, including offshore renewable energy, systems engineering and applied marine science. For early-career researchers and established academics involved in the partnership, these publications provide a foundation for future grant applications and further collaboration.

Fresh perspectives for the future

One of the clearest indicators of a successful international partnership is the extent to which staff are willing to travel, share knowledge and build personal working relationships.

By this measure, the JOIN project was an unambiguous success. **The partnership completed three full rounds of academic visits between the institutions, helping researchers spend meaningful time at partner universities, understand new research cultures and develop projects face to face.**

These exchanges went far beyond individual research projects. Participating academics returned to their home institutions with a much deeper understanding of how higher education systems operate in the UK, China and the Philippines. They gained practical knowledge about international programme processes, student recruitment pathways and the regulatory frameworks that govern transnational education. This invaluable institutional learning will make future projects smoother and more efficient.

Resilience in the Face of Crisis

The JOIN project succeeded despite extraordinary challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic struck during the first half of the project, bringing with it unprecedented travel restrictions, lockdowns and disruptions to academic calendars worldwide.

Student mobility, which had been a core component of the project's original vision, was severely constrained. In addition, changes to UK immigration rules made recruiting international students even more complicated.

But rather than abandoning their ambitious goals, the team quickly

adapted. They moved activities online, turning to virtual seminars, workshops and planning sessions. Working remotely, they also completed all the administrative preparations required to launch the joint master's programme, including a full suite of marketing and recruitment materials.





A Lasting Legacy

While the launch of the joint MSc programme was ultimately more challenging than anticipated, the experience provided valuable insights into the development of transnational education initiatives in a rapidly changing global environment.

The project highlighted both the opportunities and complexities involved in establishing new international programmes while strengthening institutional capacity and understanding across all partner universities.

JOIN leaves behind a lasting, positive legacy. The project delivered a fully developed, internationally focused curriculum, strengthened research collaboration, generated new academic outputs and deepened professional networks across three continents. These achievements provide a strong platform for future partnerships and demonstrate the value of sustained international engagement in addressing global challenges.

As Professor Lars Johanning of the University of Exeter reflected,

‘Developing the next generation of global leaders in offshore renewable energy will accelerate research, development and innovation, contributing to global energy security, carbon reduction and a cleaner, more prosperous future.’

As the demand for offshore renewable energy expertise continues to grow worldwide, the relationships, knowledge and resources developed through JOIN will remain relevant and impactful. The project stands as a testament to what can be achieved when universities work together across borders, disciplines and cultures, creating a platform for international cooperation and long-term innovation.



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University of Exeter



Project title

Joint Offshore Energy Engineering and Innovation Partnership (JOIN) (2019–2025)



Project introduction

The University of Exeter partnered with Dalian University of Technology and De La Salle University to develop an international collaboration in Offshore Renewable Energy. The project focused on creating a joint MSc programme in Global Renewable Energy Engineering, strengthening academic exchange, and enhancing institutional capacity for future transnational education initiatives.



Major achievements

- Developed a full joint MSc curriculum and programme structure in Global Renewable Energy Engineering
- Delivered virtual and in-person workshops, seminars and collaboration meetings
- Produced 4 joint journal publications and a special issue for *Frontiers in Marine Science*
- Established frameworks for future joint or dual degree collaboration

Project in numbers

1 joint MSc programme developed

3 academic exchange visits completed

4 joint journal publications

1 joint editorial special issue

3 partner universities across the UK, China and the Philippines



Key innovative aspects

Designed a tri-national MSc programme addressing global engineering challenges
Integrated international guest lectures, global case studies and digital collaboration tools into the curriculum
Combined expertise in offshore renewable energy, systems engineering and marine science
Fostered interdisciplinary collaboration across partner institutions



Key takeaway

International higher education partnerships require flexibility, long-term planning and strong institutional collaboration. External factors such as policy changes and global disruptions can significantly impact student mobility and programme recruitment.

'Educating the next generation of global leaders in Offshore Renewable Energy will accelerate research, development and innovations and contribute to global energy security and a cleaner future.' -- Prof. Lars Johanning