Integrated internationalism: interpretation and implementation in UK HE

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Abstract

It has been argued that universities are inherently international institutions, yet many UK universities have a narrow interpretation of internationalism. In line with government agendas (and fragmented national structures), many have tended to see internationalisation in terms of recruiting international students and have been motivated predominantly by economic concerns. A recent research project provides a snapshot of current institutional rationales for internationalisation and insights into some on-the-ground initiatives which provide a little encouragement that aspects of internationalisation driven by global perspectives are starting to play a more significant role in some parts of the sector.

Introduction

This paper examines first some definitions of internationalisation in the context of higher education and explores common rationales for internationalising, commenting on global variations. It then homes in on the UK national context and the relationship of national agendas with institutional agendas. Finally, it provides a snapshot of interpretations and implementation of integrated internationalism within the UK higher education sector in summer 2005, based on a national survey of International Office staff and initial impressions derived from institutional case studies.

Definitions

In the course of the past quarter-century, definitions of internationalisation have evolved. De Wit (2002) and Knight (2004) have traced this evolution, with Knight noting the need to update the working definition. Previous definitions had tended to be somewhat culturally specific, to focus on higher education only, and to apply either at the national / sector level or at the institutional level, but not both. Knight's most recent definition seeks to be "generic enough to apply to many different countries, cultures, and education systems" (Knight 2004, p.11). She defines internationalisation (at the national/sector/institutional levels) as:

> the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education.
> (Knight 2003, p.2)

It is worth picking out two terms from the above definition. First, the term "process" highlights the ongoing, developmental (and potentially transformational) nature of internationalisation. The ever-changing context means that the task is never completed: there is no such thing as a fully "internationalised" institution or system, just ones which aspire to greater internationalisation. Second, the term "integrating" is extremely important as it indicates that internationalisation cannot be bolted on, but (in its ideal sense) has to be part of the fundamental values that drive national or institutional policies, processes and activities.

A definition such as the one above, which seeks to be broad, generic and all-encompassing, is important for the purposes of global comparisons and non culturally specific debate. However, the purpose of the study which will be described later in this paper is to establish the current state-of-play in UK higher education institutions and, in order to do so, a more tailored (i.e. culturally and temporally specific) definition is appropriate, which takes into account the way HEIs define (or are encouraged to define) their own core functions. This definition covers the concept of "integrated internationalism", attempting to determine the characteristics which distinguish an integrated approach from a less coherent, more ad hoc one. It uses the term "internationalism", rather than "internationalisation", since its focus is on defining the aspirational objective itself rather than on the journey taken to get there. This

could be criticised as an idealistic, rather than pragmatic definition, but it was developed for the explicit purpose of determining whether (in the eyes of International Office staff) any UK HEI fulfils the criteria for "integrated internationalism". This concept is defined as:

> the presence of an international or intercultural dimension in all core functions of the institution (students and learning, research, business and community relations), deliberately coordinated as part of a vision which clearly (and publicly) articulates the nature and focus of the institution's international effort.
> (Lewis 2005)

A point to be highlighted in this definition is that it's about both horizontal integration (across organisational functional areas) and vertical integration (which relates to the permeating ethos which runs consistently through vision and values, governance and policies, structures and processes, programmes and activities). The public articulation aspect is also significant: many UK institutions do excellent work in this area, but the outside world is oblivious because it is not articulated as a key element of institutional identity.

Rationales

It has been argued that universities are inherently international organisations, since it is in the nature of academic endeavour and values to "escape inward-looking parochialism" and seek "relevance and confirmation not only on local or national but also on global levels" (Sadlak 1998). However, the academic motivation for internationalisation is often combined with (and even obscured by) economic motivations.

Writers on internationalisation have tended to group the rationales for internationalising (at both national and institutional levels) into four main categories: Political; Economic; Social/cultural; Academic. Although, at national level, the Political rationale has a lot to do with diplomacy, national security and the increase of a country's political and ideological influence on the world stage, at the institutional level it seems to be more about building a global profile, enhancing institutional reputation and prestige (and will be described in this paper as the Prestige rationale, when used in an institutional context). The Economic rationale (with which UK institutions are all familiar) relates to the generation of income. The Social/cultural rationale is about equipping members of the university community to operate effectively and responsibly in a multi-cultural society and work environment. The Academic rationale is about broadening horizons on an intellectual level, moving beyond an Anglo-centric mindset and embracing multiple perspectives.

