

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

*Project funded by PMI2 and commissioned by UKCISA*

**Case Study Report:**  
**Sheffield Hallam University**

**15th July 2009**

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SHARPENS YOUR THINKING

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## **A. Introduction - Background information**

Sheffield Hallam University has a diverse student population from across different ages, backgrounds and nationalities. The yearly intake is around 30,000 students studying on 610 different courses in the four faculties, with 75% of these being undergraduate students.

The University runs an '*extensive student exchange programme*' with partner institutions across Europe and the rest of the world. Where students can go depends on the programme of study they are on.

The university has around 3,000 international students from over 80 countries. Exchange partnerships have been developed with 21 countries around the world including in Europe, USA and Australia, and the university welcomes around 150 exchange students each year. An Extended Erasmus University Charter from 2007-2013 has been awarded.

## **B. Methodology**

The project aim was to look at how the university has attempted to enhance UK student's awareness of diverse, international student groups and the growing internationalisation of education, and to what extent this cultural training is effective in helping to integrate international students on the UK campus. This was explored from the perspectives of staff and students. Additionally the case study aimed to explore campus activities used to promote integration, how students feel about integration on the UK campus, and the University's strategic plan of internationalisation.

- Interviews were conducted with members of staff including: a senior manager, a member of the international student support team, a senior member of the International Office, and mobility programme leaders. These were conducted in order to gain staff perspectives on current and potential future activities designed to facilitate integration and enhance the international student experience.
- Focus groups were conducted with returning UK study abroad students and with international students studying at the institution. UK student focus groups explored how student's experiences abroad had influenced their opinions and beliefs about international students on the UK campus. International student focus groups probed about campus life in the UK, their experiences of activities promoting integration and their relationships with UK and international students.

Five members of staff were interviewed (see interview guidelines in Appendix 1); the focus groups were attended by four home students, who between them had

studied/worked in Spain, France and Canada, and seven international students who were from: Russia, China, India, Albania, and Malaysia (see focus group schedules in Appendix 2 & 3 respectively).

When conducting this research, methods had to be adapted and diversified due to emerging challenges, for example one significant setback of the project was recruiting students to participate in focus groups. E-mails were sent to student lists requesting volunteers, however the first attempt only attracted two students to both the UK and international student focus groups and therefore second focus groups were conducted in order to cover a range of student experiences.

Owing to this University not having a centralised approach to organising and promoting outward mobility, it was important to interview a larger number of staff members than in other case Universities. Unfortunately due to the short time frame of this project and the limited resources available, we were not able to conduct full interviews with all the relevant members of staff. We did however manage to interview five members of staff at this university and also meet with a number of other staff members who helped to provide insightful information towards this project.

The following sections present the findings of this study and are annotated with direct quotations from interviewees.

### **C. Promoting outward and inward mobility at university level**

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

The university historically focussed primarily on inward mobility of students. However more recently the international strategy has been developed to focus also on developing partnerships with overseas institutions, raising international horizons of students, student support and many other areas. The international portfolio within the university is involved in developing each of these aspects and collaborating with other portfolios such as student support, as well as working with the faculties and departments. To advance partnerships with overseas institutions, a new partnership support unit will be developed to *'provide a structure for managing relationships with partners in our priority markets.'* This should help in *'developing the international dimension of the University to benefit all our students.'*

The institution has an International Student Support Team working closely with the International Office based in the Department of Student and Learning Services. Interviews were conducted with members of staff from this team, the International Office and at senior management level.

