The meaning of internationalisation for a modern vocational institution: a study of Bournemouth University, UK

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A question of interpretation

The term "internationalisation" means different things in different countries, in different institutions and for different individuals.

It is argued by many that universities are (or should be) inherently "international" institutions due to the nature of the academic endeavour and academic values. Sadlak identifies not only a desire to escape inward-looking parochialism and to understand "the other", but also a need to transcend intellectual self-sufficiency which "derives from the very nature of higher education learning and academic work which imposes the seeking of relevance and confirmation not only on local or national but also on global levels".[1]

However, this educational rationale for "being international" is often combined with (or even obscured by) economic rationales.

The classic definition of higher education internationalisation is "the process of integrating an international / intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution".[2]

The word "integrating" is crucial in this definition. All too often institutions tackle their internationalisation efforts by seeking to develop a range of disconnected activities (international student recruitment, international exchanges, transnational provision etc.) without joining them up or seeing them as part of a bigger picture.

At the risk of gross over-simplification, there are two possible assumptions lying behind institutional attempts to internationalise. The first assumption is that one's own country and ways of doing things are central (and best) – and that others should be exposed to them. The second, that there is merit in learning from how others do things and that this can ultimately enhance quality.

The former puts the spotlight mainly on individuals who are not from the home country, tending to highlight difference; the latter focuses on all members of the institutional community, positively encouraging integration.

For a forward-looking, vocationally-orientated institution, internationalisation has to be something that is relevant to the whole university community. With the rapid globalisation of business and the advent of increasingly borderless careers, the graduates who will be most employable are those who demonstrate an understanding of the wider world around them and an ability to operate across cultures.

The national context

It is our contention that most UK higher education institutions have tended to adopt a commercially driven and Anglo-centric approach to international activities. This is in part because that is what our government has encouraged us to do. The tenor and targets of Phase 1 of the Prime Minister's Initiative were very much about increasing international student numbers coming to the UK (and measuring this in terms of economic impact).

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[1] Sadlak, J. (1998) Globalization and Concurrent Challenges for Higher Education in Scott, P. (ed.), *The Globalization of Higher Education*, pp100-107, Buckingham: Open University Press

[2] Knight, J. & de Wit, H.(1995) Strategies for internationalisation of higher education: historical and conceptual perspectives in de Wit, H. (ed.), *Strategies for internationalisation of higher education*, Amsterdam: EAIE

There are occasional glimpses of a wider understanding of internationalisation (including its links with employability) at national level. The recently published HEFCE-sponsored study on student mobility[3] was commissioned because of government concern that the UK's economic competitiveness on the global job market may be being negatively affected by low take-up of international experiences by UK students. Tomlinson's template for learning within the 14-19 year-old range includes "international awareness" as a core element.[4] The Learning and Teaching Support Network's 39 "aspects of employability" include language skills, global awareness and "the ability to work cross-culturally: both within and beyond the UK".[5]

However - given that we're talking about integrated strategies at institutional level - it's worth pointing out that these national developments seem to lack integration and cohesion. Indeed, there are areas where assertions made in one area (eg. that language skills enhance employability) are undermined by developments in another (eg. the decision to allow school pupils to drop foreign languages at age 14).

The institutional perspective

Leaving aside the rather muddled picture at national level, it is worth looking more closely at how individual higher education institutions are behaving, especially in light of Colin Gilligan's argument for "a change in … managerial mindsets so that rather than simply seeing their international activities as an exercise in student recruitment, they move to the internationalisation of the organisation".[6]

But what does this actually mean? How do university staff interpret the term "internationalisation", what function do they feel it serves and how do they relate it to other institutional agendas? At Bournemouth University, some in-depth interviews were conducted early in 2004 with a small number of staff in order to gauge views.

For those unfamiliar with UK universities, it is worth highlighting that Bournemouth is a former polytechnic which achieved university status in 1992 and has grown rapidly since then. It has around 14000 students (predominantly undergraduate), including 1500 from outside the UK (predominantly postgraduate). 70% of its undergraduate programmes incorporate work experience and it has traditionally boasted an impressive graduate employment record.

