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Mind the gap? A case-study of the differing perceptions of international students and their lecturers on postgraduate business programmes

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Abstract

This paper reports on a project which explored the experiences of a group of East Asian students studying postgraduate business programmes at a British university. Data drawn from a series of in-depth interviews with the students and their lecturers provided clear evidence that many of the students faced a substantial number of difficulties which affected their learning.

The data also show that the lecturers and students had differing perceptions about why such difficulties arose. Whilst lecturers regarded language as the essential cause of East Asian students' difficulties, the students recognised that, additionally, a lack of culturally-related knowledge of UK HE academic norms presented a fundamental challenge to their learning. The authors argue that these culturally-based academic practices need to be made more explicit to students. We also suggest that the complexity of East Asian cultures of learning are not fully understood or appreciated in British universities where, despite much relevant research and a range of institutional initiatives, a "deficit view" of international student behaviour and ability is still widespread. We contend that current university strategies may need to be reviewed if institutions and academic staff are to understand and resolve some of the difficulties international students face during their studies.

Keywords: international students; academic cultures; language competence; deficit; difference

Introduction

The internationalisation of UK higher education (HE) and the expansion of both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for overseas students in UK universities is well-documented (McNamara & Harris 1997; Scott 1998; Robinson 2006). Recruitment practices have become increasingly business-like within the globalised education marketplace as international education has become a "tradeable commodity" (Skilbeck & Connell, 2006, as cited in Wang 2007, p. 42). This is unsurprising as UK HE institutions were encouraged to seek new sources of funding throughout the 1990s (McNamara & Harris, 1997). UK Business Schools have been at the forefront of this trend (Robinson, 2006), with students from East Asia and the Pacific Rim, particularly the People's Republic of China and Taiwan, forming a high proportion of the international student cohort.

However, it has been claimed that, in the drive to attract international students to UK campuses, "genuine educational considerations for overseas students' may have been overlooked" (Times Higher Education Supplement, 1994, as cited in McNamara & Harris, 1997, p. 3). At the very least, "the growth in the number of international students... has led to a series of new challenges for both the students... and for academic staff teaching and assessing them" (Warwick, 2006, p. 3). Mismatches and misunderstandings in their respective expectations and needs/requirements can create a fundamental gap between students and academic staff (Ryan, 2005), a gap which needs to be addressed in the creation of a successful teaching and learning environment. As Ryan and Carroll noted, "such issues need to be tackled quickly so that universities' reputations, the experience of students, and the morale of those who teach them are not damaged" (2005, p. 4).

This paper explores these issues and reports on a qualitative research project which investigated the learning experiences of a group of international students from East Asia studying postgraduate business programmes at a British university. Exploring the participants' own understandings of their academic life, the paper compares and contrasts the perspectives of the students with the views of their programme lecturers, and focuses largely upon students' and lecturers' understandings of the role of language and culture within

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teaching and learning on postgraduate business programmes. The student participants were from the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan and Thailand; the academic participants were all British.

Throughout the paper, the terms *overseas* and *international* are regarded as synonymous when referring to the student cohort. Although the issues discussed are relevant to all students entering an unfamiliar academic culture for the first time, the particular focus of this study is on students from East Asia.

Key concepts
Overseas students
As Harris (1997, p. 31) noted, overseas students are by no means a homogenous group. Similarly, Gu and Maley (2008, p. 226) recognise the ease with which we "can fall into the trap of cultural stereotyping", arguing that, whilst labels such as "the Chinese learner" (Watkins and Biggs, 1996) and "the East Asian learner" may capture certain characteristics, trends and patterns, such labels also carry the implication that these groups of learners are uniform, and overlook the importance of individual difference, motivation and personality.

Nevertheless, Furnham (2004) recognised that, alongside the culture shock that many overseas students face on arrival in the UK, overseas students are also required to cope with and adapt to the cultural norms expected in their new academic environment, including potentially unfamiliar cultures of learning. The challenges of social isolation and lack of initiation into local, culturally-based academic discourses for students from countries such as the PRC, Taiwan and Thailand studying in the UK are well documented (e.g., Volet & Ang, 1998; Wu, 2002; Robinson, 2006; Turner, 2006).

