

THE PRIME  
MINISTER'S INITIATIVE  
FOR INTERNATIONAL  
EDUCATION

**Linking outward and inward mobility:**  
How raising the international horizons of UK  
students enhances the international student  
experience on the UK campus

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**Case Study Report:  
Leeds Metropolitan University**

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## A. Introduction - Background information

Leeds Metropolitan University is located on two campuses in the vibrant and multicultural city in West Yorkshire. During the current academic year there are over 30,000 students and 3,000 staff members.

This university is structured differently from many other academic institutions in the UK. Since 2003 Leeds Met has taken a strategic approach to internationalisation viewing this as a whole university commitment to broadening global perspectives '*moving away from profit-orientated student recruitment and towards one which better reflect[s] institutional values.*' (Jones 2008:1)<sup>1</sup>. In doing this the university has striven to develop global perspectives in every aspect of university life. The University's Vision and Character Statement states that the institution strives to be:

*'A university with world-wide horizons where an international, multicultural ethos is pervasive throughout our scholarship, curriculum, volunteering and community engagement at home and overseas' (Leeds Metropolitan 2006:3)*<sup>2</sup>

This vision lies alongside the Internationalisation strategy's four key themes:

1. *Curriculum and student experience beyond boundaries*
2. *A university of international festivals and partnerships*
3. *A globally responsible leadership university*
4. *Using all our talents to the full (Leeds Metropolitan 2008:1)*<sup>3</sup>.

These four themes are born out of the six themes highlighted in the original strategy produced in 2003:

- *Internationalising learning, teaching and research*
- *Enhancing the international student experience*
- *Enhancing the international experience of home students*
- *Developing and fostering international partnerships and alliances*
- *Developing staff capability for internationalisation*
- *Effectively recruiting international students (Leeds Metropolitan 2003:1-2)*<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see Jones, E. (2008) *World Wide Horizons at Leeds Metropolitan University*. [http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/bmaf/documents/publications/Case\\_studies/jones.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/bmaf/documents/publications/Case_studies/jones.pdf) (Accessed March 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Leeds Metropolitan (2006) *Leeds Metropolitan University, Vision and Character Statement* [http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/the\\_news/docs/visionandcharacter08.pdf](http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/the_news/docs/visionandcharacter08.pdf) (Accessed March 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Leeds Metropolitan (2008) *Internationalisation Strategy - 2008-2012* [http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/metoffice/Revised\\_Internationalisation\\_Strategy\\_2008 - 2012.pdf](http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/metoffice/Revised_Internationalisation_Strategy_2008 - 2012.pdf) (Accessed June 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Leeds Metropolitan (2003) *Internationalisation Strategy - 2004-2008*. [http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat/contact\\_strategy.htm](http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat/contact_strategy.htm) (Accessed March 2009).

These all show the institution's holistic approach to world-wide horizons. To promote this approach the Leslie Silver International Faculty was created alongside the post of International Dean. Existing departments with International themes, such as languages and tourism, were brought together in this new faculty and new subjects were developed. An additional focus of the faculty is to promote global perspectives across the university for all students and staff (Jones 2008).

Below are some comments from our staff interviews discussing advantages and challenges of structuring the institution in this way. For some, the change to this new structure has been '*tremendously beneficial*':

*'Within this main International Faculty, which is so unusual in the university, it sends a message across the university that the university sees international as something serious not just a recruitment issue. We've got an International Office there but it's not just recruitment. It is also something that has an academic dimension to it. It's difficult to see what area of the university would have been able to take forward internationalisation of the curriculum in a traditionally structured university because the International Office could not do it because they're not considered as an academic office.'*

For others while the new structure works well, this is more to do with the people within the faculty rather than the structure itself:

*'What I really honestly think is that people make things happen and personalities, so it's more important to have champions... than structure. We could make this work in a different structure but the structure that we've got works... The people are more important, nothing would happen if you didn't have the appropriate leadership whatever your structure, it would all fall down.'*

In other parts of the university the experience of having this structure is quite different. Some staff involved in outward mobility programmes outside this faculty found that they have very little contact with colleagues in the International faculty. One respondent believes that this is '*because they're in a different part of the university, so... they're not on site.*' However, the same respondent did mention that the university does try to promote cross-campus and inter-faculty working, though logically this is challenging.

Because of these logistical difficulties some staff members feel that colleagues located at the second campus are disadvantaged when looking to get involved in Internationalisation and mobility activities as '*you're very much on your own because you don't really know who can help.*'

While the logistics of promoting this faculty and its ethos may not be without its challenges, the overall feeling from staff is that this emphasis on global perspectives

is a positive one and that this institution's relatively unique structure and vision gives it a distinct base for promoting both outward and inward mobility programmes.

## B. Promoting outward and inward mobility at university level

### Institutional strategic plan of promoting outward and inward mobility

Promoting outward and inward mobility is part of this institution's wider Internationalisation policy (which itself is ingrained in university life):

*'Enhancing the understanding of domestic students and of the community generally of other cultures, languages and learning approaches... entails providing opportunities for international and local students and community to develop respectful and mutually beneficial relationships in academic and non-academic settings.' (Leeds Metropolitan 2003:3).*

*'Effective internationalisation is now considered to include student mobility in the wider context of intercultural learning at home by making use of both foreign exchange students and people from other cultural backgrounds in our society.'* (Leeds Metropolitan 2003:3).