The University created a central International Office for the first time in summer 2000 – for predominantly commercial reasons. However, the aspiration to broaden out the international agenda was already being articulated in the 2001 International Strategy, which describes the following Strategic Goal:

> "By 2006 the University will have made significant progress towards establishing itself as an internationally credible and globally aware institution. The ultimate aim is to be recognised as a pre-eminent provider of a professionally and internationally-focused educational experience, which offers all students and staff the opportunity to interact with colleagues from other cultures (whether remotely or face-to-face) in order to enhance their ability to operate in a multi-cultural working environment."

But how far has Bournemouth University come in terms of internationalisation? Interviews were conducted with four senior staff members whose roles and interests touch upon the internationalisation agenda in very different ways. They were selected because they all have an interest in the topic under consideration, but their functions (and, by extension, their approach to the topic) are divergent. Although none of them is attached to the central International Office, between them, their roles include all the main activities associated with

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[3] HEFCE (2004) International student mobility (Issues paper – July 2004/30)

[4] Tomlinson, M. (2004) *14-19 Curriculum & Qualifications* Reform (Interim Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform), DfES/0013/2004, Notts.

[5] Yorke, M. and Knight, P. T. (2004) *Embedding employability into the curriculum* (Learning & Employability 3), LTSN Generic Centre, York.

[6] British Council (2003) *Education UK - Positioning for success* (Consultation document), Manchester.

internationalisation (student recruitment, off-shore delivery, research, consultancy, institutional links, student and staff exchange, language teaching, curriculum development, student support etc.).

Staff perceptions and emerging priorities

Interviews examined the subjects' own perceptions of the meaning and consequences of internationalisation, then drew out their views on the aspects of internationalisation upon which a vocational university such as Bournemouth should focus and the appropriate mechanisms for so doing.

When asked how they would characterise an "internationalised" university, all included reference to: a diverse and inclusive culture; awareness of different cultural needs on the part of staff and students; support for these needs; an internationalised curriculum, and broad perspectives. One interviewee described the role of universities as "to help people move out of parochialism". Another pointed out that, an "internationalised" university "would respect the international dimension in incoming and domestic students equally… The institution would get domestic students to value the input of incoming students and would encourage them to seek a comparable experience".

However, when asked about Bournemouth's stage of development, there was a general sense that the University still had a narrow view of the international agenda. It was felt that staff were too introspective and the kind of students attracted to the institution tended to be narrow-minded. Variability in the international dimension within the curriculum was also noted and one interviewee remarked that "our curriculum is our most vulnerable point, because it's totally at the discretion of course teams", noting that – at this level within Academic Schools – "there is extreme variability from parochial to international orientation". A further point was made about the difficulties of achieving academic integration of domestic and international students.

The interviews went on to explore the relationship between Bournemouth's vocational mission and the internationalisation agenda. There was a clear view that we would be doing our graduates a disservice if we did not prepare them for an international workplace. One interviewee commented that "internationalisation is of the utmost relevance to the University precisely because it is vocational…. Graduates from this University are particularly likely to be working in trans-cultural groups. It will vary from sector to sector, but think of our Hospitality Management graduates. They will almost certainly be leading teams of people from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds".

There was consensus among interviewees that the University had a responsibility to provide extensive professional and personal development opportunities to enhance the intercultural effectiveness of both students and staff.

Interviewees felt that internationalisation should be embraced, made mainstream and integrated into the University's vocational mission. One noted that: "The key is not to see this as an adjunct. It's not peripheral, it's the goal. We need to articulate it as part of the vision of where the University wants to be." Another commented that, in an ideal world, the International Office would "work itself out of a job", because an international focus would permeate all Academic Schools and Support Services and be imbued in all staff.

When asked which areas Bournemouth should prioritise in its internationalisation efforts, the two areas which came up again and again were staffing and curriculum. It was suggested that a stronger institutional overview would need to be adopted in order to integrate global perspectives throughout the learning and teaching experience, but that "changing staff outlook could drive the agenda". As De Vita and Case point out: "By pursuing more inclusive curriculum and assessment strategies, internationalisation could (and should) become more

than simply flavouring courses with a sense of the international and global. It should be seen as an opportunity to reflect on, and rethink, not only what we teach but also how we teach."[7]

It is possible to distil from the interviews the following key messages:
1. Internationalisation should be shifted to become a core part of the institution's mission.
2. Mechanisms should be developed to attract, develop and reward staff who bring an international dimension to the work of the institution.
3. The processes relating to curriculum development and renewal need to be revised (in order to achieve a more flexible structure and high-quality internationalised content which is relevant to students and their future employers).

