

Research Briefing No. 19

International Higher Education Classrooms

Key Findings and Implications for Policy Makers

- Recommendations for strategies to effect greater inclusion included small group teaching, greater use of extracurricular activities, more integration in university accommodation and better use made of orientation/induction activities to enable students to get to know each other more easily and more informally
- The level of interaction between students from different contexts is poor. Where academics encourage integration in the classroom, however, students respond positively and are highly appreciative of the learning that they then gain through getting to know people from many different contexts, faiths and backgrounds
- Students with Widening Participation backgrounds at the University of Bristol reported more interaction with international students than with local students. They attributed this lack of interaction to their perceptions of the University of Bristol as an elitist university, to the way in which accommodation is organised and to their observation that people from similar ethnic groups tended to group together



The research

The main aim of the research was to gather narratives of experiences of interaction between international (including European Union) and local students with Widening Participation (WP) backgrounds, to identify not only their experiences but ways in which inclusivity could be improved in the learning environment. The categories of 'local' and 'international' were used to differentiate between those from the UK and those from other contexts. The local students all had WP indicators of mature; lower socio-economic background (SES), black and minority ethnic (BME). The WP categories also include 'disabled' but no disabled students responded to our invitation to participate. The international students were from other countries in the EU, Asia, the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa and the USA.

The research built on work conducted by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) that identified opportunities for synergy between broader equality and diversity agendas and internationalisation, particularly in learning and teaching practices (Eade and Peacock, 2009). A subsequent (2010) study *Joining up Agendas: Internationalisation and Equality and Diversity in Higher Education* concluded that there are similarities between international students and Widening Participation students who may need additional support to navigate new cultural systems, in particular to become comfortable with learning and teaching approaches.

Research design

A qualitative methodological approach that sought to understand students' lived experiences from the perspectives of the students themselves, was taken, using unstructured narrative interviews.

The total number of participants was 28, drawn from 4 Schools, 3 in the University of Bristol - Graduate School of Education, School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies, School of Law and the Bristol Business School, University of West of England. Undergraduate and postgraduate students were recruited using snowball and convenience sampling procedures. Convenience sampling was used as participants were identified based on their willingness to volunteer in response to advertisements in the different Schools. Snowball sampling was used to recruit other participants who were acquaintances of these volunteers.

The research was funded by the Widening Participation Research Cluster, a joint initiative of the universities of Bristol and the West of England.

Further information

EADE, K. & PEACOCK, N. (2009) *Internationalising Equality, Equalising Internationalisation: The intersection between internationalisation and equality and diversity in higher education: scoping report* Jan 15th, 2011 ed., Equality Challenge Unit (ECU).

EQUALITY CHALLENGE UNIT (2010) *Joining up Agendas: Internationalisation and Equality and Diversity in Higher Education*

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