These rationales are by no means mutually exclusive. Far from that, they have the potential to be mutually supportive. What is interesting is the different prioritisation of rationales which occurs in different countries and continents (and, as we shall see, among different institutions in the same country). The UK, where the Economic rationale is generally perceived to be dominant, is in stark contrast to most continental European countries, where the Social/cultural and Academic rationales have traditionally been the main drivers. The Anglo-Saxon countries in general (including the USA, Australia, UK) have tended to be driven more by Economic and Political motivations, with aspects of the Political rationale (in particular national security) coming to the fore in the USA since the attacks of 11 September 2001.

UK national and institutional context

Homing in on the UK now, there are various factors which have encouraged a commercially driven approach to internationalisation. The Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI), launched in 1999 to increase numbers of international students in the UK, articulated its targets and measured its success in predominantly numerical and financial terms. The Department for Education & Skills' International Strategy, Putting the World into World-Class Education (DfES 2004), presented a somewhat more rounded understanding of what internationalisation should mean to the UK, though there are still tensions between the embedded notion of the UK as an international leader and disseminator of good practice and the rhetoric which appears to imply an acceptance that, in an interconnected world, this country may be able to learn from others.

This tension was superbly articulated by Kader Asmal, former South African Minister of Education, at the British Council's Going Global conference in December 2004:

> The title of the strategy document, "Putting the World into World-Class Education" is eye-catching but begs the question of which world or worlds are we putting into world-class education? A shameful dimension of our world is the growing, rather than shrinking, inequality between nations and within nations.
> (Asmal 2004, p.1)

The UK geo-political context makes it a particular challenge to move beyond Anglo-centrism (we can't even claim Euro-centrism, given our half-hearted engagement with the Bologna process and the broader EU project). This challenge is heightened by a fragmentation, a lack of joining up at national level. This is overtly manifest in recent Home Office decisions to hit international students with vastly increased visa charges, with the added irony that this was an early act of Charles Clarke in his Home Secretary role, following swiftly on the heels of his pronouncements as Secretary of State for Education & Skills about "maximising the contribution of our education and training sector to overseas trade and inward investment" (Clarke 2004, p.8). (Note the dominance of the Economic rationale within this particular goal of the DfES International Strategy.) However, it is not just UK government departments which suffer from a fragmented approach. This country sports a wealth of organisations, each dealing with different aspects of the international education agenda: international marketing is dealt with by British Council; international student support (and, to some extent, curricular and co-curricular issues) are dealt with by UKCOSA; international exchanges are dealt with on a distributed basis and seem to lack an organisational champion at national level.

However much there is still a disjunction between sector-level and federal government agendas in the USA when it comes to international education, one can't help but be envious that an umbrella body, NAFSA: Association of International Educators, exists to bring together professionals dealing with all strands of international education and to perform an explicit advocacy and lobbying function, which has succeeded in influencing government in a variety of ways.

The inconsistencies and fragmentation exhibited at national level in the UK are often mirrored at institutional level. How many of our own institutions deal with the different aspects of internationalisation in different parts of the organisation and suffer from a lack of integration as a result? How many of us can say hand on heart that our institution is more outward-looking than it is self-centred or that it sees internationalisation as something which focuses on **all** members of the university community rather than just international students? (cf. Lewis & Luker 2005, p. 1). In December 2003, a "change in managerial mindsets" (Gilligan 2003) was called for, so that, rather than seeing their international activities as an exercise in student recruitment, HEIs move to the internationalisation of the organisation.

But how far have we got? The study whose initial findings are described in the rest of this paper is an attempt to "take the temperature" of the UK HE sector (in summer 2005), to test our interpretation of internationalisation and its degree of integration in our institutions, to explore examples of good practice and to establish a differentiated model for integrated internationalism which takes into account institutional rationales, vision and values.

The survey

An on-line survey was completed by 54 individuals from 46 different HEIs, all members of the British Universities International Liaison Association (BUILA), which brings together staff from UK International Offices. Almost all UK HEIs are members of BUILA. The institutional response rate to the survey was 38% (42% if non-University HEIs are excluded from the sample). 50% of respondents held the post of Director / Head of International Office. The vast majority of the rest worked in international recruitment / marketing. Responding institutions represented a broad spread in terms of size, geographical location and institutional type.

