SEDA Research Project

Project title: Leading international students' communities of learning within departmental extra-curricular activities: A case study in a Russell Group University in England

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

The notion of internationalisation in the Russell Group Universities has been considered as a top priority for their own planning and development practices, while 'international education is now big business in Anglophone universities'. (Ryan, 2011: 631) The UK Higher Education industry has grown sharply, given that the number of international students continues to rise (e.g. OECD, 2014), while HESA (2014) has reported that in 2012-2013 '51% of non-EU students (and 37% of EU students)' study at postgraduate level at UK institutions. Evidence (IN FOCUS Universities UK, 2014: 2) shows that international higher education is a competitive market among the UK, the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Germany, where government policies aim to attract international students. The case study University is a successful overseas recruiter in the UK, with an international (outside the UK) postgraduate community attracting 35% of total student population (Case study University website-International Office).

One of the most widely discussed areas in the researched University is the notion of internationalisation and the need for a broader strategy enhancing cultural awareness and diversity within an internationalised university, in order to equip students to compete in an international job market (Case Study University website, 2015). The debate of the notion of internationalisation is evident within different foci developed by UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), while 'the aspiration to internationalise […] has been implemented to a radically varying degree in different institutions' (Reid et al., 2010: 5). The international literature focuses on the notion of internationalisation in higher education (HE) with an emphasis on teaching and learning challenges for international students and their learning styles (e.g., Wallace and Hellmundt, 2003; Bell, 2007; Eaves, 2011; Wong, 2004) and curriculum internationalisation (Luxon and Peelo, 2009). Reid et al.'s study (2010: 9), conducted at the University of Warwick, revealed that internationalisation is largely conceptualised and implemented in a relatively conventional manner, while internationalisation focused practices include content approach, exchange programmes, international staff and students intake within its faculties. The literature also suggests that new forms of learning experiences (Robson, 2011) are fundamental to produce 'global' graduate employability (Campbell, 2010). Since experiential learning through an intercultural approach

facilitates deeper learning (e.g. Strang, 2011), the development of an inclusive reflective culture can be considered as an element in the internationalization strategy agenda for developing peer-learning mechanisms. However, there is a dearth of empirical research evidence in international students' synergies of peer learning outside the classroom walls and beyond the formal programme. The study of international students' communities of learning through extra-curricular activities which enhance cultural awareness, research and professional learning within departments of Higher Education in England is regarded as in its infancy.

It is therefore timely to provide empirical evidence about how a Russell Group University in England provides a learning environment for international students to flourish and develop dynamic departmental peer-learning communities through extra-curricular activities. Thus, this is what the current study has addressed. Under the umbrella of extra-curricular activities, all the activities (seminars, events), which integrate global cultural, professional and academic dimensions within an inclusive environment, shape the form of the communities under research.

Within the scope and purpose of this study, international students are considered as the student population coming from outside the UK, including the 'EU home students', since they do not pay international fees.

Purpose and Research Aims

This report discusses the background and key findings of one-year SEDA funded research project, with the purpose to study the notion of internationalisation under the umbrella of micro-institutional policies and practices related to international students' communities of learning within an extra curricular framework of activities. This study provides an empirical investigation of undergraduate (UG), postgraduate taught (PGT) and postgraduate research (PGR) students' experience and department leaders' perceptions about peer-learning environments 'outside the classroom' within a department of Higher Education (HE) at a UK Russell Group University. It explores whether and how international students' communities of learning contribute to the optimisation of learning in terms of developing an intercultural, academic and professional awareness of an international context. For the purpose of this study, the

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conceptualisation of internationalisation is explored through the extra-curricular activities in one[1] department of Social Sciences at a UK University.

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of departmental policies and practices for the enhancement of international students' engagement to informal communities of learning?

2. Whether, and how, collegial communities of learning influence the inclusivity of students in the departmental internationalised culture?

3. What is the impact of leading extra-curricular activities to students' learning and intercultural experience?

Methodology

A case study design is chosen since it allows a detailed examination of the case and in-depth data to be collected through mixed methods (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2014; Yin, 2009). More specifically, the different methods employed to gather data are:

- Documentary analysis

The researchers scrutinize macro-institutional (e.g., Strategic Vision 2015) and micro-institutional documents (e.g., department working group document, staff meeting minutes; minutes of the social and cultural events committee meeting). Bearing in mind that documents may show intentions, or subjectivity, perhaps for marketing (e.g., to recruit more international students) and political reasons, the researchers critically evaluate the documents in order to enhance credibility in the content analysis.