Staff members are also clearly engaged with and see the importance of this strategy:

*'Part of the internationalisation strategy is that we want to provide as many [mobility] opportunities for as many staff and students as possible.'*

*'The 2008 internationalisation strategy talks about a three fold increase in external mobility, by 2012... Part of the external mobility [policy] is trying to get a much broader range of people involved than has typically been the case in the past.'*

Not only is it part of the strategy but it is also seen as being a way of measuring the success of the strategy:

*'The test of success of the strategy overall will be the engagement of more people both across the curriculum and in administrative roles and students as well in internationalisation and in particular with regard to this question of promoting the mobility of UK students.'*

The university provides a variety of outward student mobility opportunities, with different financial support initiatives, to allow as wide a student base as possible to participate in mobility programmes:

*'In terms of student mobility, we think it's very important to produce many different kinds of mobility opportunities. ... So the mobility policy basically is to provide as many different opportunities as we can so as many students as possible can have access... to study abroad... But if people can't study, work, volunteer or whatever abroad then we also try to internationalise the curriculum.'*

As has already been seen, the institution's take on global perspectives is wider than just providing mobility opportunities for students and trying to integrate inward mobility students in extra-curricular activities on the UK campus. The university also seeks to widen student and staff global horizons in a number of other ways such as through class based activities so that internationalisation is '*integrated into the curriculum*':

*'Where students have to consider global situations as part of their studies or meet students from different cultures and do some sort of joint task as part of their studies.'*

This helps to reach a wider body of students than those who are able to take part in mobility programmes, and allows students who aren't likely to take part in the university's on campus extra-curricular activities to still access global perspectives in line with the university's holistic approach to internationalisation.

Another way that the university tries to encourage students to access global perspectives and take part in mobility programmes is through their Global Citizen Awards.<sup>5</sup> The university uses this award to '*support those who want to engage positively with their world*' and learn about their position in a culturally diverse global climate. The awards, which are open to both students and staff, are designed to illustrate what opportunities are available, to support participants as activities are undertaken and to enable them to evidence what they have done with the express purpose of increasing their employability prospects.

### **Institutional support services for outward mobility students**

The university has a co-ordinated office for outward mobility programmes e.g. study and work abroad programmes, International volunteering etc. The exception to this is International course placements (such as the example in Section C) which are organised and supported primarily by the department and not at an institutional level. The university has partner links with a number of European countries as well as Australia, Canada, Japan, USA and New Zealand. In most cases the arrangements are for any courses offered at the two partner institutions.

European countries are commonly visited by language students who are taking part in the Erasmus programme. The following is an abstract from a previous placement co-ordinator to a European country detailing the role of the co-ordinator and type of support that they offer to both outgoing and incoming students:

*[My role was] to prepare students who were going to [name of country] for a year and organise their placement - where they were going to go and what they were*

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<sup>5</sup> For more information see <http://gca.leedsmet.ac.uk/main/index.htm> (Accessed March 2009).

*going to do. And then I'd be the first point of contact for the incoming students from [name of country] coming into our faculty. Making sure they got onto the right courses, had their accommodation sorted out and that kind of thing. Once the students were abroad I would keep in touch with them if they were on Erasmus as part of a work placement etc.'*

One support model that this previous co-ordinator found useful was an informal networking meeting for inward mobility students as well as current and past outgoing mobility students connected to a particular country. In addition to the benefit of this one off event, the co-ordinator found that the personal links that students made during this meeting was also beneficial to students:

*'Students exchanged contact details and stayed in touch with each other. That helped them quite a lot I think. I never controlled it beyond that but anecdotally they told me it helped. Now we have a Facebook page which the new co-ordinator has set up....And the Facebook site is designed to do the same sort of thing - to put them in touch with each other.'*

This support network also helped the incoming mobility students meet home students during their time in the UK. As well as this face to face contact, the department also promotes a Euro phone project which allows outgoing and incoming mobility students to meet and prepare for their time abroad:

*'Now we have a Euro phone project organised by one of my colleagues where, through the internet... students who are coming here and UK students who are going abroad keep in touch with each other through this voice tool. So that's another way of helping prepare students for their year abroad and they've got a contact when they get there.'*

The university recognises that Erasmus students receive a lot more financial support than students who wish to go on exchange with a partner institution outside of the EU. To make exchanges outside of the EU more accessible for a wider number of students the institution subsidises the cost of this mobility programme:

*'We pay any student who is on study abroad or exchange outside the EU - we pay their travel costs... The students studying within the EU have got all kinds of different support anyway so we realise that in order to try and increase the numbers going outside Europe we needed to put some money into that.'*

The university also runs an established short term International volunteering mobility programme. This programme is open to both staff and students who would like to get involved in community and environmental projects world wide. In 2009 the university offered volunteering opportunities with twelve partner organisations worldwide. The university also recognises the financial restrictions volunteering abroad may place on some potential volunteers. They therefore contribute towards

the trip's costs and encourage the volunteers to raise the additional costs as a team through fundraising events. Responsibility for supporting volunteers in preparing for, during and after these mobility opportunities lies with the Community Partnership and Volunteering team:

*'So what happens is... we share out the projects and then we'll lead on whatever project it is - the planning, money, recruitment, all the admin, volunteer support, all the flights, the transfers, branded clothes and try to get the teams to do fund raising and try to get them to do some team building activities beforehand... Then also the evaluation. Anything to do with that trip.'*

Volunteering presents additional challenges in regard to supporting teams, in contrast to a group of classmates going on a placement abroad who therefore know each other. Team building therefore forms a large part of this programmes preparation activities:

*'The eclecticism [can be] good but it presents challenges that we don't get with a group that has already come together. So if you've got an eclectic group you need to spend more time in advance preparing them and testing them, so they can support each other.'*

In addition to the face-to-face support offered by this office all volunteers are given a Volunteers Handbook to help them with their preparation. Each handbook includes an introduction to the volunteering programme and Community Partnership and Volunteering team, an overview of the country and the projects that will be visited, a checklist of things to do before leaving the UK, information on what to take, practical in-country advice, information about the university's Global Citizen Awards and other relevant internal policies, contact information for in-country support and emergency contacts in the UK, 'to do' list whilst away (including volunteer blogs and university reflections), post-trip information and advice and a volunteer agreement and code of conduct<sup>6</sup>.