At present the approach to promoting outward mobility seems to be faculty based, as such this can vary between faculties:

*'I think it is an approach that is quite dependent upon what the four main academic parts of the university are seeking to do with their particular programmes and studies.'* (Senior manager)

*'There is an international strategy but it's now looking to be revamped in light of the new corporate plan and the new corporate plan has a significant focus on international student recruitment but I haven't seen a particular strategy document looking at inward and outward mobility.'* (Senior staff member, International Office)

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

Across the interviews it is clear that such support is very much faculty dependent, and even *'course specific'*, it is therefore difficult to generalise about support services across the university. An example is the first ever cohort of students going on an exchange to China this year;

*'It's very faculty specific. [The faculty] will be providing them with pre-departure briefings and advice and there will be a tutor responsible for them here in the UK and [there] there is a woman who works in the International Office who is going to take responsibility for the students when they are out there. It's not University wide support. It is actually coming from [the faculty] because it's their students on the course that are actually going across to Beijing. We have our Beijing office over there and the plan is to involve the Beijing office in a supporting role as far as we can and there will be liaison with the international office but it's a faculty specific project.'* (Senior staff member, International Office)

### **Promotional activities**

Because outward mobility is arranged within different faculties and is mainly dependent on different courses being studied, there can only be a limited amount of university wide promotion of outward mobility opportunities: *'Only in the regularly used things like open days and events which may have an element of course promotion.'* (Senior staff member, International Office)

There are, however, some organised events which are based around raising international awareness:

*'All sorts of events are going on throughout the year. We used to have an international week, up until last year, I think, but it was felt that it would be more useful and better attended if we had a series of events throughout the year. We always have something for the Chinese New Year, for example.'* (Senior staff member, International Office)

These events are put on in order to promote knowledge and understanding and broaden horizons of students to different nationalities and cultures, but could also potentially increase the desire for outward mobility amongst home students.

Presently there appears to be a lack of events or activities that utilise international students for promoting outward mobility. However, this is something that is being considered within the university;

*'We've seen many examples, haven't we? Where once you put a student with an experience behind them on a platform to talk to others it's the most powerful recommendation you could possibly make. So I would be surprised if it isn't done in some fashion or other but I don't think we do it systematically. And there is a strong case for doing that.'* (Senior manager)

### **Integration of international students on UK campus**

There are a number of initiatives the university uses to help facilitate integration of international students to the UK campus. These include:

1. Tandem Learning Project - This is a peer assisted project fully run by language students who are in their final year and who have studied abroad as part of their degree course. This project has been running for 12 years. Around 5 home students are employed to run this informal project which involves organising social trips and activities with international students. Tandem is open for any international students at the university to join. The project enables social interaction between international and home students but also allows students to improve their language skills by learning from each other. It is therefore mutually beneficial to both international and home students.

Tandem has a Facebook group with around 100 international student members. There appear to be a core group of around 30 students who are present at the majority of activities. This project appears highly successful in promoting interaction between students as well as facilitating integration of international students on the UK campus.

In spring 2009 English Chinese Tandem started its meetings and events. This was specifically to prepare UK students for their exchange visits to China. The objectives are for Chinese and English students to improve language, understand cultural differences, survive and enjoy daily life, make friends, learn about study methods and learn about working in China. Social activities proposed include exploring the university campus and Sheffield city centre, cooking together, going walking or swimming, going to the cinema or theatre, shopping, ice-skating, etc. Activities such as these enable English and Chinese students to meet and do things together, therefore preparing English students for going to China as well as enhancing international students' experience of studying and living in the UK.

2. International Learning: International and home students work together as part of students' assessed work in a particular module. An example of this is looking at 'cross cultural comparisons':

*'We provide international students to tell a group of trainee teachers about how education works in their country and what their experience of schooling was like. And they then do a presentation about it. But at the same time, we've encouraged the international students to ask questions about the education system here, so we forced it to be a two way engagement rather than one way which was how it was conceptualised in the first place.'* (International student support team member)

3. English Conversation Club - Organised by the international student support team the club is a group that meets monthly. There are over 50 international students who regularly attend this club. This is an informal place for international and home students to meet and chat and is advertised as 'a fantastic way to improve your communication skills, diversify your circle of friends and perhaps learn another language.'