- Web-content analysis

Internet research is employed through analysing the University and department's web-content in terms of the internationalisation strategy; the content in the international office page has been also scrutinised while the roles and activities in the international tutor's website have been explored. This method is used as part of the data collection process, and not 'as a stand-alone method for understanding the phenomenon' (Hine, 2011: 3), and thus, it is well suited for data triangulation.

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[1] The researchers acknowledge the limitations of this study, given that the institutions sample has been reduced compared to the SEDA proposal. This is due to a delayed receipt of the Ethics Approval, as well as, one of the researchers' (principal investigator) moved to a post overseas, while the latter caused restrictions (in terms of practicalities) in conducting research to a more than one department. However, this change has led to a more in-depth exploration of the internationalisation strategies adopted by the case study department in a UK Russell Group University.

- Face-to-face individual[1] interviews with seventeen participants -UG, PGT and PGR students and academic staff- in order to provide insights into participants' interpretation of events in their department. The use of interviews, in this study, is prominent and provided insights into student-participants' subjective understanding of the researched phenomenon (Ribbins, 2007; Perakyla, 2008), influenced by their experiences.

- Participant observations

'Sharing the World Seminars' which act as the foundation of inquiry have been observed by the principal investigator. As Jorgensen (2014: 7) states, '[…] the methodology of participant observation provides direct experiential and observational access to the insiders' world of meaning'. In this case, the participant observer experienced reality and the interactions of seminars participants from the role of the insider. As a result, there are questions about possible bias, as explained later in the report.

- Survey Questionnaire was part of a mixed methods approach

Qualtrics, online survey software, is designed with the potential to gain information for the inquiry, with both a qualitative and quantitative stance. An online survey within the case study is considered appropriate in order to enhance the results' credibility, given the combined several methods to answer the same research questions (Silverman, 2005; Bryman, 2008).

Employing a multiple methods approach to collect data enhances triangulation which 'is essentially a means of cross checking data to establish its validity' (Bush, 2007: 100) and reliability of the results (Cohen et al., 2001). All the research instrument schedules are derived from the research questions and the literature on internationalisation. A thematic level of analysis grounds the research process within the contextual framework of the research inquiry. Aggregating the data in terms of similarity-themes and difference-themes creates a platform for methodological comparison based on consistencies discerned in the various group sets' data. This is enhanced through triangulation which draws conclusions about international students' communities of learning under the umbrella of departmental extra-curricular activities.

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[1] Individual interviews have replaced the proposed 'focus group interview with six students in each department', in order to gain a more in-depth and robust understanding of the researched topic.

Sampling

The research is undertaken in a department of Social Sciences in a Russell Group University. The department is sampled purposively to fit the research criteria, those with a large number of international students and an international tutor. In respect of the participants, these are also purposively chosen from those who could add value to the exploration of international students' communities of learning through their active participation in extra-curricular activities and those who participated less.

More specifically, the sample of UG, PGT and PGR students includes:

  - Eight postgraduate research students coming from various international contexts (one from Africa, four from Asia, two from the UAE, one European- non British origin), while six students show an active participation in the events, and three of them play an unofficial leading role within the departmental activities, which enhance the development of a community of learning.

  - Seven postgraduate taught students; two of them are coming from Kazakhstan and five from Asia (4 Chinese, 1 Indian). Three of the sample participants are actively engaged in terms of running events related to the creation of a community for international students, while five students of this sample show an ongoing interest (high rate of attendance) for the majority of the department events.

Apart from international students studying heterogeneous disciplines -who are the central figures in this study- the researchers have purposively chosen:

- a course leader in the PGT programme with a strong record of attendance in the events organized by the department, and,
- the director of research students who has a leading role in organizing extra-curricular research-related events for students.

The international tutor of the researched department has been excluded from the sample, since the leading researcher of this study holds the post of the international tutor for that department (during the data collection period).

