Introduction

This series of conference papers within the theme 'Diversity, Internationalisation and Intercultural Learning' engages with concepts, policy and practice from a variety of different foci. Caruana's (2007) contribution gives some indication of the breadth and diversity of research taking place in the field. Based on a literature review commissioned by the Higher Education Academy in 2006 this work serves to establish parameters and frontiers in addressing four key questions - what working definitions of internationalisation of higher education are in currency? what meanings are attributed to internationalisation of the curriculum? what models for institutional internationalisation are emerging? and, what curriculum models are emerging?

The cultural dimension of the international student experience within UK HEIs receives much attention from curriculum/practice and policy/strategic perspectives. The practice-based work is thought provoking in questioning the deficit and assimilationist models of cultural adjustment; exploring the dynamic interdependence of language, culture and social interaction and presenting a case study of a European collaboration to develop a Masters level module to prepare students for work and leadership in a world of cultural diversity. At the strategic level we are provided with something of an exemplar of a - quite radical - strategic approach to internationalisation which is 'values-driven' thereby regarding international students as a rich source of 'cultural capital and intentional diversity' (Etherington and Spurling 2007; Jones 2007; Sola and Wilkinson 2007; Singh 2007). All these works are complemented by a rather more conceptual piece (Brown 2007) which connects the forces of globalisation with the emergence of a 'New Public Diplomacy' - embodying a much greater emphasis on cultural relations as between individuals - and examines the implications for policy at national and institutional levels.

Other works in the collection explore the challenges posed by diversity in the formal learning environment. Research addresses teacher perceptions and the ways in which they might 'value' the different lives and experiences of international students - on both taught and research programmes - whilst, at the same time responding to the educational challenges deriving from such diversity (Lloyd-Jones 2007). Further work explores the challenge posed to both educators and students by multicultural society and diversity in the classroom, key issues include how to encourage students to share aspects of their ethnic identities and create 'multicultural learning communities' and how to prepare citizenship educators to meet the needs and aspirations of young people from BME groups (Simon 2007; Megson 2007)

Bell, Keegan and Zaitseva (2007) provide a thoughtful case study exploring the use of ICT to support students who are studying abroad and encountering all the challenges of physical cross-border mobility, whilst at the same time providing a rich source of material to allow other students to experience 'virtual mobility'. This research emphasises the need to carefully consider technology choice and configuration in the light of organisational and socio-educational issues. Similarly, Robinson (2007) sounds a word of caution when designing student encounters with Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) in addressing the key question 'How can Virtual Learning Environments be chosen and configured to accommodate cultural differences of students and bring value to the learning experience?' She emphasises the need to appreciate that Widening Participation is not only a UK phenomenon, but will also be affecting our international partners, thereby creating complexities of cultural difference in terms of student expectations, learning outcomes etc.

Finally, having explored the challenges facing the UK the series concludes with a small number of papers that look beyond these shores to consider the impact of the forces of globalisation on Higher Education as they sweep across the European continent and beyond. Stoykova and Dencheva's (2007) research in Bulgaria provides compelling insights into the impact of political and economic change on curricula, programmes, methods and tools used for teaching local students in global surroundings. Nguyen (2007) adopts a comparative perspective in charting how globalisation has influenced educational policy making and practice in China and Vietnam.

This work addresses for example, the re-orientation of curricula to meet market need and respond to the pressures of demand for 'knowledge workers', the dismantling of state monopolies in education and the accompanying trend towards merger between HEIs and finally, privatisation and its impact on equality of educational opportunity. The questions posed by many of the papers requires an analysis of the different levels of influence that are impinging on practitioners from aspects of globalisation as evidenced through internationalisation and the concerns of governments, partly fearful of their position within the economic world order in responding by reviewing their higher education systems. The following countries have reviewed or are reviewing their higher education systems, France, USA, Australia, Germany, Japan and Scotland. In England the government published 'The Future of Higher Education' White Paper in 2003 and this became an Act of Parliament in 2004. This policy response can be seen as an attempt to combine a strategy of responding to globalisation and to widening participation in introducing fees and at the same time responding to fears about the growth of higher level skills in new economies in China and India.