International Students and Further Education Colleges in England: The Context, Policy Tensions, and Some Aspects of Practice

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Abstract

This chapter sets out the context of publicly funded further education colleges in England, outlining the position and development of these complex institutions within the broader educational structure. This is followed by discussion of some tensions and contradictions which arise from government policies partially driven by anxieties derived from debates surrounding levels of immigration together with recognition of the imperatives and opportunities arising from globalization. The benefits of the internationalization of education have been expounded whilst simultaneously enforcing visa regulations which impede the efforts of colleges to make inroads in the international student market. In particular, disparities between the treatment of the further and higher education sectors are highlighted. The paper also provides an account of practices which have emerged in a single FE college in England over a decade of working with international students following an access to HE course. The chapter indicates some of the many benefits which have been brought to FE by international students as well as the ways in which a college has developed its practices in response to their needs.

Key words: internationalization, further education colleges, government policy

> International students in the UK bring diversity to the education sector, helping to provide an international dimension that benefits all students. Engagement in international education...enhances the reputation and brand recognition of UK institutions and helps project the UK's soft power.
>
> (HM Government, 2013a, p. 23)

Introduction

In recent years international students have become an increasingly important group within what are typically known as 'further education' (FE) colleges in England, and in FE colleges across the UK more widely. It has been reported that in 2011-12 international students in the UK FE paid £350m in tuition fees, of which £30m was generated through transnational education (TNE) provision, and that international students in FE spent in the region of **£**980m on their living expenses whilst in the UK (HM Government, 2013a, p. 22)**.** In the context of FE this income is more than significant, but to maintain a sense of proportion it is worth noting that FE related income from international students in the UK stands at roughly 10 per cent of that which is derived from international students in UK HE. It should also be stressed that most figures in relation to FE international income are estimates - accurate data on international students in UK FE are generally unavailable as **'...**only Government-funded learners are recorded centrally and record of their nationality is limited to those studying in Scotland. Therefore, it is not possible to say how many international FE students study in the UK.' (HM Government 2013b p. 15). This lack of hard data is in some ways emblematic of the way in which FE as a sector has tended to be marginalised in what is the generally over-audited world of UK education, but given the data available directly to FE colleges there is reason to believe that most, but by no means all, of the various estimates that emanate from government sources are reasonably accurate.

Publicly funded FE colleges in the UK are relatively diverse institutions which occupy the space between secondary schools and higher education and their context specific cultural resonances probably make it inappropriate to draw direct comparisons outside the Anglophone world. They are broadly comparable to those institutions which sit within the technical and further

education (TAFE) sector in Australia, and to many community colleges in the United States (see Levin et al in Chapter 2 for a discussion of US community colleges). They are, however, distinct from the numerous and relatively small independent specialist language colleges that exist in the UK and which are not in receipt of public funding. They also differ, in both scale and in breadth or provision, from the many private training organizations which access public funding but which focus on adult employment related skills. Within this chapter we shall outline the key characteristics of FE colleges, provide an overview of the current position in relation to the internationalization of FE in England (though the points made will generally be applicable to the rest of the UK). We shall also foreground some characteristics in relation to current policies and practices within the sector by focusing on aspects of work with international students in a particular FE college in the north of England. Before turning to this, however, it is necessary to provide a number of contextual clarifications, some of which have direct relevance in relation to the presence (and relative absence) of international students in publicly funded FE colleges in England and which will have explanatory purchase in considering the levels and types of international engagement which have been hitherto exemplified by these colleges.

Context: The D**evelopment and Scope of the Further Education and Skills System in England**

Whilst the roots of British FE colleges are often to be found in nineteenth century mechanics' institutes (Walker, 2015), further education in England has been notable for its complex and often under-resourced development in the shadow of schools and HE focussed educational policy discourses (Tomlinson, 2005) and this explains the array of 'labels' which has been applied to it. Following on from the secondary (ages 11 to 16 years) phase of compulsory education the broad sector in which English FE sits was formerly often referred to as 'post-compulsory education and training' (PCET). The *Education and Skills Act 2008*, however, now requires young people in England to engage with education or training until the end of the academic year when they reach the age of 18. This 'engagement' can include apprenticeships, or part-time study for those who are employed or volunteering for more than 20 hours per week. The terms 'learning and skills sector' (LSS), 'lifelong learning sector' (LLS), 'further education and skills system' (or sometimes 'sector'), and 'education and training sector' (ETS) have all enjoyed favour in recent years and they tend to co-exist, thereby fostering an element of confusion beyond the immediate cognoscenti. If this presents difficulties in terms of consistency for those working within or discussing the sector it also underlines the potential miasma that faces young people making career choices including, of course, potential international students who are looking to study in England. The term 'further education' has, however, proven resilient just as the sector it represents has survived a severe buffeting in relation to its sometimes precarious position within the structure of British education and from some recent turns in Government policy.