Access and Ethics

Access and ethics follow the University Guidelines on Ethical Practice and the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2011) guidelines for education research. A

key principle for constructing ethical research is that of voluntarism by the participants when engaging with research (ESRC, 2005). Confidentiality has been ensured through not identifying the participants' names and profiles, via giving pseudonyms to participants (e.g., A-PGT; A-PGR) and exclude the academic background (discipline of study) information, in order to ensure the strictest confidence of data and minimise, if not eliminate, power relationships. Writing up research is being carried out within an ethical framework, in a way that the presentation of results is treated with strict confidence, respecting participants' privacy. Anonymity of the institution, the department and participants precedes data protection and data interpretation approaches. However, this may not be fully achieved in the case of the researched University and department.

The main ethical consideration is related to the insider researcher position that both authors hold. Both researchers may be considered as insiders, however the level of insiderness differs. The practices followed by both insider researchers may shed some light on methodological and ethical challenges in practitioner research and create a platform for debate among insider/outsider researchers. The principal investigator's position is towards the insider ends -intimate insider research- (Mercer, 2007) where the power dimension may have an effect to the results. The co-investigator's position is an insider with regards to the department, but he may be viewed as partly outsider with regards to the research topic. It could therefore be argued that their insider viewpoints could cause bias (e.g., Mercer, 2007; Busher and James, 2012). However, the argument that 'data might become thinner as a result' (Mercer, 2007: 7) of insiders' familiarity with the context and research topic has been overriden through adopting a mixed methods approach at different spans of time (e.g., online questionnaire has been administered in 2015, when one of the investigators has no longer hold the international tutor's role).

Context

The case study department is a department of Social Sciences in a world's leading Russell Group British university with a growing international reputation (case study University website 2014). The researched department offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate taught and research programmes. Of the 25 academic

members of staff, the majority is of British origin, while four of them are non British Europeans and one American. Alongside a large international student community (92 in total)- 47 UG including 2 ERASMUS students from Sweden and 2 from Spain, 40 PGT and 9 PGR students originating from outside the UK (case study department minutes of staff meeting)– the researched department welcomes international academics (e.g., a Finnish visiting research fellow) in terms of a staff mobility scheme.

Main Findings

University policy and departmental documentary findings

According to macro-institutional documents (e.g., internationalisation policy 2011; vision statement 2015) of the case study Russell Group University, internationalisation is considered as one of the top priorities, with a focus on ensuring a global perspective into the experience of all students. There are a number of strategies undertaken in order to develop its human (academic and student) capital with an intercultural competence, and also, to increase the university's international outlook. The University responds to the European Commission Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme and Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2014) and government's demand (HM Government, 2013) for universities to become globally connected, producing global citizens and leading international research which is internationally recognized, through an internationalisation strategy with a focus on:
- the growth of its programmes internationally (e.g., postgraduate programme offered currently in Abu Dhabi, Singapore),
- developing international programmes (e.g., exchange programmes with Universities in Europe, America, Australasia, Asia) and research collaborations, partnership and alliances with world-class institutions and teaching opportunities to support mobility,
- recruiting international academics and students to produce graduates with a global education. (Case study university's documents about European strategy, Alliance/ University Partnership; University's GoGlobal website).

Internationalisation within the case study department is also translated in strategies to expand the postgraduate programme with the introduction of a new MA International Education from spoke departments and it raises the need to develop an undergraduate programme which will be 'internationally attractive; increasingly international in its

content and target audience.' (Case study department internal document, 2014: 5) Among the case study department's internationalisation strategies is the establishment of international tutorship role, as a means to support students from multiple cultures and societies and enrich their experience at this British University (Case study department website, 2014). Pursuing internationalisation in every day practice –under the umbrella of extra-curricular activities- lies in the role of the department's international tutor who:

- creates a thriving environment where 'all students are international students' and work towards the enrichment of each other's cultural and professional-based experience;
- ensures that international students (outside the UK) gain the academic and pastoral support they need;
- leads social and cultural events and extra-curricular cultural and professional-based seminars; and, coordinates a student-run interdisciplinary conference.

