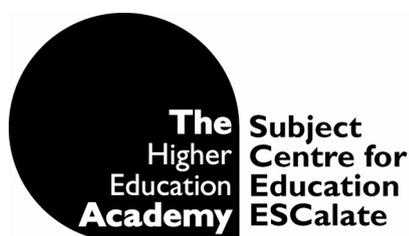


# A CHANGING WORLD: the internationalisation experiences of staff and students (home and international) in UK Higher Education

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## ABSTRACT

Much has been written about the internationalisation of higher education (e.g. Knight, 2008; Caruana & Spurling, 2007), and international student numbers have increased greatly in the UK with the Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI, 1999 & PMI 2, 2006) being one of the main driving forces for recruitment (Trahar, 2007). This project was instigated because a need was felt by the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre Network to hear from the ground, how staff and students viewed internationalisation and to explore how an internationalised curriculum might look from the perspective of different disciplines. Fifteen focus groups were run with staff and with students, both home and international, to listen to their views on what internationalisation meant to them, how it had influenced teaching and learning, and what challenges and successes they had experienced. Participants came from a range of disciplines and from across the UK. Staff in particular showed great awareness of the issues surrounding internationalisation with an appreciation of some of the complexities. Topics raised by participants included recruitment strategies, entry requirements for non-native speakers, PMI, fees, the "British degree", higher education institutions' (HEIs) competition for students in the global marketplace, and internationalising the curriculum. Staff and students described various techniques and strategies for creating inclusive learning environments. Many said how students and staff from across the world had enriched their lives, both personally and professionally. Staff discussed the difficulties of meeting the needs of culturally diverse groups, and both students and staff talked about how far we still have to go in encouraging some students to break out of their familiar cultural groups to socialise cross-culturally. Home students were the hardest group to recruit for this project. Given that they have so much to gain from learning in a culturally diverse environment it is suggested that more work needs to be done in the research area of Internationalisation at Home (Teekens, 2006, Joris, van den Berg & van Ryssen, 2003), and within institutions, to engage not only staff but also home students so that *all* students and staff can gain maximum benefit from the changing higher education landscape.

**Keywords:** internationalisation; higher education; internationalisation at home (IaH); intercultural competence; curriculum; United Kingdom; PMI; focus group; international student; home student

## BACKGROUND

Part of the work of the Higher Education Academy is to support internationalisation initiatives that enhance the student learning experience in UK higher education (HE). It provides some web pages, with useful links to resources and publications related to internationalisation, including teaching and learning and the Bologna process (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/international>).

In a Subject Centre (SC) group meeting (2007), ESCalate (Subject Centre for Education) and LLAS (Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics & Area Studies), in collaboration with other SCs (Business, Management, Accountancy & Finance; Economics; Engineering and Psychology), agreed to work together on the cross discipline project described in this paper, in order to take a snapshot of the current internationalisation experience to inform Higher Education Academy /SC work in this area. Both LLAS and ESCalate had already been active in this area, as had other SCs. ESCalate had commissioned Dr Sheila Trahar to write a Discussion

in Education series booklet for them on this topic (<http://escalate.ac.uk/3559>) and other SCs found this booklet generic enough to be useful to their own communities.

The Higher Education Academy provided funding which paid for some of the time needed for Fiona Hyland, Anne Anderson & Sheila Trahar to work on this project. ESCalate provided additional funding for Julie Anderson's time and to supplement Fiona's time. LLAS made Alison Dickens available for this project.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *Perspectives on Internationalising the Curriculum*

The cultural diversity of the modern university provides us with rich opportunities to learn about each other. Such learning can not only prepare students to cope in a world that is multicultural and interdependent (OECD, 2004) but can also ensure that academics operate beyond local and national perspectives. It is, thus, congruent with the increasing public awareness of the importance of intercultural understanding and dialogue. In addition, as European societies become increasingly multicultural, cross-cultural capability can be developed 'at home'. Internationalisation at Home (IaH) acknowledges that the majority of students (and staff) are *not* mobile and thus the opportunities for cultural capability will not be gained by travelling to other countries for study or work. In many ways IaH is much more inclusive than 'internationalisation' as it focuses our attention on "academic learning that blends the concepts of *self, strange, foreign* and *otherness*" (Teekens, 2006; 17, original emphasis) and is congruent with the perspectives of those such as Appadurai (2001), Haigh (2008) and Sanderson (2007) who foreground the importance and value of personal awareness in intercultural encounters in higher education. Appadurai (2001) speaks of the personal journey of internationalisation, Sanderson (2007) calls for the 'internationalisation of the academic Self', while Haigh (2008, p.432) suggests that the "best approach is to build from the assumption that most students are 'international'". One of the aims of the project was to articulate strategies for enabling students and staff who 'stay at home' to benefit both from the greater cultural diversity in their own countries and from internationalised higher education communities. In spite of those such as Teekens (2000) and Ippolito (2007) who position educators as holding clear responsibilities to effect intercultural communication in the international classroom, this is something that does not just happen (Otten, 2000). Indeed there can be resistance to 'difference' from many corners and 'international students' scapegoated as the source of academics' frustrations (Devos, 2003) yet:

Addressing fears about change in a positive and constructive manner and assisting established and new participants to explore and optimise the match between their theories of teaching and learning and those required in an internationalised institution can help to foster an overall positive climate (Turner & Robson, 2008; 68).

In April 2006, Tony Blair announced the second phase of his Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) in which more than £27 million is to be invested over the next two years by the government, the British Council, the education sector and businesses to attract more than 100,000 international students by 2011. Discussions of internationalisation tend, therefore, to be driven more by income generation for cash-strapped higher education institutions (HEIs) (Haigh, 2008) rather than the internationalised curricula that might prepare learners – and academics - for a multicultural world that is interdependent (OECD, 2004). One of the key aims of PMI Phase 2 is to "ensure the quality of the student experience" (Clark, 2006; 80) yet many academics sense a paucity of support, resources and recognition for innovative teaching practices in environments that are culturally complex. On the other hand, the attitude of the academic is crucial in determining possibilities for intercultural dialogue; it is our beliefs about learning and teaching that guide the way we work, that influence whether we position 'international students' as needing to acquire a set of skills to assimilate with the dominant pedagogical approaches or whether we position ourselves - local academics and students - as needing to learn and be open to change.

International students are no more a homogeneous group than any other group of people or students, for example, home students, yet the terms are often used as if they were descriptors of homogeneity. For the purposes of the project, international students were defined as those studying full-time and who are not resident ordinarily in the UK. A home or local student was defined as someone who is domiciled in the UK or

other European Union (EU) country. Mainland EU students are often conceptualised and spoken of in similar ways to international students because they rarely speak English as their first language. In the project, several mainland EU students self-identified as 'home' students and participated in a 'home' student focus group.

The internationalisation of higher education tends to be theorised in the literature at the organisational level (i.e. strategic decisions) and/or is elided with the growing numbers of 'international students'; there are very few in-depth investigations of the interactions between international students and academics (Brunner, 2006), especially in the UK. It may therefore be naïve to assume that the "core players in the process" (Teekens, 2000; 26) will welcome the encouragement of more growth in the sector unless the positive aspects of this growth can be shown. Appadurai's (2001) notion of weak (symbolic) and strong (transformative) internationalisation will be used as a framework for reconceptualising the meaning of 'becoming internationalised', viewing it as a "personal journey of deconstruction and reconstruction" (Sanderson, 2004, 16).

In his study of the internationalisation strategies of four universities in Canada, Australia, the USA and Europe, Taylor (2004), cautioned that they were "much less forthcoming in recognising the difficulties in setting out clear procedures" (ibid; 161) of relating internationalisation to the pedagogical purpose of all disciplines. To such observations, we can add the importance of *recognising and valuing* a range of academic traditions. Local teaching and learning practices are rarely subjected to critical scrutiny. Even less often do we embrace the experiences of students and academics from different cultural backgrounds and consider how we might learn from them about the complex and culturally situated influences on teaching and learning approaches (Trahar, 2007, 2006, Sanderson, 2007, Hayes & Introna, 2005). A core theme of the project was cultural influence on pedagogy, the value of recognising and articulating such influence in an international context together with practical suggestions on how to develop culturally inclusive approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. Pedagogy can be conceptualised as a moral and political practice (Giroux, 2004). It follows, therefore that, as educators, we have a responsibility to provide opportunities for intercultural learning. A critical pedagogic approach seeks to dismantle the hierarchy that creates a power differential between academics and students (Ippolito, 2007) yet in an environment where there are multiple identities (ibid) this can create a problem. In seeking to dismantle such hierarchies, we may overlook the different ways that people understand each other's behaviour and 'hierarchies'. 'Hierarchies' may be very familiar to many students who can feel threatened by apparent attempts to dismantle them. No matter how much we talk of shifting and fragmentary identities (Sarup, 1996, Fox, 2006) resisting essentialised notions of the latter, we *all* bring different understandings to the international classroom, including ways in which the relationship between learner and teacher is conceptualised (Salili, 2001).