In order to probe respondents' perceptions of their own institution's rationales for internationalisation, four statements were used as proxies for the four "standard" rationales

articulated earlier (Political [i.e. for our purposes, Prestige]; Economic; Social/cultural; Academic) and respondents were asked to allocate 20 points across the four statements, so as to reflect the priority attached by their institution to each.

Taking the average number of points allocated to each statement, the balance of rationales within the UK HE sector would appear to be:

Economic   38.5%
Prestige   30%
Social/cultural   19.5%
Academic   12%

A more extreme picture emerges if one looks at the percentage of respondents placing a given statement outright top in their ranking:

Economic   62.2%
Prestige   33.3%
Social/cultural   4.4%
Academic   0%

A rough-and-ready triangulation of these results via an exercise conducted during a UKCOSA conference session in June 2005 indicated that, even with a quite different respondent base (predominantly international student support staff and academics), the perceived balance of rationales for the institutions represented was similar and the ranking identical.

It is interesting to note that the balance of rationales varies by institutional type. As one might expect, the Prestige rationale is by far the strongest among Russell Group institutions and least marked among Post-92 and Non-university HEIs. The Economic rationale is strongest in Post-92 and Non-university HEIs and least marked in Russell Group institutions, reflecting a clear correlation with the degree of reliance on government funding. Of all institutional types, Post-92 universities demonstrate the strongest Social/cultural and Academic rationales (albeit still fairly weak), with these carrying least weight among institutions from the Russell Group and 1994 Group.

Respondents were also asked about the main **benefits** of internationalisation (i.e. positive outcomes experienced, as opposed to reasons for engaging with it in the first place) – both from their own perspective and from the **perceived** perspective of their top management teams. Respondents themselves tended to place greater emphasis on benefits that reflected a social/cultural focus (e.g. "enriched campus culture and enhanced employability of UK students by equipping them with intercultural skills"), followed by the economic benefits (e.g. "diversifying income streams") and the academic benefits (e.g. "perspective on global issues – combating prejudice, promoting peace and human rights"), with benefits associated with prestige (e.g. "contributes to our aim to become a world class institution") being considered least significant. Interestingly, respondents felt that their top management team would prioritise the economic benefits, though it was suggested that they also appreciated the social/cultural benefits (ahead of the prestige and academic ones). Participants in the UKCOSA conference session articulated an additional benefit: that internationalisation had brought enhanced understanding between academic departments and support services within the institution.

Other headline results from the BUILA survey are that: 74% of respondents' institutional mission statements mention the word "international" or a similar term; 33% of respondents' institutions currently have a written internationalisation strategy (and a further 30% are working on one); and 30% of Directors / Heads of International Office report directly to a member of the top management team (though this varies significantly by institutional type).

Additional comments indicated that UK HEIs still have a long way to go (e.g. "Probably none have achieved [integrated internationalism] yet"). It was suggested that achieving institutional coordination and oversight would be a start (e.g. "There are many different international strands happening across the institution, but apart from the International Office whose main focus is increasing overseas student numbers, then there is no coordination of the internationalisation of all activity across the institution"). There were echoes of Gilligan's plea

for a shift from international recruitment to true internationalisation, and interest was expressed in sharing good practice.

The case studies

Following on from the survey, case studies were undertaken at three very different institutions, each perceived to demonstrate "good practice" in integrated internationalism. Although interviews with between three and five staff at each institution have been completed, the formal analysis of these has not yet been undertaken. Nor has the documentary analysis which forms an element of these case studies been completed. For this reason, the comments in this paper are based on first impressions and will almost certainly be refined and revised as more detailed analysis takes place.

The interviews, reinforced by the results of rationale prioritisation exercises completed by interviewees, would appear to indicate that Institution A prioritises the Prestige rationale (let's call it the Prestige Player), Institution B the Economic rationale (we'll call it the Economic Wizard) and Institution C the Social/cultural rationale (we'll come back to that one). The inter-dependence and mutual reinforcement of the different rationales was clearly evident, with arguments presented that the Economic rationale must be stressed because, without a sustainable financial underpinning, none of the rest can happen; that the Prestige rationale is paramount because it incorporates all the others; and that the Social/cultural and Academic rationales are difficult to distinguish.