(Case study department website on Student Support: International 2014)

This role is enacted by an academic member of staff (the principal investigator of this project), non-British European origin, who acts as the international tutor of the department with the main responsibility of creating an inclusive environment for a diverse student body in departmental communities of learning. Although the term 'international tutor' may predispose a focus on students who are not 'home students', the extra-curriculum activities targeted the whole departmental population in order to ensure that the inclusion of international students in the departmental community and the home students' integration to the extra-curricular programme with the purpose of learning from and interacting with each other (Case study department website). The latter is in line with a recent British Council report (2014: 4) which states that 'integration of all students is an elemental factor in the expanding concept of internationalisation.' However, implementation in the case study department is not without critique, since the risk of separating the international community has been addressed, as explained later in this report.

Sharing the World Seminars

Whilst 'making education global' has been considered as a key theme in the work of the department (Case study department internal document, 2014: 4) within formal structures, 'Sharing the World' was used as a mantra term to create international learning platforms within the framework of extra-curricular activities (Case study

department website on Student Support: International 2014), while a course leader (PGT1) stresses the value of this provision to the whole departmental community:

> Having this opportunity is fantastic and it gives the opportunity for sharing. There is a strong international component into that, so it would be good to share with people…over and above the timetable I think this has created what we may call' community of learning'.

Under the umbrella of the 'Sharing the World' learning platforms, professional based seminars dominate the discussion in relation to extra-curricular communities of learning opportunities. Interview participants (D-PGR, E-PGR, F-PGR, G-PGR, F-PGT) perceive the 'Sharing the World' seminars as:

> the most effective way for interaction among students, since we are much more actively involved; some of us have a leading role as Seminar committee members. Our sharing does not finish when the seminar finishes. My classmates and I always meet at the Hub or library and we reflect, mainly, on the professional based new knowledge. (A-PGT)

C-PGT and G-PGT agree that this seminar series creates communities of learning, with an emphasis on reflective practices. A PhD student, D-PGR, also highlights these seminars as a source of learning, 'where students share practices, research and experience and then discuss what would work best in our contexts, bearing in mind effective practices in another part of this world.' Similarly, a course leader (PGT1) states:

> It is essential to have students participate as part of their holistic development; They share experience and knowledge and gain more experience and resources [from our] very very strong international strand.

As evidence shows, postgraduate taught and research students take the lead to share their professional practices while nuances of professional norms and practices come to the surface in these student-led presentations. According to the website data, there is a series of professional based seminars in the education sector across the world:

Sharing the World professional-based seminars
Teaching in Higher Education in Zambia
Leading Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Greece
School management in Cameroon
Religious Education teaching at secondary school level in England
Entrepreneurship in Africa
Managing a faith school in England
Teacher development in South Korea

Table 1: Example professional based seminar series

Internationalisation of professional practices is embedded in these seminars, while it creates some space for indigenous (UK local) presentations to enhance the global and comparative dimensions of practices. The latter seems to meet one of the aims of 'Sharing the World' events, which is related to the whole student community integration to the extra-curricular activities with the purpose of contributing to the vibrancy of communities of learning in the researched department. D-PGR highlights that the international tutor, the 'Sharing the World' committee and the conference committee have created equal opportunities for all students to participate and lead activities. However, the limited integration of local students may be related to their job commitments, their individual interests and probably the departmental events timetable. Another doctoral student (B-PGR) says that 'although it is a British University, it very international; it is like a mosaic, people from all over the world. The minority of students is locals and we don't see them often.' In response to a critique for the latter, this PGR interviewee argued that:

> even when some seminars were organized late in the evening- around 6.30pm- in order to attract home students- there was a small number of students attending. So, it may not be related to the time of the scheduled seminars. A stronger relationship with them would be beneficial for all.

This point confirms other participants' view and shows that there is room for home-students, predominantly full-time local practitioners to increase their cultural, professional awareness research sharing through contributing to the internationalised agenda. The director of research students (PGR1) raises an argument about:

> favouritism if you start saying..'I want to do this for international students', but there is also an element of patronising and treating international students at a deficit. So, the idea is to expand the idea of the community of learners. What can we do for the community of learners?

Students' engagement in the student-led seminars influence their inclusivity in the departmental internationalised culture. The strongest benefit for two Masters students, A-PGT and G-PGT, coming from two different continents, is related to the notion of inclusivity in a British University, which accommodates international students and creates a community. In addition, A-PGT commented that:

> not only do we have a strong community in class, but also outside the classroom walls, where we learn about different systems and cultures, without even having to travel to these countries. The Sharing the World seminars taught me how professionals act and behave in the other side of this world. Such an incredible source of knowledge! We educate ourselves without spending any more money for this useful knowledge. Studying here is a good value for money.

