

## Interview with Professor Stan Scott, EPS Dean of Internationalisation, Queen's University Belfast



We caught up with Prof. Stan Scott, EPS Dean of Internationalisation, Queen's University Belfast and UK project coordinator for the UK China University Consortium on Engineering Education and Research (UCEER). He told us what the consortium means for him and his university.

**The UCEER is about leading universities coming together to push the boundaries of research and teaching in energy and engineering, isn't it?**

That's broadly correct. Initially the idea was to establish a group of top-class UK universities to work cooperatively with China's Excellence League (E9) universities. This was done under the approval of the Chinese Ministry of Education.

Our initial focus was around energy and intelligent manufacturing in support of both countries' manufacturing ambitions, with emphasis on teaching and research at postgraduate level.

**And are boundaries of research being pushed?**

It's something we're certainly aiming to do. We can only do that by partnering globally and with each other and with companies to develop new technologies. Bringing together the expertise of the UK Russell Group, the top engineering universities in China and industry means we're applying the best minds to joint research projects that have societal impact.

**Did you have a clear idea of what you wanted the UCEER to achieve?**

A priority for us has always been the education of the next generation of engineers, to try and develop a pipeline of highly skilled students with valuable experience of working with their Chinese counterparts. It's about creating future leaders and innovators in engineering. And it's a project that every member of the consortium has engaged with.

We're doing this through our Future Engineers' Leadership and Innovation Academy (FELIA), which we set up with China in 2017 and which builds on the Queen's University Belfast Leadership Institute mini-MBA programme. Over 80 PhD students have participated so far, working together in British and Chinese teams on different technical projects.

Developing engineering leaders for the future, that's been one of the key objectives for my university and I think one of the real successes of the project so far.

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## **What has the impact been for your university of the UK China partnership**

The UCEER has been going for three years and so it's possibly a little early to identify a clear research impact but the success so far is really in the building of a network and making academic connections that will help pave the way for future research excellence.

One of the key things for Queen's University Belfast is that it has given us greater academic standing both in the UK and China, so that has been a boost for us.

## **How do you see the role of the British Council in the evolution of the consortium?**

The British Council in China has been instrumental in the development of the UCEER because it continues to make connections in China that progress the work of the consortium and the relationships within it. The British Council is a bridge between the UK institutions and the various education authorities and institutions in China.

## **Academically and culturally, what have been the rewards for your institution?**

For students and academics, working with people from other cultures and sharing ideas with them are experiences that will be increasingly important in the future. One of the FELIA students said that for them, the experience of working with China has really been a life changing experience.

## **Have there been any challenges?**

There are 18 autonomous universities working together and so from that perspective, consistency of approach or decision-making can sometimes be a challenging process, but the ultimate reward is that we're able to achieve much more by working together to progress engineering research and education for the future.

## **And what have been for you personally the main highlights of being involved in the UCEER since the outset?**

There was the UK-China High Level People to People dialogue event at Lancaster House in London at the end of 2017, hosted by Secretary of State for Health Jeremy Hunt and the Chinese Vice-Premier Madame Liu Yandong, where the lead universities, which form the secretariat of the UCEER, signed a joint declaration to establish the consortium. This was for me a very important milestone in the evolution of the consortium.

On a more personal level, working on the UCEER programme with the British Council has meant I've travelled to places in China I would not otherwise have visited, interacting with academics and industry in ways that I would otherwise not have been able to do.

But one of the key highlights for me - because I helped design it - is the creation of the Leadership Academy to develop engineering leadership that I mentioned earlier, and the subsequent success of that. It's something I'm very proud to have played a part in.