



Welcoming and Supporting International Students

Date and Time: Wednesday 1 March 2017 from 1.00 pm – 4.00 pm.

Venue: University of Strathclyde, Collins Suite, 22 Richmond Street, Glasgow G1 1XQ
<http://www.strath.ac.uk/maps/collinsbuilding/>

If you are travelling by car there is an NCP car park beneath the neighbouring McCance Building with an entrance on Montrose Street.

Event Aims:

A Scotland sector-wide event hosted by the University of Strathclyde and supported by QAA Scotland and offered free of charge to participants.

This event will be of interest to a range of academic and professional service staff and students whose roles involve welcoming and supporting international students, for example colleagues working in areas such as international student recruitment, Erasmus and student exchange programmes, careers, counselling and wellbeing, study skills, English language support, academics and Students Associations who support academic and social induction into programmes of study.

The event aims are to:

- Share the recommendations of the QAAS-commissioned report, *International Students' Transitions into Scottish Higher Education: A Scoping Study*.
<http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/publications/international-students-transitions-into-scottish-higher-education-2016.pdf?sfvrsn=8>
- Provide participants with the opportunity to hear directly from a number of international students about their experiences of arriving and settling into student life in the Scotland.
- Provide participants with the opportunity to bring along and share examples of their practice and experiences of welcoming and supporting international students.
- Provide participants with the opportunity to share one or two of the challenges they are currently debating, with a view to getting support and ideas on these matters from other participants.
- Provide the opportunity for participants to consider opportunities that might exist for inter-institutional collaboration.

The event will feature a number of presentations from staff and students who will share their experiences. Three parallel activity sessions will be offered that focus on aspects of the international student experience: academic integration, socio-cultural integration, and English language ability.

The QAA publication *Supporting and Enhancing the Experience of International Students in the UK* (2015) and available at the following web address will be of particular interest to participants:
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/International-Students-Guide-15.pdf>

Programme:

Time	Activity
1.00pm	Lunch
1.30pm	Introduction and Welcome
	Welcoming comments from Dr Mark Ellis, University of Strathclyde.
1.35pm	Presentations
	Presentation from Irene Bell, author of <i>International Students' Transitions into Scottish Higher Education</i> scoping study report.
1.55pm	Presentation from Professor Roni Bamber, Theme Leaders' Group Convenor and Student Transitions Enhancement Theme Leader.
2.05pm	Presentation from students on their experiences: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr Raj Jeyaraj, NUS Scotland International Officer and Student President, University of Strathclyde• Ms Heidi Vistisen, Student President, Queen Margaret University.• Mr Rojan Kumar Subramani, Student President, Edinburgh Napier University.
2.20pm	Panel Session
	Chaired by Dr Mark Ellis, an open question and answer session where participants have the opportunity to raise any questions with the opening presenters.
2.35pm	Parallel sessions
	Academic integration (Principal's Dining Room) Session presented and chaired by Professor Roni Bamber, Director of the Centre for Academic Practice, Queen Margaret University. Sharing practice discussion.
	Socio-cultural integration (Main auditorium) Session presented and chaired by Professor Divya Jindal-Snape, Professor and Personal Chair of Education, Inclusion and Life Transitions, University of Dundee. Sharing practice discussion.
	English language ability (Breakout Room) Session presented and chaired by Mr Ian MacLellan, Student Support and Wellbeing Manager, and Mr Ben Brown, English Language Teaching Manager, University of Strathclyde. Sharing practice discussion.
3.30pm	Plenary Session
	Dr Mark Ellis to chair and facilitated by QAAS officers
4.00pm	Close of Event



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QAA Scotland Officers' Event Notes

Plenary

- Considerable overlap between English language, academic integration and socio-cultural integration elements.
- Need to move away from using a deficit model when we refer to support for international students.
- International students benefit other students and staff, helping to internationalise everybody. Focus on all students operating in a global environment and developing the graduate attributes to achieve this and for students to be able to articulate the skills etc. that they have gained.
- Very large emphasis on staff development and appetite for better supporting staff to support international students but all students so they gain an internationalised student experience. Staff better valuing international students, linked to staff's desire to continue to learn and have their learning challenged. Recognise staff have to make transitions in their activities. How can we better support staff - tool kit, for example, information on different grading schemes, cultural briefings etc. (This could be a potential area for collaboration and QAAS could add value here).
- Support for evaluating the effectiveness of what institutions do e.g. how do we know what activity makes a difference? There was some discussion around, students' experiences of English language courses and could the impact of participating in these be evaluated. Also linkages to induction programmes, the need for longitudinal induction and again what is the progress and development of students who participate in induction compared to those who were too late for induction, i.e. how effective are these interventions beyond the end of week 1 which is typically where institutions evaluate them?
- How can we better support institutions to work collaboratively – when it can be challenging enough to get practice shared within an institution? (QAA Scotland could potentially add value here.)
- There may be a desire to establish some kind of sector wide forum to support this work. Could be a combination of face-to-face and online. (This should be investigated given it seems to be contrary to the messages from the November TLG.)
- The University of Dundee took the recommendations from the scoping study report and developed a checklist for internal use. Staff assessed the institution on each recommendation, scoring 1-10, and then used this as the basis for an afternoon of discussion.

Notes on academic integration

Academic integration involves unlearning some of what students already know or are familiar with.