The majority of research conducted in this field tends to compare the experiences of students from 'one culture' with those of another, or is an evaluation of internationalisation strategies developed by institutions. Such research is valuable but neglects to explore the complexities of interactions between students and academics from many different cultures. Reference may be made to the need for cultural sensitivity in pedagogical approaches, but this is rarely underpinned by stories from the field, nor informed by accounts of the experience of practitioners in grappling with layers of cultural complexity. There is often an assumption that intercultural learning will happen automatically – that is if it is considered to be advantageous – without effort being made by learners and teachers to effect such a process.

### *Defining internationalisation*

Global convergence and encounters with difference bring transformations in people's living practices... This is true of all walks of life, but particularly true of education (Joseph, Marginson, Yang, 2005; 3)

Internationalisation and globalisation are terms that are often used interchangeably - "different but dynamically linked concepts" (OECD, 1999; 14) – yet inadequately understood, defying simple explanation (Sanderson, 2004). Altbach & Knight (2007; 290-291) offer a simple and plausible distinction:

Globalization is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Internationalization includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems

and institutions - and even - individuals - to cope with the global academic environment...Globalization may be unalterable but internationalisation involves many choices.

Their phrase 'and even individuals' imply that 'individuals' somehow are not actors in the drama of the changing nature of higher education and yet it is we, the individual students and academics, who constitute the 'deeply embedded values, cultures and traditions' (Stenasker et al., 2008; 2) of higher education, the values, cultures and traditions that are rarely articulated and exposed to critical scrutiny (Trahar, 2007, Turner & Robson, 2008). An "unconsidered pursuit of the international can lead to a less, rather than a more, effective international contribution" (Halliday, 1999, p.99). Higher education discourse is laden with theorising about internationalisation and globalisation. It is not suggested that this discourse is 'unconsidered', but, in spite of claims of vigorous pursuit of revisionist and deconstructive agendas in First World universities to reflect the social and cultural diversity of modern higher education systems (Scott, 1998), there continues to be little research into the complexities of intercultural encounters and communication in such environments.

In the higher education context, the OECD (1999) suggests that internationalisation is the integration of an international/intercultural dimension into all of the activities of a university, including the teaching, research and service functions. In the UK, however, the internationalisation of higher education still tends to be elided with the increasing numbers of international students with a vast gulf between the marketing strategies promoting the opportunities for mutual understanding offered by the fresh and enriching perspectives of international students (British Council, 2003) and the lived experiences of academics and the student community (Turner & Robson, 2006). Thus "the opportunities offered by a diverse educational context are not self-evident and self-fulfilling in terms of ...intercultural competence" (Otten, 2003, p.13).

The practice of intercultural study, and training in intercultural competence are, however, becoming increasingly commonplace within the fields of language learning, cultural studies and business studies. Here, through the work of a number of academics and practitioners the teaching of intercultural issues is going on within academia. Crawshaw (2005) summarises some of the work of those working in the fields of intercultural competence (Byram 1997), intercultural awareness (Phipps & Gonzales 2004), intercultural pragmatics (Crawshaw and Harrison 2007), translation studies (Hervey & Higgins 2002), intercultural communication studies (Talkington & Lengel 2004) and cultural studies (Hofstede 1994). The emerging literature is informing internationalisation in practice and contributing to the development of pedagogic strategies and intercultural skills for both staff and students.

Following on from the aforementioned work, this project aimed to listen to staff and students. What could they tell us about internationalisation in UK HE in 2008?

## METHODS

The aims of the project were to explore the perspectives of students and teaching staff on:

1. what the terms 'internationalisation', 'internationalising the curriculum', 'teaching and learning in an international landscape' mean to them,
2. the extent of internationalisation within their institution,
3. the effects of internationalisation on teaching and learning,
4. the challenges they have faced, and their successes,
5. how internationalisation could be developed further in their discipline and institution.

The aims were addressed by running 15 focus groups in five locations (Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester, London, York) with students and staff from institutions around the UK and from a range of disciplines in higher education. The focus groups were carried out between February and May 2008. Six groups were run with staff participants, five with international students and four with home students.

### *Methodology*

Focus groups, used increasingly in educational research, have been shown to be a useful tool to generate data in the form of facts, opinions, experiences and feelings (Chioncel, Van Der Veen, Wildemeersch & Jarvis, 2003). Additionally, the interaction process can stimulate memories and debate which is less likely in an interview situation (Wilkinson, 2003). It was decided for the purposes of this project, that staff, international students and home students should be placed in separate focus groups, to encourage open expression of views.

### *Recruitment*

Offers of help from other Higher Education Academy Subject Centres determined the choice of locations. In particular, Business, Management, Accountancy and Finance Subject Centre (BMAF) helped organise an internationalisation event in Leicester. The BMAF event included time for focus groups to be conducted with staff and students for this project. The Economics Network, Engineering Subject Centre and Psychology Network facilitated the instigation of focus groups in London, Birmingham and York respectively, by linking ESCalate with a host institution.

The focus groups were advertised on the ESCalate website and the host institution website, with the aim given as groups 'to explore perceptions and practice in internationalising the curriculum from a discipline, practitioner and student perspective'. Staff within the host institutions and Subject Centres helped to promote the project amongst colleagues and students to aid the recruitment of participants. People were invited to register and attend the focus group most relevant to them dependent on whether they regarded themselves as an international student, home student or member of staff. Both undergraduates and postgraduates were invited to attend. No payments were offered, however, each event included a free buffet lunch.

### *Focus group procedure*

Verbal consent to video and tape-record the focus groups was obtained from each participant. Interaction between participants was encouraged and confidentiality assured. A topic guide was used to initiate and direct the focus group conversation (see Appendix 1). Topics included how internationalisation may have affected their discipline, the curriculum, and teaching and learning.

At each session there was one facilitator to moderate the groups (FH<sup>1</sup>) and one co-ordinator in charge of the recording equipment (AA). The moderator style was one of process facilitation (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990) whereby the moderator ensured that the topics of interest were covered but allowed the group to control the direction of discussion. During the three focus groups in London an additional moderator took observational notes (AD). Each group lasted approximately one hour.

At the end of each group, participants completed a demographic questionnaire and a feedback sheet (Appendix 2 & 3) which allowed them to include comments they may have felt unable to share in the group or which time had not allowed them to express.

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<sup>1</sup> In the 2nd staff group in Leicester, participant 'R' acted as both moderator & participant and FH observer

### Sample

As shown in Table 1, it was difficult to attract home students to the focus groups. On two occasions only one person came and a one-to-one interview was conducted instead. The data from these interviews is included in this report since although the interviews did not allow for group interaction, they did allow the participants to discuss their experiences in depth.

Table 1: Showing number of participants in each focus group

Location	Focus group with staff - N	Focus group with international students - N	Focus group with home students - N
Birmingham	7	2	1
Bristol	3	6	8
Leicester <sup>2</sup>	7 & 1(+4) <sup>3</sup>	2	0
London	6	4	1
York	7	5	3
Totals	31	19	13

Table 2 indicates characteristics of the participants such as age, gender, occupation, discipline. Staff and students from the disciplines of Business, Education, Engineering and Psychology predominated. This was because the departments within the host institutions were involved in recruiting staff and students and thus participants were more likely to come from these host departments namely Business in Leicester, Education in Bristol, Engineering in Birmingham and Psychology in York. However, because the groups were advertised on ESCalate's and the host institutions' websites, staff and students from other disciplines participated, (e.g. Arts, Mathematics and Pharmacy).

### Data analysis

Verbatim transcripts were produced from the recordings of the focus groups. Content analysis was used to develop categories and themes that linked with the aims of the project. The stages involved colour coding each transcript to link data to each of the aims (Feast & Bretag, 2005). Data were then manually sorted and re-sorted into emerging themes by the moderator FH. Co-authors then received coded transcripts for verification.

<sup>2</sup> Two staff focus groups were held here. The second session was a continuation of the first session.

<sup>3</sup> 1 new participant ('R') in the 2nd staff group counted towards the total numbers of staff in the project. The other 4 staff had participated in the 1st staff group earlier in the day.