If these three areas are addressed the detail will follow. If they are not, the institution must accept that its engagement with the international agenda will only ever be partial and its approach fragmented. As US internationalisation consultant, Jack Van de Water points out, many universities are content to play around on the margins, neglecting the fundamentals, but "their students are the ones who are not fully prepared for the borderless careers awaiting them, for the global marketplace, for the need to understand and interact with other cultures on a daily basis".[8]

Pieces of the jigsaw

Bournemouth University's internationalisation strategy does not have to start from a blank sheet of paper, which is clearly an advantage but also, perhaps a disadvantage. There have been three major influences on the progress that has been made to date: the Global Perspectives Network; the International Office, and the International Communications Group.

The Global Perspectives Network[9] (GP) was formed in 1998, building on an earlier informal relationship between the Chaplaincy and a local charity, Development Education in Dorset (DEED). GP published "A Global Vision for Bournemouth University" in 1999, an internal paper which drew on a number of sources in order to support the rationale and the aims of the vision, which also mapped the relevance to each of the University's Schools. A particular influence on the vision was Oxfam's curriculum for global citizenship[10], which, among other things, addresses: self-awareness, respecting and valuing diversity, social justice, sustainability and citizenship. Clearly, this goes beyond, but encompasses what we might characterise as internationalisation or employability.

GP has membership from across the University as well as DEED. Individuals from the group have made significant contributions, through curriculum development, research, publication and engaging with national bodies. Through meeting, good practice is disseminated and shared, but GP is not part of the deliberative or management structures of the University, which constrains its ability to influence policy, although it did have some influence on the University's Strategic Plan for 2002-06. The group (through significant common membership) has also worked very closely with the University's Dignity, Diversity and Equality group, which has developed the University's policy in this area. The University held a Diversity Day in 2003 and 2004, an event which will be repeated in 2005, about which more will be said later.

As mentioned above, the International Office at Bournemouth University was established in Summer 2000. From the outset, although charged with the recruitment of international students, the office has invested heavily in the induction and support of international students, and has done that well. However, as was acknowledged by the senior staff interviewed, some other parts of the University, but not all, also provide good support.

[7] De Vita, G. and Case, P. (2003) Rethinking the Internationalisation Agenda in UK Higher Education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp383-398.

[8] Van de Water (1997) Gaps in the Bridge to the Twenty-First Century. The Customer Is Always Right. *International Educator* (Spring 1997), pp10-15.

[9] http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/global_perspectives/

[10] Oxfam (1997) A Curriculum for Global Citizenship, Oxfam, 1997

The International Office runs 'Go International', which is a programme to encourage our students to study or work abroad with one of our many exchange partners or placement providers in Europe or further afield. Those students who take this opportunity derive enormous benefit from the experience, yet it remains difficult to persuade the great majority of British students to take the plunge.

One of the rôles of the International Communications Group is to prepare students before they go abroad to study, or on a work placement. This is invaluable in helping the students effect the transition to living in another country and culture, and helps them approach the experience with greater confidence. The group also delivers units such as "Cross-cultural business communication" and provides language support through two free programmes which are open to all. all@bu (Access to Language Learning at Bournemouth University) is a programme for students and staff who wish to learn French, German, Italian or Spanish, while ELSIS (English Language Support for International Students) is designed to provide support in English to non-native speakers.

It is clear that we have made a lot of progress on a number of fronts, thanks to a number of dedicated individuals. Locally, what is being done is excellent, but it is certainly not consistent, for the various strands of internationalisation are not brought together systematically, they are indeed disconnected. Using the jigsaw analogy, we have plenty of pieces, but no picture to guide our progress.

Assembling the picture

The first key message distilled from the interviews was that internationalisation has to become a core part of the University's mission. One essential pre-requisite for this is the need to change managerial mindsets identified by Gilligan.

There is certainly buy-in from the very top of the University. The Vice-Chancellor believes that "As educators, we have a unique opportunity and clear responsibility to help prepare our students to be responsible citizens in the future. The fate of our planet and all its life forms lies in their hands."[11]

The International Office ran the cross-cultural simulation exercise BaFa BaFa with the University's senior management team, which succeeded in raising the awareness of those senior managers of how behaviours are perceived across different cultures. This was followed by a presentation on internationalisation to all senior staff in the University.