The Community Partnership and Volunteering team facilitates in-country support wherever possible with University offices, partner institutions and current International students or alumni in the relevant regions of the countries that are visited:

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<sup>6</sup> This information was gathered from analysing the two following handbooks provided by the Community Partnership and Volunteering team: Leeds Metropolitan (2008) *Leeds Met Thailand 2008 - Volunteers' Handbook*, Leeds Metropolitan (2008) *Leeds Met India 2008 - Volunteers' Handbook*. Both handbooks followed a similar structure but were adapted to take into account the individual programme's context.

*'The trip to [name of country] a student got involved she didn't really want to volunteer for the work but she wanted to help. Just be part of the group and meet up with the group when they had a few days travelling... I just think that added to the trip for them to be able to be shown round by a fellow student.'*

## **Outward mobility programme models**

As discussed in the previous section this institution offers different types of outward mobility programmes such as study abroad, work abroad, International course placements and International volunteering. The benefits of these last two, which can be argued as being quite unique, will be explored in more detail below.

International course work placements are organised at a course level and promoted and supported within a specific department. Placements for the most part are organised and assessed alongside UK based placements. A work placement abroad instead of another UK based one benefits students by increasing their awareness of cultural differences and improving their communication skills in a demanding environment. This gives them an advantage over other graduates once entering the job market.

The university has found that their short term International Volunteering programme model has been a great success:

*'One of the things that is coming out is the incredible transformation impact of even just a three or four week volunteering placement... Not just any old kind of yes go and spend four weeks in the Andes or something. But if it's properly set up and prepared.... It can be even more transformational than a study abroad experience. '*

Feedback from previous volunteers suggests that the impact of this short mobility programme is in some cases more powerful than the longer term study or work abroad programmes. This could be due to the nature of the work undertaken in that it forces volunteers *'to ask questions which they would not ask on an exchange 'cause suddenly they are confronted with the reality of an impoverished group of people.'*

Each of these models will be explored further at a programme level in Section C.

## **Promotional activities**

There are a number of promotional activities for the study and work abroad programmes that are successful in attracting students, such as student fairs:

*'A couple of times a year we do an exhibition fair at each of the campuses. So we get a few stands and a few of the inbound exchange students with exotic accents who stand around and talk, grab people and talk to them. So they seem to work quite well; you know, grabbing people's attentions really.'*

One of the fairs' organisers feels that this is not only a good way of attracting home students and grabbing their attention but also as a way of supporting the incoming student:

*'I think it reaffirms for them that they are actually somebody doing something that's worth talking about. So maybe the novelty is starting to wear off and they are feeling a little bit whatever so here's a chance to talk about home and to say how great it is over there and I think it does help them.'*

Country themed events are another way the university promotes the study and work abroad mobility programmes:

*'We're promoting them through as many kinds of creative initiatives as we can. So we are promoting the American ones through... we had a big sort of thanksgiving event. So we are pushing the idea of studying in America through that.'*

As part of the wider Internationalisation strategy the university hosts learning lunches where groups of students can come and learn about a new country or culture. While these are open to all students, the organisers have found that many of the attendees are interested in taking part in a mobility programme and they are therefore a good way to promote the mobility programmes that are related to the theme of the lunch. The most successful way of promoting study and work abroad programmes however is perceived as being through departments and individual staff members:

*'I am absolutely convinced that the most successful thing is if their tutor says you know, 'Have you thought about going on exchange? If you want to do that you can do that on this course. You know we've had some students come back and they've been really good'. That's where they need the input really because they're the people they trust. '*

Promotion of the subject level placements abroad is also undertaken by individual course tutors (see Section C for more information).

The success of the volunteering programmes means that the Community Partnership and Volunteering team do not need to take such a structured approach to promotion. Word of mouth is their primary form of recruitment. They feel that if they advertised their programme more systematically they would be overwhelmed with applications. A number of International students also take part in this scheme. Word of mouth promotion is therefore reaching and presumably being promoted by both home and International students.

### **Widening global horizons within a mobility framework**

As previously mentioned some study abroad pre-departure activities link outward and inward mobility students together for their mutual benefit (e.g. social evenings, Facebook and Euro phone as useful tools in linking Erasmus students). However

one respondent feels that interventions such as this have only limited success both because of vast cultural differences and the limited time in which to make friends with home students who '*have already got their lives*'. She sees stepping out of that '*incomer's ghetto*' as being quite an intimidating step to take:

*'You often hear people talking about Erasmus ghettos but I think it's really difficult for students not to live in Erasmus ghettos or be involved in that kind of environment. I'm sure it must be the same for international students coming here sometimes. So even if they want to... Sometimes people might not be brave enough to take that step.'*

However the resources needed to help people get out of these '*ghettos*' can be very time and resource intensive:

*'I think we need to hold their hand too much to do it. It's very, very resource intensive'*

As well as being very time and resource intensive, making students dependent on staff does not necessarily help them mix with home students. A more productive strategy may therefore be to involve students in helping the incoming students integrate on the UK campus. However, once again this solution isn't without its problems:

