Teaching international students: effective learning support for all

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What is the Teaching International Students project?

Run by the Higher Education Academy

Funded through

2 year project

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How the TIS project might link with the themes for today

- Bank of resources [Web site]
- Events and conferences
- Publications
- Raising the profile, attending meetings, providing advice
- Attempting to create networks and communities of practice
What’s the context (2011) for teaching International Students?
Not just rising numbers ..... 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>UK non-domiciled</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>34,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>88,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>56,000 [full cost]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>184,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>417,000</td>
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- Much more diverse previous experiences as learners
- ...from vetting and selecting to mass higher education

For students:
- New reasons for leaving home
- New reasons for coming to the UK
- New goals and motivations

For UK HEIs:
- 10% of university budgets (2010)
- And?

source: British Council, 2009
We have certainly noticed impacts on teaching and learning due to

✓ level

✓ % within overall cohort

✓ % from any one country

✓ mix of groups

✓ length of study programme

✓ the way in which teachers, teaching and programmes were managed
Rhetoric or reality?

“.... the main benefits of the globalisation of higher education are not financial (as valuable as that may be) but intellectual and cultural. The coming together of people from different parts of the world to study has the potential to form creative global communities that learn to interact and collaborate in new and previously incomprehensible ways. Such is the dynamism of life in the ‘global village’.”

( UK VC quoted in Shiel & McKenzie, 2008, p. 1)
‘International students’: who are they?

- Variable ‘cultural’ distance travelled to the UK
- Fees and money
  - unfamiliar with ‘how teaching, learning & assessment works here’
- far from support
- far from family
- far from help

Variable capability with UK English
Why focus on teaching International Students?
Just ‘good teaching’ ... or something more? ISs list these issues:

- **Language** [study in English]

- **Transition**, new academic cultural assumptions and expectations; new standards
  ‘New game, new rules’

- Engagement and **participation**

- ‘**Support**’ and guidance [formal, informal, academic, pastoral, economic, human.....]

- **Useful awards?** : knowledge and skills can be applied ‘back home’
Students’ needs,
changing cohorts,
teachers’ reactions
Approaches to managing academic cultural diversity

Denial
‘I teach. It’s up to them to learn.’
‘I teach Chemistry. Oxygen is the same everywhere’
‘I didn’t admit this student who can’t speak English’

‘Repair’
‘You fix them and then I’ll teach them’
‘These students can’t….. They don’t ..... They are not motivated to....’

Students must adapt
‘These students want a British education – that’s what they need to be ready to do.’

Teachers accommodate and adjust their practice:

These are my students: what do they bring? What do they need? how can I help them succeed?

... ‘bottom line’ non-negotiable ... sustainable, efficient
The focus of TIS attention and resources: helping teachers’ better accommodate:

- to students’ language capability, to teachers’ use of English. Better support for learning in English.
- to students’ transition to a new way of learning [and assessment].
- to ensuring students have necessary skills for success.
- to encouraging participation in teaching and learning methods
  ‘Students getting the most from ......’
- to collaboration [ vs. ‘ghettos’ and ‘silos’ and avoidance].
Issues needing accommodation

- students’ language capability
- transition. ‘New game, new rules’]
- necessary skills.
- participation [‘Getting the most from ….’]
- collaboration & inclusion

Teachers’ role ....

- enhancing language learning
- Mediating between pedagogic cultures
- Coaching, practice, feedback
- Choreographing, shaping, valuing. Inviting in...
- Designing it, supporting it, valuing it
Resources on teaching international students

✓ TIS Lifecycle resource collection

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/teachingandlearning/internationalisation/studentlifecycle

✓ Subject centre resources
http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/handbook/international
http://www.engsc.ac.uk/guides/working-with-international-students
[also Law, Languages, Education, ....]

✓ IDP database

http://www.idp.com/idp-today/research-database.aspx
✓ events like this!
A few hard truths from two years’ effort

No easy answers

Much shared good practice / evidence-based approaches ... much of it continues to be overlooked

Most HE academics find it hard to engage with these issues [for all sorts of reasons]

It is hard to get HE teachers to see that ignoring issues does not mean neutral consequences

Hard to build strong links between language / ‘Pathway’ programmes and content teachers

Unresolved: Who needs to change?
Two big ‘unresolved’ issues in the wider picture:

✓ Nature of the curriculum. Is it globally relevant?

✓ Fostering inclusion & mixing

‘Our students’ & ‘my fellow students’
Using and valuing students’ ‘cultural capital’
Globally-relevant curriculum

Different for each programme

Not just content!

Teach and assess cross cultural skills

Promote student integration

Opportunities? - Introduction activities
- Problems for students to solve
- Reading lists
- Guest speakers
- Research areas
- Library resources
Integration
collaboration
Inclusion

Early support for social inclusion
Organised ‘getting to know’ chances
In-class discussion explained and supported
Fewer, longer, safer group tasks
Tasks which ‘bring together’
Cross-cultural skills
Programme-level value
Programme-level assessment
Final word:

All students find university new
Most find it new and hard
Many find it new and hard and strange
Some find it new and hard and strange and all wrong, really wrong

Most succeed. Teach for inclusion and the students will succeed with more ease and less pain .... and so will you.