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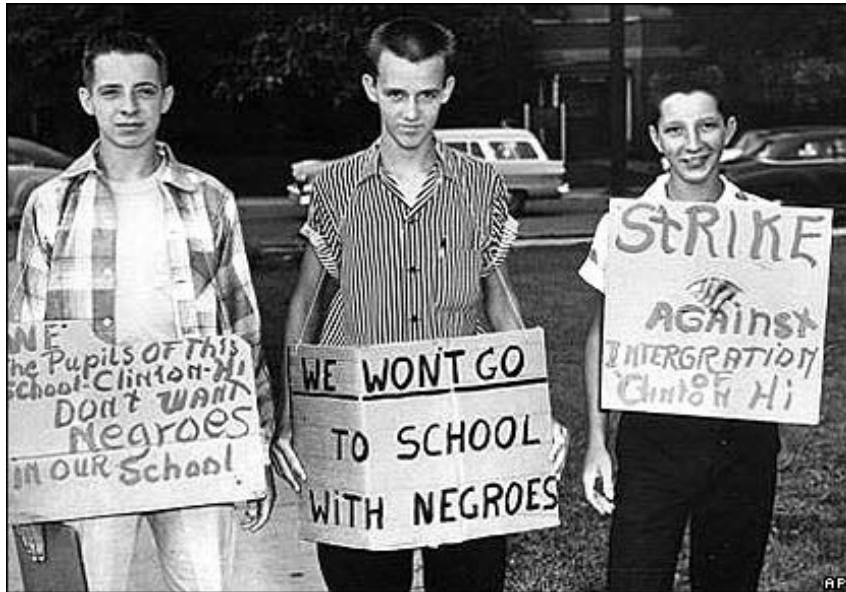
Further education colleges in England, international students, and policy contradictions

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and Mike Saunders (York College, UK)



Race, culture and education: a sorry history – a bright future?



UK Education plc: a global brand



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Brexit: what next?



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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: £££s

- It is estimated that in 2011-12 international students in the UK FE paid £350m in tuition fees
- International students in FE spent in the region of 980m on their living expenses whilst in the UK (HM Government, 2013a, p. 22)
- 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



UK FE



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Context: The development and scope of the further education and skills system in England



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- During 2014-15 FE was serving over three million students
- As at June 2015 there were 216 general FE colleges and 93 sixth form colleges in England. There were 6 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.

Globalisation: a force for good?



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- FE colleges have focussed on their immediate communities
- The international market for non-advanced provision in the UK has held little resemblance to the HE market
- Students seeking non-advanced courses are more likely to travel internationally for 'elite' provision than for other courses outside the HE sector

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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.” (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013 p. 3)

velkommen • karibu • bienvenido • أهلا وسهلا •
welkom • willkommen • आपका स्वागत है • bienvenu •
trọng đãi • optatus • ברוך הבא • καλωσόρισμα •
vítán • 欢迎

Tier 4 Rules Changes

13 July 2015



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- *United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI)* replaced 'Highly Trusted Sponsor' with '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.

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13 July 2015 changes to immigration rules, without consultation with colleges, mean that college students are not be allowed to extend their leave in the UK for any reason, 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)

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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 week 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

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Benefits reported by colleges which have Tier 4 learners:

- enabling courses they may not be able to otherwise offer through additional student numbers
- helping staff develop new teaching styles and skills to accommodate learners from different cultures
- enriching the overall learning environment...
- international students help UK learners increase the skills they need for future employment

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- 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).

International students and aspects of teaching and learning in FE



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International students and aspects of teaching and learning in FE



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- 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 professional and HE courses
- It is adjudged by *Ofsted* to be an 'outstanding' provider
- 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

International students and aspects of teaching and learning in FE



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

- Processes of peer assessment and peer tutoring have had a dramatic effect on the development of English used by international students
- There is academic and cultural benefit for the local students
- Guo and Chase (2011), following Bond (2003a, 2003b), characterise approaches as 'add-on', 'infusion', and 'transformation'. Provision quickly moved beyond an 'add on' approach.

International students and aspects of teaching and learning in FE



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b) A whole team approach to language teaching

- when a team contains Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) specialists there is a risk that English language teaching is seen as the responsibility of ‘the experts’
- a whole team approach was taken to these aspects of student development. Subject boundaries and hierarchies are often powerful and the integration of language and content teaching involves, in addition to ‘well laid plans’, sensitive negotiation

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c) Development of the language of assessment and grading amongst international students

- those international students who gain a well developed understanding of the language used in the assessment and grading criteria are more successful
- students grow in confidence when technical terms are explicitly explained and discussed
- the College provided sessions relating to academic skills, and the language of assessment and grading, as part of induction for all its international students. These include academic conduct and academic writing

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d) 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. 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.

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e) Cultural awareness

- staff understandings of the cultural differences between their students and themselves, and between the students
- empowering students to share their different perspectives
- the creation of opportunities for teachers to position themselves as learners (see Tran and Nguyen, 2015).
- friendship groups amongst international students

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Processes of inter-cultural learning can produce negative tensions. Tarry (2011), in a study of Thai students in two UK universities describes how the 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 globalisation.

International students and aspects of teaching and learning in FE



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f) Clarity of communication

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 provision of learning materials to students electronically enables them to use translation software to check their understanding.



Conclusion

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:

- integrating international and local students
- the experience gained by teaching staff
- Tran and Nguyen (2015) have discussed changing teacher identities through internationalisation

Conclusion

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