*'You've got to get the students involved in the first place and that's resource intensive too. You've got to encourage them and convince them it's not a risk for them... We looked a bit at using language students coming back. But as they are coming back into the third year of their degree ... they are simply too busy. ... It can take an awful lot of setting up for very little reward and you still only get involvement from those who are interested so you are preaching to the converted again.'*

Societies also promote events for both home and International students. Some themed events as well as general socials in a non alcohol environment seem to be the most accessible to a wide range of International students:

*'One of the most successful integrating things in this university has to be the walking club that's run by the students union which attracts a lot of international students and it does so just because... the people who have been involved in it... have welcomed international students and gone out of their way to attract them.'*

Involving the students union in promoting events for all students and combining fresher's and international welcome events is also seen as being a positive step forward in promoting linkages:

*'I think this year we got the students union much more involved and the freshers' events and the international welcome events much more closely integrated so that we were sort of giving a message to students about coming together and so forth. So I think... if it's going to be successful it has to be to do with the life of the*

*university and not to do with 'OK let's have a party for international students and invite some home students'.*

Despite these initiatives that are being promoted it is felt (by staff members) that more students could and should successfully mix across the perceived home and International student boundaries. The same respondent went onto explain this in the following words:

*'Human nature does protect itself and is worried about things that are different and different perspectives. I'm not so sure we've cracked it in society so in universities we are fighting against the tide really. [But] we have a responsibility to ... improve people's tolerance of difference and diversity and we should be working towards that.'*

As this is a deep-rooted problem the solution also needs to be at a profound level:

*'If we could manage to make a difference - to change people's mentalities about what they think about others and the way that they reflect on themselves in the world of other and otherness... and even the celebration of diversity then that can have a broader impact. These people talk to those in wider society but I think that because most people have come from that wider society [to begin with] which is not like that. There is a lot less tolerance for diversity in society than we'd like to think. ... So I think its important universities are trying to promote global understanding and perspectives'.*

However changing this way of thinking cannot be a short term goal; it needs to be looked at in the long term with a focus on universities impacting on wider society. This challenge to internationalisation is not a barrier but is rather an incentive to promoting mobility and creating global perspectives:

*'But that's not a reason not to promote Internationalisation. I think that that is more of a reason to promote Internationalisation, particularly in the political environment in which we live and with globalisation, where something that happens in one country can impact directly on the other side of the world. And it's important that we are trying to promote this with younger people as well as older ones. We have a responsibility to try and promote that kind of tolerance, acceptance and diversity.'*

To achieve this at this profound and deep level '*lots and lots of little initiatives*' are needed to link people from different cultures and backgrounds and assist them in widening their global horizons. Mobility experiences can do this through helping students to '*reflect on themselves in the world of other and otherness*'. This can have a profound impact on their relationship with International students once they return to the UK:

*'I think it definitely helps people with their cross cultural awareness, and capabilities. Lots of people have travelled but some of our own kids haven't even been on holiday overseas.'*

*'I think that is a general tendency... They are more likely to join in anything that is international when they've had the experience themselves. So you'll see faces popping up again and again who have had some sort of international experience themselves and want to feed something back.'*

The university has six separate online reflections strands where staff and students are encouraged to reflect on their experiences of the general subject area. One theme is an International Reflection, which has been part of the University's life since September 2003. This reflection is updated daily and comprises short reflections of exactly 200 words<sup>7</sup>. In addition to this the volunteering project workers all keep communal blogs. All outward mobility students are encouraged to reflect on their experience abroad through these mediums. This emphasis on reflecting on your International experiences for the university website promotes the notion of reflecting on the mobility experience more generally and its impact on the individual both immediate and long term.

### **C. Promoting mobility at programme level**

This section explores two different mobility programmes in place at the University for students. The programme leaders were interviewed about their programme, looking specifically at promotion, student support, and the student experience.

#### **Programme A**

The information on Programme A has been provided by the course co-ordinator. This programme is also linked to the outward mobility focus group presented in Section D.

#### **Overview of mobility programme**

Programme A is a short term subject level placement mobility programme in the university's faculty of Health. 2008 is the first year that this placement has been run.

This placement is one of a number of practice placements and is offered as a replacement for one of the UK based placements that students are required to do. Students are able to go to two Asian countries on this programme. Whilst away students complete a similar placement as to ones available in the UK.

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<sup>7</sup> The reflections can be found on the university's website at <http://www.lmu.ac.uk/internat/reflects/index.htm> (Accessed July 2009).

*'It's a big teaching hospital. It's very similar to working in a teaching hospital in the UK... they offer the same rotations that we would have over here.'*

Students are also assessed in the same way as they would be if they were doing a UK based placement.

The placement was set up as a way of expanding on the placements already offered to Masters Students. The rationale behind these placements is to aid employability chances in the UK as well as to create employment opportunities for graduates abroad:

*'We've had real issues with graduate employment on all of the health courses. And you know anything that can set you out differently, when you go to interview, has got to be a bonus really.'*

*'She [placement manager in-country] said that she would like... graduates to go out there and work, because they have real problems recruiting well qualified [professionals] in [name of country]... Initially, that was what she wanted and then when we approached her with the PMI2 idea of students, she was really keen to be involved in that because it's her having a possible workforce in the future.'*

### **Support services and support activities**

The programme is promoted through class networks. Interested students are selected from a written application exercise. The department doesn't offer pre-departure activities as such but due to the close knit nature of this group takes a more personal and individualised approach to supporting students in preparing for, during and once they return from, their placement. The placement co-ordinator is the first point of contact and supports students in all aspects of their preparation from gaining visas and booking flights to advising them on what to pack. The co-ordinator views good pre-departure preparation as being crucial for a successful placement:

*'I think for me the experience with this has been... making sure that everything is in, absolutely in place for them before they go.'*

The co-ordinator also facilitates contact between the students and the placement manager in-country and the Masters students who are abroad to ensure that they have in-country support on arrival:

*'I think we need to make sure that the students know that they are not just a thousand miles away and that we're not thinking about them and caring about them. Cause if a student had problems in the UK obviously I would go out and visit them, but we can't do that so we have to make sure that somebody else can do that over there.'*

All students received a planned visited by a member of staff during their placement abroad. This personalised approach to support was also in place to help students

reflect on their experience on their return. Section D of this report shows that the students who went on placement felt well supported by Leeds Met staff throughout all aspect of their placement despite some of the challenges they faced.