In England a wide variety of publicly funded providers offer opportunities beyond secondary schooling, including school based 'sixth forms', sixth-form colleges, FE colleges, universities and local authority adult education services. The term 'sixth form' is generally applied to the context where students study the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (GCE A Level) qualifications which lead to university entrance. There are a number of specialist colleges catering for subjects such as art and design, performing arts and land-based studies which sit within the broad category which is FE. In 2010 the first university technical colleges (UTC), which are non-advanced institutions serving 14-19 year olds, opened their doors and fifty of these were established by 2016 with several more scheduled to open in 2017. There are other colleges which provide for learners with special needs or which cater for adult learners. In addition, private companies have been encouraged to enter the FE marketplace. During 2014-15 FE was serving over three million

students. According to the *Association of Colleges* (AoC), as at June 2015 there were 216 general FE colleges and 93 sixth form colleges in England. There were 6 colleges in Northern Ireland, 26 in Scotland and 15 in Wales (AoC 2015a). FE colleges vary in size with the largest having in excess of 50,000 students. The AoC (2014a) stated that in 2013-14 FE colleges educated 41,500 students from outside the UK: 23,500 of these being attracted from the European Union (EU), and 18,000 from non-EU countries. The 93 state-funded sixth-form colleges in England, with 170,000 domestic 16 to 18 year-olds, were in 2013-14 reported to be educating just 601 international students dispersed over about 20 colleges with fees of up to £15,000 a year (Doughty, 2015).

Typically FE colleges have strong business/industrial links arising from their focus on vocational education and training (VET) (Ainley and Bailey 1997), together with a broader curriculum offer which normally includes the humanities and social sciences; basic skills; courses for those with special educational needs; English for speakers of other languages (ESOL); and work-based learning for people following apprenticeships. Whilst FE colleges are often characterised as the vocational alternatives to sixth form colleges this is an over-simplification. Some FE colleges have broad and successful GCE A Level provision and have, on occasion, incorporated traditional sixth form colleges through formal mergers. Most FE colleges also offer significant higher education provision including degree courses and those leading to professional qualifications. Fisher (2010, p. 120) suggested that,

> The local FE (or technical) college, affectionately known as 'the Tech', was generally associated with a culture of craft vocationalism. FE colleges were 'solid' civic institutions, integral to the fabric of most urban centres – they would produce the craft apprentices, the service workers (such as hairdressers and caterers), and the 'white collar' clerks and secretaries, needed by the economy…FE colleges also provided culturally improving opportunities for adults through 'night schools', with courses such as local history and modern languages. This remit was central to the promotion of social cohesion associated with the post-war consensus and efforts to both modernise British industry and engender a spirit of 'self-improvement' in society more generally.

FE colleges were statutorily removed from local education authority (LEA) control by the *Further and Higher Education* (F and HE) *Act* 1992 and have now 'enjoyed' more than two decades of freedom as 'incorporated' institutions. Foster (2005, p. 58) has characterised FE institutions as – 'the neglected middle child between universities and schools' – indeed, for some time it was so usual for academics to make reference to the 'Cinderella' sector that this became something of a stylistic cliché. The New Labour Government (1997-2010) made a relatively strong investment in FE (Chote et al., 2010), and this is often reflected today in impressive college buildings and learning resources. The Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government (2010-2015) which followed was intent on giving colleges more independence in terms of governance and, inevitably, seeking funds through competition. The politically unshackled Conservative Government which was elected in May 2015 is currently pursuing an austerity based public spending policy which has led to dire warnings regarding the future viability of FE, and the quality of vocational training, with Alison Wolf pointing to a widening divergence between FE and HE funding (Wolf, 2015, p. 66). It should be added that despite the current financial difficulties impacting on FE, the sector is proving remarkably responsive to the needs of the students it serves through the collective commitment of its staff and, often, some inspirational pedagogic practice (see Daley, Orr and Petrie 2015 for an account of this). For overviews of the development of English FE after the Second World War, see Richardson (2007) and Simmons (2008, 2009). The direction of educational policy in the UK has pointed ever more strongly towards institutional financial independence and market competitiveness, and that has inevitably created a stronger focus by FE colleges on the benefits of internationalization. In Chapter 1, Tran and Dempsey (see p. 5) point to the European Union's focus on the internationalization of VET, a factor which was, in terms of

direct policy initiatives, effectively removed from the UK context following the UK's referendum of 23 June 2016, the result of which indicated by 52 to 48 per cent a wish to exit from EU membership. Kaleja and Egetenmeyer provide an analysis of the internationalization of VET in the EU in Chapter 4.