Meanwhile, for academic staff, overseas students have brought substantial additions to work-loads. In a 2003 survey on Business School staff at a British university, Gannon-Leary and Smailes (2004) noted that lecturers believed that the presence of more international students was having a significant impact on their teaching.

Lecturers' reported views of Asian students' classroom behaviour often focuses on the perceived problems that overseas students bring with them, such as poor spoken and written language ability; a low level of participation in group work; a reluctance to display critical thinking in study; problems with reference skills and plagiarism; and difficult relationships with UK students in teaching groups (Warwick, 2005).

However, such responses may illustrate a "deficit model" of overseas students' behaviour and study patterns (Volet & Ang, 1998; Warwick, 2007) in which difference is viewed as a problem. Carroll and Ryan noted that "it is easiest for lecturers to stick to their existing assumptions about and expectations of the 'ideal student'" (2005, p. 5), and they suggested that, when examined, the deficit model fails to recognise the strengths, motivation and achievement of international students who travel overseas to study.

English language ability
Universities in the UK have generally standardised their requirements for overseas students' English language ability around the International English Language Test Score (IELTS) test or equivalent measures of English language ability. An overall IELTS test score of 6.5, a widespread requirement for admitting overseas students onto many postgraduate programmes, would classify overseas students as "probably acceptable" users of English for "linguistically less demanding academic courses" (IELTS Handbook, 2007). Language use at an IELTS level of 6.5 may therefore include inaccuracies and, consequently, additional English study is encouraged for students at this level within British HE (IELTS Handbook, 2007).

Language tests such as IELTS are effective mechanisms for screening students' language abilities in speaking, listening, writing and reading, but whether tests of this nature can verify other more pragmatic academic skills deemed necessary in the classroom settings such as note-taking, report writing, exam techniques, oral presentation, and participation in group work/seminars remains debatable. As Todd (1997, p. 175) noted, to see overseas students' study problems "as solely arising from linguistic limitations is an oversimplification". Academic competency should be separated from linguistic development as "the former will not necessarily enhance the latter; nor does the proficiency of the latter presuppose competence in the former" (Sowden, 2003, p. 377).

Academic cultures, cultures of learning and cultures of communication
Whilst the possession of advanced language and study skills (e.g. seminar and IT skills) are clearly key competencies for overseas students within British HE, Cortazzi and Jin (1996) suggested that the effects of culture on students' ability to communicate and participate effectively within academic discourses and communities is often underestimated. Cortazzi and Jin (p.76) defined *academic cultures* as "the systems of beliefs, expectations and cultural practices about how to perform academically", suggesting that academic norms may seem obvious to academic staff, but are rarely made explicit to students. They arguedthat academic culture works because (and when) it is implicit in participants' behaviour and academic practices.

However, they noted that novices, such as overseas students, need to consider the cultural practices of such cultures explicitly in order to develop their academic performance.

Cortazzi and Jin (1996, p. 76) provided two additional associated concepts: through *cultures of learning*, they refer to "cultural beliefs and values about teaching and learning, expectations about classroom behaviour and what constitutes good work", whilst a *culture of communication* refers to "expected ways of communicating and of interpreting others' communication in a cultural group". Together, these three aspects of culture interact within the teaching and learning environment as participants draw on their own specific cultural frameworks in shaping their own behaviour and interpreting other peoples' actions and performance (Cortazzi & Jin).

Hence an individual's culture will affect their perspective on what and how teaching and learning should be conducted in the classroom. For many international students, embarking on a course in a UK institution requires a "new set of thinking" and "a new system of rules" for processing knowledge (Ballard 1996, p. 150). The previous set of (language) skills that they have cultivated may actually be less effective in their new university environment than students expect.