This argument shows a strong emphasis on a cost-effective exchange of knowledge through inter-culturally driven and international professional-exchanging seminars.

Departmental research seminars

Other practices recognized by the participants are the department research seminar series, organized by the director of research students. They are well-received by half of the interviewees, while they acknowledge the significant contribution to their research growth, under an extra- curriculum framework of activities. It is interesting to mention, though, that the PGR students focused on the inter-disciplinary dimension of the seminars, whereas the PGT students mainly highlight the research seminars reporting data from an international context (e.g, Finland, England, South Africa), probably because inter-disciplinary research may not be used at a masters level.

Seminars with a leadership focus

Another seminar series which is very well perceived by the majority of the interviewees is the research seminar series in leadership. The leadership seminars - organized by the leadership group of the department- are praised as 'insightful and thought-provoking' (C-PGR) by the great majority of this study participants, while E-PGR –PhD student who is rarely involved in the departmental activities- mentions that:

> if there is one seminar series that I attend, this is the leadership one. This is due to the up-to-date research evidence, practical based information by local practitioners and experts. I still remember the session on scenario planning by a consultant.

Participants, with few exceptions, agree that these well-attended seminars establish a strong leadership community within and outside the seminars, which 'should model the platform for student, university staff and speakers' engagement with critical leadership issues' (A-PGT). A department course leader (PGT1) highlights the positive elements of the exposure of international students to 'hot spot leadership areas' while the majority of students stress the importance of gaining an understanding of issues pertaining to leadership and management. The primary investigator's participant observations in the following seminars -Managing a primary school in England;

Human resource in education; Leadership and trust in English schools; Professional development and leadership in Greece; Scenario planning and effective strategies from scenario models; Parental engagement with children's learning; Recruitment and selection; Black minority ethnic leadership in England- reveal different dynamics in terms of reflection and engagement, mainly based on students' working experience and country of origin. Kazakhstani, Middle East and non-British European students are more reflective than East Asian attendees. The engagement in current debates and research dialogues, as highlighted in the seminar series website, has been evidenced via PGT students' creation of a discussion group on stimulating areas to extend research interests and practice based knowledge. A central Asian student (B-PGT) says:

> With the pressures of student results in our schools and my limited knowledge of leadership before joining the course, I haven't never problematised enough about parental engagement with their children's learning. It may be because parents in my context rely on school and teachers. After this engaging seminar run by a professor from another UK university, I gathered my home country's classmates at the learning hub and we discussed how we can introduce this area in our schools, and we came up with the idea that this change should happen across our schools to make it happen. … In our course we have a strong community of learning, we discuss a lot and reflect on what we learn both in the formal sessions and this kind of extra seminars, which are valuable to our understanding.

Cultural-based seminars and social events

As part of the cultural awareness development, the researched department organises social events, such as an International Christmas Dinner Party; International Day with a careers workshop followed by a cultural based seminar; also, an International Day: Sharing International Cultures, where students bring along traditional dishes from their home country and are exposed to traditional dances, music and cultural norms and expectations through drama activities and quizzes. Alongside the social events with a significant cultural orientation, the international tutor leads the 'Sharing the World' cultural based learning, through organising cultural sessions where students from the department international community are welcomed to make a presentation on Festive celebrations (e.g., Eid, Diwali, Bonfire, Chinese New Year, Carnival, Halloween, celebration of becoming an adult in Japan) in their home countries.

Similarly to A-PGR, C-PGR, F-PGR and H-PGR and B-PGT and E-PGT interviewees, a final year PhD student D-PGR highlights the added value of the extra-curricular

activities to the development of a culturally-diverse community which promotes the international dimensions of research and practices. She says:

> The department acknowledges and respects the cultural diversity and […] creates a platform for discussing about future international research collaborations and sharing professional practices which will help us position ourselves in the market.

Findings are in the same vein with British Council's (2014:15) study highlighting that 'multiculturalism is representative of integration at the institutional level.