### **Widening global horizons through outward mobility**

The two main skills that students pick up on this placement were cited as being communication and cultural awareness. Both of these skills can be seen as part of the university's wider emphasis on widening global horizons.

## **Programme B**

The information on Programme B has been provided from three separate sources: a representative in the Community Partnership and Volunteering team, programme co-ordinator, and volunteer team leader.

### **Overview of mobility programme**

Programme B is a short term International Volunteering outward mobility programme in South Asia. Leeds Met has a long standing relationship with a charity in the region and is now beginning to work with sister projects in the same area.

Volunteers get involved in many different activities such as providing extra tuition and support to local schools and children or practical jobs around the charity's grounds such as landscaping projects. To protect participants' identity information on this part of the trip will not be included in this report due to difficulties in anonymising this data and consequently protecting respondents' identities.

### **Support services and support activities**

As discussed in Section B Leeds Met runs an established volunteering mobility programme and has an established support system in place for volunteers.

Responsibility for ensuring this support lies with the Community Partnership and Volunteering team. This includes all pre-departure support (such as administrative tasks, fundraising support, team building activities), in country support (through facilitating links with Leeds Met representatives/alumni in country and manning the 24 hour emergency contact number in the U.K.) as well as post-trip support (e.g. programme evaluation and on going development).

The timing of Programme B within the academic year made it difficult to organise pre-departure activities for this programme:

*'Some were only able to attend [some] of the pre-departure sessions, and so that bonding as a group could have been improved.'*

While this proved challenging in terms of team building the Community Partnership and Volunteering team was still able to provide individual pre-departure support to

team members both through the programme's handbook and face-to-face support as has been discussed in Section B.

In addition the Community Partnership and Volunteering team facilitated in-country support for this programme. Two members of staff were attached to the team full time and were on hand to deal with on going challenges associated with being in-country. Having such support was cited as being helpful not only from a students' viewpoint (evidenced from internal evaluation data) but also from a leadership standpoint whilst in-country. This office was also able to help produce the written preparation materials for volunteers and in particular the information about cultural differences and specific in-country detail.

### **Widening global horizons through outward mobility**

The group of students who took part in this outward mobility programme in 2008 were an eclectic group who were motivated to participate for a number of different reasons. Consequently their reactions to the experience and their response to being back in the UK are also diverse. '*A couple have said really we've now had enough of [name of country] thank you very much*' but '*students with the most mature outlook [who] were the ones who coped best with the challenges that they faced on the way*' are also the ones who have been able to transfer their experience back to life in the UK, albeit in a number of different ways, e.g. one student thinks that '*it will have an impact later in life or when she's got her own children*'.... '*So it's not the tangible benefits. It's the things that are going to stay with you later, and have a benefit.*'

Staff haven't noticed returned outward mobility students linking more or to a greater depth with inward mobility students. However students are keen to get involved in preparation activities for future volunteers. This is viewed as a positive way of supporting and preparing new volunteers which may be more effective in promoting certain topics, such as advice on dress codes, than pre-departure advice offered from university staff members.

*'Instead of hearing it from me, hearing it from another student. And that might sink in a little bit more.'*

While there has been no noticeable improvement in this outward mobility cohort's relationship with inward mobility students, the programme co-ordinator feels that outward mobility is still important in promoting links and widening people's global horizons. Alongside this emphasis on the importance of outward mobility the co-ordinator emphasises the importance of encouraging students and staff to engage in cross-cultural experiences through class based and extra-curricular activities in the UK:

*'The reason why we are keen on external mobility is because there is a real concern for UK students to engage in things international... We're really resolute in trying to*

*encourage this international experience in home students... Also the idea that you can get an international experience at home for example through mentoring of refugees in Leeds... You know you're getting some insight into cross cultural experience here.'*

A volunteer on this programme stated how the experience had had an effect on her in the following way:

*'It broadened my thinking, and experiences of different cultures and understanding of how things work differently. It's not the same as the UK, so it has helped me in terms of my career goals and where I want to go.'*

For her the main benefit of this experience was the breaking down of previous stereotypes about the country and culture she was visiting:

*'I was a bit worried because the general stereotype... but when I went there it was totally different. I got such a warm welcome and people were just so hospitable... Now I just want to go back... In terms of learning, in terms of understanding people, in terms of the perception the media builds before you go - you actually experience something totally different.'*

She sees confidence building and developing of communication skills as the major personal benefits of taking part in the programme:

*'I feel like having the international exposure [has] given me the confidence and the experience to go out there and work I'd like to go back at some point in my career and work in [name of country]. That's how strongly I feel about it. I think communicating with other people... that have this perception... has helped on a lot of different levels - on a personal level and a professional level.'*

The main benefit of this programme appears to be a widening of global perspectives and personal development of individual volunteers. The co-ordinator cited the challenges that are still felt in transferring these benefits into promoting links between home and international mobility students. Numerous individual activities scattered throughout the year are seen as being the way to encourage this linking:

*'The challenge is getting more UK students involved with the international students, through freshers' week and through activities through the year we try to encourage that.'*

## D. Outward Mobility - Home student voice

### Context: Introduction to focus group participants

Five students attended our outward mobility focus group - four female and one male. They were all on the same course in the Faculty of Health and took part in a short-term outward mobility programme which formed one of their course placements

(Programme A in Section C). Participants were assessed for this placement in the same way as they would have been if the placement had been in the UK.