As Cortazzi and Jin (1996, p. 173) noted, "children in China are socialised into a particularly long- standing culture of learning at an early age". Thus children are taught to memorise and repeat learned language or knowledge in a way which would be considered rote-learning in UK university contexts, and this culture of learning, despite vast economic changes in China, has remained intact. Most notable in the context of this paper is the suggestion that strategies that have been used successfully in the early stages of education are likely to continue as students progress to the latter stages of education; hence students who are socialised into a particular culture of learning, such as that Cortazzi and Jin characterise for China, are likely to maintain these approaches as they grow older and enter UK universities.

Summary of key concepts
Summarising the discussion so far, general perceptions from several UK studies typically present overseas students as isolated, socially incompatible and academically misaligned with UK HE norms. However, they are also identified as working hard to overcome these difficulties, with their strengths and achievements not being fully recognised by hard-pressed academic staff who often operate within a deficit model of overseas student behaviour, study and achievement. Studies suggest that lecturers' focus on the language ability of overseas students and do not fully recognise the role of cultural knowledge in academic performance.

The aim of the project described in this paper was to establish the reality (or otherwise) of this picture for a group of overseas students from East Asia. It also aimed to ascertain whether the participant lecturers shared the views ascribed to academic staff across the sector, and investigate the implications of these debates in one particular context.

The case study and methodological approach
Erikson (1986) listed case-studies as one of the instruments through which interpretive research can be undertaken and suggests that interpretive approaches reveal immediate local meanings of actions as defined from the actors' point of view. Therefore, the key questions of interpretive approaches are "what is happening here, specifically? What do these happenings mean to the people engaged in them?" (Erikson, p. 124). This study also draws upon constructivist approaches to research whereby, truths and knowledge are cultivated through interpersonal interactions between the researchers and the participants in an interview process and through mutual understanding (i.e., rapport) (Richards, 2003).

Incorporating a strong element of triangulation through accessing multiple data sources, the project was based around in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Five HE lecturers from a northern UK university business school participated and were interviewed individually, whilst 5 student focus groups were established with 3 students in each (i.e., a total of 15 students). The students were members of the lecturers' seminar and lecture groups.

All the students were postgraduates. Three of the focus groups were drawn from programmes in Marketing and an MBA, whereas student samples in the fourth and fifth groups were drawn from courses in Business Management and Finance. The student participants were a balance of 7 male and 8 female students and were drawn from Taiwan (5 students), the PRC (7 students), Thailand (2 students) and Indonesia (1 student).

Interviewing took place in the participants' "home" settings (i.e., the lecturers' offices and the students' lodgings). Prior to the interviews, all participants received written guidance as to the topic themes that would be addressed which included:

- impressions of the learning styles and behaviours of East Asian students

- their views on 'cultures of learning' and the implications for academic success
- (for lecturers) strategies and teaching styles adopted to cater for student diversity
- (for lecturers) support and training required from and provided by their institution

Each interview lasted around 30 to 50 minutes, and strict ethical procedures including informed consent and anonymity were adopted (Cohen *et al.*, 2000).

Results
General perceptions: Confirming the issues
As suggested by the wider literature, when the overseas students first arrived in the UK, many seemed to have relatively little prior knowledge of what to expect in terms of the UK educational system:

> Before I came here I didn't have a clue about the teaching and learning here. (Student Focus Group 1/Participant 3 [SFG1/P3])

Isolation from UK and European peers on their programmes of study was also clearly identified, with students noting that:

> There are few people from Europe in our subject. (SFG2/P2)

> I actually made a lot of friends here but most are from Asian countries. (SFG1/P2)

General comments from academic staff about international students included:

> I think they are eager to learn, sometimes anxious about what's expected of them, partly compliant in some respects. If you ask them to do things, they do them… but if it's not a requirement like seminar attendance, they're not there. (Lecturer 3 [L3])

However, positive accounts were counterbalanced by some comments concerning the inability of East Asian students to participate fully and/or appropriately in academic settings:

> [Most issues pertaining to East Asian students] reduce down to issues of language operation. And, also understanding of the Westernised educational standard… so those are the two main issues as far as I can tell. (L1)

A deficit model also seemed to emerge when some (but not all) lecturers commented on overseas student difficulties in fully understanding lectures, their perceived reluctance to participate in group seminars, and their proficiency in English language:

> The temptation [in a lecture] is to make things simpler so that you know the overseas students and the people in a second language can understand it … and it's the same sort of thing when you slow down so that they can pick up the words… but it is a dilemma. (L2)

> I think with our [home] students, if you put them into groups and they've got international students with them, that often seems to be a bit of a burden… it'll slow things down, to explain things; and they won't expect the same level of contributions. (L4)

> Sometimes you'll get a bunch of [overseas] students who start talking. They turn around and say something, often in Mandarin or some dialect; it's very off-putting for the lecturer. (L2)

> The impact that a large cohort of foreign students appears to have is that… it discourages the home students from attending the class in the university… the reasons I suppose for that is that one way one has to teach is teaching different levels of language capability. (L1)

This points raised in this brief summary are now examined in more detail.

Gaps in perception
Lectures and seminars
All participants in the study noted the effects of cultural difference and cultural expectation on overseas student behaviour and participation on their programmes of study:

> We do understand something about the culture. (L5)

> Our studying style is different from the British people… because Asian people keep silence in the class. British people may not; most of them do not. (SFG1/P1)

However, what was particularly notable about the responses was that, in interview, students continued explain their behaviour by focusing on academic cultures and knowledge about cultures of learning for most of their interviews, whilst most lecturers tended to move on and develop their explanations of student behaviour by focusing on language issues.

Hence, by their own account, the majority of students in this study were generally reluctant to raise issues and ask questions during lectures and seminars. Instead, they seemed to want to question or even contribute after sessions finished. This was due to their own cultural norms, with no reference being made to language issues by any student:

> Most Asian students are conservative. They are really afraid to add something in the lecture; all students after the lecture want to [ask] the tutors. (SFG2/P1)

> You know the Asian style is always keep silent in class. They [East Asian students] will always listen in the classroom only teacher talk, talk, talk. (SFG1/P1)

However, despite lecturers' initial identification of cultural difference as a key issue, their subsequent analyses of student understanding and participation focused almost exclusively on language. Thus responses concerning lectures included:

> I try to speak slower; I am trying to use less idiomatic language … I could sense everyone had not got what it meant. (L3)

> I can talk more slowly but there's a strain on. It means that I don't make it all the way through my lecture… I can't use much humour. (L1)

> I try to be a little bit more careful about words I use but it's actually very difficult when you know English well. (L4)

> … but the British students will say, "we dominate because we are the only ones who speak"… to engage the [overseas students] takes so much time that you cannot run the seminar the way perhaps you wanted to. (L2)

The lecturers' responses to their perceptions of the lack of student interaction and participation are undoubtedly valuable and valid (the students themselves noted some language difficulties), but it interesting to note that differences cultural understandings were not referred to in any real detail. Lecturers acknowledged the need to change their language but not, to any great extent, to alter teaching patterns in other ways. Nor, as an exemplar of the deficit model, were the benefits to UK students or the need to address and challenge UK student behaviour and attitudes noted. Indeed:

We have made some changes, but part of me does this with reluctance… if they want a British degree, a British qualification, we shouldn't make it something which is not really a proper British qualification. (L4)

Programme content
Developing this theme further, it became apparent that students also found difficulty with culturally-based references during their programmes:

> Yes, British examples… they're talking about something about the British TV programmes. I think most foreign students don't really understand that joking or the knowledge. (SFG2/P1)

This was acknowledged to an extent by one of the lecturers, but with the caveat:

> It would be good to use more [East Asian] case-studies but we've got to have the confidence that we really do know what we are talking about when we use them. (L4)

> It's a credibility issue... there's a safety zone if I talk about issues in the UK. (L4)

The institutional context
All lecturers were aware of some, but not all, activities the university was undertaking in support of its international agenda. All were aware of staff development workshops focusing mainly on classroom pedagogy and language issues, but not all knew about more strategic activity such as a university-wide International Learning Enhancement Group, the remit of which included "the internationalisation of the curriculum".