Table 2: Socio-demographics of staff and students in the focus groups

	Staff (N=31)	International Students (N=19)	Home Students (N=13)
<b>Age</b> - mean years (s.d.)	47.4 (8.4) <sup>4</sup>	31.2 (9.4) <sup>5</sup>	29.7 (10.9)
<b>Gender</b>			
• Female	12	10	11
• Male	19	9	2
<b>Staff Occupation</b>			
• Lecturer	7	-	-
• Senior/principal lecturer	11	-	-
• Professor	1	-	-
• Research fellow	2	-	-
• Programme co-ordinator / director	8	-	-
• Dean	1	-	-
• Other	1	-	-
<b>Students</b>			
• Undergraduate	-	4	3
• Postgraduate	-	15	10
<b>Discipline</b>			
• Business, finance, accountancy, marketing, human resources	10	4	-
• Education	6	8	8
• Engineering	5	2	1
• Economics	2	-	-
• Arts	1	-	-
• English for academic purposes	1	-	-
• Mathematics	1	-	-
• Pharmacy	1	-	-
• Psychology	3	5	4
• Sociology	1	-	-
<b>Ethnic Group</b>			
• White British	18	-	4
• White European	4	1	4
• White Other	3	3	1
• Black British	-	-	1
• Chinese British	-	-	1
• Palestinian	1	-	-
• Black African	1	1	-
• Black Caribbean	-	1	-
• Chinese	3	8	-
• Japanese	-	1	1
• Malaysian	-	2	-
• Indian	1	1	1
• Pakistani	-	1	-
<b>Where in the world do you consider "home"?</b>			
• UK	20	-	8
• Other	5	13	4
• UK & other	3	2	1
• 'Wherever I am'	2	4	-
• Don't know	1	-	-

<sup>4</sup> missing N=8<sup>5</sup> missing N=2

## RESULTS

**Aim 1:** To explore the perspectives of students and teaching staff on what the terms 'internationalisation', 'internationalising the curriculum', 'teaching and learning in an international landscape' mean to them,

**Aim 2:** To explore the perspectives of students and teaching staff on the extent of internationalisation within their institution,

The moderator (FH) began the staff focus groups by asking what the term 'internationalisation' meant to them, to begin to address Aim 1 of the project. This prompted wide-ranging discussions which were dominated by participants' experiences and perceptions, not academically defined definitions. Internationalisation terminology was discussed hand-in-hand with debates about internationalisation in UK institutions. Consequently, emerging themes from Aims 1 and 2 are presented together as shown in Figure 1. Participants were allowed a free rein to talk about internationalisation and so it can be argued that the issues raised were ones they felt most significant. For instance, the moderator did not ask about the motivations for increasing international student numbers; this issue was however, raised, in some form, at all of the staff focus groups. These themes are now discussed in turn.

Fig. 1. Talking about internationalisation: key themes

Aim 1 UK HE Courses - the package being delivered	Aim 2 Views about what is happening in UK institutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internationalisation at all levels: teaching, research &amp; service functions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internationalisation - a step forward for HE?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity of students &amp; staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment and fees</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The internationalised curriculum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entry requirements for non-native speakers - language tests</li> </ul>

### UK HE Courses - the package being delivered

#### *Internationalisation at all levels: teaching, research & service functions*

Internationalisation was described in various ways by staff and students. Some of the attempts at defining "internationalisation" were similar to published definitions (see page 5). Examples such as "it has to be everybody working together on this" and "internationalisation is all our responsibility, across the board" are aligned with the concept of internationalisation at all activity levels within a university: teaching, research and service functions (OECD, 1999). One lecturer's understanding of the importance of integrating service functions into internationalisation activities is illustrated below.

...if the person at the front, i.e. the lecturer, and the support staff - because there's a whole arena of admin and support staff here, who comes into play, say 'oh, I don't understand', puts the phone down, 'I don't know what that degree means, you're not entitled to come'. Unless all of those players are aware of their management role, it falls into complete disarray. (Staff)

The need to adapt to a changing world was another way of talking about internationalisation, as in the example below.

So if we think of the challenge of living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as living in a very expanding multicultural society and world, that to me is the challenge of internationalisation ... it's about equipping people to live in that kind of world, now and in the future. (Staff)

Associated with "a changing world" was the idea that the UK was in competition with other nations for international students. For instance, one member of staff felt that, in this respect, Australia is "going to beat the

pants off us". Other staff and students additionally mentioned USA, Canada, European countries as competing institutions.

"The British degree" was held up to scrutiny by some participants, some with pride, and others with an acknowledgement that there might be some arrogance associated with its esteem.

I think there is a sense when we have to play to our strengths. I actually think British education is pretty good, I really do, and there are many aspects I wouldn't want to see diluted and changed or radically re-invented, for a sake of a market that happens to be here at the moment ... I think we need to lean but not necessarily fall over. (Staff)

A couple of participants questioned the use of the term "internationalisation"; one student said it was like "a buzz word that teachers will say without ever really backing it up or explaining really what it is". Another participant, a lecturer, went further to describe their emotional reaction.

I also think it'd be much better if you took away the label of internationalisation. Because it just sounds ... just the very word makes me kind of shiver, and I know it has the same effect on a lot of academics, it just sounds like another government quango-ey kind of thing. (Staff)

#### *Diversity of students & staff*

A strong element of the internationalisation package described by participants, and especially students, was the diversity of people in the university environment. One group of home students talked about how much students from a range of countries added to the richness of classroom debate through their differing and interesting perspectives. There were, however, comments that there is still some way to go in forming the international communities that one might expect from increasing the cultural diversity of staff and students. Firstly, some staff and students felt that the diversity in some universities was not as wide as that in the local environment.

Universities can present themselves as champions of internationalisation, but then you go to the town centre and find that the town centre is a lot more international than the actual university. (Staff)

Secondly, some international students described how they rarely met home students since their courses were filled with mostly international students. One lecturer felt that this "ghettoising" of international students was a result of giving courses the title "international" thus biasing the likely applicants. Thirdly, many staff and students described difficulties, observed and experienced, in forming relationships across cultural groups. This issue is expanded on further in Aim 3: group work (page 16) and Aim 4: the student experience (page 21).

#### *The internationalised curriculum*

When defining internationalisation, staff often brought up the issue of curriculum. It was seen as part of the internationalisation package being delivered to all students and was discussed extensively in the focus groups. However, there were differences in perspectives depending on which discipline staff were working in. This issue is explored more fully in Aim 3: the curriculum (page 14).

## Views about what is happening in UK institutions

#### *Internationalisation - a step forward for HE?*

When staff were asked to define internationalisation and to describe what was happening in their institutions, the topics discussed were at three levels: (a) British government agenda, (b) agendas of HE institutions, and finally, (c) the effects on staff, of government & institutional agendas.

#### (a) British government agenda

Some staff referred to the Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI, 1999 & PMI 2, 2006) as the major impetus for the institutional drive to recruit international students. Some expressed doubts about the motivation for increasing international student numbers, as in this edited exchange between two lecturers.

- Staff X There's an implicit government agenda which is to make as much money as you can.
- Staff Y There's a government agenda about attracting international students... I think that the government's agenda is very disappointing. PMI2 is still very much about student recruitment.
- Staff X My fear is that if they did concentrate on it more, it would increase the bureaucracy and reduce the effectiveness.

Although PMI 2 includes a strand to improve the quality of the international student experience, this was not referred to by participants.

#### (b) Agendas of HE institutions

Participants thought about the role of institutions in internationalisation. The following exchange, with the same members of staff as in the last example, illustrates some of the considered responses. The first speaker indicates the inclusive nature of internationalisation, "for all our students". The second speaker discusses the need for caution when making institutional changes on the basis of world trends.

- Staff Y I think internationalisation is about changing our institutions so that they provide a curriculum and learning experience for all our students which gives them an international perspective on their subject area, on their approach to the world, on themselves as human beings.
- Staff X That assumes that the institution must adapt to the world regardless. Some institutions might feel that we're doing very well as we are, we don't want to change the whole institution in order to make it suitable for large numbers of students from abroad.
- Staff Y Oh indeed, and I possibly expressed myself badly, because I think the need to change is to make it suitable for our own students as they go out into that world we which can't ignore.

The responsibility of HE institutions to produce a workforce that can compete internationally was brought up in three of the staff focus groups. References to an 'internationalised curriculum' as one method of doing this, were made. One participant acknowledged that institutions, quite reasonably, would not take the same approach to this, whilst another accepted that institutional changes often took time to make.

#### (c) The effects of government & institutional agendas on staff

One lecturer, who felt that the push for internationalisation had come from outside academia, questioned how much "buy-in" there was from university staff as a result. Overall, the feelings of these (self-selected) focus groups attendees to internationalisation were more positive than negative. Many individuals talked about how they had adapted their teaching to accommodate the needs of an increasingly diverse student body.

#### *Recruitment and fees*

On the subject of defining internationalisation, one lecturer said that on one level "internationalisation means recruitment; it means reaching out and pulling students in". This was expressed by some of the other staff with additional concerns for teaching and learning quality, as in the example below.

... part of the problem is that universities are desperately strapped for cash and their motivation for having international students is financial. And probably in a lot of cases the people who decide how many students, as many as possible, are not the people who then have to deal with them... So I think the problem is basically that the system has become too financially driven without, you know, care for the quality. And it may well be that it'll be self-correcting, that we'll get fewer and fewer foreign students, and that might not be a bad thing. (Staff)

#### *Entry requirements for non-native speakers - language tests*

Concerns were expressed by some participants that the entry requirements on English language tests such as IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) were set too low, resulting in students being admitted with inadequate language skills. One lecturer felt that with so many practice papers available, these tests were now easily 'crackable'. A couple of participants felt that institutions were accepting students with low language scores to win the fees associated with international

students. Participants discussed the consequences of accepting students who go on to struggle with the course requirements because of poor language skills, as in the case of this home student who talked about her friend.

I have known like one person I lived with actually ... it's a sad story, because she was doing a music course, and she actually had to quit her course because she couldn't cope with the course. But I think that in a way, I was kind of like 'Well why did the University let her in?' – I, kind of, got a bit angry about ... they really shouldn't have let ... if she couldn't ... her English was so bad that she couldn't cope with the course. (Home Student)

## The curriculum

**Aim 3:** To explore the perspectives of students and teaching staff on teaching and learning

*Can all disciplines have an internationalised curriculum?*

Staff were asked to discuss what impact working with students from a range of cultures had on their approach to designing the curriculum. The definition of international curricula has been given as: curricula with an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students to perform (professionally/socially) in an international and multicultural context, and designed for domestic students as well as foreign students (IDP, 1995, p.1). Staff from some of the disciplines represented including business, sociology and education indicated that a curriculum with an international orientation was possible and that they used international case studies within lectures as examples of how they achieved this. However, the following quote from a lecturer in the area of business and human resource management illustrates several points. Firstly, that they also aim to provide students with skills to find out what they need to know for themselves thus enabling them to apply learning to their own international contexts. Secondly, that examples from the UK are also useful when learning is gleaned from them, and thirdly, that internationalisation of the curriculum is not achieved solely by adding international examples to lecture presentations.

