

Values-Driven internationalisation – embracing cultural change

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Abstract

While the recruitment of international students is nothing new, universities worldwide are increasingly recognising the need to value and nurture populations of students who take up Higher Education opportunities outside their home nations. Whereas in the past this has frequently been seen as problematic, increased competition in trans-national education means that a different approach has to be adopted which values the contribution international students make to the learning community. The complexities arising from diverse student populations represent a source of learning for the organisation as well as the individual. To date, recruitment of international students has been seen by many as primarily a source of income generation. This paper, conversely, situates the international student at the heart of the university as a source of cultural capital and intentional diversity, enriching the learning experience both for home students and for each other, expanding staff horizons, building a more powerful learning community and thus deepening the HE experience as a whole.

Introduction

Internationalisation has been described by John Taylor (2004) as “one of the most powerful forces for change in contemporary higher education.” It is unsurprising, therefore, that more and more British universities are addressing their approach to internationalisation and developing strategies to deliver their objectives.

Even today, some universities take an instrumental view of international student recruitment viewing this, primarily, as a source of income generation. Once recruited, students may be problematised in the kind of deficit model which does not encourage reflection on the value they can bring to the institution. While the recruitment of international students is nothing new, competitive pressure in trans-national education means that universities worldwide are increasingly recognising the need to value and nurture populations of students who undertake higher education outside their home nations.

For those universities which go beyond this stage and value international students as a source of cultural capital and intentional diversity, there can be significant benefits. International students can enrich the learning experience both for home students and for each other, expand staff horizons, build a more powerful learning community and thus deepen the HE experience as a whole. Such an integrative approach recognises the contribution international students make to the academic community, adding to existing diversity and representing a source of learning for the organisation as well as the individuals within it.

A number of universities have gone yet a step further and view internationalisation to be at the heart of their work. Curriculum, staff development, institutional policies and strategies embrace internationalisation and the benefits of this broader approach are recognised as adding value to all dimensions of university life. Fundamental to such a values-driven ethos is the notion that good practice for internationalisation is good practice for all. An internationalised university offers opportunities to enhance the global perspectives of all students and staff, not only those who are already in an international environment as a function of undertaking their education in another country. It is possible for positive benefits to accrue from any international and cross-cultural experience, including those which take place ‘at home’, in one’s own country of origin.

Universities wishing to adopt an approach of this kind face a number of challenges. Often, primary among these is the need to move from an institutional mindset which places the emphasis on international student recruitment for financial gain. This paper will consider how institutions can address such a challenge. It will refer to key aspects of internationalisation at both strategic and operational levels, from organisational policy to the difference individuals can make. It will consider the impact on staff and students when an institution adopts and supports such measures and show how this can help develop students’ employability skills. It will demonstrate how an internationalisation strategy can be used to bring about institutional cultural change and will provide examples from one institution, Leeds Metropolitan University, which can be applied in other contexts.

Strategic Approach to Internationalisation

Challenging and changing culture in an organisation as large as a university is not done overnight but since 2003, Leeds Metropolitan University has sought to engage its staff and student community, as well as

partners, in bringing about cultural change for internationalisation. Knight and de Wit (1995) describe internationalisation as... 'the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service of an institution.' This definition was later updated in 2005, but it is the original definition which Leeds Met adopted in 2003 to offer a holistic overview for its Internationalisation Strategy. The strategic approach attempted has been similar to that characterised by Ellingboe (1998): "an ongoing, future oriented, multi-dimensional, interdisciplinary, leadership-driven vision that involves many stakeholders working to change the internal dynamics of an institution to respond and adapt appropriately to an increasingly diverse, globally-focused, ever-changing external environment."

Leeds Met is striving to be 'a world-class regional university with world-wide horizons, using all our talents to the full'.¹ This vision of 'world-wide horizons' has been used to review the approach to internationalisation, to integrate it with other strategies and to ensure a values-driven orientation towards the development and implementation of the Internationalisation Strategy. It is taken as read that internationalisation is for everyone in the University, for home and international students as well as all staff of the institution.