Responses indicated a clear sense of responsibility amongst the lecturers for addressing the difficulties they perceived students to be experiencing, but there was also a feeling that finding satisfactory solutions could not left to individual members of staff:

> I don't feel a broad systematic approach to it anywhere in the university. I would like them to come back and explain the differences between the British higher education system and the Chinese and effectively bridge that cultural gap. (L3)

> The university might provide staff workshops but … you are so busy that going to them is difficult. (L3)

> How do you deal with the difficulties? One is to leave the university! … it's a matter of failing students on every level- the students fail to have their needs met. Now it's partly the responsibility of the university. (L1)

> I don't know whether or not you can take the teacher and then turn them into the kind of teacher that can deal with cultural problems. (L1)

When discussing the institutional context, all lecturers also made reference to university-wide English language provision and support. As at most UK universities, many students on the PG business programmes, and most students in this study, had experienced university-based in-sessional English language support courses. Participating students valued these courses highly (with comments such as "it was good for me", "it's really helpful", "I think the courses gives us a lot of confidence"). However, most lecturers tended to focus on structural issues within the institution's English language support provision, such as student attendance. They held the view that those students who were weak in English language tended to avoid attending the courses:

> Fundamentally it's the students who are weakest who won't go near it because they don't want to expose their weakness. They don't want people to say, "hey, your English isn't good enough". They rather kind of sit in cocoon, in the classroom where they actually don't have to answer anything. (L4)

> I'm afraid to say that the students have let us down by saying they want to come forward and do it. We've identified them with and then the attendance has fallen away now. Why the attendance has fallen away, I cannot say because we don't really know. Is it because the students got bored; is because they didn't perceive that they need it really? (L2)

Lecturers participating in this project also expressed concern about the language levels required for overseas student entry onto their programmes and were concerned that, where recognised and reliable international tests were used as a measure of English language level, students were focusing on passing the tests rather than learning the language more generally (and more appropriately for their programme needs). The disjunction between necessary critical thinking skills during university study and pre-entry language-focused assessment was also raised:

> People learn how to do a test, rather than learn English; it's how do I pass at the level I want. That's my impression. (L4)

> The [international test] scores we use for entry onto our programmes do not allow students to take part in critical thinking. (L3)

Additionally, lecturers were concerned about whether IELTS entry points were appropriate for postgraduate level study, but acknowledged the pressures the programmes were under to maintain recruitment in a competitive market:

> I'm beginning to wonder whether the IELTS scores are high enough. (L2)

> We understand there are students with IELTS scores of 6.5… that doesn't necessarily make them competent in using the language in the UK. (L5)

> [IELTS entry levels] come down to market forces… we would be bankrupt. (L4)

It is clear, then, that the lectures who participated in this study found their professional environment to be challenging. There was some pessimism about the future:

> I think the cultural barrier will be hard to beat. (L2)

However, positive views were also apparent, albeit representing a range of differing perspectives on which group needed to adapt:

> I would say that makes you a better teacher because you develop skills - how to communicate with different people from different parts of the world which can only be a good thing. (L5)

> I can't sit here and say it's different, you students do something about it, you've got to change. I think the strategies in the seminar do have to change. (L3)

> The more imaginative students will adapt. (L1)

Summary of results

The data show that lecturers and student participants held a variety of perspectives about teaching and learning on their postgraduate programmes, perspectives which often differed when focusing on the perceived difficulties experienced by students.