Participants were offered the opportunity to go to two different countries. Our focus group sample represents this. To protect participants' identity information on their specific course has not been given.

A number of different motivations and aspirations were given for participating in an outward mobility programme. However all students stated that after doing five placements in the NHS they wanted to do one which was a bit different. Some wanted to compare another healthcare system with the NHS, others wanted to experience what it was like to work in another country and still others wanted to experience another culture first hand.

### **Experience of pre-departure and international promotion activities**

Students took part in an informal question and answer group session as part of their pre-departure activities. This is quite a close knit group so the pre-departure support in addition to this was very informal, where students would go to the placement co-ordinator with specific queries or questions about all aspects of the placement. The placement co-ordinator was cited as being very supportive whilst also encouraging participants to be independent and take responsibility of their own trip:

*'[Name of co-ordinator] told us everything we had to do and who we had to contact but we had to do it. ...That's all part of the experience though.'*

All students were visited during their time away by the placement co-ordinators.

### **Experience abroad - positives and challenges**

Overall the students who went to Placement 1 and those who went to Placement 2 seemed to have two very different experiences. The students who went to Placement 1 were challenged to work in another health care system with a different set of cultural values but for the most part felt able to participate in their placement despite the challenges they encountered.

Students were, in general, struck by the hospitality they encountered, the local people tended to be friendly and intrigued by them. They were asked to attend social events such as weddings and dinners and were often questioned about life in UK.

Students in Placement 1 stated that their communication skills and awareness of other cultures had been heightened by their experience:

*'In terms of the communication and team work, I got way more out of this placement than any of my English ones cause it was a challenge to communicate and work within a team made up of different cultures.'*

*'It's not just language, but using body language... to explain your meaning and communicate... It was a massive challenge.'*

However, they did not feel that they had learnt any subject specific knowledge on the placement:

*'I don't feel I took much away from it about [subject knowledge]. I took lots of personal and communication elements but not much about actual [subject knowledge].'*

The students who went to Placement 2 had a very different experience. They did not have as much freedom as the students who went to Placement 1 and '*felt constrained*' by some of the requirements placed on them. To counter this they '*had to rebel a bit so they understood us and what we wanted to get out of the experience.*' They did not have as much face-to-face contact with patients as the students who went to Placement 1 which caused problems with the assessment at the end of the placement. Because of this they felt that the trip abroad may have been more suitable as an elective placement in addition to a UK based placement, rather than instead of one.

For all students the PMI2 funding was decisive in allowing eligible students to be able to afford to go to the placement abroad rather than stay in the UK:

*'If it wasn't for the money and for [the placement co-ordinator] we wouldn't have been able to have had this experience.'*

### **Outcomes: Benefits of experience**

The majority of participants felt that the cultural and communication skills that they learnt during their time away, far outweighed any challenges they experienced:

*'It really upped my communication skills despite the challenges... which is what being a [name of profession] is about!'*

To experience life from a different viewpoint and '*put ourselves in the position of the minority*' was highlighted as being a valuable experience which made participants aware of cultural and communication aspects as well as the importance of team working. This was particularly true for participants who are planning on working abroad or in a multicultural environment in the UK after graduation.

### **Improving the outward mobility experience**

Participants were divided over whether future placements should be done as a last placement or completed earlier in the third year. It was felt by most participants that the new cohort should be told about the opportunity to do a placement abroad earlier on so that they can prepare better for it, especially in respect of choosing their UK based placements to fit in with the placements on offer abroad.

This cohort was the first set of students to go on the placement abroad for this course. Therefore some students felt a bit like 'guinea pigs' as they '*went in completely blind.*' Participants understood that as this was the first year there were bound to be problems that had not been foreseen. They all felt that their experiences can help to iron out these problems for the next cohort. Some of these issues related to module requirements, assessment criteria and paperwork:

*'I practically dictated my paperwork to her cause she just didn't know what to write.'*

*'Being over there has given me an insight into the fact that I can do different things ... but it has kind of now hindered... if I'd stayed in England I wonder what kind of mark I would have got, 'cause as I mentioned... we weren't able to fulfil our criteria despite us constantly asking.. I feel a bit let down by things but also understand we were the first ones so were the guinea pigs.'*

Cultural differences between working for the NHS and another health care system:

*'For example, culturally, if you have a problem with someone you don't approach them directly but instead you go to their friend.'*

*'It's little cultural things that we had no idea about such as things are much more relaxed over there.'*

To help improve the experience of next year's cohort participants would like to be involved in some pre-departure activities so that they can be on hand to answer any questions or queries that staff members are unable to answer:

*'I think one of the big things in terms of the whole project... is that us being the first, there was no-one to say 'this is what to expect' or 'this is how to get around these challenges.' Now we would be able to speak to the next set going out.'*

The cohort also thinks that it would be helpful if they could put together some web-based resources to help prepare the next group of students.

