

Have we got it right? A case study on international student views of inclusive teaching and learning at Northumbria

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Abstract

The need for change in light of increased student diversity, particularly international participants, is well documented. Sherry *et al.* (2003) note the gap that exists between international student expectations of a HEI and their perceptions of the services provided.

At Northumbria University, a number of primary data based studies addressing learning and teaching experiences of international business students have been undertaken. The first (2003) examined the pre-sessional English Language course experience; the second followed up the same issues with all students once the subject courses were underway (2004). In 2005, a good practice guide was produced and distributed to academic staff based on the survey findings and relevant literature. A third student survey (2007) was then conducted to ascertain whether students supported the recommendations made and the extent to which they felt lecturers had employed these.

Findings demonstrated that there was a positive corroboration on the guide's recommendations and, in a majority of environments, staff practice supports international students' adjustment to UK study. However, some room for improvement was identified, namely in the areas of seminar practice and the management of assessment. Recommendations to overcome these issues are proposed and further research into seminar practice is suggested.

Keywords: international students; diversity; higher education; inclusive approaches; feedback

Introduction

International students bring a different educational background and cultural knowledge into the classroom than their UK peers. In 2006/07, more than 3500 international students studied at Northumbria, with around 70% originating from the Pacific Rim. A significant number of these students chose programmes within Newcastle Business School (NBS), therefore much of the narrative relates to students from the Pacific Rim regions who have chosen to study NBS programmes.

International students can enrich academic life through sharing their culture, providing the potential for the development of globalised curricula and of students' intercultural skills, which are increasingly valued by employers (Ryan, 2000; Wisker, 2000). While there are many reasons why international students wish to study outside their home country, in choosing a university, primary considerations are academic reputation and content of the programme (Barker, 1997; McNamara and Harris, 1997; Bamford *et al.*, 2002). This highlights the importance for staff to have an understanding of other cultures and a willingness to adjust teaching to create pedagogies that are culturally fair, inclusive and meaningful for all the participants in the education process.

Cronin (1995) neatly summarised some of the main challenges international students may need to address during their study in the UK. These include:

- understanding accent and intonation of lecturers
- adjusting to new ways of thinking and of presenting material
- overcoming fear of making mistakes or losing face
- becoming confident in speaking up, participating and asking questions in class
- understanding the educational rationale for critical thinking, decision making and independent thought

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Their additional challenge is to adapt to the requirements of the UK academic environment whilst staying true to their own values, such as upholding Confucian traditions and respecting the teacher.

However, Sherry *et al.* (2003), in their discussion of the management of expectations of international students, note the gap which exists between student expectations of an HEI and their perceptions of services provided by the HEI they attend.

This paper draws upon a number of studies undertaken at Northumbria University, the aims of which were the creation of an international student approved inclusive teaching and learning environment. Initial studies concentrated upon the production of suitable teaching practice recommendations, with a tertiary study undertaken to establish whether students agreed with the recommendations made and assess the extent to which they believed these were being practiced within their programmes.

Methodology

The issues summarised by Cronin (1995), along with assessment, blended learning and plagiarism, were investigated by a number of chronologically distributed questionnaires supplemented by recorded group interviews (conducted with a translator, if required). The first study involved a questionnaire distributed to students who were on Northumbria's English Language (ELAN) summer schools. A few months later a similar but extended questionnaire (n=4000) was distributed across all University Schools, addressing teaching and learning needs in terms of diversity in its broadest sense. In both cases numerical information was supplemented by data collated from audio-recorded group interviews.

In 2005, by drawing on the two studies and existing relevant diversity literature, a good practice guide titled 'Diversity: what's the problem?' was produced and distributed to all academic staff. The guide's objective was to enhance teaching and learning experiences, not only for international students but also for students with disabilities, mature students and students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

In 2007, following a suitable period to allow lecturers to make adjustments based on recommendations within the guide, a tertiary university wide study was undertaken. Firstly, to assess student agreement with recommendations made and secondly, to gain student feedback on their perceived rate of implementation.