The latter point merits consideration. In the current UK context, where employability, open-mindedness and global perspectives increasingly go hand-in-hand, perhaps the distinction between an intellectual grasp of multiple perspectives and the accompanying practical experience of multi-cultural interaction is blurred. One could argue that the Academic and Social/cultural rationales for internationalisation represent points on a continuum, rather than distinguishable drivers. For this reason, and because the UK HE sector seems to underplay and undervalue many aspects of the Academic rationale, it seems logical to combine the Academic and Social/cultural rationales to form a single, broad rationale, driven by the need for global perspectives, which one might describe as the "Global" rationale. This would mean reclassifying Institution C as prioritising the new Global rationale (and we could call it the Global Citizen).

The Global Citizen institution: some tentative observations

So what are the characteristics of the Global Citizen institution? There are, I am sure, many different ways of fulfilling this remit, so it is important to stress that the observations below are derived from initial impressions of one case study institution. There can be no "one size fits all" approach, but a brief (and, of necessity, superficial) description of some of the characteristics and practices of an institution which prioritises this aspect of internationalism may help other institutions seeking to adopt this approach.

The first observation is that, in the course of five interviews with staff in different roles within the institution, the University's mission statement (which articulates its "world-wide horizons") was quoted in full or in part on five occasions. It is rare to come across a University mission statement which staff know by heart and actively embrace. The second observation is that a change in leadership provided the catalyst for extremely rapid progress with the development of a new focus that was already starting to emerge. The internationalisation agenda is, without a doubt, led from the top and driven by clear (and clearly articulated) ethical values. This approach seems to have led to a shift amongst staff from cynicism (when the focus appeared to be about generating income via international student recruitment) to engagement (now that the scope is broader, focusing on the educational experience of all).

Specific mechanisms were put in place to achieve this cultural change. An internationalisation strategy was developed with the explicit aim of winning hearts and minds. An international aim ("To develop students' international opportunities and global perspectives, ensuring that an international, multi-cultural ethos pervades the University") was firmly embedded within the institutional strategic plan, which includes frequent use of words such as diversity, ethics,

global perspectives, international, multi-cultural, sustainability, world-class and world-wide horizons throughout its 27 pages. Internal awareness, understanding and espousal of the underpinning values seem high, supported by communication mechanisms such as a daily "International Reflection" on the University website, which helps to stimulate discussion. There is a sense that permeation of the internationalisation agenda across all areas is due more to the strong and repeated messages which help to develop a clear understanding of the issues on the part of staff than it is from any edicts or requirements to include global perspectives in the curriculum.

The practice on the ground is characterised by a relative lack of division between the curricular and the co-curricular, between traditionally "academic" functions and traditionally "support" functions. Institutional structures (which provide for the co-location of academic degree programmes with an international focus, institution-wide curriculum internationalisation initiatives, international student support, international exchanges and international student recruitment) play a role in this. There is also an emphasis on international volunteering, which encourages staff and students to ask questions about what it means to be a "global university". Staff development workshops address philosophical issues such as "What is an international education?", as well as more practical training in cross-cultural capability. A recent development is the establishment of an Internationalisation Research Group, which attracted 25 staff to its first meeting. This group comprises both academic and administrative staff, who will work together in small teams to write papers on specific projects, mainly related to the evaluation of different aspects of the internationalisation strategy.

Sharing of good practice is achieved partly because staff involved in delivery of degree programmes with an explicit international focus work alongside colleagues involved in rolling out curriculum internationalisation across the institution. Specific mechanisms (such as the Assessment, Learning & Teaching Strategy, and the annual course review process) are being used to embed cross-cultural capability in all programmes. This is driven in part by the requirements of the 21st century employment market, but there is also a strong desire to develop graduates who are ethically engaged and are known for this engagement. This manifests itself in, for example, the undergraduate business curriculum, whose core themes include Globalisation and Ethics / Values alongside others such as Change / Innovation and Enterprise.

Conclusion

As noted earlier, this project to explore integrated internationalism within UK higher education is a work in progress. The findings to date, which support the notion that UK institutions are driven primarily by economic and prestige considerations, are not surprising. It is, however, encouraging to note that the global perspectives agenda (incorporating social, cultural and academic elements) is playing a significant role for some institutions and that there are examples of good practice to be shared amongst those wishing to embrace this alternative.

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