Both lecturers and students noted that international students had difficulties adapting to British educational norms, principally in relation to understanding lectures and participation in seminars/group discussions, where they were less likely to ask questions or to put forward their opinions and ideas in class. Reasons for this differed between the two groups. Lecturers tended towards a *deficit model* (Warwick, 2007) of both overseas students' language capabilities and their ability to follow UK norms of academic practice. Lecturers tended to identify language as the primary cause of difficulties, whilst students more frequently referred to their cultural background and cultures of learning. Students also suggested that whilst problems may arise from the use of colloquial English, the use of local case-studies and examples was sometimes beyond their cultural knowledge-base. This suggests that a review is necessary of whether internationalisation of programme curricula is occurring or required.

Lecturers also felt clearly that they more systematic institutional arrangements in support of the university's international agenda were required. They were concerned about support for academic staff, and also language support and development for international students, noting that language tests may not test essential academic skills required for study in Britain.

Discussion

Although this paper documents a case-study of a specific group of postgraduate business students and academic staff at a particular university, it seems reasonable to suggest that the findings are relatively typical of most universities. Thus, this study confirms the well-documented difficulties experienced by both East Asian students and their lecturers within British HE institutions, but also notes that a gap exists between staff and students' understanding of these difficulties.

However, the findings also raise a more fundamental question faced by universities, and indeed bodies such as the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). Given that knowledge of these difficulties is widespread (as evidenced by the volume of research into this area, much of it published by the HEA), and also given the effort and attention of universities (and their staff) and the requirement of the QAA for institutions to engage with the internationalisation agenda (QAA, 2008), why do lecturers' understandings of international students continue to be limited?

Considerations for lecturers
Developing an understanding
Given the pressures that academic staff face in their work (see literature and data above):

> The answer does not lie in doing more but rather viewing the problem differently, in doing different things, and in thinking creatively about the major issues which underpin concerns about teaching the ever larger number of international students we encounter in our classroom. (Carroll & Ryan 2005, p5)

This suggests that academic staff need to develop a deeper understanding of their own and their international students' cultures of learning which moves away from a deficit model of students' skills and abilities; lecturers also need to find ways of accommodating (and appreciating) difference on their programmes. To facilitate this, as Gu and Maley noted, "an analytical, empathetic and reflexive attitude is important for teachers and researchers working across cultural borders", including "the ability of teachers and researchers to step outside their own habitual norms and values in order to better understand and appreciate the difficulties, and the victories, of their students" (2008, p. 225).

The data in this study fully supports Carroll and Ryan's assertion that:

> We equate language skills and confident styles with intelligence and the results of hard work. We do not have the time to look beyond style for the substance and understanding. (2005, p. 6)

Hence lecturers need to recognise that language difficulties are not the same as cultural differences. Given the numbers of international students on programmes and the contribution of East Asian students to UK universities generally, it is no longer enough for academic staff to adopt a primarily deficit model of overseas student practices, simply expecting overseas students to adapt and integrate into existing UK university norms and practices. As Cortazzi and Jin (1997) noted, assimilation is unlikely to happen without mutual understanding of both parties' respective expectations and needs.

For example, it would be useful for teaching staff to appreciate more fully that apart from culturally-based content which East Asian students may not grasp, student clarification and contribution in lectures does not appear to be the norm in East Asian cultures, and is perceived as rude and disruptive. Meanwhile, asking questions at the end of the lecture or outside is suggested to be an East Asian norm. This may be seem odd to British lecturers but does suggest that cultural factors are at play equally as much as linguistic issues in the issue of participation in class. Similarly, excessive argument in seminars may clash with East Asian students' traditional "face system" in which they tended to work for harmonisation in groups instead of challenging authority and confronting other peers (Flowerdew, 1998). Hence, in argumentative settings, a common strategy for East Asian students is to remain silent.

An appreciation of these and similar points by lecturing staff is necessary if universities are to continue to change to accommodate and appreciate international students.

The practical context
In practical terms, and developing the ideas above, Carroll and Ryan noted that "lecturers who are aware of their own beliefs can consider how their rules and beliefs might be explained and taught to those who do not yet understand them" (2005, p. 7). It is clearly important that overseas students are fully informed about, and understand clearly, the nature of studying in Britain when selecting courses and prior to arrival. This includes expectations of classroom practices, academic culture, and cultures of communication and learning (Jordan 1997). It is worth noting that these induction practices are commonplace throughout British HE (and, within this case-study, both at programme level and on university-wide academic programmes), although this again raises the questions surrounding their possible lack of effectiveness.