Globalization and FE's Turn to the International Market

The local roots of FE colleges have traditionally meant that their focus has been on serving their immediate communities and, compared to HE, they have therefore been relatively parochial in terms of the geographical range of their recruitment. Another factor in this is that the international market for non-advanced provision in the UK has, for various historical, social and economic factors, held little resemblance to the HE market. This under-development of the international market for UK FE has been an enduring characteristic despite the global reach of English as an international language, the often strong international cultural links which are a legacy of the British Empire, and the associated ethnic diversity of British society which, it might be surmised, would prove attractive to would-be international students. Another factor is that students seeking non-advanced courses are more likely to travel internationally for 'elite' provision, such as that available in the UK private schooling market, than they are for other courses outside the higher education sector – a study by Brooks and Waters (2014) suggests that international students often constitute up to 20 per cent of the pupils in elite private schools in England. In other words, social class factors have played a major part in who has had the financial means, and the cultural capital, to seek out and access education beyond their immediate national, or indeed regional, geographical locale – a point well made by Brooks and Waters (2011) in relation to higher education. This, however, is changing as the processes of globalization create more labour mobility, in response to the needs of business, as well as more migration in consequence of economic and political instability including those seeking asylum.

As mentioned above, more recently economic pressures on FE arising from political policies that transformed governance and finance mechanisms have led to stronger marketization with a pronounced entrepreneurial orientation, and this has included an imperative for the exploration of international markets (see Pasura p. 41 in Chapter 3). The impact of neo-liberalism and globalization has led to visible symptoms of 'McDonaldization' (Ritzer, 2008; Simmons, 2010) in FE. The vocational basis of the FE system means that these trends have been amplified in colleges where there has been some restructuring of the teaching force and of modes of delivery, reflecting the adoption of new learning technologies. Such processes have been documented in the works of Brookfield (2005), Apple (2006) and Avis (2009) among others. For a discussion of recent British developments see Fisher and Simmons (2012) who argued that,

> The shifting culture and function of FE partly derives from the changing nature of employment and the decline of much of the UK's traditional industrial base. The stream of 'day-release' apprentices and craft technicians that characterised much of FE's intake in the decades following the end of the Second World War has now almost totally dried up; nowadays both the nature of the curriculum and the make-up of the student body is far more diverse than under the 'golden years' of LEA [local education authority] control... (p. 37)

In a report on transnational education (TNE) the British Council, the UK's body for international cultural relations and educational opportunities, state that the '...internationalization of education is at the heart..." of its work arguing that,

> The global education market is changing rapidly. The number of students choosing an overseas education continues to increase, but there are now many more destinations and modes of delivery from which to choose. The differences between educational sectors, institutions and the landscape of particular countries are increasingly blurred: countries which traditionally held a role as a source of international students have become study destinations and play host to international students; new alliances both international and national are being formed; and private and corporate sectors are increasingly active as providers. (British Council, 2013, p. 3).

The inexorable logic of globalization as an economic and cultural process, however, often runs up against vestiges of English conservatism that play out in contemporary debates around migration and which, at times, expose deep seated national anxieties. Concerns with levels of migration into Britain have been prominent in populist political discourse and this has inevitably impacted on the position of, and policy dispositions towards, international students. These have been exacerbated by fears relating to violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism – the Government's *Prevent* strategy seeks to prevent people being drawn into terrorism and there is specific guidance for FE colleges in this regard (HM Government, 2015). A classification category known as 'Tier 4 (General)' relates to those non-European Economic Area (EEA) students wishing to remain in or enter the UK for post-16 education and this was,

> …introduced in March 2009 in order to address problems of 'bogus' colleges and students. However, there is a continuing fear that student status can be, and is, used as a 'backdoor' route to long term immigration by non-bona fide students who would not otherwise be admitted to the UK. Rules which introduced further restrictions and regulations for Tier 4 learners wishing to study in FE colleges were introduced in 2011… Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013, p. 3)

It was in this context that the UK's *Department for Business, Innovation and Skills* (BIS) commissioned an evaluation of the value of Tier 4 international students to FE and the wider economy. The subsequent report (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013) indicated that two thirds of the 155 colleges which responded to its survey had Tier 4 students, though there had been a reduction in numbers and some cuts in provision following the 2011 changes referred to above. From April 2012 institutions wishing to sponsor these students needed to be classed as a 'Highly Trusted Sponsor' by the then *United Kingdom Border Agency* (UKBA), the UKBA closed in 2013 and has been replaced by *United Kingdom Visas and Immigration* (UKVI). Highly Trusted Sponsor status was superseded by 'Tier 4 Sponsor status' on 6 April 2015. The UKVI is empowered to refuse entry to those potential students who are unable to speak English. 76 per cent of colleges responding to an *Association of Colleges* survey undertaken in 2014 (AoC, 2014b, p. 14) reported that student visas presented the greatest challenge in their international work. The positive logic which lies behind the recruitment of international students is based on factors which range from financial motivation to loftier educational purposes (such as the benefits to teaching and learning which arise from the presence of international students) as well as an element of altruistic political internationalizm. In practice this logic seems to be too often in tension with a *realpolitik* which sacrifices high principle in the face of a practical politics shaped by public concerns – the latter being simultaneously formed by and surfacing in anti-immigration rhetoric in sections of the popular press.