### **Widening global horizons through outward mobility**

Participants felt that their experience may enable them to help International students coming to the UK from the countries they have visited. They don't feel though that their experiences would be helpful to International students in general but that their knowledge of cultural differences could be used to help inward mobility students from the countries they have visited adapt to life in the UK:

*'Regarding students coming over here I think it would have to be specific to [name of country] because obviously every culture is different. And how they are going to have to adapt will be different depending on where they are coming from... So yea we could be of some use to future foreign students... I'd love to help other people to maximise their time here.'*

More than this though they feel that their experiences would help other outgoing students visiting the same countries as part of the same placement:

*'I think we would probably be most helpful to other students going out to [name of country] though, as we've done it.'*

## **E. Inward mobility - International student voice**

### **Context: Introduction to focus group participants**

Six students attended our inward mobility focus group - one female and five male. They were from a number of different countries - Poland, Indonesia, Iran and South Africa. Two students are on the Erasmus programme and are in the UK for one term. The other four students are post graduate students in the UK for the full duration of their course. They are studying a variety of courses, all in the university's Faculty of Business and Law. To protect participants' identity, information on their specific courses has not been given. However it should be noted that no more than two participants studied on the same course.

Participants had a number of different reasons for studying in the UK, but improving English and '*learning a new culture*' were high up on most people's lists of motivations. The notion of change was also important, with some seeking a change of scenery and others looking to meet new people. For others, academic reasons motivated their decision to study in the UK. Some participants felt that the UK had a strong reputation compared to other countries. For others this reputation, coupled with length of course was an important factor.

### **Experience of pre-departure and international promotional activities**

Participants' experience of pre-departure activities in their own country was varied. Some, who were visited by a university representative, had very positive experiences:

*'We had a visit from Leeds Met before coming over. They told me everything and arranged everything. So no problems at all.'*

Students who had received this support felt that they had received all the information they needed. They also found it useful to have made contact with the institution before arriving and in particular having a friendly face on hand, that they recognised from their own country, during the induction.

Students who did not have a visit from a university representative did not feel as supported. One participant expressed their frustrations in the following words:

*'UCAS don't do their job properly. I had to go to another country to do an English test...No-one was clear about what I had to do and miscommunication was frustrating at the time.'*

Other students also expressed similar frustrations with lack of communication:

*'Huge problems with contact. I had a flight to Leeds and two days before it I was still registered with the wrong faculty. So lots of problems!'*

However, it was noted that these pre-departure difficulties were resolved during the initial few weeks on campus.

### **HE experience and integration on UK campus**

Despite the pre-departure difficulties that a number of students highlighted, all participants stated that since arriving university staff have been helpful and friendly. The general feeling was that the first few weeks as an International student were very challenging:

*'The first month is challenging, you have to do everything. Then its OK and you just have to ask people things and not be shy!'*

Other participants stated that in the initial stages they felt that they had been bombarded with lots of information, but that they hadn't been given enough time to process it. Some stated that due to this they felt that they had not been fully supported. A number of students felt that they needed time to adjust to being in a new country without having to deal with lots of information about university procedures.

Some students from outside of Europe, also stated that they would have liked to have been given time to get used to the UK academic systems and ways of studying which are very different from what they are used to. They felt that their assessments began too soon after arrival. Comments were also made about the style of teaching in the UK. The role of supervisor rather than teacher was new to many of our focus group participants who expressed the need to have more time to get used to this style of learning. The positives of this way of learning were acknowledged but students felt that time was again against them:

*'It's good for you though, it encourages you to study. But then it can be stressful.'*

The independence that this style of learning encourages, as well as the experience in general of living and studying in a new country, was highlighted. The positives and negatives of this were discussed though the overall feel was that the opportunity to be independent is a valuable one.

Participants have had mixed experiences of making friends and integrating on the UK campus. Some have found their time here very lonely, others have made friends with other International students and others still have found it easy to make friends with both British and International students.

While participants' experiences were radically different, as our discussion progressed there was a general agreement on how to promote integration. To reflect this, this section will follow the order of our discussion rather than documenting the three different types of experiences participants have had regarding integration. Our conversation was kicked off with this opening statement:

*'I have found lots of friends from different cultures and countries - but not British students as they don't like to make friends with International students. They think you are different.'*

There were murmurs of agreement from a number of other participants:

*'It's easier with international students. There is a big wall with UK students and international students. UK students cannot overcome the differences in culture.'*

Students from other countries, such as Western Europe and China, were also cited as '*sticking together*':

*'In our class the students from some different countries stick together. They don't communicate with other people. But this is due to their culture. The countries that they are from are places where people are 'colder', so it's their culture. That's why they are like this. At first I thought they were unfriendly.'*

Other participants highlighted language reasons for students staying within their national groups, especially within a classroom context.

A number of people stated that in general '*British people are polite and friendly*'. This was cited in particular relation to university staff. Despite this observation of British people more widely, a number of students felt that British students were not open to integrating with International students:

*'British people are friendly but as students they think they are better than international students. They try to keep their own groups and communities and they create distance from international students.'*

*'This [difficulty in making friends] is just the student, though. Other British people and the staff are very friendly; they will talk to you and smile at you.'*

Age was cited as a big reason for this difference. A number of participants felt that British students are relatively young and immature in comparison to International students. Another possible reason that was given was the perceived isolated and secluded nature of the UK which is epitomised in a lack of perceived outward mobility in British culture:

*'The more you travel, the more you accommodate other nationalities. Most of the UK students have never been out of the EU. They only know the UK so they feel threatened and this leads to them being negative towards you but we are more*

*positive and tolerant. We have lived away and travelled so it is easier to make friends.'*

It was widely felt that you can't blame people for lack of experience but that more should be done to help widen people's global horizons.