To enable a detailed and chronological analysis of NBS international students' experience, demographic data from the two university-wide studies were extracted. In all surveys, sample sizes were large enough to validate any statistical comparisons made (NBS International (n) = 52, 65, 67 respectively).

Findings and recommendations

Lecture Sessions

In an increasingly competitive market, universities are generally required to raise student numbers, often without a concomitant rise in staffing levels. This frequently results in decreased face-to-face contact with students and increasing reliance on instruction and information in written or electronic format, plus didactic formats such as lectures, as the primary form of teaching.

In lectures, international students can encounter a number of problems in following what is said including:

- speed of delivery may be too quick
- a lecturer with a pronounced regional accent
- use of colloquial English and unfamiliar terminology

These may lead to an inability to determine what is relevant and may impact on note taking (Shakya and Horsfall, 2000; Thorpe, 2006).

In the ELAN to NBS analysis, language and, in particular, accents and pace of delivery did cause some difficulties for international students ($p < 0.01$) when compared with UK students. 30 % of students on NBS programmes felt their teachers talked too quickly, whereas for their earlier ELAN programmes only 15% reported this as an issue. Regional accents were not particularly problematic with only 1 in 8 international students on either the ELAN or subsequent NBS programmes reporting this as a difficulty. Interviewed participants stated that lecturers used to working with international students obviously reduced pace of delivery, whereas lecturers unused to working with international students tended to ignore the group dynamics. However, international students themselves wished to stress that adopting too slow a pace would not be advisable, as their UK counterparts would either be bored or resent being "spoken to as if they were children".

In the good practice guide, in light of students' comments, it seemed more sensible to suggest that lecturers allow students to make recordings of lectures rather than suggest pace of lectures was made slower. Overall a high proportion (68%) of all NBS students said that this was useful and, perhaps unsurprisingly, international

students showed a greater desire ($p < 0.05$) for the option of recording to take place. When asked what occurred in practice, around half of NBS students said recording was rarely permitted. Some international interview participants reported lecturers refusing permission when asked. One admitted that they found recording so useful they had surreptitiously done this anyway. To avoid this, supplemental recommendations arising from the tertiary study will be that lecturer preference on recording be made explicit in student module/programme handbooks.

Other recommendations made in the guide to counteract problems stemming from delivery speed were that lecturers include an initial overview of the lecture's scope and content and also insert obvious 'reflective pauses' into lecture sessions. These measures were reported as being useful by 95% of all NBS students, with 45% UK and 50% international students saying the suggestions were extremely useful. In practice it was gratifying to note that virtually all lecturers (94%) provided an overview at the beginning of a lecture. However, in the opinion of both UK and international students, those lecturers who incorporated obvious pauses for catch-up formed a much lower percentage, with only 12% reporting this occurred regularly.

Research evidence suggests that note taking during lectures is problematic for international students. Dunkel and Davy's (1989) study revealed significant differences between the perceptions of the Western students and those from other cultures, concerning note-taking while listening to lectures. Beaven *et al.* (1998) agree that their Pacific Rim students were unable to simultaneously listen and take notes, after classes finding that they could not make sense of those notes they had managed to make, further stressing the validity of the previous recommendation to allow students to record lectures.

When the Northumbria study investigated student note taking practices during lectures, there was a distinct difference between responses from international students from the ELAN course and those on NBS undergraduate (UG) programmes. During the ELAN course 59% believed it was difficult to listen and take notes at the same time. However, this reduced to 48% when questioned again during undergraduate study. The integrated use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) to support classroom contact within NBS was a major and positive contributing factor in this reduction. In ELAN, although handouts and set texts are regularly used, as yet little use is made of the VLE. 80% of respondents agreed that the availability of lecture notes via the VLE helped their study and interview participants supported this view:

It was really interesting to see presentations on VLE (which we were supposed to use later in the class) as reading them prior to class made it easier for me to come up with comments during the class. Comments and discussion within the class are important to have a clear understanding of concepts.