The *Department for Business, Innovation and Skills* Report (2013, p. 5) quoted above found that the income from Tier 4 learners was seen by FE colleges as "…highly valuable in supporting the college's financial viability…" and it was estimated that these students "…spend approximately twice the value of their tuition fees on subsistence in the local area.". The proportion of college income from Tier 4 learners' tuition fees was reported to range from 0.5% to 12%. Far more importantly, it was reported that,

> There are numerous educational benefits reported by colleges which have Tier 4 learners including enabling them to offer courses they may not be able to otherwise through increased demand and additional student numbers; helping staff develop new teaching styles and skills to accommodate learners from different cultural backgrounds; and enriching the overall learning environment... (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013, p. 5)

In addition to the benefits identified above,

> Many colleges emphasised the value that Tier 4 students have by adding diversity to more homogenous areas and increasing UK learners' awareness of other cultures which will be useful for future employment. (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013, p. 5)

It was reported that colleges often integrated Tier 4 students in classes with UK students, indeed,

> ...several colleges also emphasised that they felt that the presence of international students in the classroom was important to help UK learners increase the skills they need for future employment by developing skills that can be applied when working in a wider international market. These skills included being able to think about how scenarios may apply in a [sic] different countries, improving their general understanding of other cultures that they may work with in the future, and communicating effectively with individuals with English as a second language, (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013, p. 29)

The comments above are very positive, though it is important to recognise that such benefits do not materialise automatically from the presence of international students and there is a need for the development and implementation of appropriate teaching and learning strategies in FE colleges which explicitly and proactively address internationalization (Blum et al., 2010).

The delivery of transnational education by FE colleges has also received Government encouragement,

> The further education sector has an established quality assurance system for teaching and learning content. The sector is now considering options for how this could be developed for provision delivered abroad, working with key partners including Ofsted, QAA and the British Council. (HM Government, 2013a, p. 45)

This was exemplified when UK Export Finance (UKEF) assisted a consortium of UK further education colleges in gaining a £76m Saudi Arabian contract to develop a vocational training college in 2013 (HM Government, 2013, p. 58).

The benefits that international students bring to FE are clearly recognised but conflicting policy pronouncements persist. Colleges have expressed the view to the *Department for Business, Innovation and Skills* that there was an impression that the UK did not welcome Tier 4 students and that in the longer term this might have a negative impact on both future international relations and overseas trade. This fear was exacerbated on 13 July 2015 with the announcement of changes to immigration rules, without consultation with colleges, which mean that **c**ollege students will in future not be allowed to extend their leave in the UK for any reason, thereby impeding the progress of those wishing to progress into HE following their completion of GCE A Levels or HE access courses. The maximum time limit for courses below degree level has been reduced to two years (from three) provoking a strong statement from the AoC who expressed concerns that,

> By introducing these changes the Government seriously risks further restricting the UK's ability to attract international students. By blocking the natural progression from further education to university, the Government will do long term harm to the UK as an international student destination.
>
> (AoC, 2015c, no page number)

Home Office progression requirements are more stringent in relation to FE courses than for those relating to HE (Home Office 2015 paras. 64-80 provides a full explanation). Rules relating to Secure English Language Test (SELT) requirements have also been recently tightened. A specific matter of concern for FE colleges was that whilst Tier 4 students in HE were permitted to be employed for up to 20 hours per work during term time, the limit for those in FE was set at only 10 hours. In August 2015 work rights for Tier 4 international students in FE were effectively removed by Government when guidance was issued (Home Office, 2015) advising Tier 4 students in FE that,

> If you are following a course at any level with a sponsor which is a publicly funded further education college, the following work is allowed:
> • on a work placement as part of a course, providing the work placement does not amount to more than 33% of the course;
> • as a student union sabbatical officer for up to two years. (para. 320, p. 76).