*'They meet to chat, sometimes they have a theme. They have drinks and crisps and stuff. They sometimes go out. Last year I did a history tour of Sheffield with them, we went out in the rain and I showed them places of interest.'* (International student support team member)

4. Hallam volunteering is a well established student led volunteering organisation within the Students' Union, set up to '*deliver a broad range of voluntary projects that address a clear community need in a supportive environment*'.

This is seen as:

*'A good way in which students get very integrated because then they can meet people, children, old people, people that they are volunteering for, and that's really quite a good way of finding out about life in this society.'* (International student support team member)

5. Orientation programmes are run for international students to help them to '*settle in*'. This is mainly informative and helps with practical issues. Home students also get involved in this to give information about where to live and shop etc.:

*'We use students very much as part of the orientation process so we employ students, a mixture of international and UK students to work in what we call our student crew... who meet and greet the students on arrival, take them to their accommodation and spend time with a small group of students during that two or three days that the orientation takes place and they go on the trips that we organise within that process. We show a few films; they go on some trips; they have a party, the student crew go along. And so by the time they've had that three days of contact they should be confident to ask some things.'* (International student support team member)

6. Global café: sessions are run as part of the orientation programme, '*where students are supposed to meet and talk [with UK staff and students], and bring their*

*problems and so on and I'd like to extend that.'* (International student support team member)

7. Pre- arrival, on- line mentoring service: Students who have been abroad or international students currently studying here, offer to give advice and guidance to international students preparing to come to the university. *'We are hoping to develop that so that students have actual mentors, if you like, on arrival and they can keep them as long as they need them.'* (International student support team member)

8. Local Friends Scheme: A project run by the International Student Support Team, mainly aimed at university staff, who are encouraged to invite an international student to spend a day with them. This offers international students a chance to have a taste of English culture and home life and meet an English family. This is *'just fantastic for students because they have a really unforgettable experience.'* (International student support team member)

9. Facebook group set up for international students with 450 international students as members. This group posts information on social activities, events, volunteering opportunities and promotions at the university and in Sheffield.

10. The Students' Union *'encourage students to involve themselves in societies and clubs, international students can start their own clubs'*. The union has also made an effort to create activities that are not alcohol based in order to be more inclusive to other cultures: *'they are trying to develop their awareness'*. Trips have been organised, for example, a day out in the Peak District, where around 50 international students were taken out on this organised event.

## **D. Promoting outward and inward 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. Students who had attended these programmes were also interviewed and their views are presented and discussed in Section E 'Outward mobility - Home student experience'.

### **Programme one**

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

Programme one provides a non-mandatory semester abroad opportunity for students to go to USA, Canada, Australia or a number of European countries. The programme is in English and is credit bearing as the modules studied abroad will be transferable to their course back home:

*'Whatever modules they study, we have to "map" them before they go, to ensure they are of both an equivalent level and topic. Sometimes there are differences*

*within the topic title or the content, so that's really where the mapping comes in, to make sure the students don't come back with credits that they can't transfer, so they have a gap in their programme.'* (Programme leader)

Historically the programme came from an opportunity for time abroad as an experience to help 'internationalise' students and make them think about going abroad, it then became formally recognised as part of the course as an option:

*'That means they get a bit of a hybrid experience, they're studying in English, similar modules to the ones they would be studying at home but what they're doing is actually being able to take up the cultural experience as well. So it's not just about the study, it's about the cultural experience that's going on, whether that's in England, in America and places, or whether there is another language going on like Danish or French, Italian etc.'* (Programme leader)

The programme started as an option for business students and was made possible as the examining bodies were happy to accept the credits received from the partner institutions abroad regardless of the differences in study in other countries. This was due to the view that the student's experiences abroad would be highly useful and valuable. The programme has now expanded through other courses in the faculty, and is offered to the majority. For certain courses however it has not been possible to do this:

*'That goes back to accreditation, back to validation. When we design the courses if we have professional body involvement we obviously devise the courses in line with their requirements as well. Because most of the time that does two jobs, it gives the students academic credits with us and accreditation for future development with the professional bodies.... But there's a bit of flexibility, depending on where your professional body requirement sits.'* (Programme leader)