...but maybe my point is that I don't necessarily feel an obligation to ensure that my students leave me knowing exactly what the market position of Tartar Trucks is. I need them to leave me with the skills and the abilities for them to source that information for themselves. So perhaps there's a sense in which the immediate trend following of the international business is going to be something that we would never achieve to the standard that we might want. But the deployment of skills, the enhancement of skills for students to be able to access that, is really where I want to be. So whether my case studies are purely UK-centric, it's the learning that's generated from those. And perhaps we should be looking at curriculum modifications throughout and not just tagging it with this international search for examples...(Staff)

Another participant considered the needs of home students but also compared the challenges for different disciplines.

I think the way we try to interpret it is perhaps not from the perspective of the international student but from the UK home students... You know how do we take those home students out of the Anglocentric curriculum and put them into an internationalised curriculum... what are those international dimensions to their experience. It's quite easy, or relatively straight forward in areas such as theology, history and education... other subjects do present more of a challenge. (Staff)

Several participants remarked on the difficulties of providing an international curriculum in areas such as neuroscience and physics. A lecturer from engineering felt that teaching in their discipline centred on theory and that theory was international in nature.

...the easiest way to internationalise technical material is to use first principles, which are clearly international – a building falls down the same way whichever country it's in. (Staff)

However, a student from the same School appreciated that attempts were made to apply theory to practice and it is possible that some of this practice may include examples from across the world.

... in China we learn more about the theories, but here we learn more about the applications. Yeah, we may learn some techniques, we know it can be used in the industry. So it makes us feel useful to the society. Yeah after two years' study in China I really didn't know what I could do when I finish my subject, my programme. But here I know yeah we can design ... we can go to the steel factories ... yeah we can design many things used in cars... (International Student)

The aforementioned lecturer in engineering went on to say that if defining the internationalisation of the curriculum more broadly, then they did this through their group work activities. Pedagogy which encourages

learning in groups of students from a range of cultures and backgrounds is not discipline specific, and therefore allows all disciplines to become engaged in the process of internationalisation.

Finally, one academic co-ordinator felt that internationalisation aside, curriculum design should start with the end in mind; what do we want graduates to become.

... I think the starting point has to be what do we want graduates to become, and do we expect the graduates to become the same in multiple contexts. You know we talk about independent thinkers, creative collaborators, we give all these graduate attributes, but I don't think we've actually, as we've seen Internationalisation, particularly in Business Schools, I don't think we've actually sat down and thought what do we expect the graduates to be. And if you like, that's the starting point of designing curricula, what do we want them to be and we design around that. I've certainly never become aware of any engagement of that kind of thought-process, what do we expect graduates from Business Schools to be and what will be their contribution to a global economy. (Staff)

#### *Problems associated with attempts to internationalise the curriculum*

The main problem discussed by both staff and students across several focus groups was the imposed restrictions in curriculum development when programmes were accredited by professional organisations. One engineering lecturer felt that given the dominance of accreditation it seemed odd to even consider an international element to curriculum design and another remarked that as a consequence there was no such consideration.

One member of staff felt that although they were unable to make curriculum changes as they might wish, the trade-off was that students would get an accredited degree. This sentiment is echoed by a student in the following extract:

So the question of the curriculum and did it encourage internationalism ... it doesn't encourage or inhibit, it's neither. It's just ... it's a tool to get through what we need to do to pass an exam to get a qualification. What I don't find it doing is opening avenues where we can compare or contrast or delve into the way that people work and the way that cultures might approach psychology – which is what I'm interested in as well. (Home Student)

Home students in this focus group spent considerable time discussing that although they felt their curriculum was not international, because of accreditation, their conversations over coffee and outside class made for an international experience.

Another participant, however, was in the process of considering the implications of accreditation for a course they had developed in Malaysia.

... our intention was to get accreditation by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, which meant that we had to make the course really UK based, because that was what we were after. And so those two years taught in Malaysia had to really, 'inculcate' is the term, inculcate them into the whole ethos of UK pharmacy ... and we really really centred on that and how we should do that. So I'm now thinking 'Mm, this is a really interesting one', cos I now really need to broaden this out ... and trying to get that balance is interesting. (Staff)

Other problem areas included trying to balance the curriculum to accommodate the differing intellectual and language abilities of students. Fears were expressed about the possibility of diluting the academic content when there was a concentration on skills-based learning and discussion activities.

Practical difficulties were also mentioned in relation to getting permissions for international students to carry out work experience and schools-based research projects. For instance, in the area of education, one staff participant discussed that planning work placements within the curriculum was problematic since it was not possible to offer them to international students. Related to this, a couple of staff mentioned, that they had to consider that ethical and consent procedures in usage here for project work, could possibly be quite different to those used in other countries where their students would be collecting data.

# Teaching

## *Teaching strategies*

Lecturers discussed numerous strategies which they used to teach multi-cultural and mixed-ability classes. Since many of these have been described elsewhere (e.g. Carroll & Ryan, 2005) they are simply listed here as checklists.

## Language

- avoid culture-specific idioms, proverbs and analogies,
- keep your language neutral
- think carefully before making a humorous comment which might be misinterpreted
- balance language and subject matter to cater for non-native speakers & students with high level language ability
- ask students what words would they use in their context e.g. what does 'policy' or 'politics' mean in their countries.

## Teaching delivery

- have two parallel dialogues whilst you are teaching: talk about the content, and talk about your academic approach
- explain how British education is delivered and what is expected from students
- offer multimodal delivery with visual support
- use international examples and case studies
- timing - teach at a moderate pace
- when a lecturer is asking questions in class allow students time to think, and time to verbalise their thoughts
- ask questions that have no 'right' answer to encourage debating skills
- allow students to practice writing using small and regular writing tasks in class time
- use active reading tasks whereby reading can be done in groups of mixed ability and questions can be used to guide the debate
- let students know that you have an interest in their culture
- draw on students' past experiences
- explore other epistemological traditions and education systems in the classroom
- encourage experiential learning
- use short quizzes to encourage student interactions
- draw into debate even the most reluctant students, "I throw chocolate at them" to get them involved, said one lecturer
- Use Virtual Learning Environments e.g. Moodle & Blackboard, to post handouts in advance of the lectures. Students can read them, check meanings of words and then derive more from the lecture.
- make sure everyone can hear and understand contributions from all students

Students were asked about the teaching strategies they had experienced, and as you would expect, students gave both positive and negative feedback. For instance, one group of international students talked about lecturers using international examples in their lectures. One student added "there was no room to discuss what is happening in my country". This led to participants describing how much they appreciated lecturers' attempts at using international examples whilst acknowledging that this was not always possible.

## *Group work*

Many lecturers said that they used group work activities in the class room and for assignments. This topic generated much discussion amongst both staff and students, perhaps indicating that this is currently a challenging area in higher education teaching. The extract below illustrates part of the problem, that students like to work with friends rather than reaching beyond their familiar groups.

Yeah, when I came to the lecture room it seems like white people sit at the back, white people, and then in the middle some like me, yellow coloured people, and then at the front,

black people. And when they divide groups, just like Malaysia students will go with Malaysia students. Muslim students would like to go with Muslim students. White people will get white people together.

... people are still sitting (like this) for a whole year (International Student)

Staff debated whether they should organise students into groups themselves, ensuring a balance of ability and culture. Many were, of course, doing this already, with some success. However, one sticking point, making group cohesion more difficult was *assessed* group work. In the words of one lecturer "you can sense a certain resistancy to accepting a foreign students by home students, because they (home students) expect they will drag them down", and as explained by another member of staff "if there's an individualist outcome then people will naturally not want to work with people that they think will weaken their performance". A couple of participants spoke of occasionally having to intervene in groups to re-distribute work or to talk to dominant members to encourage group cohesion.

When the students talked about this issue, although some expressed difficulties, the majority spoke positively about their experiences. They described how sometimes they chose their own groupings and how sometimes the lecturer arranged the groups. When groups were arranged for them, students said that socialisation improved, as well as their own cultural competency. More than one student recounted tales of how difficult the process was at first, but how, in the end, they were successful. One group of home students felt that if group work was to be engineered to encourage social groups then this should be done at the start of the course, as illustrated in this edited text.

Student A I think it's important if there is going to be any effort to mix students you have to do it from the very beginning of the course...

Student B I think at the beginning that's really vital, because after a term you don't really have a reason to turn round to the person and say 'Hi I'm ...'

Student C You must feel a bit weird like. It's like 'Well have you not got your friends yet?' or something. That's what you think other people might be thinking.

Whatever strategies are used to encourage effective group work, it should be remembered that some students find working in groups a very difficult experience and one that could be eased by careful management.