The pace of a lecture, exacerbated by the need to take notes, would still appear to be a cause for concern for international students. VLE materials can assist students with pre and post study opportunity. During a lecture, catch up pauses were considered useful but not prevalent in practice.

However, there seemed to be no doubt in the minds of international students that the ability to record a lecture would be invaluable and this is something which lecturers should carefully consider allowing permission for.

Seminar Sessions

For other forms of classroom contact such as seminars it is inevitable that lack of language confidence can be exacerbated by unfamiliar practices in classroom interactivity. For example, 57% of UK students, when asked about previous seminar experiences, said they were used to interactivity and classroom discussion in comparison to 46% of international students ($p < 0.01$). Although interview participants acknowledged that classroom interactivity began on ELAN classes, where discussions took place in English, they also admitted a tendency to revert back to their first language if they lacked understanding. They also noted how, even after they had entered NBS, seminar groups often comprised a majority of Pacific Rim students and again they might revert back to their first language. The preference for more UK students to be in the seminar group was explicitly made.

All responses relating to speaking up in class from the surveys indicated that many international students have less confidence with their public speaking ability than their UK counterparts. Confidence associated with language fluency can have a major impact on the establishment of relationships with peers (Ledwith, 1998). Ledwith, working with culturally mixed groups, also notes that international students saw home students as exclusive, unfriendly and unwelcoming. This issue was initially investigated by eliciting responses to the statement: "I like being in a classroom with a cultural mix of students". Table 1 illustrates the responses from the international students when studying their ELAN course and results from the same question once the NBS programme was underway, along with the responses from the UK students to the same question.

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|-------------------|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| ELAN | 69 | 20 | 10 | 2 | 0 |
| NBS International | 28 | 48 | 20 | 3 | 0 |
| NBS UK | 9 | 30 | 41 | 13 | 6 |

Table 1: Percentage responses to ‘I like being in a classroom with a cultural mix of students’

Although international students affirmed that they liked a culturally mixed class, there was a marked shift in strength of agreement between the ELAN and NBS experience. UK students exhibited a more mixed response to the statement. This unwillingness to mix, with students seen as not fitting into the local culture, confounds academic staff’s efforts to get international students to ‘speak up’ in class (Rifkin *et al.*, 1996). A healthy 80% of respondents on the ELAN course disagreed with the statement: “I participate in class discussions, only when someone asks me a direct question”. However, in response to the same statement for the international UG programmes figures reduced dramatically to 30% in disagreement. This would seem to indicate that, once international students enter a mixed group, they have more inhibitions in relation to making a contribution. Indeed, during the interviews, international students revealed the extent of this inhibition i.e. they have to overcome the hurdle of getting the language ‘right’, plus the hurdle of being confident that their subject knowledge is correct, and in their view speak at the right speed - a point picked up by Ouyang (2006) and Thorpe (2006) who note how international students do not wish to disturb the ‘harmony’ of sessions.

In the lecturer’s guide, a number of practices were suggested to lecturing staff that they might adopt to encourage the establishment of relationships, particular between students of different cultural backgrounds:

- Early in module seminars students are given a chance to introduce themselves to other students in the group
- For group work the lecturer carefully selects the group members (e.g. two UK and two international students)
- Ground rules are set for group discussions e.g. only one student speaks at a time
- Students are given a few minutes before group discussions to jot down an outline of what they might say

Table 2 indicates that high proportions of both international and UK students found all the recommendations useful.

| Statement | Extremely useful | | Fairly useful | | No preference | |
|--|------------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|------|
| | UK | Int. | UK | Int. | UK | Int. |
| A: Early in module seminars students are given a chance to introduce themselves to other students in the group | 27 | 32 | 39 | 49 | 34 | 18 |
| B: For group work, the lecturer carefully selects the group members | 14 | 28 | 33 | 54 | 51 | 19 |
| C: Ground rules are set for group discussions e.g. only one student speaks at a time | 14 | 25 | 48 | 55 | 39 | 20 |
| D: Students are given a few minutes before group discussions to jot down an outline of what they might say | 43 | 48 | 46 | 48 | 11 | 5 |