The programme is different from an Erasmus exchange in that it offers non European countries and is a non mandatory option for students who would like to add an '*international dimension*' to their course without necessarily including a different language element. This programme option has proved very popular to many students who want to travel and study abroad but who may not have second language ability or indeed may not want to study a second language:

*'That suddenly went bananas with numbers of students.... There are numbers of students out there who don't want to do the language. A finance student, for example, it perhaps has never occurred to them to do a language, but if you start dangling America or Australia in front of them, all of a sudden the study takes on a totally different dimension.'* (Programme leader)

The numbers of students taking part was around 40 to 50 as due to staffing issues the numbers have been kept quite small. However the scheme is in the process of 'growing' to become broader as there is a lot of interest from students:

*'We know students come to open days asking about it, to ensure their interest is registered because they know there is a limited number of spaces, which keeps demand high.'* (Programme leader)

*'That puts an onus on us to keep the relationships going, to forge new relationships, to expand where we have Erasmus relationships into this area as well. So it's a non-Erasmus element, but within that same university. So again, for our students going over there, and theirs coming here, the infrastructure for support is already in place and to add one or two to it is not a problem for either university.'* (Programme leader)

As well as the University hoping to expand the projects, partner institutions particularly in America are keen to see the programme develop as *'they see the value of us helping them to internationalise their students.'* (Programme leader)

There is no formal funding for this programme at present.

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

There seems to be a wealth of support in terms of process and engagement and promotion of the programme: *'We have that in place. We have a team of professional services and a nominated academic.'* (Programme leader)

There is also support for the students before they go: *'we obviously get the students to come to a formal presentation and engage them in preparation in terms of mapping, what to expect, the cultural difference there will be etc, and things like that before they actually go.'* (Programme leader)

### **Linking outward and inward mobility on the UK campus**

Students coming back from time abroad are seen to have an attitude more conducive to welcoming international students to the UK campus:

*'They come back a different person.... there is more of an awareness among final year students both that they have travelled, but also appreciating that other people are travelling.'* (Programme leader)

These students can then be 'utilised' within the university to help with integration of international students:

*'If we're using student ambassadors, and those student volunteers, part of the reason they can do that is because they've done it themselves. So they appreciate the nature of any problems that might come up, or the feelings that these international students might be going through when they come.'* (Programme leader)

However the international experience of home students is not being utilised to a full extent, one of the reasons for this is that some students are not aware that their time abroad has equipped them with skills to be able to do these types of activities:

*'They don't actually see it as something they can offer. They don't see it as value added, when that's exactly what it is.'* (Programme leader)

There is clearly still room for improvement within this. As well as students not realising their potential, there is also the feeling amongst some students that they need to get something back for their efforts:

*'Unless we have a way to accredit that, to give them something in return for that, rather than just saying "add it to your CV", they won't engage, they need an incentive.'* (Programme leader)

One of the ways the university could help with this is to possibly accredit some of the activities such as 'budding' to encourage this:

*'We could actually tie it in to their professional development. We're all focussing on employability and one of those skills is very much, how do you pass on expertise, how do you mentor, because at some point you're going have to mentor somebody.'* (Programme leader)

This type of thinking seems to be an emerging process that is still in a conceptual stage for certain aspects but is being thought about and developed:

*'I think it's going to become more part of the formal agenda. And part and parcel of that is this debate over if we've got international students that we're pulling in from the globe, we've got students that we send out internationally then we've got another tranche of students that don't go anywhere, how do we bring those three groups together so they can all learn from one another and that's part of our thinking.'* (Programme leader)

## **Programme two**

### **Overview of mobility programme**

Programme two is set in a context of a faculty which has a strong internationalisation agenda. The faculty's Internationalisation Project, launched in 2008, has the vision of becoming:

*'A faculty with global perspectives within which an international, multicultural ethos is pervasive throughout our curriculum, scholarship, research and engagement with communities at home and in other countries.'* (Internationalisation Strategy)

This programme has a long history of more than ten years with student exchanges to several English and non-English speaking countries. It was initiated by academics

with a link to a French institution. The programme was set up as a joint degree course and students participating in this programme spend Year 2 and Year 4 in the partner university in France and Year 1 and Year 3 at their home university. The process is vice versa for incoming students from the partner institution in France. On completion of the programme students are awarded dual awards by both institutions.