I remember I was pretty scared in the early stages because of all the, especially in the seminar, it's just British students – I was quiet, I didn't talk a lot... I feel pretty lonely, should I use this word?  
(International Student)

## Learning

### *Language skills*

The international students who were non-native speakers were keen to discuss the English language challenges they were coping with, as part of their learning. The critical appraisal of research, and writing reflectively, seemed to be particularly challenging areas.

As discussed on page 12 the language scores on standardised tests allowed for course entry, were discussed by staff. One lecturer felt that it would be worth considering how much culturally embedded teaching practice might affect perceptions of language ability in non-native speakers.

The other thing is we ascribe far too many of the problems that we have today with international students language, rather than cultural issues. It's often 'oh it's a language issue'. But some of the issues are with our own practice and we don't tend to question the way we present because that's the way we were taught. (Staff)

### *Independent learning & assignments*

Students spoke about their learning experiences. Some said they found their coursework relatively easy and some found aspects of their learning more difficult. The challenges mentioned were: becoming an independent

learner, applying teachings and finding research relevant to their own country, writing essays, time management, proofreading, critical analysis, and avoiding plagiarism.

A couple of students made requests for further guidance when first approaching assignments or in the case of the example below, receiving back marked assignments.

We don't want to see assignments with circles here and there, question marks here and there, double lines here and there, and then they expect us to know ourselves what's wrong with our piece of paper. So we need guidance. (International Student)

#### *Learning support*

Students talked about the support that was available to them for their studies and many were currently using learning support or had done so in the past, to reportedly good effect. However, some staff felt care needed to be taken to ensure that support was not seen as remedial, as they saw this as adversely affecting the uptake of these resources.

... in India, the students who were coming to the UK were in many respects the 'elite of the elite'. They were students who had the financial backing and family support to enable them to come to the UK in the first place. They were students who had the wherewithal to think about an international education and they were students who had the ability to achieve the academic entry requirements. So they considered themselves, and quite rightly so, to be a very special group of students. And the first thing we do when they come here is offer them, as they see it, remedial support. And so when you say to them, there's all this English language help, there's all this help with writing, it's 'Me, I don't need help, I am top achiever in my country, I am top achiever in my university'. And it's this, it's a bit like you were saying earlier, a sort of switching the mentality about how we approach things. And that was the huge block, 'Yes, inside I might acknowledge that my English isn't as good as it might be', but there's no way I'm going to avail myself of something I see as a remedial support mechanism. (Staff)

One solution, in practice in some of the departments represented, was to create a module within a course that dealt with English language support and study skills but which was also credit-bearing so as not to increase student workload detrimentally e.g. a module called 'English in Business' in the case of a Business Studies degree.

Some participants mentioned that they had noticed cultural differences in seeking support resulting in some students struggling unnecessarily without help. One participant speculated if there was a hidden dyslexia issue amongst the international students with some students coping with an undiagnosed learning difficulty which was being confused with English language problems.

Staff in more than one focus group talked about the consequences of failing international students.

... we allow progression to degrees if they've done 7 out of 8 modules. If they pass 6 they're supposed to go on to an HND, but so many of them, they beg and beg and beg, because of the loss of face at home, to an HND, because it's not regarded in the same way that a degree is regarded. And so myself and other members of staff who are involved in their progression have this every year and it's quite heartbreaking, it's very difficult. (Staff)

As part of a mindful practice of teaching in higher education there needs to be as one lecturer put it "a recognition of what's been invested in them, both financially and emotionally, to get them here".

## The staff experience

**Aim 4:** to explore the perspectives of students and teaching staff on the challenges they have faced, and their successes

### *Challenges*

Although staff were happy to talk about difficulties, they most often phrased their responses in terms of "challenges staff face in general" rather than the more personal "challenges I face". It is suggested that this may be because staff attending the focus groups were particularly drawn to them because of a positive attitude towards internationalisation. Group effects may also have been a factor where participants may not have wanted to portray themselves negatively in front of other participants.

However, even with much of the discussion centred on the staff experience in general, several themes emerged. These were that participants reported that some staff sometimes feel that:

- teaching international students can be difficult and the challenge is not enjoyable,
- having to change is not easy,
- they do not always have the necessary experience and qualifications beyond the UK,
- staff development can be seen by some as 'remedial' and thought questionable when they have several years teaching experience

The following extract illustrates the perceptions of one participant about the experiences of some lecturing staff.

...they are usually very competent lecturers but they don't enjoy it. They really do not enjoy it. And it seems 'oh, they don't understand what I'm saying, it takes so long to read through their work, they don't participate in class, when they say something I don't understand it'. All of those barriers to effective engagement are part of that management issue, of how do you manage it. (Staff)

Another extract, this time illustrating a lecturer's feelings of lack of knowledge and an enquiry into what might be expected from a lecturer teaching an internationalised curriculum.

I know nothing. What I know is Anglo American western theory, and what I know is Anglo American western content ... in all my knowledge. And I know that because I'm a product of this education system and culture myself. The students I teach aren't in that tradition, and they do teach me a lot, they do inspire me and I learn a lot from my students and I hopefully always will ... but in order for a lecturer to go beyond that is asking a huge amount from a lecturer. If we're talking about ... if we had a paradigm of an international lecturer, what would they be? They'd be multilingual, they'd be well travelled, they'll have lived abroad in a number of different countries and worked abroad ... they would know the theory and content of a number of different parts of the world ... and how many of us around the world fit into that category? – very few. So it's a huge demand on the lecturer here. (Staff)

One participant discussed the challenge of being viewed by students with some positive and negative speculation about their ability to teach because of their own ethnic minority status. They described a feeling of 'credentialism' whereby they felt they had to justify their presence as a tutor.

I'm finding what is an issue for me perhaps is being an ethnic minority myself as a tutor, and how that may impact upon the teaching I think. That can be positive but it can also be quite negative. I sometimes find myself thinking about ... there's a process of 'credentialism' sometimes like ... you know ... 'What is your background or your expertise in this area'. And I think that is perhaps something that's not particularly addressed actually. I do know of colleagues who've had difficult experiences precisely because of their background which I think perhaps white males may not get to the same extent. (Staff)

### *Learning from the students*

As underlined by Killick (2008, p.2) internationalisation is a 'process'. When staff were asked to consider what they may have learned as a result of teaching culturally diverse students, many responded in ways that implied a process, that their thinking and feelings changed over time. For instance, the lecturer below critically examined their approach to organising group work and was still in the process of working this through.

I deliberately do what you say which is, there must be a mix in the group, and I had huge, it was a lot of students come and say how ineffective that was, to the point where I've re-thought it. Because I wanted them to mix with other nationalities and I wanted them to become involved in people's lives from other countries and to understand different expectations but I had to sit down and think 'just exactly how arrogant am I being' because what right do I have to manipulate people in this way, what right do I have to assert my middle-class western values of 'it will be good for you' to go and talk to people from other countries when their comment was 'look, we've only just arrived here, we're struggling with language, we're struggling with climate, we're struggling with culture, we're struggling with academic content, we're struggling with referencing, we're struggling with just learning to learn in the UK environment and actually you are not helping us by then adding yet another level of complexity by making us work with other people when perhaps really my own decision is, well perhaps I don't want to do that' and it really did leave me thinking maybe I'm satisfying my own interpretation of what an holistic education is, what a multi-cultural education is, what an international education is, rather than actually listening to the students. (Staff)

At another level, in this next extract, a lecturer tells the story of a conversation he had with an international student which resulted in him re-considering the service that higher education provides.

...we had dinner, and I sat next to one of our MA students, and it was June, so she was just about to graduate, and I said, 'what are you going to do now that you've graduated?' She said 'I'm going back to Korea'. And I said 'would it be better for you in employment terms than staying here?' And she said 'oh no, I want to go back and see my baby'. And I said 'well how old is your baby'. And she said 'nearly one'. And I said 'but this course lasts 9 months'. And she said 'well I left him when he was 3 months old with my mother'. And I said 'have you been back to see him'. And she said 'no, I've seen photographs'. And I thought good God, how could you do this? She said 'this course really did deliver such a good opportunity for me I was willing to pay the money and take the time away'. And I thought s\*\*t, if I'd know that before I'd never have been able to face her. Because that's a tremendous sacrifice for anybody to make. And to do that. She did really well on her course. I was so impressed but also really humbled by that. And I thought I don't know if we serve these people properly at all. (Staff)

As a final illustration of the individual process of internationalisation, one participant said that it was only when they lived with international students did they stop seeing them as 'international students' but rather that they 'became people who, as one facet of their lives, were studying'.

Many staff said how much they had learnt from their students and how much they enriched their work. This learning was often in the form of stories and illustrations from their home countries where as one participant put it, the lecturer was a 'co-learner'.