It also seems important that, in seminars, classroom activities are structured in ways that generate an equal share of turn-taking between students. This suggests that free discussion may be problematic. In seminars, classroom activities could perhaps be structured slightly more to ensure participation is evenly spread. Thus instead of encouraging general open discussion, students could participate in, for example, group work, nominated turn-taking and structured pair-work tasks (Biggs, 2003) - these approaches were indeed suggested by some of the lecturers participating in this project. Biggs (p. 272) also suggests that academic staff may need to share their teaching experiences and expertise in structured ways which he terms "regular sharing sessions", creating an environment in which interdependence, cooperation and synergy are mutually shared and administered.

Content themes, topics and contexts need to be further internationalised to ensure relevance for East Asian and other international students. It seems that, despite the influx of overseas students into UK universities, syllabuses may not keep pace with the backgrounds and contexts of the new student cohorts. This means the relevance and accessibility of some material is difficult for some overseas students to grasp. If local contexts and examples are used, they need to be fully explained to, and understood by, all students.

The wider context: Considerations for institutions
There is a clear overlap between some of the practical issues facing lecturers teaching international students and the wider context of institutional activity. As the data in this study suggests, lecturers feel that, while their institution attempts to deal with the difficulties of teaching and learning on programmes, strategies and initiatives do not always filter down as much as they should.

Similarly, Webb (2005) noted that responsibility for dealing with the effects of internationalisation is typically placed in the hands of a working party (as found in this case-study institution). However, the existence of such a grouping was not identified by any of the participants in this study, who instead noted a lack of a systematic approach in implementing strategies and disseminating good practice. It seems reasonable to assume that similar criticisms are made at other institutions. Thus, how university-wide policy and strategies can be disseminated and made relevant to academic staff is clearly one of the most challenging issues faced by universities.

Universities face a similar challenge with staff training and development. Usually organised on a voluntary, self-nominating basis, workshops focusing on international student issues are often attended by relatively few

staff, often, in the experience of the authors, those who already have moved beyond a deficit model of student ability to a fuller understanding of cultures of learning. A corollary of the lack of involvement of many staff in such programmes and workshops is that lecturers develop a sense of isolation when faced by the evident difficulties international students experience. As Carroll and Ryan (2005, p. 5) noted, "lecturers can feel they are constantly 'reinventing the wheel'", whilst Dunn and Carroll (2005) suggested that supporting networks are necessary, not only at the generic university level, but also focused on disciplines and departments. A challenge for university management is to enable these to operate effectively by prioritising their importance, and finding time for academic staff to attend and develop.

An essential challenge universities face, therefore, is how to engage all staff and develop an institutional and institution-wide approach to overseas students which regards the diversity they bring to programmes and the benefits to home students more positively. Developing Webb's ideas (2005), institutions need to provide clearer rationales and conceptualisations of internationalisation, indeed, internationalisation and international students need to be normalised as an expected and standard part of university life.

Conclusion

Unravelling negative and positive aspects of the international student experience can only be a constructive undertaking in the long run for institutions, and the results of this study do raise serious questions for lecturers, students, the programmes and for UK universities. Although the research is specific to a single institution, it nevertheless raises key questions for policy-makers, managers, and lecturers across the UK HE sector to consider - how can UK institutions balance the need to recruit large numbers of overseas students on the one hand, while providing the resources necessary to address the students' needs and, indeed, lecturers' needs? Why, when internationalisation has been progress for 15 years, do lecturers and students still share differing perspectives on the difficulties they face and possible solutions? Further research is clearly necessary, but it is hoped the discussion in this paper may start to bridge gap between lecturers' and students' needs and expectations, and also wider institutional strategies and on-the- ground experiences, on business-related postgraduate programmes within British universities.

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