

## Introduction

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Recent developments relating to the internationalisation of higher education have involved ever greater diversity: in types of collaborations; in methods of course delivery; in origins of students; in expectations of students and their sponsors, in needs of provision of support and administrative services; and crucially diversity in methods of quality assurance whilst maintaining standards of quality. This can be appreciated by considering the different training needs created in the following illustrative scenarios:

### Scenario One

A UK university has an existing top-up degree related to financial services, and now wishes to offer this course using supported distance learning in Hong Kong. The students will use a virtual learning environment (VLE) to access the materials, so the course needs to be adapted for this mode of delivery. The students will get some support from tutors in a study centre there, but assignments will be marked by tutors in the UK. Members of the faculty in the UK will travel to Hong Kong to run weekend workshops.

### Scenario Two

Two universities (one in the UK and one in India) have received funding to develop jointly an undergraduate module aimed at developing entrepreneurial skills and intercultural communication. The module needs to be jointly validated by the two universities and the lecturers of the two universities are to develop the content together. The course will be delivered via the VLEs of the two universities and the students will be form working groups where each group contains students from the two universities. The careers advisory services of both universities must be consulted during the development of the module.

### Scenario Three

A university is designing a training package concerning logistics for middle-level managers of state-run enterprises in an African country. This course will be funded by the sending government. The participants will come for a twelve week block which will include lectures, visits to industry, and short work placements. Accommodation must be in home-stay with two students allocated to each host family. All the participants will be males. A social programme must be included, and this must respect the social, cultural, and religious backgrounds of the participants.

### Scenario Four

A faculty of Environmental Science is going to collaborate with several European universities to develop joint activities related to waste management. This will be a complex network with a range of activities including joint research (for which they will collaborate in seeking funding), student exchanges for periods of various lengths, development of teaching materials (reusable learning objects), joint supervision of PhDs, and the organisation of dissemination activities including workshops and conferences.

It can be seen that each of these collaborations will have different impacts on different parts of an institution, and that quality provision will require staff training of a range of stakeholders. This special issue of *'Enhancing the Learner Experience in Higher Education'* presents articles which were prepared by participants on a ground-breaking postgraduate course run by the University of Northampton for university staff who work with international students, including support staff, international office staff, and academic staff. The following points summarise the underpinning intended outcomes which informed the development of this course.

The first intended outcome was that there should be the development of an open stance; a recognition that things can be done differently, a state of cultural mindfulness. Without such an understanding there is a constant danger of confusing *one* way of doing things with *the* way of doing things, and so to assume that certain expectations and requirements are obvious and do not need explanation. For example it is necessary to look at communications with students, such as when giving assignment instructions, or sending pre-arrival information, and to recognise that some details assumed as 'given' may in fact need to be unpackaged.

The second intended outcome was that there should be the development of a reflective stance, leading each participant to analyse their own roles, their own encounters, and the conventions of their communities of practice. The reason for this training is to allow participants, via the reflective/action cycle, to make amendments to their activities which will be improvements; possibly improvements for all and not just international students.

The third intended outcome was that there should be the development of a research-based stance, so the intended outcomes are changes in behaviours which are firmly based on good quality research, conducted by others and by the participants themselves, as part of their ongoing professional development.

The fourth intended outcome was that there should be the development of a stance supportive of professional standards in the areas relevant to the participants' area of work, be that teaching or supporting students. It is essential that, in any amendments to operations which the participants plan, procedures relating to professional standards are followed. The training course should ensure that the participants refer to the relevant standards when considering amendments to their activities, for example: the *'National Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education'*, or the *'Professional Standards relating to Information Advice and Guidance professions (IAG)'*.

This innovative course was therefore developed with the following aims:

- To enable participants to operate as reflective practitioners in an internationalised environment in Higher and Further Education.
- To enable participants to develop a systematic understanding of knowledge and a critical awareness of complex issues relating to internationalisation and globalisation of Higher and Further Education at different levels: globally; nationally; within their own institute; within their own subject area or area of professional activity.
- To enable participants to develop an understanding of the links between their own individual areas of activity and the learning experience of all students.
- To enable participants to recognise how differences in cultures of education (including values, beliefs, conventions and language use) affect perceptions,

expectations and behaviours of all stakeholders in Higher and Further Education institutions.

- To enable participants to be able to participate in the creation of effective institutional environments (for example programmes of study, and/or student support activities) which will foster an internationalised environment.
- To enable participants to incorporate research, scholarship, and/or examples of best professional practice concerning internationalisation and globalisation of Higher and Further Education into their own professional activities.
- To enable participants to design and plan original interventions in their own areas of activity based on relevant techniques of research, (for example programmes of study, and/or student support activities) which will foster an internationalised environment.

The articles presented in this issue of the journal were produced as the final assessment on this course; requiring the participants to outline amendments to their professional practice which incorporated the aims and intended outcomes of the course. It should be noted that the reflective action process is not something which is ever completed, it assumes an ongoing series of reiterative stages wherein previous experiences are evaluated and analysed in order to inform the next round of activity. Hence each of these articles presents what can best be thought of as work in progress.

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