So no matter how much I might have tried it's only by having students from Ghana, from Nigeria, from Taiwan and from India who when they talk about worker representation, when they talk about consultation, when they talk about flexible working that you can begin to understand the parallels and the contrasts and comparisons and it brings a dynamic to the learning that is so real, so alive, so energised, that no textbook, no amount of me preparing to remember to say 'oh and in Singapore it might be different, oh and in Canada they do this'. There's no way that I could have created that. That is a very dynamic and creative element of the learning for students and for me. (Staff)

## The student experience

### *Successes in forming multi-cultural relationships*

Many students, both home and international, said how much they appreciated having peers from around the world on their courses and in their institutions. Participants talked of internationalisation providing them the chance to learn about other peoples and places of the world, to learn about their differences and similarities, and form lasting and valued friendships. One international student said that on occasion he even felt like a 'cultural ambassador' representing his country. An EU home student indicated that over time she had learnt not to fall back on stereotypes but rather that "you have to go out and meet people first and speak with them in a more relaxed, chilled out way" to get to know them.

### *Barriers to forming multi-cultural relationships*

As discussed in the section on group work (page 16), despite students appreciating the value of their multi-cultural environments, several home and international students remarked that there was not as much mixing of cultural groups as one might hope. Although this was discussed in all the focus groups there did not seem to be any great sadness or anger about this, more an acceptance of the way it was. This acceptance is illustrated here as one international student talks about her friend.

I had a friend say who... looks very Thai. I've heard her say several times, seriously, that she feels like she's not being treated like a person by other people. Not that they're being mean to her, but they're ignoring her, or they look down on her ... she's very short as well ... and they would not talk to her in the way they would to home students. She feels ... she didn't even complain about it, she just said 'Oh, you know, I don't feel I'm treated like a proper person', ... 'I feel like I'm invisible' (International Student)

Several themes emerged from the analyses to describe the kinds of problems preventing a more dynamic mix of students.

- **Cultural cliques**

Both home and international students felt that students from similar cultures and nations had a tendency to socialise together within cultural cliques. However, some students stated that this was often just because it was easier to do so, as indicated below.

...it's not about rudeness or about people disliking each other, it's just the natural groups that people tend to form with people from their own countries. Sometimes people prefer to speak in their native tongue as well... (Home Student)

- **Language**

Unsurprisingly, students said that languages were a barrier to making multi-cultural relationships. Some international students expressed that the resulting tendency for them to remain in their cultural cliques, because it was difficult for them to communicate with English-speaking peers, only exacerbated the problem since there were then limited opportunities to practise their English. One student whose conversational English was good said they still found it difficult to understand dialects, colloquialisms, jokes and gestures.

- **Cultural differences in socialising**

A small number of international students said that they found that making friendships with British students was difficult because they socialised in different ways. One Chinese student said that British students did "crazy things" and he was happy to join in, another said that the culture of "going to the pub" and "parties" did not exist back at home. Only a couple of students mentioned alcohol as an issue and when the participants of the last international focus group were questioned directly on this, one participant replied the following.

<i>Student</i>	I guess we didn't mention it (alcohol), because it's so obvious, it's just there.
<i>Student</i>	... my interpretation of the word sociable is: helpful, supportive, friendly, maybe patient, things like that. It turned out to be different here.
<i>Moderator</i>	what is it here, your perception?

*Student* As experienced in my hallway, it means being able to drink more than 10 pints of beer an hour. If you can do that, you're very sociable. Otherwise, you may be intermediate.

- **Institutional and degree-course barriers**

Some international students expressed disappointment that they did not get many opportunities to meet home students since their courses were mostly filled with international students. It seemed that this was partly due to some courses being designed for international students. However, some stated that it was also due to the choice that home students made to take part-time courses where they could, so that they were able to work concurrently to pay their fees, whilst international students (due to visa restrictions) opted for full-time courses.

Accommodation was described as a barrier in cases where international students were allocated to halls reserved for overseas students, on the basis that they might need year-round accommodation rather than for term-time only. This practical 'segregation' thus created a physical barrier to forming friendships.

International student associations were mentioned as a barrier in that it was one student's perception that they focussed mostly on getting international students to socialise amongst themselves and failed to engage home students in this process.

- **Making the effort**

Both home and international students acknowledged the part they played in making friendships as in the case of this Chinese student "I don't always talk to others, so it might be my problem". One group of home students debated the barriers to making friendships and they discussed how important it was to make an effort but as one student said

We don't do it actually (make the effort to get to know international students). I mean that's the problem. It's also our responsibility to find out and we don't actually do it, we find so many excuses, like 'I have to do this, and this, and this'. (Home Student)

In the last focus group with home students, they were asked if they felt any responsibility as 'home students' to help international students. One student replied:

I don't think I'd ever thought about going out of my way to specially help somebody. I mean I do what I can when asked, but beyond that there's not really anything there. (Home Student)

### *Experiencing life in the UK*

In the international student groups, students sometimes spoke of their lives more generally. These experiences are not highlighted in this report since these contributions were fewer in number to those contributions about making friendships with other students. One issue which kept coming up though, was British weather and its consequences on morale!

## Developing internationalisation further

**Aim 5:** to explore the perspectives of students and teaching staff on how internationalisation could be developed further in their discipline and institution

Focus group sessions were scheduled to last for one hour. Lively discussions meant that the time went quickly, and as a result, time to explore how internationalisation could be developed further was often limited. Nevertheless, students and staff made several suggestions.

### *Improving the student experience*

- consider a module / extra sessions / handbook to raise cultural competencies of all students
- hold sessions for international students to learn about the British education system
- invite the tourist board to talk to students at the start of courses about the local area to help students integrate into the local community
- keep asking students for feedback about their learning experiences and their student life in general, with a view to using feedback for programme development
- detailed website information needed (in multiple languages) about the courses on offer and student life
- provide opportunities for students who are choosing which institutions to apply to, to talk to past students
- high quality induction procedures should be in place for all new students including postgraduate research students and students starting in the middle of courses such as 2nd year placements in some undergraduate programmes
- as well as on-line discussion boards, use physical boards where students can place messages to encourage communication
- invite discussion from home students about how what roles and responsibilities they might have as "local" students within their international student community
- ensure all students know where to find help with practical difficulties such as opening bank accounts and paying bills.

### *Improving the staff experience*

In staff development workshops, if you say you have to be more mindful of the requirements of international students then there is sometimes a knee-jerk reaction, that you're suggesting a lowering of standards. You have to show that internationalisation doesn't mean a lowering of standards. For example, that you can speak more clearly without necessarily diluting the content. (Staff)

- give all staff (those working in administration and service roles, teaching staff, research staff, managers) the opportunity to talk with colleagues about internationalisation, as well as teaching and learning in general. Therefore, empowering staff to discuss how progress could be made, with a view to making individual, departmental and institutional changes to enhance the HE experience for all. A good resource in this area has been created by Dr Dave Bumapp (2007) and can be found on the LLAS website [www.llas.ac.uk/international](http://www.llas.ac.uk/international)
- develop further support structures behind teaching staff so that they know who they can refer to, or refer their students to, when issues arise beyond their teaching remit.
- an in-house international officer available to support teaching and learning for students, and to give guidance to staff, was highlighted by one lecturer as a great asset to their department.
- provide language support for new lecturers who are non-native speakers

### *The curriculum*

- when designing the curriculum, ask "what do we want students to become" in terms of individuals and their place in the global economy.
- invite experts in the areas of globalisation, sustainability and social justice to share pedagogical techniques that can be used in all disciplines
- assign time in the curriculum to allow students to meet each other socially in the context of their course

- develop interventions at the start of a course to encourage students to get to know each other

*Changes at the institutional level and beyond*

- ensure discussions are continued at senior management level, Higher Education Academy and Subject Centres to maintain progress in internationalisation and in enhancing student learning.
- effort needed by universities and senior management to engage academics in this issue; one participant felt that progress would be faster if it came from the "bottom, up" via teaching staff rather than as "top, down" institutional directives.
- ensure home students and international students are housed together in university accommodation
- ensure student societies are inclusive and welcoming to all

# DISCUSSION

## Critique of methods

Inevitably a project such as this, small scale and dependent on the goodwill of participants and supporters, can reflect only certain elements of the increasingly internationalised UK curriculum. Although all the Subject Centres, and therefore all subject disciplines, were invited to take part, getting academics and students on board was problematic and only some were able to make time in their hectic schedules. However, even with small samples, the contributions made can be seen as "voices" in the HE arena, adding to the commentary on the progression of internationalisation in the UK HE. Questionnaires completed by staff at the end of the focus groups, indicated a large proportion of staff were involved in some way in internationalisation within their institutions. Their feelings as a group, however, did not seem skewed positively or negatively, rather, they offered insights which were informed and measured.

The focus groups themselves worked very well as means to gather views on internationalisation; conversation and debate flowed easily. In fact, it would have been preferable to hold sessions lasting two hours, rather than one. Although staff and students (home and international) were in separate groups in this project, it is suggested that further research would gain immensely from mixed focus groups of staff/students and home students/international students.

## Language tests & recruitment

Language entrance tests were discussed by some – with criticism being levelled at the fact that they can be too limited and can be practised to such an extent that they do not accurately reflect a student's true ability. In a comparative study of IELTS writing tasks Moore and Morton (2005) concluded that the type of writing demanded by the IELTS test was more akin to "public non-academic genres" as it encouraged personal opinion, did not link writing to reading and thus presents writing as a spontaneous activity:

Whilst practise in this type of writing will certainly contribute in a general way to students' literacy development (how to write coherently, grammatically, etc.), it would be a mistake in our view to see it as an appropriate model for writing in a university context. (Moore and Morton, 2005, p.64)

One participant speculated that in some countries there may be less or even no formal recognition of learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Some students may therefore also be struggling with additional undiagnosed learning difficulties, further restricting their learning and academic development.

