



# Supporting international students in UK Higher Education: a staff development course

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Facilitator's pack

## Note

All reading material and online activities can be retrieved through links within this booklet.

For example:

[P. Sander \(2004\). 'How we should research our students – part one'](#)

If you are working from a printed copy all the links can be found at:  
[www.llas.ac.uk/international](http://www.llas.ac.uk/international)



Accompanying online resource:

Where you see this symbol click on the links to go to the online learning materials.

# Introduction

This pack is designed to be used with teaching and support staff in HE institutions who wish to understand the needs of international students better and improve the ways in which they can be supported on both a personal and institutional level. It encourages teachers in higher education to reflect on their own practice regarding support for international students, and suggests ways in which support for such students can be improved and embedded within the context of their own higher education institution. The materials have been developed to be delivered over approximately six day-long workshops, and they can constitute a Masters-level module which might form part of a course such as a Certificate of Academic Practice; or be part of a professional development course; or alternatively, each unit could be used independently as a one-off personal development activity.

## How to use these materials

The materials in this pack have been designed to be delivered in workshops forming a discrete course (although they do not have to be delivered in this way). This booklet contains complete workshop facilitator's notes. Participant's resources are in an accompanying booklet.

All reading material and online activities can be retrieved through links within each booklet and can also be downloaded from: [www.llas.ac.uk/international](http://www.llas.ac.uk/international)

The materials are divided into six topic areas, each consisting of a set of three suggested workshop activities, related reading materials, reflective Portfolio activities, some synthesising activities and an accompanying online resource. While the topic areas may be presented consecutively as a unified course, they have also been designed to 'stand alone', making it possible to focus only on particular topics, as desired. The online resources can be used on their own for independent study or in a blended way alongside the paper-based materials.

While the materials can be used effectively as they stand, it is recommended that workshop facilitators adapt these materials to meet the specific requirements of their contexts; this is particularly important if the outcomes and Portfolio Activities are to form any part of an assessed course, or need to fit the validation requirements of a particular institution.

## Essential background reading

There are several key publications which underpin the creation of these materials. It is recommended that trainers become familiar with them:

- The Department for Education and Skills paper *Putting the World into World-Class Education*<sup>1</sup> (DfES 2004) which outlines the three goals of that strategy:
  - o establishing the global contexts of all forms of education;
  - o the creation of international partnerships;
  - o identifying the links to be made from education, training and research in universities to trade and investment.
- The UKCISA (formally UKCOSA) report *New Horizons: The Experiences of International Students in UK Further Education Colleges*<sup>2</sup> (UKCOSA 2006), which included the recommendation that 'colleges should ... ensure that there are appropriate opportunities for staff development for all those in contact with international students, as well as encouraging the sharing of creative approaches to teaching and learning'.
- Higher Education Academy materials which call for 'development of initiatives to enhance the learning experience of international students'<sup>3</sup> and the 'promotion of staff development activities'.<sup>4</sup>
- The *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education*, which has been developed 'for institutions to apply to their professional development programmes and activities and thus demonstrate that professional standards for teaching and supporting learning are being met'.<sup>5</sup>

## A suggested introductory activity for a workshop

The following activity is useful as an ice-breaker with a new group of trainees. It also introduces key ideas and issues of internationalisation which run through each of the topic areas covered in this pack.

### Method

1. A pair of participants introduces themselves to each other, giving their name, one piece of personal information which they want to share, one piece of professional information, and one piece of information about their work with international students.

*My name is Bob, my main hobby is playing guitar, I teach economics, I supervise international students doing Masters dissertations.*

2. Pairs become fours, and each participant now introduces their first partner to the other two.
3. Each member of the group of four tells the others what they think are the main opportunities and the main challenges for their institution concerning internationalisation.
4. The points raised in step 3 are reported to the whole group.

If these materials are being delivered as a complete course, the trainer should introduce the course, its scope and aims, and the methods of working that will be used. If the course is to be assessed the specific details of assessment (for example specifications of the Portfolio) should also be introduced. If appropriate, the aims, methods and tasks may be negotiated by participants in order to align them with the participants' own objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.globalgateway.org.uk/PDF/International-Strategy.pdf](http://www.globalgateway.org.uk/PDF/International-Strategy.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.ukcisa.org.uk/files/pdf/new\\_horizons\\_report.pdf](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/files/pdf/new_horizons_report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [www.heacademy.ac.uk/International.htm](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/International.htm)

<sup>4</sup> [www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/pdp](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/pdp)

<sup>5</sup> [www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/policy/framework](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/policy/framework)

# Unit one

## The UK Professional Standards Framework: applying it to support for international students



Accompanying online resource:

[The UK Professional Standards Framework: applying it to support for international students](#)

### Facilitator's notes



Higher education staff in the 21st century are having to cope with an increasingly diverse student body which includes significant numbers of international students. Differences in cultural background and student expectations of the academic experience make new and challenging demands on academic staff. The following activities will use the *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education* as a basis for the exploration of participants' own practice in the teaching or support of international students. The Framework has been developed by the Higher Education Academy.

Each section has an activity that can be incorporated into a Portfolio for personal or assessment purposes. There is also a concluding Synthesising Activity.

### Learning objectives

- To examine the *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education* and consider how it might be applied to international students.
- To explore the nature of action research.
- To sketch out an initial personal development plan concerning supporting international students.

### Reading materials



The following texts will be referred to in the activities, and should be read prior to the workshops (as outlined in the participants' pack).

- [The UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education](#)
- Sander, P. (2004). [How we should research our students – part one](#)
- Todhunter, C. (2001). [Undertaking action research: negotiating the road ahead](#)

### Further reading

- Jenkins, A., Healey, M., Zetter, R. (2007). [Linking Teaching and Research in Disciplines and Departments](#). York: Higher Education Academy.
- Masters, J. (1995). [The history of action research](#). In I. Hughes (ed.) *Action Research Electronic Reader*. The University of Sydney.
- Trahar, S. (2007). [The International Higher Education Landscape - Some Theories and Working Practices](#). Bristol: ESCALATE Education Subject Centre.

# Workshop Activity 1: The Professional Standards Framework

## Pre-workshop reading:

- [\*The UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education\*](#)

## Introduction

In this activity, participants will consider how they understand the term 'international students'. The session will involve reading the *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education*, published by the Higher Education Academy, and considering how it might be applied to supporting international students.

## Method

Read the *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education*. This is not a long document, so it is possible to do this activity either in small groups of 2-3 (who then report back their key points) or as a seminar discussion.

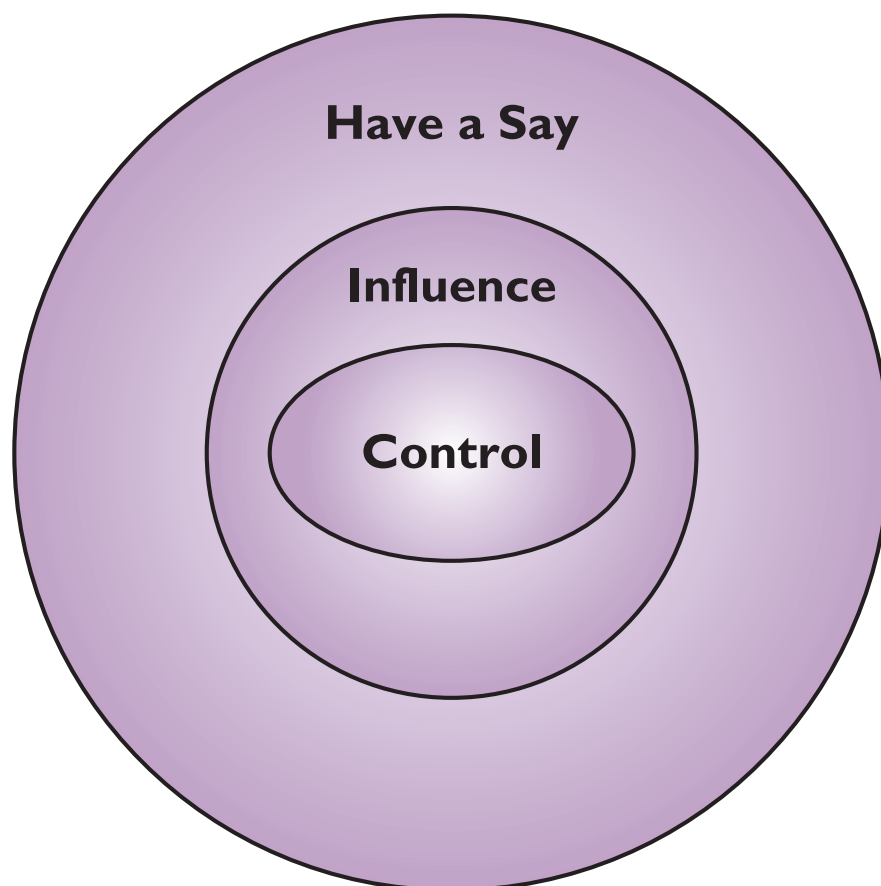
| Unique features  | Facilitator's notes  |
|--|--|
| What does it describe as being a 'unique feature of support for student learning in higher education institutions'?  | The unique feature is 'the scholarly nature of subject inquiry and knowledge creation, and a scholarly approach to pedagogy'<br><br>Do you agree that it is unique? Do you think that international students perceive its 'uniqueness'?  |
| Stakeholders   |  |
| The document refers to 'students and other stakeholders'. In relation to international students in UK Higher Education and your institution in particular, who do you think are the principal stakeholders?  | If necessary expand on the concept of stakeholders – and its link with an ethos of ethical business behaviour over and above profitability. The list should include all bodies of students and staff, partner institutions, sponsors (perhaps families), student employers ...   |
| Standard descriptors   |  |
| Which of the 3 standard descriptors applies best to you?   | The aim here is to show that each of the participants will have a distinct relationship; it is important to establish that students have a network of individual relationships with staff members rather than an abstract relationship with the institution.   |
| Core knowledge   |  |
| In relation to 'Core knowledge': do you believe that the subject material of your speciality can be divided into knowledge which is universal, and knowledge that relates to specific cultures or societies? | The aim here is to elicit, if possible, that all knowledge is to some extent social, that even in domains of hard science there are still community practices e.g. citation practices, or the use of team working (and the conventions associated with these) which trainees need to find out about.   |
| Learning communities   |  |
| To what extent does the 'learning community' to which you belong include international students? (To what extent does the 'learning community' to which you belong exclude international students?)          | This should be a seminar group discussion, and is likely to be wide ranging. Therefore the trainer should act as scribe of key points raised, and these notes should somehow be stored for future use by the group. When the discussion is finished, point out where/when this course will address the issues raised, e.g. in relation to teaching and learning, to assessments, to student services and so on. Point out that as part of the course the participants will have the opportunity to explore one/some of these points more deeply. |

## Post-activity task

Discussion of the concept of reflective practice and its link to continuous professional development: ask each of the participants to tell the group what their particular link to international students is, and to recall any changes in approach (or understanding, or methods used) that they have already considered as a result of reflecting on experience. Broaden the discussion to a general consideration of reflective practice and its value in professional development.