Student-run conference

Among the strategies employed in the case study department with the purpose of creating collegial communities of learning is the student-run conferences which have been held during the last three years in the case study department, with the guidance and support of the director of research students, the international tutor, two one more academic member of staff in addition to doctoral students' voluntary organising role. It is agreed that all postgraduate students have benefitted from such a conference, since it is open to students across the university. A-PGR says 'meeting people from different disciplines is good for networking too', while H-PGR pinpointed the positive aspect of running the conference 'on a Saturday, so all of us –either those with families or those with job commitments- is more likely to present.' All participants acknowledge the importance of learning about research projects outside their research focus and network with other postgraduate students. F-PGR and G-PGR's points about the fruitfulness of discussions at a planning and organization stage create a community of learning where 'all of us advanced our knowledge about how our excellent 2013 conference is run.' B-PGR also stresses the importance of empowering PhD students through giving them a leading role in the conference. This student also mentions that 'it is good for practicing our presentation skills in front of a friendly audience. I look at it as a nurturing environment.' Both the director of PGR students and the course leader who participated in this study acknowledge the benefits of 'such a great opportunity [which increases] their motivation and develop them.' (PGR1)

Findings' overview

The findings show that the great majority are aware of the plethora of the departmental provision of extra-curriculum activities, while they argue their contribution to their internationalized professional, cultural and research learning. A doctoral student, C-

PGR, acknowledges the importance of those events mainly organized by the international tutor, as they promote a positive informal learning environment 'for all students, and not only the international students', and enhance student leadership. All PGT students confirm the doctoral students' view that they have experienced a sharing culture for research and professional-related understanding, where students are used as a resource for international learning. Interestingly, the qualitative data from six respondents in the online survey confirmes that students are considered as a resource for the internationalisation of learning via extra-curricular activities in their department. For example:

> The focus is on internationalising knowledge, professional experience and advance our research development through sharing ideas. I feel privileged that the international tutor and the PGR director work hard enough to organize a series of research seminars that experience researchers and current PhD students from all over the world share their research journeys and methodologies at different contexts. Sometimes, we get guidance and support by more experienced research buddies [PhD student]

> I remember that in one Sharing the World seminar I learned something really important, that people in centralized contexts rarely welcome observations, both as a research method and practice. This 'informal' knowledge is extremely helpful to me, since I am planning to do research in the future in a centralized context. Now, I need to find out more about alternatives …[PhD student]

The majority of interviewees, mainly PhD students highlight that learning through unofficial platforms and within their community is a way to develop their collaborative and coaching skills and construction of knowledge. B-PGR argues that:

> the attempt to learn about ethnography through books and papers […was not very successful]. Someone in the PhD office has done ethnography and we started talking and learning from each other. We both learned new stuff. I think we now coach each other about ethnography and as soon as we finish with our PhD we plan to do a study at contrasting international contexts.

In contrast, half of the survey[1] respondents stress the importance of 'collaborative construction of learning'. As Table 2 shows, the highest percentage (100%) stated that 'learning from each other', 'sharing research [and] professional experience' (75%) and engaging with the departmental community (75%) are among the most well-perceived benefits.

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[1] Although the statistical data derived from the survey is not reported in this paper, it is believed that the data in Table 2 would inform the readers about respondents' views on the benefits of the extra-curricular provision in their department.

1	Learning from each other	100%
2	Developing their inter-disciplinary academic understanding	25%
3	Sharing research experiences	75%
4	Sharing professional experiences	75%
5	Gaining an intercultural understanding	63%
6	Engaging with the departmental community	75%
7	Developing a sense of inclusivity in an internationalised culture	63%
8	Valuing shared leadership	25%
9	Developing a reflective learning-centred attitude	38%
10	Developing a collaborative construction of learning	50%
11	Developing skills to adopt an internationalist perspective	38%

Table 2: Benefits of extra-curricular activities

The 63% of respondents indicated 'gaining an intercultural understanding' and 'developing a sense of inclusivity in an internationalised culture', while a minority (25%) said about 'developing their inter-disciplinary academic understanding' and 'valuing shared leadership'. However, what derives from the interview data is a strong emphasis on intercultural experience. Similarly, a survey respondent stated:

At a research driven university, the creation of the space for students to share research is fundamental. But, we do not only learn from each other in terms of research; we learn about social norms and cultural aspects of different contexts. The international tutor was organising stimulating seminars, with people from academia and practitioners, from other universities, who introduced us to research and practice issues, but some presenters share cultural information about Korea, Greece, Finland.. We also had the opportunity to see how things work elsewhere, culturally-wise.