Table 2: NBS Percentage Responses to the usefulness of recommendations for seminar practice by Nationality

However, these recommendations (apart from statement D) were found to have significantly more appeal to international students than those from the UK [$p < 0.01$ for statements B and C, and $p < 0.05$ for statement A]. Interview students reported that in ELAN they felt more comfortable as they were all on the same level as far as their grammar, speaking and aural skills were concerned. While group allocation by the lecturer may initially result in them being taken outside of their comfort zone, the international students in the group interviews felt that this would be more beneficial in terms of improving English language and interpersonal skills.

Shakya and Horsfall (2002) comment that many international students have difficulties joining culturally mixed groups and are rarely assisted in doing so by staff, as many assume that all students have equal social skills. Although 81% of international students felt that careful group selection would be useful for them, 53% of the total NBS sample said that this rarely occurred with 44% also reporting that it was rare for ground rules to be set for discussions.

Therefore it would appear that these recommendations are worth re-emphasising to staff. In addition a

further recommendation will be to suggest the use of the VLE for initiating or extending classroom discussion, as one interview participant suggested:

Using the VLE beforehand make it easier for me to understand lectures. English is not my native language plus I'm not extremely comfortable with accents so having a prior knowledge is helpful for me.

By using a VLE students can be given time to prepare for and think through their responses to an online discussion (Graziadei, 1998; Freeman and Capper, 1999).

Ellis et al (2005) also noted that the idea of peer mentoring was praised by international students as a method of overcoming early dilemmas. Peer mentoring programmes in which an international student is matched with a home student can be of value in promoting interaction between international students and home students (Poyrazil *et al.*, 2002; Yeh and Inose, 2003). Northumbria University does indeed offer a welcome scheme for international students but this is at a central rather than at programme level, which would be more beneficial for assisting student relationships at the seminar level.

It is teaching in small group teaching where international students appear to require further support. In this situation it would appear that proactive action on the part of lecturers will potentially greatly assist an inclusive environment for international students. Positive action includes extended preparation and discussion time, as well as the purposeful creation of supported yet interactive situations between international and home students.

Academic Literacy

Studies concur that international students entering the Western academic system are required to change their cultural identity with regards to ways of thinking and writing. The descriptor 'passive' has been applied to some international students but Jin and Cortazzi (2006) take issue with this, pointing out that interpretation of 'passivity' depends on academic literacy expectations. While Western student-centred pedagogy encourages learning by involvement, other countries' cognitive-centred pedagogy encourages a learning-listening approach. Bamford *et al.* (2002) found that the international students acknowledged differences between the learning styles in their home countries and in the UK. 86% of international student respondents in the ELAN to NBS survey agreed (49% strongly) that, in the UK, students are encouraged to be more independent. Additionally, 79% of the international students believed that different study skills were required for UK study.

Many international students displayed a tendency to maximise the benefit from seminars by completing preparatory reading beforehand, with 31% reporting that they spent significant time preparing for classes. This is significantly higher ($p < 0.01$) than UK students, where only 17% undertake preparatory reading.