This project therefore adds its voice, in line with some of the literature, that institutions should not rely too heavily on this form of assessment. The drive to recruit students should not overshadow the need for rigour in the use of entrance tests of language ability, and this should be informed by a better understanding of what they do, and do not, measure. What was apparent from our data was that allowing students, unable to manage a relevant standard of language ability, onto UK courses places an increasing demanding burden on staff, especially where those same institutions do not have adequate additional language support in place for students and are unlikely to offer much in the way of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) which would truly serve to offer language support in context. It is also suggested that closer collaboration between recruitment offices and lecturing staff would aid both parties, increasing their understanding of each others aims and needs, and allowing a consideration of the student journey after recruitment.

## Staff

The staff we spoke to on this project were a mixture of quite experienced as well as new to HE teaching staff, mostly from the UK - but with some having come here from outside the UK as students and now teaching here themselves. They therefore offered a small but varied cohort and represented many disciplines.

Overall, there was much that was to be celebrated and applauded. All the project team were impressed with the level of diligence and commitment shown by staff who were willing and in fact enthusiastic about changing aspects of their teaching to adapt to the changing nature of the student body. However, we are mindful, as also stated earlier, that of course we only heard from those who were able to attend the focus groups and therefore this was perhaps to be expected.

What was striking, however, from among this group of committed individuals was the sense that they were in the 'frontline' of internationalisation. The concerns relating to recruitment policies, language tests and student welfare were largely felt to be out of their hands. However, it was in the engagement between staff and students that many of these larger issues were felt. Learning about the backgrounds of their students was both an enriching and challenging experience for some, highlighting their own limitations (in terms of international experience and global perspectives on their subject) and bringing new insights into their approaches to teaching). Just as the students were able to articulate the learning culture of the UK, the teachers had also engaged in considerable reflection on the 'accepted' approaches to teaching and how these needed to be introduced to students in more considered ways. It was unclear how much these experiences were shared with others outside their own classrooms or curriculum team and this suggests that there is a need for a dialogue between those engaged in internationalisation within the institution at a variety of levels. Teachers are informally collecting data on internationalisation in their classrooms and it might be encouraging for them to appreciate (and be appreciated for) what they know and what they do in a practical sense, to make the learning experience of their students a positive one.

Giving opportunities for 'frontline' staff to share practice and give feedback should also help engage them in the process of internationalisation, as suggested by this focus group participant:

I think there needs to be much more of a focus by universities and the senior management on engaging the academics. If it came from the bottom up it would work a hell of a lot better than a directive saying "do this". (Staff)

Sometimes staff described a lack of support (both financial and personal), and this is echoed by Knight (2008) who states that developing faculty interest as well as developing expertise in the international office are the current challenges. Staff development in this area needs to be seen as beneficial and relevant to all, including support staff, and a means to increase competency and confidence.

## Curriculum

Staff asked big questions: for example, what do we want students to become, what is the British degree, how should we develop the curriculum? These are ongoing debates. It was evident though, that some staff felt that their curriculum was, to a great extent, set by an associated professional body through accreditation, resulting in less freedom to consider issues such as internationalisation. Many suggested, however, that internationalisation could take place using internationalised pedagogies, meeting the needs of all the students, no matter what the topic.

When considering the programmes offered by institutions, we found some evidence that the title 'international' could have a narrowing effect on student diversity in that it may appear to be targeted at, or mainly appeal to, international students, resulting in fewer home students registering.

In her 2005 study Hilary Footitt reported on a survey she conducted of HE programmes that were titled international or involved an international dimension. Her focus in this study was on the presence (or otherwise) of a language learning or intercultural element and she concluded that:

It appears to be particularly at postgraduate level that there is both a proliferation of courses with 'international'/'global' in their titles, and a more specifically focused professional training. It is however also at this level that the understanding of 'international' largely seems to exclude explicit curriculum exploration of cultural/linguistic difference, and its possible implications for professional practice. (Footitt, 2005 p.39)

This suggests that there is a need for more thought out approach to defining the characteristics of an internationalised curriculum which is not restricted to narrow interpretations and course titles. As Footitt (2005) comments, “there is a tendency in many undergraduate and postgraduate courses to use ‘international’ without any obvious consensus as to what the word might imply for course, content, pedagogy, or future professional practice.” (p.44). Account needs to be taken of the comments from students about what they felt was missing in terms of references to their own (non-UK context) and their reports of why they had chosen their course, namely because it offered them something they could not get in their own country or dealt with areas not well-advanced in their own culture. As one staff respondent made clear, one of the goals of higher education is to equip students with the skills to deepen and extend their knowledge for themselves while another reflected on what a student in his discipline might be expected to become and how that might be articulated in an international landscape. Here the international students themselves provide some of the answers as they describe the skills they have acquired e.g. intercultural communication. Again the challenge is to cascade this learning to all students and to help them to see that international learning experiences are not confined to the language classroom, or to the ‘international’ module but to all their encounters with other languages, cultures and people at university.

## Teaching & learning styles and group work

The focus group data demonstrated again that styles of working in the UK are unfamiliar for many students coming, as they may do, from cultures where the teacher/lecturer – student/pupil relationships, and learning, can be very different indeed (Kingston & Forland, 2008). However this experience of a new culture of learning appears to be one to which students generally react positively once they have had time to acculturate and reflect on the differences between their previous and current experiences of learning. This is evidenced by the very articulate way in which several participants described how learning is delivered in the UK talking about critical thinking, discussion, independence and the application of theory to practice. If anyone wants to know what teaching styles are used in the UK, talking to an international student might be a very good place to start. This is not to say that this transition is without problems for international students. Examples are given in the main data analysis of how the increasingly common use of group work in UK HE has led to staff realising that students can find this very difficult. It is important to recognise that group working is a culturally constructed practice that is often considered to be superior to other teaching approaches in UK higher education. It is not our intention to suggest that group working should be privileged, rather that this approach was one that was emphasised in the focus groups. It has been described as a factor in alienating students from each other, particularly in the case of home students, who may feel reluctant to work with students from elsewhere, thinking that their assessment mark may be lower as a result. It also seems to be the case that teachers are unsure how to approach group work in an intercultural setting. Sensitivity to the difficulties that international students are perceived to have with group work appears to lead to a nervousness amongst some teachers when it comes to setting up group projects or discussions. In contrast, students appear to welcome teacher intervention in group formation to take them out of their comfort zone and get them working and communicating interculturally. As the data show much of this intercultural engagement takes place among international students (rather than UK and international students) but nonetheless it is something that students appear to perceive as having very positive outcomes in terms of communication skills and employability in a global marketplace. The data from this project would therefore suggest, again in line with findings from other work, that group work projects, especially when formally assessed, need to be approached thoughtfully, confidently and clearly by the teacher and that articulating some of the additional outcomes for both UK and international students could help to clarify the purpose of what is often an unfamiliar and unsettling learning experience.

Where placements require students to work in UK schools or other workplaces, there may be the additional complications of police checks etc. that can be more time consuming for students from outside the UK. It was also mentioned by a couple of participants that ethical procedures must not be expected to be understood by all students, some of them coming from countries where ethical standards may be at some variance from those in the UK.

The result is that all this can lead to much additional preparation and consideration when planning the curriculum for the staff involved. As stated at the outset, staff were mostly very positive that these factors were outweighed by the advantages of having more international students in their cohorts, but nevertheless, our data do illustrate that for some there may be the perception that their workload has increased. Further research and support in this area are recommended.

## Students

One of the most striking findings of this project, was the lack of engagement of home students with internationalisation either personally or pedagogically. At one of the focus group meetings there was a mix up over room bookings and a group of sociology students arrived to find the team of researchers complete with recording equipment and free coffee in their classroom. The students were naturally curious as to what was going on (not to mention tempted by the possibility of free coffee) and joked that it looked more interesting than their normal class so perhaps they should join in. They were genuinely interested in the idea that we were running a focus group but when told of the topic the response was a definite 'no thank you, we would rather have our normal class'. While this is only one example, the difficulty that the researchers had in attracting home students to the focus groups does suggest that home students may not consider intercultural learning as an important outcome of their HE experience.

Students chose the focus groups they felt most aligned with (international or home), and as a consequence EU students sometimes chose to join the international group and sometimes the home group. From a research viewpoint this created certain challenges when trying to unpick the issues, but it also served to underline the point that such groupings are not homogenous, and that people can assign themselves to groups in various ways. An example of this was a young Japanese woman who attended the home student focus group because as a British citizen (married to a British man) she was funded and classified as a home student. The subsequent description of her experiences (among the most negative reported) indicated that she was experiencing intercultural difficulties that were partly pedagogic – her school experience in Japan had not prepared her for a UK learning experience – and partly socio-cultural. She was neither embraced by the British students nor by the Japanese students who, according to the student in question, saw her as having privileges and status (being married) that they envied. This clearly flags up the problem of using terminology that derives from funding models rather than linguistic or cultural ones.