Against the background of the lack of hard data and a consequent reliance on official estimates in October 2014 the *Association of Colleges* (AoC), a membership body for FE colleges which promotes their interests, conducted a survey of the international work undertaken by member institutions which provides some broad parameters in relation to this as well as a helpful indication of the prime motivations and priorities of colleges in relation to internationalization. This survey suggested that the key focuses for colleges were student recruitment; international partnerships; overseas projects; staff and student exchanges; and TNE (AoC, 2014b, p. 4). The most common response in relation to the question 'why does your college deliver international education?' was to 'Develop educational opportunities for all learners' at 83 percent; this was closely followed by commercial opportunities (77% of the responding colleges) (AoC, 2014b, p. 5). 92 per cent of the responding colleges were teaching international students in the UK with just 32 per cent teaching international students overseas (AoC, 2014b, p. 6). With regard to the latter the key countries/areas where colleges work were reported as in Table 6.1 below:

Table 6.1: The key countries/areas where FE colleges work

Country/area	%
China	76
EU	61
Middle East and North Africa	47
Vietnam	41
Latin America	37
Saudi Arabia	29
India	27
Malaysia	24
Japan	24
South Korea	18
Kazakhstan	6
Others (Russia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, African countries).	27

Adapted from AoC, 2014b, p. 10

The *Department for Business, Innovation and Skills* (2013, pp. 41-42) reported that in 2012-13 the largest single country of origin for international students in FE was India (1,076), followed by China (521) and Bangladesh (368). The most popular course type was Business Studies (1,455) followed by English Language (757). The number of students following international foundation programmes was as low as 63 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013, p. 40). Inevitably, the Report incorporated a warning the data was not exact owing to incomplete enrolments and there is a strong probability, in our view, that the report significantly understated the reality in relation to international FE student numbers. What is clear, however, is that the picture with regard to international students in English FE colleges is a highly diverse one in which institutional patterns in relation to national origins of students, types of courses undertaken, and the range of international work in which colleges are engaged are difficult to discern and about which it is often inappropriate to generalize. It is on that basis that we offer below a vignette which outlines some aspects of provision for international students at a further education college in the north in England.

International Students and Aspects of Teaching and Learning in FE

Further education in England is, relative to other sectors of the education system, under-researched and the fact that international students feature far less prominently in FE than in HE has led to a dearth of FE focussed studies. Research undertaken on the internationalization of HE, however, including studies outside England certainly carries some resonance with the experiences which have informed this section of our study. Bolsmann and Miller (2008), for example, found that within HE economic competition was the dominant rationale expressed in terms of costs and benefits, with the concepts of 'academic internationalizm' and a 'developmental' discourse (originating in colonialism) also being influential. Certainly, these kinds of imperatives, but especially the economic ones, are evident in the 'official literature' relating to FE and international students which has emerged through the *Department for Business, Innovation and Skills* and *British Council*.

The College on which this section is based is located in a university city and offers provision ranging from vocational courses to GCE A Levels, as well as some professional and HE courses (the latter in association with a number of partner universities). It is adjudged by *Ofsted*, the body which inspects and regulates educational providers in the UK, to be an 'outstanding' provider (*Ofsted's* highest category). With its roots in a former college of art and technology, the current incarnation of the College arose from the merger of a college of further and higher education and a near-by sixth form college. This history means that the College offers a stronger range of GCE A levels than is generally found in an FE college. It is housed on a single high quality main campus to which it moved in 2007. The College building is based around an impressive central atrium and offers high quality learning environments. It has more than 7,000 students of which close to 5,000 are full-time. Some 150 of the latter are international students, and approximately 70 per cent of these are of European origin and are not considered directly by this study. Of the remainder, taking 2007/8 as the datum point, the number of international students within the College rose until 2011/12 when there were 25% more, then it fell dramatically as Government policy shifted, before rising steadily until 2013/4 when numbers were 5% above datum. Another fall, directly attributable to Government policy, has occurred in the 2015/6 recruitment cycle. Countries of origin are indicated in Table 6.2 below:

Table 6.2: Non-European Economic Area (EEA) international student countries of origin within the College between 2011-12 and 2014-15

Country/area	**%**
China	76
Other Asian countries	14
Russia	6
Latin America	2.5
African countries	1.5

The data shows that the majority of the non-EEA international students recruited by this College come from China and a significant minority from other Asian countries such as South Korea and Japan. There are some students from Russia and very few from other areas.

The scale of the College provides a relatively 'close knit' community and its location, together with its mix of courses and its high reputation, are all factors that would make it attractive to the majority of international students seeking to study FE in the UK. *Office for National Statistics* data (ONS) (2011) shows the local area with a white British population of approximately 89 per cent, against an average in England and Wales of 83 per cent. One major city in the same region returned 71 per cent white British. Despite a more recent increase in east European migrants settling in the area, the College is situated in what is still a relatively homogenous demographic and is therefore conscious of a need to ensure that all its students benefit from a diverse cultural experience – one which not all students will necessarily be exposed to within their local communities.