## Notes on the Portfolio Activity

Explain the requirements of the Portfolio Activity. Stress the need to be personal – to identify participants' own contact and relationship with international students, their own areas of activity and responsibility. You could use the concept of spheres of activity: an inner core of those things you can directly control, then a sphere of things you can influence (perhaps as a member of a team or section), and then an outer sphere where you can try to have a say (e.g. a vote in an election).



# Unit one: Portfolio Activity 1

## The UK Professional Standards Framework: applying it to support for international students

### The UK Professional Standards Framework

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

Which of the six areas of activity in the framework relate to your own work? For those areas which are applicable, can you think of one example concerning your own practice which involves international students?

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Design and planning of learning activities and/or programmes of study                                  |  |
| 2. Teaching and/or supporting student learning  |  |
| 3. Assessment and giving feedback to learners   |  |
| 4. Developing effective environments and student support and guidance                                     |  |
| 5. Integration of scholarship, research and professional activities with teaching and supporting learning |  |
| 6. Evaluation of practice and continuing professional development   |  |



## Workshop Activity 2: Exploring action research

### Introduction

When you encounter new student groups or methods that challenge your accepted notion of working, it is useful to reflect, review and perhaps alter the way you work. One of the ways in which teachers can engage in reflective practice is through the use of action research techniques.

### Pre-workshop reading

In preparation for this workshop activity, participants should read P. Sander (2004), '[How we should research our students – part one](#)'

### Method

Elicit the link between reflective practice (a general stance) and action research (related to a specific activity or project).

Key points in a definition of 'action research' are highlighted here (From the HEA Glossary of Terms):

- teachers pursue action (or change) and research (or understanding) at the same time
- teachers investigate their own teaching or other activity related to their work
- researchers are directly involved in the actions that are being researched
- it is participative ... change is usually easier to achieve when those affected by the change are involved.

If the participants are unfamiliar with action research it is worth pointing out that it differs from some other forms of research by the close involvement of the researcher as a participant. This is why in the earlier activities it was important to identify their personal connection to international students.

### Notes on the Portfolio Activity

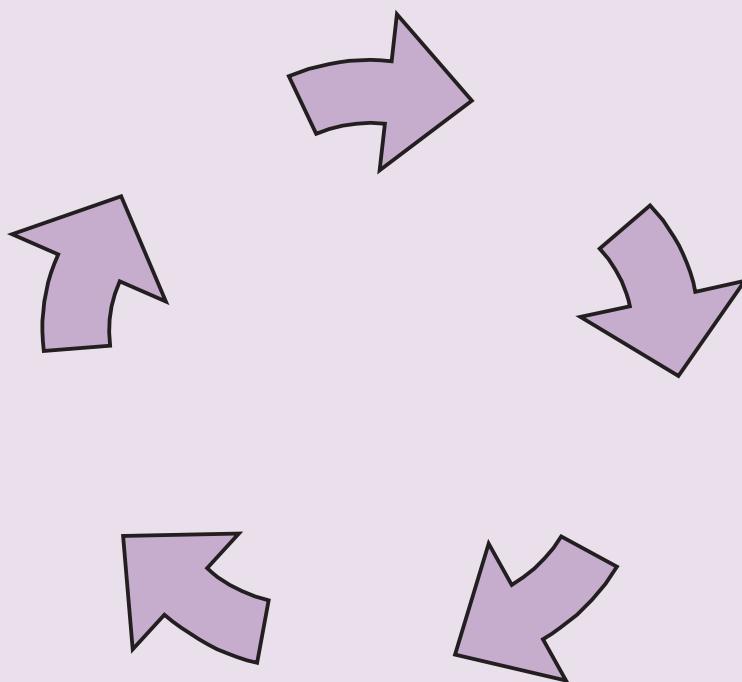
Explain the requirements of the Portfolio Activity. This particular task should begin in the workshop itself, with discussion and group work leading on to individual work.

1. Discuss the following as a group:

*'The implication is that this is a never-ending reiterative process wherein evaluation of the effectiveness of previous activities such as developing new courses or materials – together with an ongoing process of keeping up-to-date with wider professional developments – leads to amendments of future courses, which then themselves will be evaluated to produce refined ideas for further course design.'*

- In participants' own experience, do courses/materials get amended in this way?
- What methods of evaluation are usually used?
- How easy is it to make such on-going amendments?
- How frequently are materials/courses amended?

2. It is recommended that the diagrammatic representation exercise be done firstly as a workshop exercise in small groups before each participant completes their own. (The following format may be suggested, but allow the participants to supply their own formats if they wish.)



## Unit one: Portfolio Activity 2

### The UK Professional Standards Framework: applying it to support for international students

#### Exploring action research

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

Many texts discussing action research talk about it as being 'cyclical' or 'spiral'. The implication is that this is a never-ending reiterative process wherein evaluation of the effectiveness of previous activities such as developing new courses or materials – together with an ongoing process of keeping up-to-date with wider professional developments – leads to amendments of future courses, which then themselves will be evaluated to produce refined ideas for further course design. Look at the six areas of activity from the [The UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education](#)

- Design and planning of learning activities and/or programmes of study
- Teaching and/or supporting student learning
- Assessment and giving feedback to learners
- Developing effective environments and student support and guidance
- Integration of scholarship, research and professional activities with teaching and supporting learning
- Evaluation of practice and continuing professional development

Referring to your own work, can you create a diagrammatic representation (which does not have to be a cycle or a spiral) that reflects your own continuing professional development concerning the support of international students? This may include both actual and intended activities.

## Workshop Activity 3: Action research, conflict and change

### Introduction

This activity will investigate action research through analysis of a case study, and explore some potential sites of conflict in relation to international students. It will conclude with a Portfolio Activity that analyses such areas of conflict and looks forward to solutions in an action research context.

### Pre-workshop reading

In preparation for this workshop activity, participants should read C. Todhunter (2001). ['Undertaking action research: negotiating the road ahead'](#)

### Method

Lead a discussion to identify:

- The stakeholders in the case study
- The steps the project followed
- The methods used to gather information
- Any lessons which might be transferred by the participants if they are to conduct action research within their institution.

### Notes on the Portfolio Activity

Explain the requirements of the Portfolio Activity. This particular task should begin in the workshop itself as it provides a valuable opportunity to hear other people's perspectives from different parts of their institution.

After the workshop, participants should spend some time reflecting on the exercise and complete their own version to add to their Portfolio.

## Unit one: Portfolio Activity 3

### The UK Professional Standards Framework: applying it to support for international students

#### Action research, conflict and change

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

If you were to undertake action research in your institution related to supporting international students – recalling that action research aims to bring about change as well as understanding – who are the different stakeholders you would need to involve? Could they have contrasting expectations of what could be achieved? Are there liable to be points of conflict?

Stakeholder one and possible conflicts

Stakeholder two and possible conflicts

Stakeholder three and possible conflicts

Stakeholder four and possible conflicts

## Workshop Activity 4: Synthesising Activity

### Introduction

This activity, comprising a discussion task and a Portfolio activity, synthesises the three previous sections together and builds upon the Portfolio activities already completed.

### Method

Discuss as a group the 'Professional values' section of the *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education*. Get individuals to explain what their commitment concerning supporting international students is in these areas.

### Notes on the Synthesising Activity

Explain the requirements of the task. Emphasise that this 'initial personal development plan' will certainly change over the course of using the materials, but that it is useful to have these goals even if they do change. The four steps from the framework imply the approach of reflective practice, and use the methods of action research:

1. Incorporating the process and outcomes of research, scholarship and/or professional practice.
2. Developing learning communities.
3. Encouraging participation, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity.
4. Continuing your own professional development and evaluation of practice.

## Unit one: Synthesising Activity

### The UK Professional Standards Framework: applying it to support for international students

The 'Professional values' section in the *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education* lists four commitments related to professional standards (along with 'respect for individual learners'): can you use the outcomes of the three activities in this unit to identify your personal commitment concerning supporting international students in each of these areas? Can you sketch out an initial personal development plan describing how you intend to do the following:

1. Incorporate the process and outcomes of research, scholarship and/or professional practice.
2. Develop learning communities.
3. Encourage participation, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity.
4. Continue your own professional development and evaluation of practice.

# Unit two

## Designing and planning learning activities and programmes of study



### Accompanying online resource:

[Designing and planning learning activities and programmes of study](#)

## Facilitator's notes



### Introduction

The academic experience of most international students in their home countries differs widely from that which they encounter in the UK, and this difference starts to be felt at the base level of course and learning activity design and presentation. The planning and design of courses and learning activities is the first area addressed in the *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education* and is the keystone of good academic practice.

