

From rhetoric to responsibility: cross-institutional insights on staff development and internationalisation

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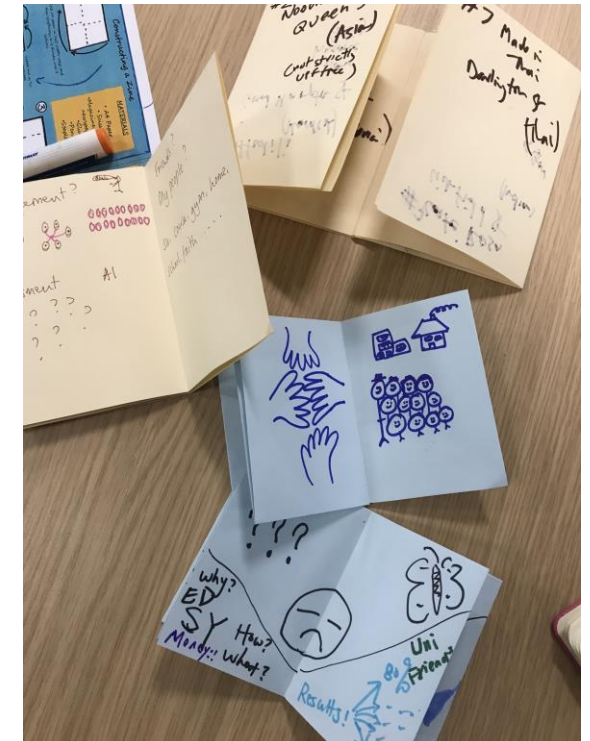
Agenda

1. Introducing the team and wider project
2. Preliminary findings
3. Food for thought
4. Key takeaways
5. Practical considerations
6. Q&A and Thank You

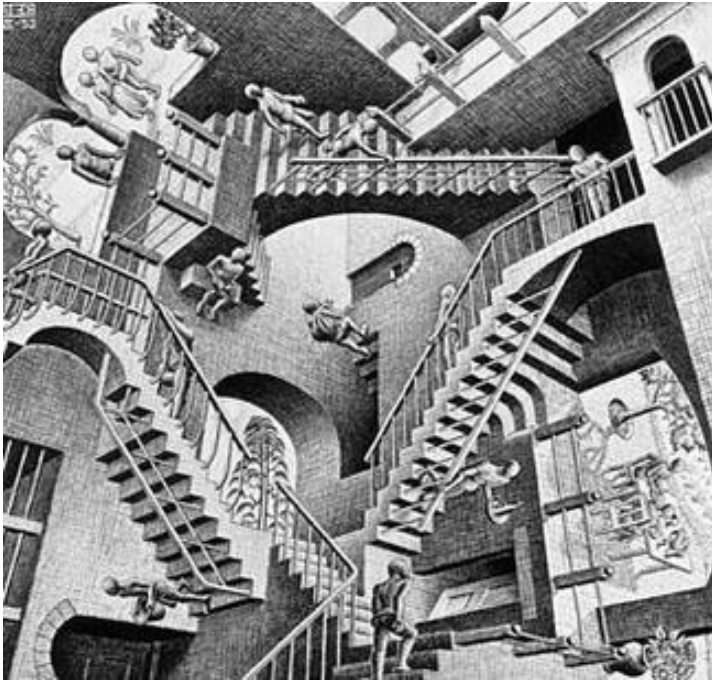


Study context

- **The levels of internationalisation within UK higher education institutions have increased, but staff training and resources seem to lag in their responses.**
 - Inadequate training homogenises international students and focuses only on decolonising the curriculum rather than exploring lived experiences of individual students
- **This study is part of a QAA Collaborative Enhancement project in collaboration with four universities** across the UK dedicated to protesting deficit narratives, homogenising ideas of international students as ‘cash cows’, and seeks to fundamentally re-evaluate staff professional development and training.
- **Led by De Montfort University: Dr Sumeya Loonat and Dr Hardeep Basra**
- **Four workshops conducted at each institution:** self-illustrations, provocative questions, group discussions, student experiences, collage and zine making.
 - Themes of staff experiences and training, positionality, prior assumptions, and co-development



Preliminary findings – three main themes



Belonging precedes pedagogy

Community is a prerequisite for learning – community in and *beyond* academia (e.g., aid with Visa, shared lunches, informal discussions on culture and language)

Who has the deficit?

Everyone has a deficit – which of those are legitimized?

Staff lack knowledge on international students, and students may be unfamiliar with UK university and academic culture.

Enigmatic support – where are the buildings? Where are the people?

Fragmented support; staff don't know who to go to, or even where support is physically located in buildings. Training and news is cascaded from the top, and can be strictly departmental rather than a standardised, centralised approach to knowledge and support sharing.

Food for thought – highlights and quotations

“International students are a treasure
that’s already in the room with you.”

During workshop; on how international students are positioned in the
classroom.

“I went from a deficit mindset to an
expansive mindset.”

Immediately post workshop.

“Preaching to the converted.”

On the difficulties of generating staff interest in similar
professional development opportunities.



Key takeaways

- **Belonging is foundational, not supplementary**
 - Learning, participation, and critical engagement are contingent on trust, safety, and a sense of community.
- **Deficit narratives obscure institutional responsibility**
 - Framing international students through lack diverts attention from structural constraints, staff knowledge gaps, and uneven provision.
- **International students are not a homogenous group**
 - Over-generalisation erases diversity of experience, reinforces misrecognition, and limits pedagogic responsiveness.
- **Good practice for international students benefits all students**
 - Home students with English as an additional language (EAL) have very similar experiences to international students barring the physical move to a different country.
- **Resources are unevenly visible**, rely on individual labour, and are often inaccessible in practice.
- **Co-creation shifts power and practice**
 - Positioning students as co-creators disrupts deficit narratives and guarantees support for international students as coming directly from the source: the international students themselves.

Practical considerations

- **Co-create, don't consult**
 - Include students in the developments of curriculum materials
 - E.g., create a skeleton assignment brief and have individual students flesh it out for themselves or gamify learning activities
- **Make support visible and accessible**
 - Signpost where available resources are **throughout the year**, not just in early inductions
 - Use clear language and refrain from abbreviations that may be hard to understand
- **Belonging first**
 - Make belonging a priority by getting to know your students beyond whether or not they have a superficial 'international' status attached to them. One to one meetings, tutorials, and personal stories make more of a difference than you think!





Q & A and Thank You

Please share your thoughts, beliefs, assumptions, or questions with us. We will be happy to share more on our work and hear your contributions.

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