Many of the students the project team spoke to, had positive examples of the benefits of learning in UK HE institutions in 2008. Some referred to the issues of getting students to socialise cross-culturally but spoke very positively about this when it had been successful, noting that perhaps it was most successful when early intervention had been employed. The lack of mixing between cultures is well reported in this and other studies relating to international student experiences (e.g. UKCISA 2004). In informing the discussion on how to offer all students an international learning experience (sometimes referred to as internationalisation at home) this study does offer some insights. Examples of these are creating the conditions for mixed nationality group work, providing space for full-time and part-time students to work together (this could be virtual as well as physical), engaging students in dialogue about their previous learning experiences (this can be just as relevant for home as for international students) and providing courses with an international focus that do not appear to be targeted only at international students. However much more on this still needs to be done and all the time that the market is not calling for this the priority given to it will remain fairly low.

Martin Haigh (2002, 2008) makes the point that internationalisation training for staff often addresses the wrong group: 'the international student'. He argues that international students are already adept at working in unfamiliar culturally diverse environments whilst home students are novices. Many conferences and research projects focus on the international student. It is argued that given that home students have so much to gain from the international HE environment more attention should be given to how they might be encouraged to develop their intercultural competencies. By switching the focus to home students, this may also result in less 'problematizing' of the international student as evidenced in the literature (Leonard, Pelletier & Morley, 2003).

## How does this project inform the work of the Higher Education Academy Subject Centres?

It is hoped that this report will be of interest to the staff associated with the Higher Education Academy Subject Centres and their communities. Some of the views expressed may challenge readers and some may lead readers to think "so I'm not alone in this experience". Comments from participants on feedback forms distributed after the focus groups were that many gained immensely from being able to share their views and practice with other colleagues. Some SCs have already held, or are due to hold, events and conferences for their communities to further discuss issues surrounding internationalisation. These events will contribute to awareness-raising and will help with the development of pedagogic practice.

## CONCLUSIONS

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change" Unknown<sup>6</sup>

'Change' was mentioned in one form or another throughout the focus group discussions. UK higher education is adapting to an increasingly competitive global market to survive. The ramifications of increasing numbers of international students have been felt throughout the system. Staff and students described many positive outcomes as a result of the process of internationalisation and they also talked about the challenges. Mostly people did not talk of being able to make departmental and institutional change, rather they talked in terms of making individual changes in their teaching and learning practice and in their values, thus reflecting a core theme of the project, that of recognising cultural influences on pedagogy. This willingness to adapt demonstrates the strengths of the individuals in the UK HE system, leading the way to progressive internationalisation. If HEIs work with their staff and students, listening to feedback and responding mindfully, then the needs of both HEIs and the individuals within them could be met and consequently learning for all students enhanced.

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<sup>6</sup> often misattributed to Charles Darwin, see van Wyhe (2008)

## Contributors

Alison Dickens (LLAS senior academic coordinator) and Julie Anderson (ESCalate associate director) together arranged for the project funding from the Higher Education Academy, and ESCalate added additional resources. Sheila Trahar (University of Bristol, senior lecturer in education) was invited to be academic consultant for the work and the three met and set up the initial parameters for the work. Fiona Hyland (ESCalate research assistant) finalised the topic guide and participant questionnaires, undertook the empirical data collection, coded and analysed the data and wrote the first report draft with ongoing liaison with the other three. Anne Anderson (ESCalate events / web coordinator) supported her in the focus groups with camera and audio recordings and the two also created a videopaper (<http://escalate.ac.uk/4967>). AD, JA and ST each attended some of the 15 focus groups and offered comments at all stages of the research. All four authors contributed to and commented on the final project report.

## General note

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of ESCalate, LLAS, Higher Education Academy or those of the focus group participants.

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# APPENDIX I

## Topic guide for staff

### Aim 1: exploring the terms

We've used the term 'internationalisation' several times already today. You may be using other terms such as 'teaching and learning in an international landscape' and 'internationalising the curriculum'.

- I don't want us to get too caught up in creating precise definitions, but it would be useful to start with your views on what teaching and learning in an international landscape means to you. Can anyone offer their perspective?

From this point onwards, discussion will be partly participant-led but the moderator will need to make sure that the following topics are covered in whatever order naturally arises.

### Aim 2: the extent of internationalisation within their discipline and in their institution

As we heard at the beginning you're not from identical backgrounds. I'm interested in how much internationalisation has affected your discipline.

- What is the ratio of home students to international students in your area?
- Are you aware of any activities in your institution that have been developed specifically to support students (or staff) from outside the UK?

### Aim 3: the effects of internationalisation on teaching and learning

Moving on to teaching and learning in an international landscape.

- What impact has working with students from a range of cultural backgrounds had, on your approach to teaching?
- How about, when you've come to design the curriculum?
- In your experience, how have international students found these teaching methods?
- What about assessment, how do international students cope with your assessment methods?
- What strategies do you use to help those students, who do not have English as their first language, feel comfortable in your classes?

### Aim 4: the challenges they have faced, and their successes

#### Interactions and group dynamics

- In your view, what impact does working with students from a range of cultural backgrounds, have on their interactions and relationships?
- Do the home students and international students socialise well together in the classroom?
- How have you found your interactions with students - in lectures, tutorial sessions etc.

#### Challenges

- Can anyone give some examples of the challenges they've faced as a teacher in this international landscape?

- Have you noticed any challenges that students have faced?

### **Successes**

- How has working with students from a range of cultural backgrounds added value to your discipline?

### **Internationalisation at home**

- What have you learnt, as a person and as a teacher, to challenge your beliefs, as a result of being in a culturally diverse environment?

## **Aim 5: how internationalisation could be developed further in their discipline and institution**

- Do you any ideas about how teaching and learning in an international landscape could be developed further in your discipline?

### **To finish**

- Is there anything anyone would like to add or clarify. Perhaps there is something important to you that we missed?

## Topic guide for students

### Aim 1: exploring the terms

- Perhaps we could start with why you chose to study in the institution you're currently based?
- What do you expect to gain from studying there?
- Does anyone have some thoughts on what it means to be a student in an international landscape? What is it like?
- Have any of you heard of the terms 'an internationalised curriculum' and 'internationalisation'? What do these terms mean to you?

### Aim 2: the extent of internationalisation within their discipline and in their institution

I'm interested in how much 'internationalisation' (or other suggested phrase) has affected your discipline.

- In your estimation, how many home students and international students are there, in your discipline?
- Are you aware of any activities in your institution and in your department that have been developed specifically to support students from outside the UK?
- To what extent do you believe that the content of your degree course meets the needs of all the different cultures in your student group?

### Aim 3: the effects of internationalisation on teaching and learning

Moving on to teaching and learning in an international landscape.

#### *Home students*

- How do you experience the learning and teaching here? What, for you, are the most challenging aspects?

#### *International students*

- How do you experience the learning and teaching here? What, for you, are the most challenging aspects?
- Have you had to change any of your study methods? How have you felt about this?
- How are you coping with the course assessments?
- Are there any aspects of your learning experiences back at home that you're helping or hindering you now?

### Aim 4: the challenges they have faced, and their successes

#### **Challenges**

- Can anyone give some examples of the challenges they've faced as a student in this international landscape?

#### **Successes**

- How has being with students from a range of cultural backgrounds added value to your studies?

## Internationalisation at home

*Home students:*

- What have you learnt, as a person and as a student, to challenge your beliefs, as a result of being in a culturally diverse environment?
- How, in your view, is the learning and teaching environment enhanced by greater cultural diversity?
- What can people from varying cultural backgrounds learn from each other?
- How much do you mix and interact with students whose cultural background may be different from yours?

## Aim 5: how internationalisation could be developed further in their discipline and institution

- Do you have any ideas about how teaching and learning in an international landscape could be developed further in your discipline?

## To finish

- Is there anything anyone would like to add or clarify. Perhaps there is something important to you that we missed?

## Appendix 2 Internationalisation Focus Groups - Staff

Thank-you for attending this focus group event on Internationalisation. We would like to ask you some information about yourself so that when we come to report the findings we can accurately describe who came to these focus groups. No names will be used in any reports and all comments are confidential. We would appreciate it if you could complete the following questionnaire but understand if you would prefer to leave some questions blank.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Job title: \_\_\_\_\_

Brief description of teaching responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How long have you lived in the UK? \_\_\_\_\_

Where is your country of origin? \_\_\_\_\_

How would you best describe your ethnic group? \_\_\_\_\_

Where in the world do you consider "home"? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3 Internationalisation Focus Groups: Feedback Sheet

Thank you for taking part today. We would value any feedback you could give us to help meet our aims: In particular, given the time available:

1. Did you feel you were able to openly express your views on teaching and learning in an international landscape?

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2. Is there any additional information you could give us to better understand internationalisation in your discipline?

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3. Are there any issues or questions you feel are important that were not addressed today?

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4. Has your thinking changed, or expanded, in any way, as a consequence of listening to the views of other participants?

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5. Have you decided to make any changes to your teaching / learning behaviours as a result of the discussions today. If so, what changes are they?

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Finally, if you are able and willing to offer help by sharing your experiences further, or your expertise, then we would be glad to have your contact details. Many thanks!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to Anne Anderson, or, if you would like to discuss the day in more depth, please email [fiona.hyland@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:fiona.hyland@bristol.ac.uk)

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