Conclusions

This study generates some substantive findings about the notion of internationalisation in terms of extra-curricular activities while it provides insights of diverse learning communities and informs academic staff about the necessity of embedding bottom-up (student) approaches to learning.

Lessons learnt

Among the lessons learnt from conducting this research study are:

- The realization that the department's stakeholders acknowledge the importance of creating a series of extra-curricular activities to support the broader notion of internationalization.
- The insider/outsider researcher continuum which positions researchers based on the power relationships between researchers and the focus of research. Practices

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followed by insider researchers may shed light on research methodology or challenges it. In any case, it is an ongoing exploration for good research practice.

- The experiential learning of students -in terms of inter-cultural awareness and research sharing from international perspective- through their communities of learning can be considered as an important element in the internationalization strategy agenda for departments of Higher Education.

- Valuing diversity through the internationalized dimension of extra-curricular activities may show how welcoming an institution can be with the international community of students. However, the idea of an 'international tutor' at a department who ensures a vibrant learning community for international students (as the role title entails) may be debatable, especially if the focus is not on 'sharing and learning for ALL'. According to the director of PGR students:

> I do criticise the idea of an international tutor. Not [our international tutor as a person], because [she] did a great job. Other departments do not have that role? Why don't they? Because we are an international university. Why would you single out international students as people who are needing special support in an international university? But what [our international tutor] did, was to expand the role beyond whatever that was. And also let more people lead. Everybody has a responsibility to create a community of learners.

- Learning beyond the classroom walls through the development of international student-run communities of learning can be an element of enrichment. This supports the argument that 'hav[ing] a diverse student body from multiple cultures and societies […] enriches our intellectual environment.'(Spenser-Oatey and Dauber, 2015: 5)

Main outputs and suggestions for the educational development community

Aimed primarily at university faculties and the educational development community, the research findings of university policies on internationalization and departmental practices in action provide valuable insight into the nature and impact of these initiatives at the heart of internationalisation. The findings show that international students benefit from this provision –through developing an intercultural awareness, professional understanding of global employment environments and research sharing, while it recommends educational developers at an institutional level to review their target group of these extra-curricular activities, since the implications have been

debatable. Another element related to the empowerment of learners to actively participate in the development and sustainability of a vibrant and international community is through a departmental strategy which encourages the engagement of all students who are registered in the programmes of the department. As part of 'widening participation, a course leader (PGT1) states that:

> the local practitioners would have benefitted from participating in the international sharing seminars and the leadership seminars. But, let's also remember our [international cohort in the UAE] as well. It would be good to link them up together to talk to each other, to share their experiences.

This point reflects the potential of more widely international opportunities in order to creating conducive environments to learning and wider participation, probably though the use of 'cyber seminars' in the future. Finally, this study may reveal that the case study department has shaped some educational development practices towards an internationalized community.

The case study findings:

- shape thoughts on approaches supporting peer learning schemes outside the formal taught curriculum and create a platform for sharing good practices drawn from evidence,
- stimulate debates and initiate action, and,
- may influence transformative agenda practices for learning in Higher Education.

However, the study is limited by scope and its size. It is recommended to be broadened in a scope to include a cross-departmental comparative element in its nature (as stated in our SEDA proposal) and all students (home students, non-British Europeans and those students coming from other continents than Europe). The discussion of complexities, interactions and differentiation emerged within a cross-departmental comparative study will be likely to contribute to the impact of extra-curricular activities upon students' learning and cross-departmental effectiveness of provision. This research area will also benefit from a follow-on research which will be able to inform educational developers about wider perspectives, policy development and implementation. The researchers shall seek for larger grants –e.g. SEDA, ESRC- in order to be able to conduct a larger scale-study which will have greater impact.

In response to the dissemination strategy, the authors are planning to present to the next SEDA Conference and submit a paper for review at the International Journal for

Academic Development where the findings shared in this report will be disseminated to the academic community. Given the 'insider' dimension of this study, the researchers will contribute to the debate and challenges about 'insiderness in research' through a research paper in the British Education Research Journal.

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