

7 Steps to: Internationalising Teaching and Learning

Overview

HEIs are charged with the responsibility for producing graduates who are 'global citizens' and can operate effectively in the 21st century (Shiel, 2006).

'Internationalisation' is the process by which HEIs hope to achieve this aim. The term 'internationalisation' does not have a fixed meaning (Leask, 2005) and is often only understood in narrow terms of attracting international staff and students to a UK university. However, its intention is much wider than this. In its broadest sense internationalisation is about the development of inclusive and globally relevant curricula, designed to ensure that students develop the intercultural competence needed for professional careers in a globally interconnected world.

Plymouth University's internationalisation strategy contains 10 key themes: enhancing the student experience; internationalisation of the curriculum; attracting international students; ensuring staff are internationally active; an expansion of international partners; research; knowledge and new international markets; making use of alumni and international contacts; embedding these in Plymouth University Practice. This strategy aims to respond to the globalisation of education, and develop opportunities for students to experience an international education which is highly valued by employers, in an increasingly competitive job market (Plymouth University, 2009).

This 7 Steps leaflet is aimed at a wide range of university staff who are involved with activities from the strategic planning level through to module delivery and face-to-face contact with students in the administration office. You may not have influence over some of the suggested activities in this leaflet, however these 7 steps should help you to reflect on the part you play in internationalising teaching and learning at Plymouth University.

1. Review current practices

The first step of internationalising teaching and learning is to work collegiately to negotiate the approach that your department or programme team will take (Tingle, 2011). Time is needed to review current practices and identify ways of opening up opportunities for students to have international experiences and interactions. A good internationalisation strategy will develop approaches that aim to help students to gain a wider understanding of the global village. This might be through well-designed classroom activities or through direct experiences such as overseas placements and short field-trips.

Practical tips: • identify international issues or examples within your discipline • look at similar programmes in different institutions for comparison • articulate any overseas study opportunities • develop a gap analysis where further international elements could be incorporated • consider the international expertise of staff when making appointments

2. Enhance internationalisation in the curriculum

Use your gap analysis to identify areas where more international examples could be used to help students understand the international context. Some students will go on to jobs overseas; many others will work for international companies. The curriculum arguably needs to prepare students for this global market place (Bremer and van der Wende, 1995). Even those who have a specific goal to remain in the UK will be working in an environment where they will mix with people from all over the world. An internationalised curriculum may not be appropriate for every module, however it should exist in every programme and may help to attract international students and those with ambitions to work in multi-national settings.

Practical tips: • use international examples/case studies • look at the subject from a range of perspectives • ask students to bring their international expertise to the classroom • design activities and assessments that are flexible enough to enable students to utilise their knowledge and experience of other cultures • ensure the reading list contains international publications • ask your students to identify aspects of teaching styles from other cultures, incorporate them where appropriate

3. Provide opportunities for intercultural interaction in the classroom

There is much evidence to suggest that international students often feel alienated and that UK students and international students do not mix (Heffernan et al, 2010). Academics need to use a range of strategies to bring student groups together and harness their varied experiences, as these can enrich the curriculum (see 7 Steps on 'Adopting Culturally Inclusive Teaching Practices').

For example, form groups with mixed-nationalities to examine the impact of culture on your discipline. In general, good practice in terms of classroom management with international students is good practice for all students (Jones and Brown, 2007).

Practical tips: • identify resources that help to demonstrate an international perspective • encourage your students to work in mixed groups starting with low risk tasks • build their confidence to contribute to class discussion • encourage students to ask questions publicly, and to put forward other points of view • make use of relevant technologies such as GoogleEarth, TV programmes through Box of Broadcast (BOB)

To see other titles in the 7 Steps series go to
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Further reading or links to useful websites

- Atfield, R. and Kemp, P. (2008) Enhancing the international Learning Experience in business and management, hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism. Newbury: Threshold Press.
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- Fieldwork Education resources collection <http://www.openfieldwork.org.uk/api/search.php?source=collection&kw=health%20and%20safety>
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- Maskell, J. and Stokes, A. (2008) Designing Effective Fieldwork in Environmental and Natural Sciences ISBN 978-1-84102-201-7 <http://www.gees.ac.uk/pubs/guides/fw2/GEESfwGuide.pdf>

4. Support international students

Evidence suggests that international students take a while to acclimatise and that they need support in order to do this successfully (Kelly, 2009). An awareness of intercultural difference will help staff to provide more effective support for students. Academic, pastoral and front-line support should be available, with clearly communicated office hours indicating staff availability outside of timetabled sessions. An induction programme needs to include activities which help to explain some of the known differences in educational culture such as: referencing styles, critical analysis and reflection (Heffernan et al, 2010). Students also need clear guidance on the parameters of the programme and a clear understanding that deadlines are non-negotiable. They should be informed of the professional support and services available at the university. These include the International Student Advisory service www.plymouth.ac.uk/isas and the English Language Centre www.plymouth.ac.uk/elc. A combination of these induction activities is proven to accelerate the settling in period (ibid) and improve the students' ability to focus on their learning.

Practical tips: • ensure that students meet colleagues from the relevant support services • give students a tour of support services • consider developing a student buddy system • offer front-line staff training opportunities to understand the specific needs of international students better

5. Utilise and build staff development opportunities

Staff benefit from opportunities to discuss what internationalisation means in the context of their discipline (Biggs, 1997). It can be useful to gain expert advice from leaders in the field or to spend time learning lessons from others in your field who have already developed their approach. Use team meetings or away days to develop an internationalised approach and to ensure that every member of the team understands the key issues. Major areas of development might include: inter-cultural competence, international perspectives and the acquisition of modern foreign languages.

Practical tips: • attend conferences and events with international foci/global dimension • offer holiday bursaries for visits that include an element of international development • appoint staff who are able to broaden the international expertise of the department • ensure staff development includes international awareness

6. Collaborate with international partners

Working with international partners brings many benefits including: research and funding opportunities; sharing of knowledge; student exchange; collaboration and consultancy opportunities. Ensure that sufficient time is allocated to building these partnerships. Clearly articulate the intentions of the partnership in a written agreement between the partners (Caruana and Hanstock, 2003).

Practical tips: • those who intend to work with colleagues at institutions in other countries need to develop a good understanding of the educational background and context that they are moving into (see <http://geert-hofstede.com> for further insights) • links must be embedded within departments rather than reliant on individual relationships

7. Organise overseas visits

Overseas experiences have a powerful impact on personal and academic development (Nilsson, 2000). Such experiences can help students to move from a parochial thought process to a more dynamic way of thinking (Caldock, 2011) and add to students' employability prospects (Huang, 2011). When planning overseas trips think about how the visit will benefit students and staff both in terms of subject knowledge and intercultural development. You could also consider ways of creating positive links with areas or the organisation that you visit.

Practical tips: • give students twelve months notice in order to save for a trip • identify ways that students, who do not have the resources to undertake field trips, are able to participate through the use of technology • have a checklist for the organisation of overseas trips which includes risk analysis, health and safety, insurance and travel arrangements

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