The College has been integrating students from non-EU European countries into classes within both its GCE A Level courses and 16-18 vocational education provision for its local students, with additional classes in English and other subjects being made available, for the past 10 years. The international students are taught separately only for some of the additional classes, including a module on 'British Culture'. Small numbers of international students study higher education courses. There is an established Access to HE Diploma course which in 2014-15 had in excess of 220 students, more than 40 of which were international learners attracted by the prospect of entry to higher education on successful completion. The College has identified this course as an appropriate accredited route for international students has focussed recruitment activity on this programme. The provision has high success and progression rates which compare very favourably to national averages. The rationale of the integration of international and local students is one that seeks to enrich the learning experience of all parties. International students have enhanced contact with native English speakers, accelerating the enhancement of their English language skills, and local students benefit from the opportunity to study in close proximity to learners from other cultures. The advantages of this arrangement extend to members of staff who are able to develop their teaching skills whilst taking advantage of the learning synergies that arise from the presence of a more diverse range of learners.

The Access to HE Diploma is a qualification which aims to prepare adult learners for higher education within the UK. It currently consists of 60 credits; 45 of which are graded pass, merit or distinction and 15 of which are ungraded academic skills units. The programme is available in a wide range of subjects including Art and Design, Business, and Science. The grading system is set by the *Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education* (QAA) but is managed by the access validating agency used by the provider. International students studying this programme normally apply to UK universities through the nationally operated *Universities and Colleges Admissions Service* (UCAS), generally making informed choices based on factors including rankings in league tables with many aspiring to places in the research intensive 'Russell Group' of institutions.

The evolution and development of teaching and learning practices within the College owes a considerable debt to the processes which have been adopted in response to the internationalization of its provision, not limited to the Access to HE Diploma courses, though the account that follows

relates mainly to that provision. Our intention here is to indicate aspects of the approaches that have been adopted and which have been found to work well. We have eschewed the management/business derived concept of 'best practice' on the basis of our belief is that all educational practices are both structured by the societal and institutional contexts and, at the micro level of the classroom, contingent on the available resources, the composition of the group and the qualities and skills of the individual agents/actors involved. What works well at a given time in a given place does not necessarily transfer to another, and the complexities that arise from an intensification of cultural differences tend to amplify the need for a nuanced application of strategies and techniques. At the same time, through experience teachers develop forms of practice informed technique which manifest themselves in institutional and teaching team approaches and resources. The processes of professional development have been part formal (courses etcetera) but largely informal. By working with international students, and with each other in relation to this work, a number of emergent practices developed over some ten years and these are indicated below. Whilst we recognise that these may be seen as prosaic by those with long experience and established expertise in the field, they are nonetheless representative of what has been learned and what is currently seen as central to practice in one FE college and, despite our caution above regarding the dangers of generalisation, there is no reason to assume that they are not sometimes replicated by similar practices elsewhere in England.

a) The integration of International and local students in teaching groups and the process of curriculum change

International and local students have been able to work closely in teaching groups. This has allowed for processes of peer assessment and peer tutoring which have had a dramatic effect on the development of English used by international students in their assignments as well as more generally. It is also clear that, where the different perspectives and experiences of international students are being proactively and constructively engaged with within the classroom, there is a great deal of academic and cultural benefit for the local students. International students are encouraged to bring examples from their own country into the classroom during groupwork and discussions. For example, classes have had the benefit of discussion around the differences, and similarities, between the education systems in the UK and China. The importance of going beyond a Eurocentric approach to subject teaching, and developing learning resources which incorporate material drawn from a range of national cultures has been recognised. In addition, international student identities are positively affirmed and their confidence is developed when assessments encourage the utilisation of materials and ideas from their own respective national cultures.

Guo and Chase (2011) have provided an account of experiences arising from a program in the context of a Canadian university seeking to enable the integration of international postgraduate students, and despite the different national context and educational level, the process described seems not very different to that which we have encountered. Course content for international students may be addressed by a range of approaches, which Guo and Chase, following Bond (2003a, 2003b), characterise as 'add-on', 'infusion', and 'transformation'. The latter arises from critical pedagogy and demands a complex and deep-seated analysis of the specific elements of the context leading to the creation of a wholly new and 'transcendent' curriculum (Williams, 2015). International provision within the College quickly moved beyond an 'add on' approach and most areas of the curriculum have been successfully infused with international dimensions. Teaching strategies have been informed by attention to issues of respect and trust, and the sensitive and nuanced communication of 'what is important'. Guo and Chase (2011) see the neoliberal economic motive as a persistent problem, as well as a tendency for the curriculum to suffer from an 'add-on' approach. They provide an account of a program that created a 'transnational learning space where international students felt a sense of belonging and where they felt safe to share their challenges and experiences.' (p. 316). This has certainly been the aspiration in the context we describe.