The following activities will explore the process of course design typically followed in UK universities, and encourage reflection on possible implications of the outcomes of this process on students who are new to this culture of learning.

Each section has an activity that can be incorporated into a Portfolio for personal or assessment purposes. There is also a concluding Synthesising Activity.

### Learning objectives

- To examine the first area of activity in the *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education*.
- To explore how international students can be introduced to the expectations of new cultures of learning.
- To build up a model of reflective practice concerning support for international students.

## Reading materials



The following texts will be referred to in the activities, and should be read prior to the workshop:

- [The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland - January 2001](#)
- D. Burnapp (2007). [EAP: Not just English for Academic Purposes but also Epistemologically Appropriate Practice](#)
- Explanation and examples of benchmarking statements at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp)
- 'Guidelines for preparing programme specifications' at [www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/programSpec/guidelines06.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/programSpec/guidelines06.pdf)

### Further reading:

- The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, August 2008' at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI08/default.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI08/default.asp)

# Workshop Activity 1: The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland - January 2001

## Introduction

This section considers the ways in which learning outcomes are used to describe knowledge, understanding and skills (for employment). If the participants in the workshop are new – either to HE or to the institution they are now in – it would be a good idea to introduce this section with an explanation of the process of course / module validation followed in the specific institution in which they are working.

It is also necessary to clarify how an overall institutional commitment to quality assurance is then realised in specific courses (relating to level and subject). If there are participants from different faculties then it might be useful to note if there are any differences between their QA practices.

## Pre-workshop reading

NOTE: Please advise workshop participants that a second edition of the document used in this activity was published in August 2008. The new edition explains, in detail, the rationale behind the FHEQ and includes information on how the UK Framework relates to cycles within the European Framework. However, the qualification descriptors - what this activity is concerned with - are unchanged beyond being retitled from C,I,H,M,D to 4,5,6,7,8. Direct participants to the new edition as further reading, but it is advisable to use the 2001 article for the workshop activity, as it presents the relevant information in a more user-friendly and concise way.

Read the following article published by the Quality Assurance Agency: [The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland - January 2001](#)

Reflect on how it relates to ONE course that you are involved with.

1. First, read the 'Executive Summary' to survey the framework in general. As you read the summary, note how the five levels it uses describe a rising scale of knowledge/understanding; and similarly a rising scale of employability qualities.
2. Second, skim read 'Part 1: The framework'. Note that it explains that each descriptor is in two parts: the first part describes demonstrable outcomes and is of interest to course designers; the second part describes abilities and is of interest to employers.
3. Third, skim read 'Part 2: Specific guidelines'. As you read think about one course or programme that you are involved with and what the intended outcomes of that course are.
4. Fourthly, skim 'Annex 1 Qualification descriptors'. Select one level (C, I, H, M, D - or as they are now known 4,5,6,7,8) appropriate to one specific course or programme that you are involved with in order to complete the Portfolio Activity.

## Method

- 1 Participants should prepare for the workshop by:
  - i) Doing the pre-workshop reading which involves skim-reading *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland - January 2001*.
  - ii) Making a draft of their Portfolio Activity (see Portfolio Activity 1) which will form a basis for discussion in the workshop itself.Trainers should also have already completed the exercise themselves to be able to demonstrate the intended outcomes. This could form the basis of a short presentation.
2. Get the participants to share their draft versions, and to discuss ideas which arise. As one of the objects of this course is to increase staff mindfulness of differences between cultures of learning it may be illuminating to mix participants from different parts of the institution, or staff working on courses of different levels. After small groups have exchanged their drafts, a selection (different faculty / level) should be reported to the whole group.





## Workshop Activity 2: Subject Benchmark statements and Epistemologically Appropriate Practice

### Introduction

'Subject benchmark statements set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject.' (QAA Subject Benchmarks)

This activity will explore the academic behaviours that might be expected of students which are implicit in a subject benchmark statement related to your subject area. Some of these may be unfamiliar to international students.

### Pre-workshop reading

- In preparation for this activity, participants should read the following:

An explanation and examples of benchmarking statements at [www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp)

- Case study [EAP: Not just English for Academic Purposes but also Epistemologically Appropriate Practice](#) (Bumapp 2007)

Participants should select one or two examples of benchmarking statements which are related to an area of their own activity to bring to the workshop.

### Method

1. Start with a discussion on the pre-activity reading. Some participants might see the distinction made in the case study between 'standards' and 'epistemology' – i.e. a distinction between on the one hand assuring quality, and on the other specifying methods of learning and knowledge creation – as being contentious, or difficult, or simply wrong. The first step should therefore be a discussion of these concepts, and discussion of the validity of the claim that students from other cultures of learning may have '*a genuine confusion about the value, purpose, and forms of the expected, accepted, and respected behaviours in this setting*'.
2. For this activity participants will examine one subject benchmark statement prepared by the Quality Assurance Agency, then reflect on implications of this for students from other cultures of learning. The introduction to the subject benchmarks states:

*'Subject benchmark statements set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the techniques and skills needed to develop understanding in the subject.'*

There are currently 54 (H) level statements, 8 (M) level statements, 18 NHS/Department of Health statements, 7 Scottish statements, and a Foundation Degree qualification benchmark (Autumn 2008).

Participants should have pre-selected one or more benchmarking statements to use in the workshop. Using knowledge acquired from reading Bumapp's case study, get them to reflect upon and discuss in pairs the implications of the statement for students from other cultures of learning.

Participants should present their discussion findings to the group.

### Notes on the Portfolio Activity

Explain the requirements of the Portfolio Activity. As the outcome of this task is institutional (rather than personal) it would be suitable to use group work here, in which case after the discussion (perhaps also after some investigation within the institution) and reflection, each group could then make a presentation of their conclusions. The group brief would then be to:

- Read one benchmark statement.
- Note any descriptions of required behaviours which you think may be specific to this culture of learning.
- Write a summary of what these specific behaviours are.
- Make suggestions of how these behaviours can be explored with students.
- Describe which other stakeholders within your institution would need to be involved with such actions.

## Unit two: Portfolio Activity 2

### Designing and planning learning activities and programmes of study

#### Subject Benchmark Statements and Epistemologically Appropriate Practice

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

Go to the QAA Benchmark page:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp)

Select a benchmark statement which is related to an area of your own activity and read through it noting any descriptions of required behaviours which you think may be specific to this culture of learning, and which hence may be unfamiliar and so require overt exploration – ‘unpicking’ – with students from other cultures of learning.

Then write a summary using the headings below of what these specific behaviours are, make suggestions of how these behaviours can be explored with students, and also describe which other stakeholders within your institution would need to be involved with such actions.

#### Specific behaviours

#### Methods to explore them

#### Involvement of other stakeholders

## Workshop Activity 3: Preparing programme specifications

### Introduction

In preparation for this activity, participants should read the 'Guidelines for Preparing Programme Specifications' at [www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/programSpec/guidelines06.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/programSpec/guidelines06.pdf)

Emphasise that the focus of this activity relates to methods of teaching, and that methods of assessment will be addressed later in the course.

### Method

1. This activity is suitable for group brain-storming, and the more varied the group (by level, faculty, experience) the greater the range of teaching methods they will supply. Give each group the following instructions:

For each of the methods which are used in courses you are familiar with (and any other methods your courses use but which are not included in the list), make notes concerning the demands that these place on students, and whether any of these methods may require specific explanation or support for some international students.

| Teaching method                    | Demands and support |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Lectures                           |                     |
| Seminars                           |                     |
| Directed study of textbooks        |                     |
| Directed study of journal articles |                     |
| Project work                       |                     |
| Group learning activities          |                     |
| Laboratory activity                |                     |
| Workshop activity                  |                     |
| Field-based activity               |                     |
| Workplace placement                |                     |

It is possible that discussion of specific support needed for any group of students could become heated, as any suggestion of change can often be seen as a threat to standards. It may be necessary throughout the course to repeat that any proposed amendments (to materials, methods, inductions and so on) should be seen as assuring the maintenance of standards rather than seeking to lower them. Certain guidelines may keep the discussion fruitful, such as:

- Clarify whether any specific point being discussed relates to standards or to epistemology (method of learning).
- Note that one of the aims of internationalisation is to benefit *all* students and to enrich the learning environment by inviting students with other perspectives.
- Discuss whether any other groups of students receive (or could justifiably demand) similar support.
- Clarify if the learning and teaching methods make implicit demands over and above those related to the intended learning outcomes (e.g. assuming but not stating a level of cultural competence).

### Notes on the Portfolio Activity

Following the discussion the Portfolio Activity should be completed individually.

## Unit two: Portfolio Activity 3

### Designing and planning learning activities and programmes of study

#### Preparing programme specifications

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

Read the QAA Guidelines for preparing programme specifications:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/programSpec/guidelines06.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/programSpec/guidelines06.pdf)

Read again section 4 of Annex 1: 'How do we expect our students to achieve and demonstrate the intended outcomes?'

This section of the document discusses methods of both delivery and assessment, but for this activity you should consider only methods of delivery. Section 4 describes how different teaching methods are better for different types of learning, and the methods it refers to are listed in the chart below. For each of the methods which are used in courses you are familiar with (and any other methods your courses use but which are not included in the list), make notes concerning the demands that these place on students, and whether any of these methods may require specific explanation or support for some international students.

| Teaching method                    | Demands and support |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Lectures                           |                     |
| Seminars                           |                     |
| Directed study of textbooks        |                     |
| Directed study of journal articles |                     |
| Project work                       |                     |
| Group learning activities          |                     |
| Laboratory activity                |                     |
| Workshop activity                  |                     |
| Field-based activity               |                     |
| Workplace placement                |                     |

## Workshop Activity 4: Synthesising Activity

The Synthesising Activity for this section is a presentation based on the activities undertaken during the workshop. These individual presentations can be linked to individual activities (a specific level and a specific subject) in the 'Core knowledge' described in the *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education*. The presentations should include:

- A summary of the learning outcomes on a specific course
- The expected student behaviours
- The most frequent methods of course delivery
- The steps possible to enable international students to participate fully in this programme of studies
- The support needed from other stakeholders to enable international students to participate fully in this programme of studies.