In the excellent book by Carroll and Ryan, *Teaching International Students, Improving Learning for All*, Webb (2005) encourages us to 'normalise internationalisation of the curriculum' and offers strategies for doing so which extend beyond the narrow interpretation of curriculum into the student experience as a whole. He defines such normalisation as 'turning the ad hoc and uneven efforts of a few enthusiasts into the normal expectations and requirements of the organisation'. He proposes that this should 'be seen as a dynamic process which...affords staff and students the opportunity to own the processes of their own learning and knowledge production'. As Leeds Met has found, achievement of such an aspiration requires a coordinated strategic approach along with significant effort from staff at all levels of the institution. Are there universities which would not claim to have 'world-wide horizons'? Perhaps not, but by stating this within the vision, and then developing it through inter-related strategies such as Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Research and Staff Development, commitment at the most senior levels is assured. It is unusual, particularly for a UK university, to have such a bold statement of internationalisation as part of its vision or to receive this kind of support from the very top of the organisation.

Until 2002/3, Leeds Met's international priorities focused primarily on student recruitment. With the appointment of Professor Simon Lee as Vice-Chancellor in 2003 broader internationalisation began to be seen as fundamental to the work of the University. This required a radical reconsideration of how all aspects of the University's life and work would be affected. As a result, the Internationalisation Strategy was developed in 2003 with six themes, only one of which relates to student recruitment:

1. Internationalising learning, teaching and research;
2. Enhancing the international student experience;
3. Enhancing the international experience of home students;
4. Developing and fostering international partnerships and alliances;
5. Developing staff capability for internationalisation;
6. Effectively recruiting international students.

In contrast with the position in 2002/3, sufficient progress had been made in changing the culture by late 2006 that one of the ten vision and character statements now reads: '[we intend to be] a university with world-wide horizons where an international, multicultural ethos is pervasive throughout our scholarship, curriculum, volunteering and community engagement at home and overseas.'² The next part of this paper will consider how the institutional culture was challenged to help bring this about.

Progress to Date – Values-driven Internationalisation

An International Faculty and International Dean were created soon after the Vice-Chancellor joined Leeds Met. The Faculty was to be responsible not only for delivering a range of existing subjects with a broadly

¹ Leeds Metropolitan University, *Vision and Character Statement* http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/the_news/docs/visionandcharacter.pdf

² Leeds Metropolitan University, *Vision and Character Statement* http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/the_news/docs/visionandcharacter.pdf

international theme but also for fostering and leading internationalisation across the whole University. The development of new subject areas, to promote international understanding and global perspectives for home (i.e. British) students, was to be a further focus of the Faculty's work, and a School of Applied Global Ethics was created to offer courses such as Development Studies and Peace & Conflict Resolution. With academic as well as marketing expertise, international student advisers and broad experience in English language development for academic purposes, the Faculty was in a unique position to support international developments across the University and to provide a lead in the achievement of ambitious internationalisation objectives.

All six elements of the strategy were to receive equal emphasis in order to develop a shared understanding that it was not the intention simply to seek ever higher numbers of international students. Leeds Met has around 4,500 international students from 120 source countries and there are no plans to increase significantly the number of students attracted to Leeds. It is undeniable that there are financial benefits from international student recruitment, but the real impact international students can have on the university is of a different order and relates much more to essential aspects of the educational process. This includes providing alternative perspectives in the classroom; encouraging staff to diversify research and teaching interests; offering opportunities for engagement in international contexts, for example through working with partner universities; and, of course, remodelling the socio-cultural context and assisting the internationalisation of UK students.

To help promote a wider understanding of the different elements of the strategy, the procedure for approving international travel was revised; anyone wishing to travel overseas, had to seek approval from the International Dean, via the International Office. This was to 'ensure that international contacts and experience are shared and that the whole capability of the University is deployed as effectively as possible in support of internationalisation.'³ In order to ensure strategic as well as financial overview, the proposal had to make clear the purpose of the visit and how it would contribute to one or more of the Internationalisation Strategy's six inter-related themes. With around 700 international visits a year, this helped to focus attention on the six strategic themes and raise awareness of the strategy among those undertaking international visits. It also provided useful management information and more targeted control of expenditure. Prospective travellers are offered guidance by the International Office, linking new proposals with previous visits to the country or region and putting them in touch with those who have expertise in the region to be visited. On return, as well as providing a formal report, those travelling on behalf of the University must provide a contribution for the International Reflections section of the website.