The course has now extended its exchange links with more institutions in Europe including in Austria, Italy and Spain and in English speaking countries such as Canada and Australia. Students spend one year abroad as part of the course requirement. Although there are a small number of students going to each country, this programme helps establish long standing links with HE institutions abroad.

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

For students coming to the university, there is university wide support, for example representatives from the Institutional student support group will come to meet students at the airport. In addition to this the course/module leader also meets with the in-coming students personally.

*'What I have always done, some faculties don't do this, is to meet with the individual students, as I've said I met with one yesterday to discuss her modules'. (Programme leader)*

There is therefore a mix of central and faculty support for these students:

*'I always make it clear to them if they want advice on those sorts of things they can get stuff from the International Office but also they can get stuff from me and from other colleagues'. (Programme leader)*

For outgoing students on Programme two, there are three academics and one administrator who are involved in programme support services and activities. The administrator sent outward mobility information to students by email and also put all information on blackboard *'so all students would get the information'*. Students send the administrator a 500 word statement to apply for the exchange places in partner institutions. Decisions on applications are made using strict selection criteria, ideally looking for students *'good enough to be a SHU ambassador'*.

For students going to non-English speaking countries, they have free tuition in language, for example, the students going to France are paid by the programme to learn French before they go.

When students are abroad, academics go there once or twice a year - usually one visit per term to ensure students have support from both institutions: *'Just a lot of hard work for a small number of students.'* (Programme administrator)

Academics reported that students who came back from outward mobility programmes have *'become more confident and more positive'*. When talking to

students who have been abroad, academics said, *'they all have amazing experiences.'*

### **Linking outward and inward mobility on the UK campus**

This particular programme does not lend itself to many opportunities for linking outward and inward mobility. However the programme leader and other academics involved in the Faculty Internationalisation Project feel there are possibilities to produce linkages. The university could help to facilitate this on an academic basis:

*'For example if you have students coming from university A in country B over to here, and you were also sending university students from here to that university. Then having some sort of means of formalising contact between them, both whilst they are apart and then coming back would seem to me a very good thing to do.'* (Programme leader)

On a more social, informal level, however the best way to integrate home and international students seems to be through using student societies:

*'That's presumably best done in the context of an international students' society or something like that, to which both students coming into SHU and but also SHU students who have an international experience might be brought together.'* (Programme leader)

In fact, some students studying Programme two who came back from studying abroad have already been actively involved in international society by initiating and organising events and activities to integrate international students with home students, as discussed earlier.

## **E. Outward mobility - Home student experience**

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

The focus groups were attended by four undergraduate home students who had gained study/work experience in Spain, France, and Canada. One Student had studied in Spain for 6 months and then gone on to do a year's work placement. Another Student had also been on a placement for 18 months, with the first year in France split into 6 months study and 6 months work placement, she had then gone onto a further 6 months work placement in Spain. Both students were studying international business. Students studying in Canada had gone as part of their law degree. It should be kept in mind in this section that this was a very small number of participants and therefore any conclusions drawn are based on this small sample and would not necessarily reflect the views of the wider outward mobility student population.

For the two students who studied in Europe, one of the key influences for taking up an outward mobility opportunity and indeed for choosing their course and the university was their experience with, and desire to travel. Both students have had experience living in another country, with one student having travelled extensively, living in many different countries in Europe including Italy for nine years.

Students having visited Canada identified the prospect of travelling as their main motivation for going abroad as neither had previously had much experience of this. One also commented she wanted to '*meet lots of people in the same situation*' and have the '*university experience abroad*'.