## Unit two: Synthesising Activity

(You may print this out and add it to your Portfolio)

The 'Core knowledge' described in the *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education* includes:

'Knowledge and understanding of:

1. The subject material
- 2.. Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme.'

Can you combine the outcomes of the three activities in this unit to write first a summary of the student learning outcomes, the expected student behaviours, and the most frequent methods of course delivery for your subject area at the level you are teaching? Can you then reflect on the steps you might take, and the support you might need from other stakeholders, to enable international students to participate fully in this programme of studies?

Learning outcomes

Expected behaviours

Methods of delivery

Support needed for international students

# Unit three

## Supporting international students in new cultures of learning



### Accompanying online resource:

[Supporting international students in new cultures of learning](#)

### Facilitator's notes

#### Introduction

These learning activities will explore some of the problems encountered by international students studying in UK universities, and then suggest several ways in which learning support might be delivered. The activities will explore debates concerning cultures of learning, case studies of supporting international students, and research concerning international students.

Each section has a Portfolio Activity associated with it that can be incorporated into a Portfolio for personal or assessment purposes. There is also a Synthesising Activity.

#### Learning objectives

- To examine links between language, culture, learning styles, and individuality.
- To explore case studies of how international students can be introduced to, or supported in, the expectations of new cultures of learning.
- To design an appropriate framework of support for international students in our own areas/institutions.



### Reading materials

- R. Matthews (2006). [Exploring the Development of Discipline-Specific Language Skills with Increasingly Diverse Art and Design Student Groups](#)
- Lord and Dawson (2002). [The Induction Needs of International Students at Postgraduate Level](#)



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# Workshop Activity 1: Debates concerning cultures of learning

## Introduction

*'At one time it was thought that once L2 students had learned English they would not be at a disadvantage and could be fully integrated into the work of every classroom.'* (Spack 1997, p.103)

The belief that Spack is describing here (and then moves on to challenge with a longitudinal study of an international student in an American university) assumes that language is an autonomous system, capable of carrying meaning without reliance on references to settings or users. Contrary views, which link the ways we make meaning to contexts and cultures, are many, varied, and often conflicting. It must be remembered that classrooms are about more than language: other factors such as culture, psychology, the social dimension and theories of learning are included along with language.

The aim of this activity is to introduce participants to theoretical aspects of learning and their key areas of focus by reading and discussing brief summaries of some of the debates that situate approaches to learning within different linguistic and cultural contexts, and consider which approach or approaches are being described.

## Pre-workshop reading

### Debates concerning cultures of learning

#### 1. Linguistic relativity

A theoretical framework which examines the ways that language influences how people perceive and hence act on the world, it explores the extent to which different languages cut up the world in different ways, including concepts such as time and place. For Whorf (2000 [1940]), language is 'the shaper of ideas'. This strong view of linguistic relativity is now seen as too deterministic, for it would follow that the language learnt in childhood would set the way one was able to observe, remark, and comment on everything. Slobin (1996) proposes a weaker version: a person's language will bring them to pay particular attention to certain features or aspects of events, but thoughts are not constrained by language.

#### 2. Vygotskian psychology

Lantolf (1999) describes 'the power of the mental organization set up during apprenticeship into one's native language', whilst the child engages in dialogue and internalises and appropriates 'the organizational patterns (concepts) of the culture'.

#### 3. Social construction

Bruner and Haste (1987) link the Vygotskian view of learning to the social construction of reality proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1966):

*'the child makes sense of the culture in which he or she is reared, coming to appreciate the common-sense knowledge which is available within the culture... expressed directly through language in the form of rules, but even more extensively through the style and use of language, the selection of categories deemed appropriate for classifying different behaviours, and forms of address which communicate and reproduce the relations between persons of different ranks and roles.'* (Bruner and Haste 1987, p.5)

#### 4. Contrastive rhetoric hypothesis

A suggestion that the structure of texts produced in different cultures reflects differences in thought patterns, which was first proposed by Kaplan (1966). Zamel (1997) accepts that first culture is an influence on writing in a second language, but fears that too great an emphasis on contrastive rhetoric may make educators think of students as being only products of their cultures.



## 5. Cultural models

Sperber (1996) links psychology and anthropology in an epidemiological model of how *representations* spread, hence an individual's *mental representations* (including beliefs, intentions and preferences) may be shared with others by *public representations* (including signals, utterances and texts), some of which remain held for some time by groups and so become *cultural representations*.

## 6. Cultures of education

Scollon (1999) typified western education as employing dialogue, 'the Socratic method of teaching' (p.15), which she contrasts with the Confucian tradition in much of Asia. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) differentiate between the questions asked by Chinese and Western students, the latter are claimed to speak spontaneously whereas the former 'value thoughtful questions which they ask after sound reflection' (p.173).

## 7. Approaches to learning

Ballard (1996) suggests three approaches: reproductive; analytical; and speculative; and claims that there are 'dominant tendencies within cultures about socially appropriate attitudes to knowledge' (p.152). She suggests that within Western culture the analytical approach typifies undergraduate education, and the speculative approach is expected of postgraduate students. She goes on to make a contrast: '[h]owever, in many non-Western societies there is a much stronger emphasis on the conserving attitude, producing a greater reliance on reproductive learning' (pp.153-154).

## 8. Individuals-in-context

There is much mistrust of explanations which invoke large-scale generalisations (see 6 and 7 above). Atkinson (1999) criticises such views as being 'received' conceptualisations of culture with individuals somehow determined by their culture as by a set of rules. He describes a possible position which 'moves away from a received view but still sees cultures in some sense as repositories of shared, possibly normative values' (p.629). He reminds that '[a]ll humans are individuals' yet '[i]ndividuality is also cultural' hence 'individuals are individuals-in-context' (p.642), and so to know students as individuals cannot ignore knowing them culturally.

## 9. Discourse community

Swales (1990) uses the concepts of 'discourse community' and 'genre' to examine language in academic settings. Discourse communities are socio-rhetorical networks with agreed public goals, whose members have 'familiarity with the particular genres that are used in the communicative furtherance of those sets of goals' (p.9). Genres consist of sets of texts recognised within that discourse community, and these have some stability in their organisation and vocabulary; for example a case study, or a laboratory report.

## 10. Transculturation

It could be claimed that application of two of the professional values outlined in the Higher Education Academy UK *Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education* – namely respect for individual learners, and commitment to development of learning communities – imply individuals-in-context. In relation to international students, these two professional values would call for steps to produce what Lantolf, citing Byram and Morgan (1994), calls transculturation: 'recognition of the validity of different cultural viewpoints while remaining at ease with one's own culture' (1999, p.28).

## Method

1. The notes outlining ten debates concerning different cultures of learning (see *pre-workshop reading*) can be used as a jigsaw reading activity leading to an information exchange. In groups of five, each participant reads two of the descriptions. Then each member describes their readings to the others in the group, adding their own views related to them.

2. The whole group should then discuss how far they agree with the five points below (to some extent at least):
  1. the language(s) we first learn cause us to categorise items in the world, and concepts such as time, in certain ways
  2. our encultured experiences, for example previous experiences in educational situations, cause us to assume certain approaches and behaviours.

However:

3. individuals within a culture do differ
4. individuals can and do change
5. individuals can and do learn the approaches and behaviours of new cultures.

Try to get the groups to elicit personal examples to illustrate each point (knowledge of different languages; experiences of changing educational situations; examples of adopting or refusing to adopt expected patterns of behaving when moving between cultures).

## Notes on the Portfolio Activity

The Portfolio Activity continues on from the workshop activity by getting individuals to produce a written document summarising their own responses to the statements discussed as a group.

## Unit three: Portfolio Activity I

### Supporting international students in new cultures of learning

#### Debates concerning cultures of learning

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

Write a short response to the following five statements illustrated with examples from your own life:

1. the language(s) we first learn cause us to categorise items in the world, and concepts such as time, in certain ways
2. our encultured experiences, for example previous experiences in educational situations, cause us to assume certain approaches and behaviours.

However:

3. individuals within a culture do differ
4. individuals can and do change
5. individuals can and do learn the approaches and behaviours of new cultures.

Is it possible for you to illustrate each point with personal examples? These could include your knowledge of different languages; your own experience of educational situations and changing of such situations; examples where you feel that you have both adopted and refused to adopt expected patterns of behaving when moving between cultures? Alternatively, do you feel that these explanations of links between language, culture and individuality are mistaken and you have another model to summarise your views?

Write a reflective account, using either the points arising from the reading, or using your own explanation, to illustrate how you see such linkages in your own life.

## Workshop Activity 2: Case studies of supporting international students

### Introduction

In the growing climate of internationalisation of UK Higher Education increasing numbers of international students are being recruited at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. A key challenge for the institution is to provide an environment and infrastructure to support the transition of these students into UK HE and to avoid problematising the very students who are both a financial and an intellectual asset. Moreover this support must be provided at all levels - not just at the level of the institution but at the level of the department, course and student.