<http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat/reflects>. We will return to this later.

Rather than international student recruitment for financial gain being the main focus of internationalisation, as was earlier the case, students are now seen to be at the heart of the University, providing a valuable source of cultural capital and support for delivery of the strategy in that, amongst other things, they add to the diversity of the institution and offer focal points for themed activities, such as events celebrating particular cultures. However, the presence of international students can not be relied on, in itself, to enhance the global perspectives of the wider student and staff body. The next section of this paper considers how 'world-wide horizons' have been developed at Leeds Met, taking each aspect of the Internationalisation Strategy in turn and offering examples which other institutions may find helpful or wish to emulate.

Aspect 1: Internationalising Learning, Teaching and Research

Guidelines on Cross-Cultural Capability and Global Perspectives have been produced (see Jones and Killick, 2007) and all new courses are required to consider these, (and all current courses to be reviewed against them) by 2008. International Teacher Fellows have been introduced in each Faculty to promote internationalisation. Research at Leeds Met has shown (Leggott and Stapleford, 2007) that internationalisation can develop employability skills and enhance employment prospects. To assist in this, a series of *Global Citizen* awards were developed (assessed via portfolio), which enable students and staff to be rewarded for their world-wide horizons.

The *Language Pass*, modelled on the Sports Pass, offers staff and students reduced rates for language study, along with additional mentoring and support in over twenty five languages. The Senator George Mitchell

³ *Leeds Metropolitan University: Supporting Internationalisation – Guidelines for travel outside the UK*

Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution has been inaugurated and will eventually incorporate the UK's national Peace Museum. The International Centre for Responsible Tourism has been launched and the International Centre for Community Engagement is in planning. Education for Sustainable Development is being promoted across the University and Leeds Met recently headed the league table as the UK's 'greenest' university. Fairtrade status was achieved some years ago and a commitment has been made to becoming a Globally Responsible Leadership University.

Aspect 2: Enhancing the International Student Experience

We try to provide the best possible welcome for international students coming to Leeds and support for when they return home. Examples of the latter include 'reverse culture shock' seminars and career planning and employment support, being piloted in the Leeds Met South Asia office. Opportunities are also being offered to a broader international student body: 'offshore' delivery of programmes by Leeds Met staff now takes place in six countries across three continents, with over 1,000 students taking part. The number of offshore research students is being increased, enabling those who could not afford to undertake their research in the UK the chance to do so at home. Commonwealth Scholarships have been secured to deliver Masters programmes in three African countries, thus enabling 75 students each year in Zambia, Tanzania and The Gambia to achieve qualifications they could not afford to pay for themselves. Carnegie Coaching for Life seeks to raise aspirations amongst society's most disadvantaged, through sport and literacy programmes, in South Africa and Sri Lanka. An award-winning tour of China with the Northern Ballet Theatre, sought to engage students and Chinese partners with a novel demonstration of partnership work. From there we progressed to a partnership with the International Indian Film Academy which saw 140 staff and students working as volunteers for the 'Bollywood' weekend which, at the same time, helped to engender a sense of belonging amongst staff and students both from India itself and those from a South Asian background.

Aspect 3: Enhancing the International Experience of Home Students

A crucial element of the strategy is to provide opportunities for internationalisation at home for those who do not engage in an experience involving travel to another country (such as study, volunteering or work placement overseas). World-wide horizons are not developed merely by having a few international students in the class, nor simply by visiting another country. If students are engaged in meaningful cross-cultural learning, however, the benefits of alternative cultural perspectives in the classroom can be extremely valuable.