Some students would have liked the university to have helped them to make friends and alleviate their loneliness. While the open day was acknowledged as a good opportunity to find out about societies and other extra curricular activities, timing was again cited as being a barrier. A longer term scheme, such as a mentoring programme, was suggested as a good way to help International Students who want more support:

*'When you arrive everything is in motion. You need a mentoring programme for 6 months to find everything and how to do things.'*

While some participants feel very isolated this is not true for everyone:

*'I disagree. It depends on how we interact with them. I live with 99% UK students...I am very well travelled and lived in lots of different countries. I've been around and met people. It depends on the people. Some are approachable and some are not. My three best friends are UK students and I know they will be there for me if I need them. You just have to get to know them. It depends how you interact with them.'*

*'In one of the flats where I live [student accommodation] they are unfriendly. I've made friends with all the other flats but in this one - that's how it is. It's individuals!'*

The need to look at people as individuals rather than grouping students into broad umbrella categories, such as home and International, was stressed.

## **Outcomes: Benefits of experience**

The experience of living in another country and experiencing a new way of life was seen as being the main benefit of being an International student:

*'It is a great experience to touch another culture and be in a different climate. In the United Kingdom, as an island, everything is almost different. There are common things [between mainland Europe and UK] but also lots of differences.'*

*'It is diverse and you learn a lot. Everyone has ways to look at things; social things are different from your culture.'*

Even students who did not feel well integrated cited that being in another country and being exposed to another culture and another way of life was a major advantage of studying in the UK.

## **Improving the inward mobility experience**

Timing was cited again and again as being a major challenge for participants. This related particularly to induction procedures:

*'They tell us everything but it is too late. It's all too fast. We should start one month before there is a course.'*

Participants feel that the institution could think through the timing of induction events more thoroughly to make them more accessible to a wider body of students as well as making the information more context-specific and less overwhelming. A long term mentoring scheme to link up new International students with experienced International students from the same countries was suggested as another way of improving the induction process:

In addition to improving the induction procedures, participants would also like help on how to prepare to leave the university, and in particular to have careers advice that is tailored specifically to International students.

## **Incoming mobility integration on the UK campus**

As mentioned above, some students who found it hard to make friends highlighted a lack of outward mobility in British culture as being an over-riding factor in the difficulties International students have in integrating with home students. They consequently see outward mobility programmes at universities, as well as a widening of global perspectives in other ways, as being key to increasing the quantity and quality of links between home and International students.

The Erasmus students were surprised that there was not an opportunity for students to meet together on a regular basis. They see this as being an easy and effective way of connecting individuals, as a way for outward students to socialise, inward students to meet each other as well as outward and inward students to get together.

Throughout all of this was the underpinning theme of individuality. It was stated a number of times that students should not be thought of as coming from two separate groups, namely; home and International students. Rather individuals should be encouraged to mix together as individuals because they share common interests or hobbies. A mentoring programme was also suggested as a way to link individual students. Using these umbrella labels was seen as being counterproductive, as were intervention programmes designed to connect two perceived groups of students. The over-riding argument was that commonalities between people should be emphasised and not the differences.

## F. Conclusion

### Strengths of case study context

Leeds Met has taken a holistic strategic approach to Internationalisation where widening staff and student global horizons is a priority in all aspects of university life. Promoting this ethos is achieved through promoting '*lots of little initiatives*', such as mobility programmes including volunteering opportunities, curriculum based activities, extra-curricular events and reflection initiatives, to reach as diverse an audience as possible. Global Citizen Awards are also used as a way to encourage participation in mobility and global activities.

To show the university's commitment to this strategy the Leslie Silver International Faculty was created alongside the position of International Dean in 2003. Staff commitment to the strategy also ensures its success and implementation in a number of different ways.

Mobility programmes are ingrained in the strategy and a variety of different mobility programmes are offered at different times of year to help as many students as possible access these opportunities. Financial support is also available to ensure this is possible.

### Widening global horizons within a mobility framework

The university's strategy of widening global horizons lays the foundation for the work that they are doing in linking outward and inward mobility groups.

Staff who organise promotional events for outward mobility groups find that involving International students not only supports the potential outgoing students, but also helps to integrate the incomer in campus life. A similar situation can be found at the university's learning lunches (although these aren't specifically aimed at mobility students). Other promotional and pre-departure events for outward mobility students also incorporate international students, such as social evenings and Euro phone links.

Respondents feel that linking outward and inward mobility students is only part of what is needed to achieve successful integration of International students on campus. Vast cultural differences, as well as the notion of being an incomer can be a large barrier to integration, especially for students who are on short term mobility programmes. As the blockages to integration are deep-rooted the solutions also need to be. Therefore a long term, reflective approach needs to be taken:

*'We need to keep looking at this deeper and keep coming at it from lots and lots of different angles which is what this university is trying to do with the strategy. ... Lots of different ways that staff and students can access global perspectives.'*

Findings from our outward mobility focus groups shows that participants feel that their experience abroad has helped them to improve their communication skills and given them a greater understanding of cultural differences. Mobility experiences are therefore part of this integration process through widening individuals' global horizons and understanding of different cultural groups.

The International students that we spoke to also see mobility experiences (either at university or apart from university) as being key to helping individuals widen their global perspectives and be open to individuals from other cultural groups. For this group of students, the experiences that students have as individuals was seen as being key to successful integration. Individual friendships between people rather than initiatives to connect perceived groups of students were seen as being the way to move forward. Broadening individuals' global perspectives and creating spaces for individuals to mix, emphasising the commonalities that they share and not the differences between them, was offered as a possible way to encourage integration.