### Method

#### Pre-workshop reading

- Selection of the institutional case studies relating to the experience of international students commissioned by the Higher Education Academy

[www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/international/casestudies](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/international/casestudies)

This activity makes use of eleven case studies dealing with the experience of international students. Before the workshop, each of the participants should read a different selection of the case studies (see above) and then prepare a presentation to make to the group concerning one of them. Their presentations should cover these areas:

- The different techniques which are referred to
- The aim or focus
- The level, subject areas, or anything else which defines the target cohort
- The obstacles that were found
- The other institutional stakeholders who were needed to be involved
- The recommendations they conclude with

## Unit three: Portfolio Activity 2

### Supporting international students in new cultures of learning

#### Case studies

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

For this activity look at a selection of the case studies referenced (at least three).

Make notes which summarise the following factors:

- The different techniques which are referred to
- The aim or focus
- The level, subject areas, or anything else which defines the target cohort
- The obstacles that were found
- The other institutional stakeholders who were needed to be involved
- The recommendations they conclude with.

|                 | Case study 1 | Case study 2 | Case study 3 |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Techniques      |              |              |              |
| Aims/focus      |              |              |              |
| Target cohort   |              |              |              |
| Obstacles       |              |              |              |
| Stakeholders    |              |              |              |
| Recommendations |              |              |              |

## Workshop Activity 3: Research articles concerning supporting international students

### Introduction

This activity considers research into areas of need for the acculturation of international students. A large part of the activity is preparation and reading, but participants should discuss their reflections with the group in a workshop setting.

### Pre-workshop reading

- R. Matthews (2006). 'Exploring the development of discipline-specific language skills with increasingly diverse Art and Design student groups'.
- Lord and Dawson (2002). 'The induction needs of international students at postgraduate level'.

### Method

For this activity participants will read two articles from two Subject Centres of the Higher Education Academy:

- **Business, Management, Accountancy and Finance**
- **Art, Design and Media.**

They each refer to different levels of higher education as well as different subject areas.

The Art and Design article 'Exploring the development of discipline-specific language skills with increasingly diverse Art and Design student groups' by R. Matthews, relates to an Arts Foundation course (first year undergraduate course), and the Management article relates to a pre-MBA course.

It begins with a clear statement of rationale:

*'Within all academic disciplines there are a range of terms and words that are the language of that academic community. This language has evolved and developed within disciplines to communicate particular ways of seeing and thinking specific to that subject. This discipline specific manner of communicating is obviously less familiar to those outside or attempting to enter this academic community.'* (Matthews 2006)

Interestingly, although the article does make reference to international students, Matthews points out that acquiring this discipline specific knowledge is necessary for all students of all backgrounds. As you read through the article consider what might be examples of subject specific language from within your own area, and how knowledge of this can be better developed with all your students, including international students.

The Management article 'The induction needs of international students at postgraduate level' by Lord and Dawson, specifically refers to international students, comparing students from China and India. The research found some differences between the groups, but one of the comments is:

*'A strong and unanimous theme running throughout the interviews with both groups in our sample was their insecurity with respect to our expectations of them as postgraduate students, and their desire for significantly more guidance from tutors with respect to these expectations'* (Lord and Dawson 2002)

Read the whole article, but pay specific attention to the end of the article, 'Differences in learning and teaching', 'Conclusions', and 'Initial recommendations and further research'. Note particularly the last recommendation.

## Notes on the Portfolio Activity

The Portfolio Activity briefing is suitable for small group discussion before the Portfolio entry is written. Instructions to students:

*'Can you make a list of recommendations of how new students in your subject area, and at the level of one programme you teach on, could be best prepared for the demands of learning and teaching they are entering? For this activity imagine an ideal situation with no constraints.'*

Point out that in the next activity a more detailed set of proposals will be made which will have to take account of the real constraints that exist.

## Unit three: Portfolio Activity 3

### Supporting international students in new cultures of learning

#### Research into supporting international students

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

For this activity you will link ideas arising from reading these articles to the second and third points of 'Core knowledge' in the *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education*:

Knowledge and understandings of: ...

2. Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme.
3. How students learn, both generally and in the subject.

Can you make a list of recommendations of how new students in your subject area, and at the level of one programme you teach on, could be best prepared for the demands of learning and teaching they are entering? For this activity, imagine an ideal situation with no constraints.

## Workshop Activity 4: Synthesising Activity

This Synthesising Activity could be the basis of a lengthy piece of work which, if it is used on a validated credit bearing course, would be a useful assessment activity. It could be set either as individual or group work. This task serves to link together several of the topic areas already covered: action research; the professional standards framework; quality assurance processes; and features of learning communities including student support.

1. When setting up the activity, have a group discussion about the different sections of the institution which are involved. Identify individuals who could be interviewed and policy documents (mission statements, student guides, institution websites, etc.) from where data can be found.
2. Clarify the three-stage structure used in the Lord and Dawson article (see reading material): pre-arrival; encounter; metamorphosis.

Point out that in addition to the necessary descriptive account of the support available it is necessary to include a critical evaluation of your institution's support with recommendations for improvement, and that these recommendations must accept the situational constraints – resources available – of the institution.

[If this is to be used as assessment then more detailed specifications about the content, research methods, length and format will obviously need to be supplied.]

## Unit three: Synthesising Activity

### Supporting international students in new cultures of learning

#### Research into supporting international students

(You can print this out and add it to your Portfolio)

For this activity you should find out about, and then write a report on, the support which is currently available in your institution for students entering one of your programmes.

**Note: At this stage focus specifically on support concerning learning and teaching.**

It is likely that this support will be distributed to different sections of the institution, perhaps including an International Office, a Student Services department, a Language Centre or EAP (English for Academic Purposes) department, as well as provision arranged within your faculty, for example during induction. It is suggested that you could use the three-stage structure adopted by Lord and Dawson: pre-arrival; encounter; metamorphosis. Then, write a critical evaluation of your institution's support with recommendations for improvement, but these recommendations must accept the situational constraints – for example, the resources available – of your faculty and institution.

Pre-arrival

Encounter

Metamorphosis

Critical evaluation and recommendations

# Unit four

## Methods of assessment: implications for international students



### Accompanying online resource:

[Methods of assessment: implications for international students](#)

### Facilitator's notes



#### Introduction

Assessment and feedback are both integral elements of learning, and methods in both can pose problems for students unused to the UK Higher Education system. In fact, methods of assessment might well be the area where there is the greatest diversity of experience amongst staff from different faculties and levels. The activities below will explore the role of assessment in learning, and identify some of the diverse and evolving methods of assessment which students may face during their courses. The implications of this diversity for international students will be considered, as well as reflecting on ways of supporting them.

#### Learning objectives

- To examine the role of assessment in Higher Education.
- To examine the range of assessments in Higher Education.
- To explore how international students can be supported in appreciating the expectations of assessments.
- To design an appropriate framework of guidance concerning assessments for international students in our own areas/ institutions.

### Reading materials



The following texts will be referred to in the activities, and should be read prior to the workshops:

- [Assessment: a guide for lecturers](#) (Brown 2001)
- 'A model of assessment in higher education institutions' (Joughin and Macdonald 2004)
- [Assessment: a guide for students](#) (Race 2001)



# Workshop Activity 1: Designing effective assessments

## Introduction

This activity is based on 'Assessment: a guide for lecturers', an article by George Brown from the *Assessment Guides* series, published by the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN, now part of the Higher Education Academy).

The article combines theoretical background with practical guidance. The description of this article states:

*'This guide is designed to help lecturers to review, refresh and refine approaches to assessment. It is based upon the theme of alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment tasks, criteria, marking and providing feedback.'*

Brown states that 'effective assessment methods and tasks are related to the learning outcomes and the methods of learning' (p.4) and he produces a model (Figure 2 in Brown) linking this process to external influences such as standards and benchmarking, as well as university policy and strategy. It could be argued that methods and tasks (of both learning and assessment) are also based on specific cultures of learning. On pages 8-9 in the section 'Cognitive demands', Brown refers to models that are influential within the UK culture of education such as Bloom (1956) and Biggs (1997; 1999). The guide is generic, and makes no specific mention of international students, or of the extra tasks of deciphering the assessment requirements for students from other cultures of learning.

## Pre-workshop reading

- [Assessment: a guide for lecturers](#) (Brown 2001)

As you read it consider the following questions:

### Principles of assessment

1. When he discusses 'principles of assessment', are there any extra principles which would apply related to internationalisation?

### Common weaknesses

2. When he discusses 'common weaknesses', are there any extra common weaknesses which would apply related to assessments and international students?

### Designing assessments

3. When he discusses 'designing assessments' he lists seven questions, and mentions the dangers of 'unintentional ambiguities': does this have extra significance in relation to international students?

### Assessment types

4. Brown gives a lengthy list of assessment types. For those which you use, have you found that they present any specific additional barriers for international students?

### New forms of assessment

5. Brown discusses designing new forms of assessment, but later when discussing feedback he talks of the danger of students not transferring learning acquired from one assessment to future assessments. Do your assessments allow such formative gains, again considering specifically international students?

## Method

As an initial activity, elicit and list from the participants the range of assessments that are used within their institution. This listing of assessment types should establish that there is an amazing range of assessment types, and that inventiveness and creativity in

this area is leading to an ever-expanding list of possible types. Each of these, though recalling the earlier discussion of 'standards' and 'epistemology', could create new uncertainties for international students. This is not to argue, however, that this creativity should cease, but that staff should be mindful of these difficulties and supply adequate explanation and preparation.

1. Participants should have completed the pre-workshop reading prior to the workshop. The pre-reading instructions listed five questions, which can now be used as workshop discussions:

#### **Principles of assessment**

1. When he discusses 'principles of assessment', are there any extra principles which would apply related to internationalisation?

#### **Common weaknesses**

2. When he discusses 'common weaknesses', are there any extra common weaknesses which would apply related to assessments and international students?

#### **Designing assessments**

3. When he discusses 'designing assessments' he lists seven questions, and mentions the dangers of '*unintentional* ambiguities': does this have extra significance in relation to international students?

#### **Assessment types**

4. Brown gives a lengthy list of assessment types. For those which you use, have you found that they present any specific additional barriers for international students?