In addition to such internationalisation of the curriculum, students can connect with the international dimensions of the University through regular celebrations and events. These include opportunities for academic engagement as well as celebrations of different cultures through music, dance, photography, cinema and food. Exhibitions on Darfur, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Islamic Student Society's exhibition of Muslim culture drew appreciative audiences. Recent festivals include Leeds Met Africa, Leeds Met Ireland and Language & Culture Fiestas. We supported the British Asian Rugby Association's championship-winning tour of India, linking local South Asian heritage students with the sub-continent. The Global Citizen Awards for international engagement are not dependent on travelling outside the UK but emphasise opportunities for internationalisation at home. At the same time, international volunteering is being promoted, alongside an increase in the number of academic exchange places around the world. In this, the Centenary Year at Headingley Campus, 50% bursaries are being provided for 100 international volunteers in ten countries across six continents, along with travel bursaries for 100 outgoing international exchange students.

Aspect 4: Developing and fostering international partnerships and alliances

International partnerships are the enabling factor for many aspects of the strategy. Staff exchange, for both academic and support staff, has been one means of developing the knowledge and skills needed for effective internationalisation. Joint research opportunities, the development of collaborative programmes and reciprocal consultancy and knowledge transfer have all proved beneficial. Sharing ideas and benchmarking against international best practice has proved invaluable in stretching ourselves to innovate.

Aspect 5: Developing staff capability for internationalisation

None of the strategy's objectives would be achievable without the appropriate staff to deliver them. As has been mentioned, International Teacher Fellows play a role in helping to spread the word within Faculties and to raise awareness of the opportunities available. Both the two-week staff development festival in September and year-round Learning Lunches have offered staff the chance to engage in internationalisation discussions,

including the development of cross-cultural capability and assessment, learning and teaching issues for international students. The Library has provided workshops for their staff on dealing with students whose first language is not English and staff have worked together to produce papers on internationalising the Library. The Language Pass, mentioned earlier, is available to staff as well as students, and specific language programmes are offered to staff who teach overseas. Developing and delivering offshore programmes has provided academic staff with new contexts and examples for teaching both in the UK and in third countries and the Global Perspectives Network offers a forum for those who wish to take forward the challenge of incorporating Education for Sustainable Development and global perspectives in the classroom.

Aspect 6: Effectively recruiting international students

This was deliberately placed last to emphasise that it is but one dimension of the strategy. Standard recruitment techniques have been supported by an emphasis on parents and other decision-makers, with local languages used to provide basic information. Scholarship opportunities, festivals for agents and representatives and Graduation and Alumni events overseas all enable a different approach to student recruitment. The development and fostering of partner and agent relations by more unusual means, such as through the Northern Ballet Theatre tour of China, have played an important role and the International Indian Film Academy partnership, referred to earlier, will yield further opportunities, with the awards ceremony itself reaching approximately 500 million people around the world.

Key Factors in Internationalising Higher Education

Substantial progress has been made at Leeds Met in reaching the strategic internationalisation objectives, although there is still a long way to go. From this experience, key factors in internationalising higher education have been identified (see Jones, (2006), Jones and Brown (2007b)) and the strategy will be revised to reflect progress made to date. The next section of this paper will consider how culture has been changed to support the delivery of the strategy.

The Role of International Reflections in Changing Culture

The International Reflections webpage⁴ was mentioned earlier. Daily vignettes of exactly 200 words (no more, no less) have appeared since September 2003 on the Leeds Met website and have both contributed to, and shown evidence of, a shift in mindset in the importance attributed to internationalisation in the university. In this respect they have played a central role in helping to change institutional culture. The page was designed to explain, support and promote the broader, values-driven approach to internationalisation as this was rolled out across different aspects of university life, but how has it made such a difference? As should be apparent from what follows, including comments from readers and contributors to International Reflections, these daily postings have brought about change in the institutional culture while at the same time reflecting change within that culture through their growing sophistication. Several contributors note that engaging in the reflective process, and doing so in a public forum, is fundamental to the broader culture of academia, and it may be for this reason that they have been so enthusiastically embraced. This would echo one of Kezar and Eckel's (2002) conclusions that, "change strategies seem to be successful if they are culturally coherent or aligned with the culture".

