

# Leaders go back to school

A growing number of Chinese institutions are forging partnerships with their western counterparts, says Deborah Harrison

As China's economy continues to grow - pushing 10 per cent per annum - Beijing and Shanghai are home to a growing number of schools that have forged links with their counterparts in the US, UK, Australia, continental Europe and Hong Kong, all dedicated to developing MBA and part-time executive MBA programmes that put students on the fast track to world business leadership.

These joint ventures enable ambitious south-east Asian and western students to develop a vital two-way flow of management culture and business experience.

Clearly one of the significant attractions of the international school, whatever its origin, is its ability to introduce China's future business leaders to their counterparts in other economies.

Cass Business School, City University runs its China EMBA in conjunction with the Bank of China and the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics. The venture was in part the brainchild of Cass alumnus Liu Mingkang, previously President of the Bank of China and now chairman of the high profile China Banking Regulatory Commission. Cass also runs an annual symposium in Shanghai, where students from the London campus can integrate with their south-east Asian counterparts.

"We think it is really important that students who are studying on an international MBA programme have the opportunity to interact with colleagues and businesses in foreign cultures," says David Sims, associate dean for MBA programmes at Cass.

"Over half our London-based students believe they will be doing business in or with China in the future. The symposium also provides an opportunity for our Chinese EMBA students to see the business world through the eyes of their London-based colleagues."

Cass students keep in touch with academics as well as their peers through a Customised Virtual Learning Environment (known as CassLearn). Additionally, the students at the Shanghai schools benefit from face-to-face contact with visiting faculty from London who fly out each month for residential teaching blocks over long weekends. The school's local host in China - the Bank of China - helps with



A billboard advertises an MBA programme. The qualification is becoming increasingly popular as China's economy grows

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the logistics of the course by organising local workshops, providing teaching facilities, and a dedicated team dealing with local course management and administration issues. Within this team, Cass has a resident course officer who is a central point of contact.

Business schools are aware that employers in Europe and the US, who often sponsor their employees on an EMBA programme, can use it as short-term golden handcuffs - a retention tool in a labour market where ambition is virtually synonymous with job-hopping. In China, the executive courses must be relevant to employees committed to a career with a single employer - hence the interest in developing the customised EMBA.

Buck Pei is associate dean and director of the China programme for the WP Carey School of Business at Arizona State University, which offers a customised course for Motorola, as well as open programmes. "The executives we receive on our Motorola EMBA in Beijing are focused on a career path within their company," says Mr Pei. "The course covers all of the EMBA subjects but is designed with the Motorola corporate culture

in mind. This is Motorola's investment in the next generation of managers for its Chinese operation."

WP Carey also offers a Shanghai EMBA developed in co-operation with the Ministry of Finance and delivered in collaboration with the Shanghai National Accounting Institute. This is aimed at senior government

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officials and executives and is delivered face-to-face in Mandarin and English. "China must prepare its state-owned businesses to succeed internationally," Mr Pei stresses. In an initiative to offer the best of the west, in addition to Carey's own staff the course employs faculty from other US schools including MIT, Stanford, NYU and Yale.

The Robert Smith School of Business, University of

Maryland, offers a Beijing and Shanghai EMBA, plus customised courses, for example, for Otis Elevator China. Walter Czarnecki, manager of the school's China Business Development and Executive Programs in Beijing, says: "Location is paramount. Our students are middle-to-senior managers from Chinese government, multinationals and smaller companies looking for a global business perspective."

"They need to find it here in China - they do not have the time to study overseas - and they need a combination of business theory and the practical aspects of management that they can bring to their jobs immediately."

All of these schools are up against mainland China's own stars in the international business school firmament. Rolf Cramer, dean and vice-president of the China Europe International Business School in Shanghai, which has a close working relationship with Cranfield Business School in the UK, says that the schools must understand the cultural background of their students and that the students must appreciate the importance of changing their mindset.

"Frequently these students are already senior in

their organisation and may be responsible for managing thousands of employees but they have never been exposed to modern western management concepts and techniques. They have to unlearn old habits and develop a more flexible and critical approach to new methodologies that are relevant to the market-dominated environment of the west."

In the coming years, corporate China can anticipate further domestic and foreign executive learning initiatives, and with the growing choice of schools will come a keener analysis of the appropriate format for the China EMBA. Ultimately, these programmes will be judged not on the parentage of the school but on how well they deliver business leaders conversant and confident in east-west relations.

Richard Speed, associate dean of faculty resources at Melbourne Business School, which offers an EMBA for the Asia-Pacific region, puts it this way: "The ability to develop a global network of contacts is a vital feature of these courses. Students often start the course thinking that it's all about the qualification. When they leave they believe it's all about the network."