b) A whole team approach to language teaching

When a team working with international students contains Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) specialists there is a risk that other colleagues see the provision of English language teaching as being the responsibility of 'the experts'. To ensure that all staff plan explicitly for the development of academic, and English, skills in their students means that a whole team approach must be taken to these aspects of student development. The development of language therefore needs to be given as much emphasis as the development of subject knowledge, and this is particularly the case in the early part of the course when students are likely to feel most anxious in relation to this aspect of their academic progress. One approach to this is to encourage all students to develop glossaries of technical and academic terms under the guidance and with the support of their teachers. The importance of students being clear about and confident in relation to the metalanguage used within the course, both that relating to assessment and that relating to their subject, cannot be overemphasised. The complexities of an integrated approach to language and content teaching have been usefully outlined, in the context of Australian secondary schools, by Arkoudis (2005, 2006) and Love and Arkoudis (2006). Subject boundaries and hierarchies are often powerful and the integration of language and content teaching involves, in addition to 'well laid plans', sensitive negotiation. Development of the language of assessment and grading amongst international students

It quickly became clear that those international students who are able to gain a well-developed understanding of the language used in the assessment and grading criteria against which they are being judged are more successful. This language is often complex, as it is in line with that used in HE, and it has been found that the students grow appreciably in confidence when technical terms are explicitly explained and discussed. It has been found that to be effective this process needs to be repeated as the students' academic skills develop. Ensuring that students have a deep understanding of the key words used in assessment, as well as the language used in the criteria is critical to their success. It should be emphasised that many local students have difficulty with some of these terms and addressing this issue directly often assists them as well. To respond to this issue, the College has provided a range of sessions relating to academic skills, and the language of assessment and grading, as part of the induction programme for all its international students. These cover a number of principles of assessment in the UK including academic conduct, referencing conventions, and academic writing styles. The aim to ensure that the process of academic skills development, which is particularly central to the Access to HE Diploma, starts early and is a key focus for students throughout the programme. The provision of academic tutorials throughout the academic year for all international students by a member of staff with a deep understanding of the academic requirements, regulations and engendering ethos of the access course allows students an appropriate space in which to develop these skills.

c) The critical nature of briefings when setting assignments and tasks

Providing clarity as to the requirements of assignments has proven to be critical in allowing students to complete them successfully. Assignments which incorporate particular requirements beyond the subject matter, for example how to structure a report, need to explain these clearly if students are to maximise their achievements and realise their full academic potential. Just as critical in enabling students to achieve high grades is explaining what a high quality piece of work looks like, teaching them to reference correctly and to produce clear, well supported, arguments. All assessments are introduced to the students in the context of a taught session so as to enable them to better understand the requirements of the assignment, the format that is required, and the expectations of the teacher on relation to what would constitute an excellent response to the

assignment. Students are, where possible and appropriate, normally provided with exemplar work from international students and sample answers that allow them to identify for themselves the ways in which excellence can be demonstrated. The aim is to ensure that students have the knowledge to achieve the highest possible grades.

d) Cultural awareness

It is clear from international student feedback that where staff have an informed understanding of the cultural differences between their students and themselves, and between the students, communication is more effective and the students have a better classroom experience (see Tran and Le in Chapter 5). Teachers encourage students to use experiences/information from their culture and heritage in assignment work. Empowering students to share their different perspectives in the classroom creates cultural synergies and places the curriculum in a broader perspective. The creation of opportunities for teachers to position themselves as learners within their classroom is particularly valuable as it allows them to deepen their cultural awareness and to be more sensitive to the needs of their students as well as more alert to the possibilities of enhancing learning (see Tran and Nguyen, 2015). This requires teachers to work to gain an insight into the way in which students are coping in class as well as an understanding of their cultural mores.

In his study of support for international students in UK HE institutions McDonald (2014) has highlighted some of the cultural differences which impede pedagogic interactions, for example, high levels of deference to tutors. Donald argues that orientation programmes should not be 'one way processes' addressing the needs of students only – staff also have orientation needs. Provision of cultural awareness development opportunities for staff in direct relation to the particular cultures of the students with which they are working is seen as an effective response to this issue. This development work can be presented by individuals from within the culture where there are substantial numbers of relevant students, or can be made available online for those cultures where fewer individuals are represented within the learning group. The development of the cultural awareness of staff, and their willingness to 'self-position' as learners, is central to the development of cultural awareness in local and international students. As England becomes more diverse both ethnically and culturally this also has advantages for other areas of the curriculum.