Some early Reflections were simply reports of a visit without any real reflection, but the best began to show fascinating insights into the emerging internationalisation ethos. Students were encouraged to contribute by several enthusiastic staff members and an incentive of a £50 book token for the best student contribution was introduced. Items may offer tantalising glimpses of other cultures, or of different viewpoints on life as an international student in the UK. Many talk of personal transformation or changed perspectives as a result of an international experience or encounter. Others help to raise awareness of global development issues or the need to understand better other communities and cultures, including the needs of our international students. Yet more mark a response to world events, including natural disasters which may have affected students' families. It is not only academic staffs who write Reflections. Some of the best have been from support staff, including one who took part in a fundraising walk along the Great Wall of China⁵. Colleagues from international partner institutions and the British Council have made contributions, as have alumni and students on exchange overseas and incoming exchange students. There have been pieces from agents and representatives, and international visitors are encouraged to submit a Reflection. One parent of a staff

⁴ <http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internet/reflects/index.htm>

⁵ <http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internet/reflects/jan06/jan17.htm>

member, who was at that time working within the Arctic Circle, wanted to describe this experience and so sent in a Reflection⁶ and there have been other contributions by family members of staff⁷ and students⁸.

Taken as a whole the pages, which are all available through the online archive, offer real evidence that internationalisation at Leeds Met is about much more than recruiting international students. They have helped to support the kind of culture change which was needed in adjusting mindsets of those who thought that internationalisation was simply about student recruitment. They have done this in part by providing evidence that students, staff and friends of the University are not only having international and intercultural experiences but are learning from these in ways which support and reflect the internationalisation process, and these are often more than simply working with international students. Some writers have been willing to offer thoughts and insights of such a personal nature, they have seemed more like letters from friends than public material, read on several continents. Many colleagues have said how much they value International Reflections, one saying that the best of these 'transport' him to other countries or cultures. This, in turn, has led to an increase in quality of the pieces submitted.

What do readers think?

Readers of International Reflections were asked to give their views online:

- 'I enjoy all of them, especially the one on 19 December 2005 as it touched me – it talked about displacement – which captured a feeling I have... I particularly enjoy Reflections by students from this country and outside. Every day the Reflections open a different chapter, people experiencing the same things in the same country at different times – or new feelings and experiences... I do enjoy Reflections from people not immediately from the University but connected to the University for example staff from partner universities. Also, the article from Leeds Met South Asia after the Tsunami was especially poignant and brought that office and people - so many miles away - closer.'
- 'Personal insights into the lives and customs of other countries or outsiders' views of British lives etc. The two that particularly stick in my mind were a student who was missing his young child and details of orthodox Christmas celebrations.'
- 'For me one of the most positive aspects of International Reflections is the opportunity they provide to enlighten staff and students about other cultures and other perspectives than their view of the world. Staff should be encouraged to write with this in mind and staff should encourage students to read the Reflections and on the most appropriate occasions use a reflection to engage students in discussion, e.g. poverty, standard of living, transport, education, medical care. The International Reflections are one way to take a global perspective.'
- 'The International Reflections serve as a constant reminder of the global context in which we both live and work, they remind me of the diversity of our students and of the breadth of the activity of the University.'
- 'I find the Reflections to be an interesting part of our uni – they serve many purposes to many audiences and contributors.'
- 'International Reflections are useful as they provide us with insights into what the University is doing abroad as well as personal reactions, cross cultural knowledge and experiences which can help in the understanding of our own international students and possible country contacts for our next visits.'

⁶ <http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat/reflects/dec04/dec17.htm>

⁷ <http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat/reflects/apr04/apr20.htm>

⁸ <http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat/reflects/apr05/apr20.htm>

Figure 1 shows a sample Reflection, which illustrates their impact on one reader.

Today we mark three years of International Reflections

International Reflections take me to new cultures and give me insight, not into how we view others, but how others view us. An example was from **Kobon Moses Togo**⁹ reflecting on the support he received from inspirational individuals at Leeds Met. My favourites are those that send a message or make you sit back and think, such as the empty chair at the table for a missing loved one, in my all time favourite reflection from **Teresa Pioro**,¹⁰ What Reflections have done for me is best summed up by **Karen Griffith**,¹¹ where she talks of her son and a couple of students in hospital beds next to each other, “They have shown consideration and compassion and have recognised each others' diversity... [this] is another example of how essential integration and understanding can be”.