In terms of reading and writing skills, there is a general Western academic perception that Pacific Rim students are rote learners (i.e. they simply memorise text rather than understand and critique it). This notion originates from a partial truth: memorisation is a teaching method but this is only the primary stage in their learning process. Only when Pacific Rim students feel they have mastered the subject and have accurate recall of texts do they then progress on to creative thinking (Gow *et al.*, 1996; Beaven *et al.*, 1998). Numerous studies indicate that, contrary to perceptions, Pacific Rim learning processes achieve higher academic levels of understanding than Western students (Gow *et al.*, 1996; Volet and Renshaw, 1996)

As the accurate recall of texts is not a requisite of the Western academic system, many international students are required to change their reading strategies. For example, they may think that all books on a reading list have to be read cover to cover and fully understood. Furthermore, some are unlikely to critically evaluate the contents of their reading due to the respect that they have for academic authors. They are also unlikely to know that they are expected to go beyond the reading list and find other sources of information. If they are unaware of this last point, it is less likely that they will have the skills to be able to differentiate between core and peripheral material and may lack the skills to judge the authority of a source.

Beaven *et al.* (1998) also report that international students find topics such as Accounting particularly difficult because they have to learn the concepts and specialised language simultaneously. Other studies corroborate that unfamiliar, discipline-specific terminology can be a major problem (Flowerdew and Miller, 1992; Burke and Wyatt-Smith, 1996).

One question in the ELAN to NBS survey addressed the issue of whether international students could read English academic texts with understanding. While the international students felt they had no real problems in reading, respondents seemed less sure in the NBS UG environment than whilst they were on the ELAN course. These findings were probed further by asking whether they felt there was too much specialised language and too many unfamiliar concepts encountered during reading. Around half of the respondents felt that indeed

they did come across specialised language with a slightly lower percentage (41%) reporting they came across many unfamiliar concepts.

One student interviewed reported how difficulties increased as level of study progressed. During the first and second year they found recommended texts tended to be descriptive with pictorial and diagrammatic explanations. However, final year texts were found to be far more demanding, with more stress placed on the use of journal articles (which they were generally required to find for themselves). These they found difficult to understand, given their English ability.

Whilst on ELAN 63% of students felt they could clearly express their ideas in writing, only 31% agreed with this statement in relation to their NBS UG course. These data could illustrate a compounded difficulty between the specialised language and unfamiliar concepts students came across when reading.

In the lecturer's guide, a number of suggestions to alleviate changes in literacy culture were made in relation to both directed learning and classroom practice listed in Table 3.

| Statement | Extremely useful | Fairly useful | No preference |
|--|------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Reading lists are distributed early | 79 | 17 | 3 |
| Reading lists identify which materials are essential or core and which are just recommendations | 80 | 19 | 2 |
| Lecturers provide a teaching and learning plan at the start of each module with precise guides for directed learning and seminar preparation | 87 | 13 | 1 |
| Materials such as handouts and PowerPoint slides are made available on VLE a few days before lectures | 89 | 10 | 1 |
| In lectures any key or unfamiliar concepts are explained | 73 | 26 | 1 |
| In lectures global or international examples are used to illustrate topics or concepts | 62 | 30 | 9 |

Table 3: NBS Percentage Responses to the usefulness of recommendations for adapting to a new learning culture

Responses illustrate that the students felt that all but one of these suggested practices were extremely useful. It is particularly noteworthy that, although these recommendations were principally made to address potential need of the international student groups, no statistically significant differences were found between the UK and international student groups in their views of their usefulness.

The most popular of the recommendations (i.e. provision of notes on the VLE) was reiterated during interviews:

We will make a good preparation for the class if we can get the information beforehand. You can prepare some questions about each class, understand more about each session, and solve problems through asking the tutor in class.

For the remaining recommendations, in most cases, students reported high levels of practice amongst their NBS tutors: 74% of students reported that the majority of their lecturers used extensive teaching and learning plans, while around two thirds of lecturers were reported as distributing reading lists early and noting which texts were essential. For the final two recommendations relating to lecture practice there was some mismatch between student desire and lecturer practice. Although 73% of all NBS students felt that an explanation of key and unfamiliar concepts would be extremely useful, this occurred on a regular basis only a third of the time. Similarly 62% of respondents felt the use of global and international examples was also extremely useful, but 29% of respondents felt this rarely happened. Therefore these are recommendations which will be re-stressed to academic staff.