#### **New forms of assessment**

5. Brown discusses designing new forms of assessment, but later when discussing feedback he talks of the danger of students not transferring learning acquired from one assessment to future assessments. Do your assessments allow such formative gains, again considering specifically international students?

### **Notes on the Portfolio Activity**

The Portfolio Activity is well-suited to small group discussion, which can then be followed up by individual work discussing the questions with students and others before completing the Portfolio entry.

## Unit four: Portfolio Activity 1

### Methods of assessment: implications for international students

#### Designing effective assessments

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

Brown (2001) concludes his guide with 'A compulsory examination for all assessors'. Take the first five questions and add to each one the rider 'what are the implications for international students'? Then (taking Brown's suggestion of conferring with others – including students) write a short response for each of the five.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. What intended learning outcomes do you assess? How well does your approach to assessment align with these outcomes? |  |
| 2. Justify and criticise your choice of assessment methods and tasks used to assess the outcomes in question 1.        |  |
| 3. Refer to relevant research on assessment in your answer.  |  |
| 4. Describe, justify and criticise your use of criteria, methods of grading and/or marking.                            |  |
| 5. Outline and justify your approach to providing feedback to students. Refer to relevant research in your answer.     |  |

## Workshop Activity 2: Case studies of international students concerning assessments

### Introduction

Student reflections on assessment reveal that the challenges they face are very varied and will be influenced by their prior knowledge of the subject, the culture of learning they are familiar with and, to some extent, linguistic difficulties. This activity will look at some case studies of international students and their experiences of assessments in the UK.

### Pre-workshop reading

- Three student interviews about assessment

#### Student 1 (Extract from an interview)

Q: *Can you tell me about your first assignment?*

A: Yes, my first assignment that's for 'Information System Management', that is IT.

Q: *What did you have to do?*

A: I had to finish essay, 1,000 to 1,500 words.

Q: *Did you need to do research?*

A: Yes I do a lot of research ... I found this very difficult, because I don't know how to do research, it's very different from China, ... in the beginning of the class, we, first from the module guide, and then in the class my tutor told me we should do that, I didn't join the how to do research class (*meaning the EAP course*), so I just delay, I just, don't, do it very slowly.

Q: *How long it did it take you to do the first assignment?*

A: Let me see ... I just do it for two, more than two months.

Q: *How easy was it to understand what the task was, what they wanted you to do?*

A: I just feel difficult, and I don't know, 'cos I don't know the system, ... and I don't know, so I just think maybe I will see some book, some article from book or from website.

#### Student 2 (Extract from a written account)

I am going to talk to professor tomorrow about resit in August and so forth. He is not my supervisor but I had chances to talk to him before and he is very good.

I think now I am getting used to how to prepare for every lecture and tutorial. In foundation course, it was not busy like this. And it is certainly very hard to read everything for lectures and so on. But now I am getting used to. Although in term 1, I could not manage to read everything I had to, I have read everything essential for each lecture and tutorial this term so far. And I read also in Japanese too. I mean I check on the net or a book in Japanese to get myself easy to start to read in English. That helps a lot.

So I think I am getting better I hope. Today in tutorial, we studied Rousseau and I understood really better what my tutor said. I think my preparation was not enough. And I was kind of panic to adjust myself to the new study way in degree course.

I have an exam again in the beginning of the next term for politics.

Actually I am really afraid as exams are really different from essays and presentations for me. And I might again end up failing. But now I try not to think that and let myself study a lot. I changed a lot. I mean I think I became to study more. Otherwise, I can not follow lectures or anything. So I have to study a lot.

Now I have 3 essays to do. One is about Machiavelli. 2nd one is about development studies in third world and last one is sociology about comparing Marx, Durkheim and Weber on conflict theories.

Actually though I am saying that it is very hard to study in English in England, everybody thinks that. At least people I know tell me the same things. So I just should not give up on studies in England.

### Student 3 (Extract from an interview)

Q: *Could you understand, from reading the module guide, could you get a clear idea of what they wanted you to do, or did you need to discuss it more?*

A: ... when I did the first and the second assignment I wasn't aware that, so um, I find some theory to support the company, some application, but the tutor said 'you need more tell detail about theory', so I asked him why you say 'that's good', 'that's good' 'that's good', ...

Q: *So in the comments it says good, good, good, ...*

A: (laughs) Good, good, ...

Q: *But then [you got] only C for the mark...*

A: Yeah he said your theory is not very perfect, you need to follow the module guide, following ... what we studied...

Q: *Do you feel that the teachers in England are asking for different things from the teachers in China?*

A: Definitely. Totally different.

## Method

1. Each participant should bring with them an example of an assessment used on a course they work with. In small groups they should show each other the instructions concerning the assessment which are given to students e.g. in module guides or on course VLEs.
2. The groups should then review the students' accounts describing how they try to come to terms with their tutors' expectations, and perhaps supplement these with examples from their own experience.
3. As preparation for the Portfolio Activity the small groups should then examine the assessment activities discussed earlier and suggest how the descriptions of them could be made more transparent to international students.

## Unit four: Portfolio Activity 2

### Methods of assessment: implications for international students

#### Student perceptions of assessment

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

Take one assessment activity used in a course you work on, and edit the description of it (for example as given in the module guide or on the course VLE) to make it more transparent to international students.

## Workshop Activity 3: Guidance for international students concerning assessment

### Introduction

Setting assessment tasks presents a particular challenge for teachers in that a particular task may be interpreted in different ways by students depending on a number of factors including previous experience and expectations, which in the case of international students may be culturally defined and not immediately predictable by the teacher. This activity will explore models of assessment and the ways in which these impact on teaching and learning in an international context.

### Pre-workshop reading

- 'A model of assessment in Higher Education institutions' (Joughin and Macdonald 2004)
- [Assessment: a guide for students](#) (Race 2001)

The first article, 'A model of assessment in Higher Education institutions' (Joughin and Macdonald, 2004) describes a model of assessment. One element of their model identifies critical issues concerning students, including how students perceive tasks and whether this matches with teachers' intentions, their approaches to learning, their previous experiences and understanding of the tasks set, their backgrounds and culture: these issues are all particularly salient with regard to students whose previous experiences may be in different cultures of learning.

Later in the article the authors state that critical relationships between pairs of elements in their model 'may be highly functional or characterised by unresolved tension', and one of these pairings is that between students' experiences and teachers' experiences.

The second article, 'Assessment: a guide for students' (Race 2001), is an assessment guide for students. As you read this article pay particular attention to the sections 'Transparent assessment'; 'What is assessed?' and the chart of assessment types with top tips.

### Method

In preparation for this activity, participants should read two articles: Joughin and Macdonald (2004), which describes a model of assessment; and Race (2001), which is an assessment guide for students.

Lead a group discussion which will contribute to a group report, and conclude with individuals writing up the report for their Portfolio Activity.

Joughin and Macdonald state that the interface between teachers and students in the assessment can be 'highly functional' or alternatively may produce 'unresolved tension'. Ask trainees to draft an additional section for the guide for students addressed specifically at international students, with the aim of resolving the tension which may exist.

Individuals should write this section up for Portfolio Activity 3.

## Unit four: Portfolio Activity 3

### Methods of assessment: implications for international students

#### Guidance for international students concerning assessment

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

For this activity, remembering that Joughin and Macdonald state that the interface between teachers and students in the assessment can be 'highly functional' or alternatively may produce 'unresolved tension', draft an additional section for the guide for students addressed specifically at international students, with the aim of resolving the tension which may exist.

## Workshop Activity 4: Synthesising Activity

### Introduction

The Synthesising Activity for this unit is an individual activity, as each participant must work on an assessment related to their own courses, reflect on the topics covered so far in this course, and possibly consult with some international students. The requirements are reasonably complex, so the facilitator should demonstrate with a set of assignment instructions, and indicate how they can make the format and criteria transparent for all students. One example of the difficulties involved is that critical evaluation is a typical requirement of university assessments, a concept that may be interpreted differently by different individuals. The word 'critical' itself has many uses, as follows:

1. a tendency to find and call attention to errors and flaws: 'a critical attitude'
2. at or of a point at which a property or phenomenon suffers an abrupt change: 'a critical temperature of water is 100 degrees C'
3. characterized by careful evaluation and judgment
4. urgently needed; absolutely necessary: 'critical medical supplies'
5. forming or having the nature of a turning point or crisis: 'a critical point in the campaign'
6. being in or verging on a state of crisis or emergency: 'a critical illness'
7. involving or characteristic of critics or criticism: 'critical acclaim'.

(Definitions of 'critical', *WordNet*: <http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=critical>)

### Method

1. Participants should design one original assessment task for one module that they are involved with. The task should be at the appropriate level and matched to some of the stated learning outcomes of the module. Then participants should prepare student instructions which they believe would make the format and criteria transparent for all students.
2. Then, if possible, invite the participation of international students at this level and ask them to discuss the assignment and their understanding of it, and, if necessary, amend it to remove any unresolved misunderstandings.
3. When this process is finished, write a reflective account of the process, highlighting lessons learnt from the exercise.

## Unit four: Synthesising Activity

### Methods of assessment: implications for international students

#### Analysis of an assessment

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

Write a reflective account, highlighting lessons learnt, based on the following exercise:

1. Design one original assessment task for one module that you are involved with. The task should be at the appropriate level and matched to some of the stated learning outcomes of the module. Prepare student instructions which you believe would make the format and criteria transparent for all students.
2. If possible, invite the participation of international students at this level and ask them to discuss the assignment and their understanding of it, and, if necessary, amend it to remove any unresolved misunderstandings.