I believe that International Reflections have made the world a smaller place for me, made me understand diversity and given me the impetus and courage to go beyond boundaries by visiting Mexico last year and later this year Brazil. I could pick ten books on various countries in the world but I am more likely to remember ten 200 word Reflections. Thanks to everyone who has contributed.

Brian Bolton
Campus Services Manager and Staff Governor

Figure 1: International Reflection Friday 15th September 2006

<http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat/reflects/sep06/sept15.htm>

What is the impact on the writer?

While International Reflections was not specifically initiated with this in mind, several authors have suggested that the process of reflection and the writing of them have contributed to their own learning process. A survey of frequent contributors to International Reflections was conducted. Writers often mention the fact that, conscious awareness that a Reflection was expected of them, caused the author to view the place they were visiting in a different light or to notice things which otherwise they might not.

- ‘Writing the reflection actually does encourage me to take the time to reflect on what I am finding strange, interesting, irritating or exciting about where I am.’
- ‘I choose a mental souvenir; this is what I shall remember about this place.’

The constraint of writing exactly 200 words in two paragraphs has been mentioned by some as a difficult challenge, although those who work with students who are not native speakers of English say this is a useful learning task which helps students to gain greater understanding of English grammar in use. Those who responded to the survey generally found it an interesting personal challenge:

- ‘Shorter is not easier. The limit means only the essence can be included and every word must count Much time is spent crafting those last four or five words in or out. The key discipline is to make a couple of points powerfully.’

There were comments on thought processes while composing the item:

- ‘Ideally there should be something new and interesting ... something that deserves reflection, which readers will actually want to read. The creative process involves finding that essence. It's an act of story telling.’
- ‘It is a creative process, it is a rare opportunity for creative writing as contrasted to the dull academic reports which we so often write. I have even written in verse.’
- ‘Having people encourage me to start writing in this way and congratulating me when something gets accepted has been very good for my personal development as a young academic. It has been a

⁹ <http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat/reflects/may06/may18.htm>

¹⁰ <http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat/reflects/dec04/dec24.htm>

¹¹ <http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat/reflects/mar04/mar05.htm>

good place to start thinking about writing concisely, getting a point across and considering the audience.’

Writers were asked to what extent their personal reaction to other Reflections influenced what they wrote:

- ‘We have a research community here which strives to share via the reflective process. Many of the Reflections are really excellent, make you think or laugh. If I find it tough then I am humbled by [the Vice-Chancellor’s] output. He writes one every day and there is a real risk that they could become perfunctory but they never are, so that is the marker. I also like the fact that some of the best Reflections have been by support staff who relish putting their experiences and thoughts into print. That knowledge that the process is shared by all is an encouragement to do better since people do look at them to make a bit more sense of what else other people are doing here....’

Conclusion

The process of daily reflection in a public form appears to be making an even more significant contribution to internationalisation than originally envisaged. Beyond merely raising awareness of the issues, its impact has been to help drive, support and reflect internationalisation at Leeds Metropolitan University. Daily Research Reflections, Assessment, Learning and Teaching Reflections and Sporting Reflections have all been introduced and are serving similar purposes in respect of those issues. All the Reflections have become a significant feature on the University’s website, and ensure that there will be daily changes to the site to keep readers coming back. In addition, there has been a growing sense of pride as, increasingly, staff submit paper copies of their contributions in job interviews and students alert family and friends around the world when their item appears.

The feedback given by both readers and writers, illustrated by the examples here, represents further opportunity for development as well as heartening evidence that internationalisation is becoming firmly embedded in the lifeblood of the institution. Examples have been given of how Leeds Met is delivering its Internationalisation Strategy and it has been demonstrated that the International Reflections webpage represents one means by which institutional culture has been challenged and changed to support a values-driven approach to internationalisation.

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