Managing Assessment

The original Northumbria surveys investigated the issue of assignment work in a number of different ways. For instance, management of study tasks relating to assessment; using sources of information for assignments; and students' understanding of plagiarism. Introna *et al.* (2003) reflect on the assertion that international students are more likely to plagiarise than their host peers and raises an issue of potential discrimination, since detection of plagiarism may be easier in respect of the work of an international rather than that of a home student. A high rate of plagiarism, or neglect of referencing, among international students is frequently a reflection of other cultures' differing academic practices. In some cultures, knowledge is considered to be in the public domain while other cultures believe that alteration of an

authority's original words is disrespectful (Ladd and Ruby, 1999).

One of the top ten reasons students give for plagiarism is lack of understanding of what they are expected to do to avoid it (Carroll, 2003). This may be owing to their lack of experience in Western academic writing. Introna *et al.* (2003) state that, in the UK, a significant part of the assessment of a course is some form of written work, such as a critical review of reading material or an essay. The consequent pressure and anxiety of dealing with the unfamiliar Western processes is manifested in a number of ways. For example, a student's wish to focus exclusively on texts given in reading lists or a lack of ease in paraphrasing (Errey, 2002; Thorpe, 2006).

Some of the basic issues surrounding the perception of plagiarism were addressed within the original ELAN to NBS student questionnaires. Students were asked whether they understood the need to use referencing and quotation marks; that work submitted for assessment must be their own; and the need to explain ideas in their own words.

| Statement | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| I understand the need to use referencing and quotation marks | 21 | 56 | 20 | 3 | 0 |
| I understand that assessment work submitted must be on my own | 43 | 43 | 11 | 3 | 0 |
| I understand the need to explain ideas in my own words | 20 | 11 | 27 | 2 | 2 |

Table 4: International NBS responses to questions on understanding plagiarism

It is clear from Table 4 that international students are aware of the main basic issues of what constitutes plagiarism, with over three quarters of respondents agreeing with all three statements. This was also confirmed by international students taking part in interviews, who noted that discussion on plagiarism was not something they had encountered until entry into NBS programmes, but then it was clear that University policies were highly stressed: 'It is the first thing we heard on every module!'

Interview participants noted how academic writing was very different in the UK from that in their home countries, leaving them unsure about local literacy practices. This extended to the ability to summarise reading, particularly of larger articles, as they felt that they needed to understand it ALL before it could be summarised. Students observed how hard it was not to use the same words as an author through lack of confidence in using appropriate alternatives, i.e. finding an apposite synonym.

Issues surrounding assessment were noted by both UK and international students. Therefore a number of generic recommendations in the guide were made in regard to assignments:

- There should be an element of individualisation to assignments.
- For large assignments, lecturers should break the work up in to tasks each with its own deadline.
- Lecturers should expand on assignment tasks, e.g. explaining the purpose, what the title is really saying etc.
- Lecturers should give clear instruction on the format and structure of reports and essays.
- Lecturers should give guidance on how to judge the authority of information sources, e.g. web pages.
- Students should be given examples of texts offering alternative viewpoints and explanations.
- Lecturers should provide examples of good work and work which could have been improved.
- Lecturers should provide opportunities for students to show them work in progress.

In all cases around 90% of respondents felt that the suggestions made for practice were useful. No differences in opinion were found between the international and the UK group, indicating that suggested assignment practices are inclusive. The most popular recommendation made was in relation to lecturers giving clear instruction on the format and structure of reports and essays, with 82% of all NBS respondents feeling this was extremely useful. This was followed closely by the recommendation for lecturers to expand upon assignment tasks, which 78% of respondents stated as being extremely useful. This is commensurate with some opinions expressed in interviews, where students noted the apparent differing requirements of different lecturers. For example, two lecturers might ask for a report but their preferred styles would differ. It was pleasing to note that 75% of respondents felt that NBS lecturers were now attempting to expand upon assignment tasks, with some interview participants describing attending a seminar session dedicated to this.