# Unit five

## Creating an effective environment for international students

 Accompanying online resource:

[Creating an effective environment for international students](#)

### Facilitator's notes



#### Introduction

Another key aspect of student life - beyond the academic - is the environment: in other words, do students have an effective environment for learning? This is recognised by the *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education* as its fourth activity: 'Developing effective environments and student support and guidance'. This moves away from the specific areas of teaching and learning to wider institutional settings, so it might be useful at this stage to have an input from sections such as Student Services or International Office (unless there are participants in the workshop who can supply such broader perspectives).

These activities will look at the different facets of the life of international students at universities in the UK, going beyond the specifically academic requirements of teaching, learning and assessment, in order to see their experience holistically. Participants will review recent research conducted by UKCOSA (now UKCISA, [www.ukcosa.org.uk](http://www.ukcosa.org.uk)): 'the national advisory body serving the interests of international students in the UK and those who work with them'.

#### Learning objectives

- To review research into the experience of international students.
- To consider what factors are needed to create an internationalised institution.
- To design an appropriate framework for creating suitable environments for international students in our own institutions.

### Reading materials

- [Executive Summary of the report Broadening Our Horizons](#)
- [Broadening Our Horizons: International Students in UK Universities and Colleges](#) (2004)



# Workshop Activity I: Broadening Our Horizons

## Introduction

*Broadening Our Horizons* is a report of research conducted in 2004 by UKCOSA into the experiences of international students in UK universities and colleges, and so is the most extensive and most recent research into this topic. The following activity concentrates on aspects of the students' experiences beyond teaching and learning, so will focus on those parts of the report which deal with living, social integration, and support services.

## Pre-workshop reading

Participants should read the Executive Summary of the report *Broadening Our Horizons* about the experiences of international students in Higher Education before the workshop, and make notes about the most surprising and most pleasing findings.

## Method

The workshop task leads into the Portfolio Activity.

Get participants to work in pairs and give them these instructions:

*'Based on your reading of the Executive Summary, make a list of questions which you would like to investigate concerning how your institution sets about ensuring an effective environment for international students, again remembering that the focus of this activity goes beyond teaching and learning.'*

Pairs should then feed back their choices to the whole group.

## Notes on the Portfolio Activity

The Portfolio Activity should then be done individually with each participant making their own list of research questions.

## Unit five: Portfolio Activity I

### Creating an effective environment for international students

#### Broadening Our Horizons

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

**Broadening Our Horizons: Executive Summary of a report of research conducted in 2004 by UKCOSA**

Based on your reading of the Executive Summary, make a list of questions which you would like to investigate concerning how your institution sets about ensuring an effective environment for international students, again remembering that the focus of this activity goes beyond teaching and learning.

|    |  |
|----|--|
| 1. |  |
| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |
| 4. |  |
| 5. |  |
|    |  |
|    |  |
|    |  |

## Workshop Activity 2: Investigating the institutional environment

### Introduction

The conclusion of the Executive Summary of UKCOSA's report into the experiences of international students in the UK, *Broadening Our Horizons* states that:

*'Institutions will want to benchmark their own performance against the points raised in the report, which cover a wide range of topics, including teaching and learning issues, language and study skills; resources and take up of support services; provision of information pre- and post-arrival; policies relating to fees and financial support; accommodation issues; and integrations of international and UK students.'*

For this activity the topics being focused on are those outside of teaching and learning, and can include:

- resources and support services
- information pre- and post-arrival
- fees and finance
- accommodation
- integration of international and UK students.

In the full report there are different chapters to cover these different aspects:

Chapter 3: Pre-arrival information and support services

Chapter 4: Finance and hardship

Chapter 5: Employment, immigration and the 'official welcome'

Chapter 6: Accommodation

Chapter 7: Social integration, leisure and students' perceptions of the UK

Chapter 8: Students' overall satisfaction with their stay in the UK

### Pre-workshop reading

Read two of the chapters cited above and prepare a short presentation to the group concerning the report's findings.

### Method

1. Participants should have completed the pre-workshop task which involved reading two of the chapters cited above and preparing a small presentation to the group concerning the report's findings. Conclude the presentations with an open discussion.
2. Participants should conduct research into the support within their specific institution. For this, they should be divided into small groups, covering each area indicated by the chapters taken from the UKCOSA report. They should carry out research using the questions that they have created in activity 1, and make a detailed presentation in a future workshop meeting. Advise participants that they should first investigate the situation within their institution concerning just one of these aspects of student support which contribute to the overall environment for international students. They might want to look at information supplied in student guides, pre-arrival literature, or on institutions' websites. They may find that the support is distributed between different departments of the institution. If possible, they should talk to staff directly involved in this particular aspect of support.

Then review the findings and recommendations of the UKCOSA report which relate to this particular aspect of international students' experiences, relate these to what they have found about the environment of their own institution, and then write recommendations for their own institution's practice.

### Notes on the Portfolio Activity

The Portfolio entry for this activity should consist of a report (group or individual) of each group's recommendations and findings.

## Unit five: Portfolio Activity 2

### Creating an effective environment for international students

#### Investigating the institutional environment

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

You should first investigate the situation within your institution concerning just one of these aspects of student support which contribute to the overall environment for international students. You might want to look at information supplied in student guides, pre-arrival literature, or on institutions' websites. You may find that the support is distributed between different departments of the institution. If possible talk to staff directly involved in this particular aspect of support.

Then review the findings and recommendations of the UKCOSA report which relate to this particular aspect of international students' experiences, relate these to what you have found about the environment of your own institution, and then write recommendations for your own institution's practice.

## Workshop Activity 3: Internationalisation across the institution

### Introduction

Supporting international students, many argue, can only come about if there is internationalisation across the institution.

### Pre-workshop reading

In preparation for this workshop, participants should read:

- E. Richie (2006). '[Internationalisation: where are we going and how do we know when we got there?](#)' *Academy Exchange*, Issue 5 (Winter 2006), pp.13-15.
- R. Middlehurst (2006). '[A leadership challenge](#)'. *Academy Exchange*, Issue 5 (Winter 2006), pp.16-17. This article reports on a case study of one university and the impact of growing internationalisation at institutional and policy levels.
- E. Jones (2006). '[20 key factors in internationalising higher education](#)' *Academy Exchange*, Issue 5 (Winter 2006), pp.38-39.

### Method

1. Participants should read the articles from *Academy Exchange* cited above in preparation for this workshop. In 'Internationalisation: where are we going and how do we know when we got there?' Ella Richie describes the process of drawing up a university international strategy. The article concludes with a list of 'helpful principles'.
2. The small groups (who worked together in the previous activity) should make their presentations about the institution's support in the area that they investigated.
3. The trainers should then describe their institution's internationalisation strategy.
4. The whole class should then debate the points required for the Portfolio Activity:

How does the internationalisation strategy compare with the various recommendations made in the documents used in this course?

Are there any particular strengths or weaknesses?

Is the strategy apparent in practice or is it just an aspirational mission statement?

This discussion should then continue with the Synthesising Activity below.

### Notes on the Portfolio Activity

Write up the above discussion for entry in the Portfolio.

## Unit five: Portfolio Activity 3

### Creating an effective environment for international students

#### Internationalisation across the institution

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

For this activity you need first to find out whether your institution has a specific internationalisation strategy. If there is, make notes about how it compares with the various recommendations made in the documents you have been reading in this course. Are there any particular strengths or weaknesses? Is the strategy apparent in practice or is it just an aspirational mission statement?

## Workshop Activity 4: Synthesising Activity

### Method

As a group, carry out a SWOT analysis concerning your institution's strategy concerning internationalisation. (**SWOT analysis:** Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. The SWOT analysis is associated with creating strategies and might be used in a particular institution or with an individual to improve performance.)

### Notes on the Synthesising Activity

Individuals should complete their own SWOT analysis for entry to their Portfolios.

## Unit five: Synthesising Activity

### Creating an effective environment for international students:

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

### SWOT Analysis

For this activity you should carry out a SWOT analysis concerning your institution's strategy concerning internationalisation. (**SWOT analysis** stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. The SWOT analysis is associated with creating strategies and might be used in a particular institution or with an individual to improve performance.) You may want to use a template such as that on the [Businessballs website](#):

| <b>S</b> trengths | <b>W</b> eaknesses | <b>O</b> pportunities | <b>T</b> hreats |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
|                   |                    |                       |                 |
|                   |                    |                       |                 |
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# Unit six

## Researching the experience of international students

### Accompanying online resource:

[Researching the experience of international students](#)

### Facilitator's notes



#### Introduction

It seems clear that HE in the UK provides a different experience for international students than for their UK counterparts. In order to provide appropriate levels of support and understanding, research and evaluation are necessary.

This topic area aims to prepare workshop participants to research for themselves the experience of the international students who they are involved with, so that they may explore methods of continuing their professional development related to supporting this group of students. Trainers should emphasise that these activities link to the *UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education*; in particular the fifth and sixth areas of activity: integration of scholarship, research and professional activities with teaching and supporting learning; and evaluation of practice and continuing professional development.

The potential final outcomes of the unit will be two substantial texts: a research proposal and a research report. (For each of these it will be necessary for each institution to determine the exact requirements in terms of length, structure, timing etc.) The activities within this section unify the separate threads of each topic area so far as they demand demonstration of reflective practice, action research, and application of general concepts to specific subjects, specific levels, and specific institutions. Depending on each participant's specific job, the research could cover any of the aspects covered by any of the topics, including any aspect of teaching and learning, student support, or institutional strategic policies.

These activities will look at two ways of carrying out research with students in order to be able to use the findings to inform reflective practice. It will also look at the resources available in the different Subject Centre websites of the Higher Education Academy.

#### Learning objectives

- To look at the use of 'critical incidents' as a method of researching the experience of international students.
- To look at the use of focus groups as a method of researching the experience of international students.
- To explore methods of using the resources of the Higher Education Academy to continue professional development in this area.