Standard good practice:

- An institution-wide standard induction that can be customised for different disciplines/subject areas.
- Delivering cultural intelligence sessions.
- Induction massive open online learning courses (MOOCs).
- International careers activities.
- Mandatory in-session English, linked to student's discipline area with a practical focus.

Unusual or innovative practice:

- Being explicit about what is involved in the student's studies and how it may differ from previous learning and teaching methods and experiences.
- Provide overview of what output students will have to produce, for example posters, reports, examinations.
- Capitalise on international students' experiences in providing support systems and resources (for example, videos).

Sharing evidence:

- More formal evaluation of practice to identify what makes a positive difference.

Opportunities for collaboration:

- Use the Transitions Map to identify common areas.
- Establish a forum online or face-to-face.
- Recognise of sharing information within as well as across institutions.

Notes on English language ability

- How much is language ability really about language ability? How much of it is about confidence, academic literacy, study skills, cultural/social, and degree structures?
- Need also to be realistic about market expectations, time constraints, costs to students, practicalities (e.g. Chinese students' results from previous study are available at a particular time), degree outcomes.

Standard good practice:

- Broadly similar practice - 3-2-1 month pre-session English programmes in the run-up to the start of degree programme.
- Use IELTS as standard, but is a blunt instrument, not effective as a diagnostic tool or measure of academic potential. Exam can be crammed for; some students take it repeatedly to get the minimum score (and would prefer to do so than attend 3 months of pre-session classes). There is also a market drive to push down to the minimum allowed of 5.5 (across all competencies), especially in recruiting institutions (as opposed to selecting institutions).
- Increasing use of private providers: Glasgow Caledonian University, University of Stirling, Robert Gordon University. University of Dundee probably moving in this direction. University of Glasgow have two options: in-house and private. Students who engage with the former tend to do better than those who engage with the latter.
- English for specific purposes (academic; subject-specific).
- Context important - subject, learning environment etc.
- Some 'funnelling' - start with generic content and stream by subject area later in programme. University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, University of Dundee all do something like this. Viability depends on student numbers.
- Expectation from some students that the pre-session English courses will be subject-specific - needs to be managed.
- Making 3 months pre-session English compulsory would be challenging. Would need to be sector-wide in order to retain market competitiveness; would be problematic for students who genuinely didn't need it; can't be a 15-month degree programme as students can usually only get a 12-month visa (pre-session English counts as 'sub-degree').
- Difficult to identify good/best practice.

Unusual or innovative practice:

- Master's in business at University of Stirling - week-long front-end for all students in PG-level thinking.
- Glasgow Caledonian University in-session academic support - don't differentiate between home and international students, as they find that the needs of both groups are broadly the same.

Evidencing good practice:

- Not enough data published on international student retention. Would institutions be willing to share this? Would be interesting to chart IELTS scores and attendance at pre-session programmes with retention / completion / degree outcome data, as well as ISB data on the overall student experience.

Opportunities for collaboration:

- Geographically-based integration programmes - have been tried in the past and didn't work, but probably due to external political factors. Time to revisit this? Important to recognise that language and academic integration are intertwined with socio-cultural integration - students need informal, social opportunities to speak and listen.

Notes on socio-cultural integration

- International student transition is about a process of change.
- Theoretical frameworks can explain and help us understand dimensions of differences.
- International students transitioning into HE study in Scotland change their identity.
- Both cultural and pedagogical adaptation is involved.
- Ideas around assimilation and segregation are important in understanding international student transitions.
- Students make a choice to come to Scotland to study. Students often come with their families.
- At the end of study, students must then make another transition (back to their own country, on to another country, on to further study or employment etc).
- Social networks support acculturation and, therefore, it is important that universities find ways to connect students with life outside of study and university.

Standard good practice:

- Bespoke support for international students is covered by central support services and/or more locally (school, subject, programme level).
- Staffing levels impact on the level and nature of support that is offered.
- Ensuring equity of experience between September and January starts.
- Pre-orientation and welcome activities are very important, having an early impact on students mixing and settling in (for example airport taxi pick up/meet and greet).
- Student ambassadors and buddying arrangements are relatively commonplace.
- Should institutions should adopt a more inclusive approach towards all students?

Unusual or innovative practice:

- University of Glasgow business department – employ a Chinese speaking counsellor.
- University of Dundee – “international families” involves reaching out into the community and working with third sector organisations to bring individuals from different cultures and countries (including children) into the university to meet with students.
- Welcome videos for students, by students that provide a realistic view of cultural differences based on personal experiences.
- Unusual group social activities – for example, kite-flying.
- Lunchtime club run by students providing a safe environment for students to develop social English.
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- Using social media, such as Facebook groups, to help engender a sense of community.

Opportunities for collaboration:

- It can be a challenge simply sharing practice within an institution. Ensuring effective communication in the institution can be a challenge.
- Better promotion of the welfare and support services for international students within institutions.
- Challenging for institutions to collaborate because international student recruitment is highly competitive. What can institutions do together that gives greater benefit than acting alone?

Sector Bodies and Contacts

- UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) - the UK's national advisory body serving the interests of international students and those who work with them
<http://institutions.ukcisa.org.uk/Info-for-universities-colleges--schools/>
- Stratos - is an informal network of advisers from HE and FE institutions across Scotland. It meets 2 -3 times per year to discuss arising issues and best practice in the area of international student support and immigration matters.
<http://institutions.ukcisa.org.uk/Info-for-universities-colleges--schools/Training--conference/Support-networks-for-staff/STRATOS/>