Other recommendations, which three quarters of NBS students found extremely useful, were for lecturers to provide exemplars of previous work, as well as opportunities to show work in progress. In interviews, the desire for exemplars was stressed further. One international student noted how they and their peers were shocked by marks for their first assignment. Despite, in their view, excessive reading and research, they were

receiving marks in the 50s accompanied by comments such as “too descriptive”, “use more argument”, etc. They felt that illustrations of higher scoring pieces of work (past examples was inferred) would have helped to place what was required into context for them. Another international student cited a positive example where her lecturer had posted assignment drafts and tutor feedback from the previous session’s students on the VLE. She found this particularly useful since the assignment topic was “very abstract”.

I easily got the answers from this feedback and the examples in the VLE. It not only saved me time but helped me solve my difficulties. It cultivated my capability of independent study without somebody’s guidance.

However, around 50% of students felt that these recommended practices were rarely observed. In the case of international students this could be due to a mismatch in perceptions. Lecturers may think students coming to show them work in progress is an ‘open door’ option whereas students may not think to make such a request.

In Hong Kong the tutor will say: ‘you can e-mail me, or come to my office’, but no-one has said that here. So we don’t know if we can or not.... In Hong Kong, we even have their phone number, not just their office room number, so we can call them. In Hong Kong, we can access them in many ways, but its not so easy here.

In interview discussions some students noted that lecturers tended to discourage an open-door policy. The interview participants remarked that many lecturers asked students to email them for an appointment, they interpreted this as a subliminal “do not disturb” message. Students realised that a fully open door policy was not practical but did express a preference for a set of drop-by office hours to be made available. Therefore, it is suggested that lecturers’ willingness to look at work in progress along with set office hours should be made explicit on assignment briefs and/or teaching and learning plans.

In managing assessment, therefore, lecturers need to make clear their expectations, for example in respect of the format and structure of the assignment and also in respect of the purpose of the assignment and how they are interpreting the title. In addition, students find it useful to see examples of previous student work with annotations as to aspects which could have been improved upon. It is also useful if students are afforded an opportunity to show their lecturers their work in progress.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, international students’ choice of a UK university is likely to be based on its academic reputation and the content of the programmes on offer. The aim of this paper was to create a student-endorsed inclusive teaching and learning environment. Findings from the literature indicate international students expect high quality teaching, good staff-student communications and prompt feedback from tutors (Billing, 1998; Peterson *et al.*, 1999; Andrade 2006). At Northumbria, all recommendations made to lecturers in relation to inclusivity were corroborated positively by international students. In relation to lectures and academic literacy it is clear that staff practice is generally assisting international students adjust to UK study. Many of the recommendations were also received very positively by UK students. However, there is room for improvement particularly, in regard to pace of lectures in light of note taking, seminar practice and the management of assessment. Unease relating to the pace of lectures could be alleviated through the use of the VLE for materials but it was clear that permission for the recording of lectures would be seen as invaluable and lecturers will be encouraged to allow this practice to take place.

In the management of assessment, concern was highlighted by all students where many of the comments stemmed from student perception of the relationships with teaching staff in this high stakes environment. Further suggestion was made to prompt lecturers to the ways in which the staff-student relationship and expectations could be made more explicit.

Seminar practices in relation to the forging of student relationships were an area of anxiety for international students who, as outlined by Ouyang (2006), do not wish to disturb the ‘harmony’ of sessions. Others issues occurred through the tendency of seminar groups to comprise mostly of Pacific Rim Students resulting in a tendency for students to revert to their first language in seminar groups. Ensuring there is a proportional mix of UK and International students in each seminar group is one simple way of encouraging culturally mixed relationships and at the time of writing NBS were taking steps to introduce this. The extended use of VLEs and socially focussed interaction such as peer mentoring are also discussed as ideas which may be employed to address this. However, it is suggested that further research may be required to assess UK students’ response to the changed seminar environment.

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