Brown (2009a) has pointed to the way in which friendship groups amongst international students can be unified by faith, in her study specifically, of Islam. Friendship is an important factor for students. Brown reports on three forms of friendship "the host national friend, who acts as cultural informant, the co-national who acts as a reference of values from the home culture and other nationality friends who act as a general social network." (p. 57). Brown identifies the difficulty of establishing meaningful host contact, and how shared faith with British Muslims could be a powerful bonding factor for some international students. In a related study Brown (2009b) refers to a 'monoethnic ghetto' which constrained many international students (sojourners) within co-national networks. This issue is recognized by College staff in the informal observations of friendship networks amongst students. Being attuned to the acculturation and integration needs of its international students, the College provides an 'International Social Programme' with local students being encouraged to participate in the events which it incorporates, including visits to sites of local and historic interest as well as an entertainment element. In addition International students are strongly encouraged to join student societies, and the Chess Society in particular has proved popular with some Chinese students, whilst a few local students have joined the International Student Society. Some of the international students have also taken advantage of the opportunity to engage in societies at local universities. There is, however, much work to be done in relation to the cementation of co-national friendship networks.

It must be recognised that the processes of inter-cultural learning can produce negative tensions. Tarry (2011), in a study of Thai students in two UK universities describes how the encounter with, and partial adoption of, more individualistic Western attitudes impacted on family

relationships, on the strength of religious beliefs, and the diminishment of cultural skills (such as reading and writing in Thai language). This signifies a kind of homogenisation which is a bi-product of globalization. The courses for international students within FE tend to be somewhat shorter than those which follow on in HE, and for that reason the kinds of issues highlighted by Tarry are largely absent in day to day interactions, though staff are sensitive to the associated emotional anxieties that can be internalised by students.

e) Clarity of communication

It is obvious that effective communication is the key to success in working with international students but what constitutes effective communication is a more complex consideration, and especially so in groups which contain a range of national cultures. In any context poor communication leads to a poor student experience and creates unnecessary anxiety. For example, international students were found to be very concerned as to how their final grade would be arrived at, and were expending emotional energy and time worrying about that rather than their coursework. This was rectified once the method used to produce the grade was explained clearly to the students and the process itself was made more transparent to them. The need to check that students have understood course related information, especially at the beginning of the course, and then to reinforce this understanding, means that teachers must plan to confirm that understanding of process and procedure have been learnt as much as subject matter. The provision of learning materials to students electronically enables them to use translation software to check their understanding.

International students need to be clear as to the expectations that it is reasonable for them to have of staff within the College. The cultures within FE colleges are typically very different from those generally found within schools in the UK, and it takes local students sometime to adjust to their new environment. For International students, with the additional cultural differences to cope with as well as issues relating to being in a foreign country, simple issues such as knowing how to order food in the cafeteria can pose considerable challenges. Being aware of who they can ask, and about what, allows them to become assimilated into the course and the college more rapidly.

Conclusion

Embedding the practices described above into the curriculum, learning environments, staffrooms and social areas of the College discussed has proved important to the development of staff and student skills, and crucial to the creation of an ethos where students (international and local) can flourish. These practices have evolved and are continuing to evolve as individuals and groups are subject to the impact of change. The aim remains to create a culturally aware and responsive learner centred program which meets the needs of international students for entry into a UK University appropriate to their individual needs and aspirations (and it must be acknowledged that these do not always match). Moreover, the provision aspires to provide the international and local students alike with a broadened and diverse curriculum. It is hoped that the relationships built on these programs foster greater understanding of other cultures in all students, and promote links between them in later life. All international students at the College are taught in the UK within its premises and this makes management of the provision and quality assurance much less problematic than might otherwise be the case. The College has not to-date actively sought opportunities to sponsor the development of overseas satellites, or to create online international provision. The external environment within which FE colleges are working in the UK is, of course, changing continuously and it can be anticipated that new directions may be taken at some point in the future.

There is can be no doubting that international students bring financial benefits - that is important, but by no means as valuable as the educational benefits. The advantages of integrating

international and local students have been shown to be so great that this particular policy is very unlikely to change. The experience gained by teaching staff working with international students has informed the development of pedagogy across the whole of the College. Tran and Nguyen (2015) have discussed changing teacher identities through internationalization, pointing to the emergence of 'sub-identities' with this work leading to a view of teaching '...as cosmopolitan work' and seeing this as '...paralleled with the growing need to revision all students and their work as being cosmopolitan' (p. 961). Through the use of positioning theory they argue that a teacher needs to be able to engage with the cultural other and to do this through being at once an 'intercultural learner' (p. 964) and an 'adaptive agent' (p. 968). Internationalization and the associated emergent practices in the College on which this account has focussed indicate that these transitions are evident in the practice of individual FE teachers, the development of learning resource teams in FE, and the vision of FE college management. The June 2016 UK referendum outcome looks certain to lead to exit from the EU, and the practical management of this process is likely to have important implications for the ability of UK colleges to attract international students. The rhetoric of UK educational policy statements suggests that the immense benefits of internationalization are now well understood at governmental level, though the operationalisation of policy has often contradicted this. It is important that these benefits are not impeded by the influence on government of a series of 'migration panics' and a continuing inability amongst policy-makers to recognise the full potential of FE colleges.

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