### Reading materials

- The Higher Education Academy website [www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk)
- J. Jackson (2001). '[Critical incidents across cultures](#)'
- A. Gibbs (1997). '[Focus groups](#)', in *Social Research Update*.



### Further reading:

- [UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education](#). Note in particular the fifth and sixth areas of activity.
- P. Sander (2004). '[How we should research our students – part two](#)'. Note in particular the ITDEM model of action research.



## Workshop Activity 1: Higher Education Academy and internationalisation

### Introduction

The Higher Education Academy works with institutions, discipline groups and individual staff to enhance teaching, learning and the overall student experience in UK Higher Education. Its website provides a range of information and resources to this end, including reports, case studies, descriptions of projects, and event announcements. As one of the Academy's key areas of concern, issues relating to internationalisation receive significant attention on this website. This activity encourages participants to explore the information available online from the Academy and use it as a springboard for developing action research proposals. Another intention is to demonstrate the diversity of materials available.

### Pre-workshop reading

Explore the Higher Education Academy website [www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk). There are a variety of documents linked to the internationalisation pages of the Higher Education Academy which include:

- Case studies
- Research
- Subject Centres
- Bologna
- Policy
- Student support
- Academic and support staff
- Events

Several of these links themselves link to other choices, for example 'Case studies' include 'Institutional policies and strategies', 'Curriculum' and 'Support for international students'.

Several of the 24 specific Subject Centres in the Higher Education Academy network contain information concerning curriculum, case studies, and staff development related to internationalisation.

Browse around the internationalisation pages of the Higher Education Academy website ([www.heacademy.ac.uk/International.htm](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/International.htm)) and the pages of the subject network most related to your own subject speciality ([www.heacademy.ac.uk/SubjectNetwork.htm](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/SubjectNetwork.htm)).

Find some examples of current developments related to teaching and learning concerning international students in an area you are concerned with. This could relate to any aspect of the student experience (teaching methods, assessment and feedback, pastoral care, induction).

Be prepared to describe briefly what you have found to the rest of the group during the workshop.

### Method

1. Ask participants to describe briefly the resources they had found useful on the Higher Education Academy website.
2. Run a brainstorming session on areas which would be suitable for research based on the explorations of the situation of international students within the specific institution. The features of action research should be referred to, such as: close involvement of the researcher as participant; the focus on bringing about change; the possibility of conflict hence the need to consider other stakeholders. Special attention should be given to ethical considerations, and if there is an institutional code of ethics concerning research this should be presented at this stage.

## Notes on the Portfolio Activity

The requirements of this activity are that participants produce a research proposal. The specific format of the proposal needs to be made clear, and it would be useful to select a research proposal format which is already in use within your institution, preferably at M level, to benchmark the specific requirements of the proposal guidelines you set.

## Unit six: Portfolio Activity I

### Researching the experience of international students

#### Higher Education Academy and internationalisation

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

Write a proposal for doing research in one area related to your own work with international students, and which will then enable you to bring about change in some way. Include in the proposal:

- An introduction to explain why this topic needs researching and why you are a suitable person to investigate it
- A clear explanation of the research aims/questions that you wish to investigate
- A description of the research approach and methods you will adopt
- A preliminary discussion of how you wish to make use of your findings in connection with your professional practice
- A review of the ethical considerations which this research will need to recognise and take account of.

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title/Context           |  |
| Introduction            |  |
| Aims and questions      |  |
| Methodology             |  |
| Application of findings |  |
| Ethical considerations  |  |

## Workshop Activity 2: Critical incidents

### Introduction

This activity and the following one on focus groups, serve to introduce two of the many possible methods of research which could be suitable for the research the participants are to carry out. It is also likely that they will themselves have made use of other research methods, so a useful idea for another workshop would be for each participant to present one method of research which they are familiar with and which would be suitable for researching student experience.

Advice to participants: In order to research the experiences of international students in your institution you could use the 'critical incidents' approach to discover what their experiences are. A definition of 'critical incidents' is:

*'Originally, a means of gathering data but can also stand as a research method. More recently, it has been applied to teaching and the development of reflective teachers as a trigger for learning. Teachers are asked to recall a specific incident or moment from their recent teaching experience, to write it down and to critique it, with the focus on the critique, rather than the incident (which could be a negative one).'* (Higher Education Academy website: [www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk))

### Pre-workshop reading

In preparation for the workshop, participants should read:

- J. Jackson (2001). '[Critical incidents across cultures](#)'. This paper describes using critical incidents in researching cross-cultural encounters. Jackson mentions 'the ways in which differing expectations, values, and behaviour can affect communication across cultures'
- Critical incident text (below)

### Reading text about a critical incident

This incident relates to an international student studying in his first year of a degree course in a school of Environmental Science, but who had already spent one year in the same university attending an International Foundation Programme. During that year he had started to become familiar with the expectations of UK universities but had always only worked in groups consisting of other international students. A lot of time in the Foundation year had been spent developing group work skills (managing groups, discussions, researching, making presentations). This student had valued his experiences during this Foundation course and had passed comfortably.

The information given here was collected in a series of meetings during his first term of degree study. In his new course the other students were mostly British, many of them were older, in employment, and some of them were married with children. Some had practical work-related experience whereas he had come to the university directly from high school in China.

During his first few weeks he found that to some extent he was an outsider. Concerning his classmates he reported:

*'They're quite friendly, but you know they, they don't talk too much to you, because you're not British I think.'*

However, he was not completely isolated:

*'I've got a good friend, who's from, who's British and he's quite ... he's quite friendly to me and also invite me to his home, to have dinner, um, well he's quite good, but the others, well they also, you know they treat me very well, as well, but don't talk to me very much, too much.'*

Concerning tutors he stated that:

*'Tutor is quite good because they treat you like, like they treat the British student, um but sometimes they speak to the British student but, not too much to, to me.'*

It seemed that academic support was very dependent on communication and posting of information via the course virtual learning environment (VLE), and this seemed not to be what he had been expecting:

*'Well, after the lecture I feel very confused, and er, but you know, the tutor just go away, and just disappear ... I just go home and get on the [VLE] and see the, see all the notes the teacher put on the [VLE].'*

A month later he felt that he was much more of an insider, both within the group of students and in seminar discussions. He reported that he was speaking more:

*'more, much more, than, than the beginning, because, you know I feel that my English is better now, and er, I start to answer the teachers questions, and start to chat with my, er chat and discuss with my classmates ... at the beginning the teachers, um just speak more, an... and they, they ask questions but always the British students answered, and now I can answer properly, because I am not bad at that subject, at chemical, or geography, and biology, I think I'm not bad, so because my English good, I could understand them well, so I can answer these questions well.'*

It was not a constantly improving path of adjustment though. Towards the end of the first term the student described the low point which he had experienced in the previous month:

Q: *Do you sometimes feel down?*

A: Yes.

Q: *What do you do then?*

A: Um, I was in my dark November.

Q: *Dark November?*

A: Yes.

Q: *Tell me about your dark November.*

A: Um, maybe it, it's because of the weather, it's very cold.

Q: Yes.

A: That's why, and do, I had to do the ... um assignments and two exams, [...]

Q: *And you labelled it dark November?*

A: Yeah, I had to work till very late, and it made me feel very tired.

## Method

1. Get participants to read the critical incident concerning an international student at a UK university. Get them to work in pairs to discuss the questions covered in the Portfolio Activity.
2. Put pairs together to share ideas and open to the group.

## Notes on the Portfolio Activity

Participants should create a Portfolio entry by writing up the ideas discussed in their groups.

## Unit six: Portfolio Activity 2

### Researching the experience of international students

#### Critical incidents

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

Can you draft four possible explanations to account for this student's initial process of adaptation?

- one related to language learning
- one related to university support systems
- one related to contrasting cultures of learning
- one related to reluctance to interact with people who are in any way 'other'.

(You may substitute any of these explanations for others which you feel are more appropriate)

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Language             |  |
| Support              |  |
| Cultures of learning |  |
| Othering             |  |

## Workshop Activity 3: Focus group research

### Introduction

In order to research your chosen aspect of the environment for international students in your institution you might organise a focus group to find out more about the students' experiences. While focus groups are not structured interviews following a set of fixed questions, the moderator does need to have topics that they want the participants to discuss. In this case you could look through the survey questions which were used in the UKCOSA survey [Broadening Our Horizons](#) (see appendix B) not in order to repeat those questions but to gather ideas of topics you might want the participants to discuss.

### Pre-workshop reading

In order to prepare for this activity, read the following article:

- A. Gibbs (1997). '[Focus groups](#)' in *Social Research Update*. This is a concise guide to the theories and practical aspects of focus groups as a research approach.

### Method

Get participants to plan a focus group session. Provide the following advice: you need to set up your meeting; you will need to make decisions concerning which students to invite, where to hold the meeting, how you will record the discussion. You will need to follow the ethical considerations of this form of research, for example concerning getting the informed consent of the participants, ensuring their anonymity in your report, and you may need to supply a research proposal to an institutional ethics committee.

### Notes on the Portfolio Activity

Participants should plan and conduct a focus group on their chosen area of research into support for international students. The Portfolio entry consists of a report of their findings. It is likely that whilst the participants are carrying out their research and producing their reports that they will require both individual and group support.

For the individual support participants should be allocated a supervisor or mentor to check that the research is appropriate (and ethical) and that the finished report will satisfy the course requirements (if any).

For group support it would be useful for the participants to meet occasionally to share experiences, findings and advice. It may also be useful if each participant could make a presentation of their research. Indeed this could then become a symposium open to others in the institution as a way of raising the profile of this topic more widely.

## Unit six: Portfolio Activity 3

### Higher Education Academy and internationalisation

#### Focus group research

(This activity may be printed out and added to your Portfolio)

Plan and conduct a focus group on your chosen area of research into support for international students. Write a report of your findings ensuring that you include the focus group questions in an appendix.