If, however, we are to elicit unequivocal buy in and effect change, it is essential to articulate clearly what internationalisation is, why it is important to the University, and how it relates to other strategies and policies of the University. Internationalisation has to be pervasive, not an optional extra, and not dependent on key individuals. It is everyone's responsibility, not just that of the GP group, the International Office or the International Communications Group. The curriculum, the third message that came from the interviews, proved to be the key to moving this forward.

Towards the end of 2003, the University established a task force (Curriculum Think Tank, CTT) to look at the priorities for the curriculum for the next decade. Given the University's vocational mission and its excellent record in placing graduates, employability was at the forefront of all the discussions, and internationalisation was acknowledged to be a key part of that (such as through the LTSN's aspects of employability referred to earlier), while also reinforcing the University's commitment to diversity. The findings of the task force have already been incorporated into the University's learning and teaching strategy and other embedding is taking place.

The need for an Internationalisation Strategy and an Employability Strategy, as separate, but connected instruments was endorsed by CTT. One example of where the agendas have

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[11] DEA (2003) Foreword, *Global Perspectives in Higher Education*, Development Education Association, London, 2003

recently come together is in "Working Worlds", a series of workshops to help international students prepare for the world of work and to prepare students about to undertake a placement abroad. This programme is an initiative of the International Office and the Careers Service, which is supported by the International Communications Group. At the beginning of the 2004-05 academic year, that group was moved from being in one of the University's Schools, into Academic Services, which emphasises the importance of the group's work to supporting the learning of all students, not just those within one School. The head of the group is a key member of the team developing and embedding the internationalisation strategy.

All new programmes are developed under the University's quality assurance procedures, for which guidance is issued to all programme teams. The relevant guidance is currently being revised, such that all new programmes for delivery from 2005-06 will have to address overtly both internationalisation and employability. Examples of good practice already developed will be made available to all teams. Increasingly, that material uses aspects of e-learning, which makes it easier to incorporate into different programmes.

Another component of the internationalisation strategy that will be addressed is how we work with partner organisations around the world to enhance what we can do—there is a limit to what we can do by ourselves, and there is much to be gained by working together.

Bournemouth University itself has to be and has to be seen to be a responsible global citizen—this is all part of reasserting the values of the University, and for the institution itself to "walk the talk". It can do that in a variety of ways. It has developed a green transport policy, is expanding its recycling policy but does not have an ethical procurement policy. The most exciting challenge, however, is a social one. Bournemouth University is located in an area of England that does not enjoy significant ethnic diversity. Diversity Day in 2005 will be used as an opportunity to engage even more with the local community and with local schools, to expose them to the rich cultural resource we have in our student body. One of the aspirations for the future is for the University to support the international awareness agenda identified by Tomlinson[12] in local schools.

Of the three messages abstracted from the interviews, the second remains to be tackled. The University's Human Resource Strategy embraces diversity well, but it does not address the recruitment, development, recognition and reward of those staff who bring an international dimension to the work of the University. Staff development is a key priority, for it has an impact not just on curriculum content, but how we deliver it, assess students and support our students through the process. We need to be better across the institution at drawing out the experiences of all our students so that our students (and our staff) learn from each other. That in itself will require a cultural shift for many. As part of its learning and teaching strategy, the University has funded a number of projects that come under the internationalisation umbrella. This support has greatly facilitated some of the progress reported above.

It could be argued that if mindsets do change, then explicit reward is not necessary. A decade ago, Boyer[13] highlighted the importance of attitude:

> In the end, educating for a global community has to do with attitude—the attitude that we relate to one another. That attitude among graduates will produce a more literate and thoughtful population. This will not occur, however, through special courses, but rather by changing the way academics think about their work.

He is right. However, it is not just the responsibility of academics. In the same way that the primacy of research and learning to a university has to be appreciated and supported by the entire university community, so is it that the importance of internationalisation be supported by all, including the car park attendant.

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[12] Tomlinson, M. (2004) *op cit*

[13] Boyer, Ernest L (1994). opening remarks, "Building the Global Community: the next step, ACIIE, November 1994, p27 in: http://reports.stanleyfoundation.org/CC1.pdf