Both students having visited Europe listed learning the language and culture of a new country as their main reasons for wanting to live abroad. As they went to non-English speaking countries they were prepared for language barriers and envisaged difficulties: '*I kind of knew we were going to struggle*', however felt it was a case of '*putting yourself right in it, trying not to speak English. You just learn the language. You are living in their country*'.

One student found that more language skills were learnt from the work placement than at university, '*I learn more in working than studying; you get caught up speaking English when you are studying.*'

As students who visited Canada went to an English speaking country, language was not an issue for them. They also mixed mainly with other international student but found English to be the common language amongst them.

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

Students found the pre-departure activities varied greatly between departments, ranging from well organised informative sessions:

*'Tutorial sessions once a week for Spanish, it was obligatory. We went through loads of different things, work, cultural differences and how to dress.'*

To having been given little information:

*'I had the interview and was given a letter to say I could go and then that was it.'*

All students seemed to feel that some pre-departure preparation was important and those who had not received this felt that it would have helped them.

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

Students who went to Canada found their university abroad to be extremely welcoming, this came from a combination of '*extensively trained student facilitators*', a vast number of organised events, and the '*community*' feel of the university.

The student facilitators were on hand to help international students upon arrival and were said to be able to *'answer all your questions and taught how to bring everyone together and create a spirit'*. This helped as they were the first point of contact and the students found there was always someone on hand: *'so many people to point you in the right direction'*.

Within the first few weeks of arriving there was a fresher's week - *'a whole week of activities organised... teambuilding exercises so you all come together, you meet people quickly and competing against others and its huge!'* These activities were found to be incredibly helpful to students in making new friends quickly: *'we had icebreaking activities.... this was good, got you speaking to a lot of people who you wouldn't really speak to before.'* The university clearly put effort into creating events and activities to bring students together:

*'The first few weeks was intensive, bonding, team building, let's make friends, their biggest concern first couple of weeks is to make friends, so every night there was some kind of international activity, you made friends with these people so quickly and so organise your own events outside, especially living together, you invite your roommate, your housemate, the person down the hall, if you bump into someone on the campus who was foreign you would go up and talk to them, you didn't have to know their names, if they were foreign they were friends.'*

It appears that the first few weeks of arrival is the critical time for bonds to be made between students. This approach seems to work very well for international students as a way to meet people early on and keep these friendships going, as well as enabling large numbers of students to get together in ways where they might otherwise not have the chance:

*'So intensive at the beginning, forced together, forced to make friends and stay friends throughout.... sometimes you need to be pushed together if you are nervous... so after the first couple of weeks you have lost [your nerves] then'*.

The structure and organisation of these events also proved to be an important factor in attracting large numbers of international students and making the activities a success:

*'All the international students would turn up and there would be an organised activity with the Canadian student knowing what was going on... Pub events, basketball, picnics, large range of things, properly structured activities'*.

Campus life at the university abroad was described as having a *'sense of community'* by the students with them stating that *'you were proud to be part of that university'*

They especially enjoyed the fact that the university was all based 'on campus' and therefore they were living and studying with their peers, this also helped to facilitate bonds being made:

*'I was living with them and there was a cafeteria where you would all go to eat at night, there was a table of us with about 25 of us all having dinner together.'*

*'You all go. You all knew what time the international students would be going for dinner and you would all turn up at the same time.'*

One student who had visited Europe had a contrasting experience at her university; she found the environment much less conducive to learning and making friendships:

*'Work placement was much better than the university experience. Spanish students didn't interact at all with us, we weren't learning anything... The teachers in Spain were nowhere near as helpful as (home university) teachers are towards international students.'*

She had also found it very difficult to integrate with students at the university as there were little or no events put on: *'No help, nothing.... we were made to feel like aliens during lectures.'*

However a different experience was had by another student also visiting Europe who felt she *'interacted really well'* with both home and other international students:

*'Lot's of foreign students went out together.... there were about 60 of us that went together, people from all over the world.... I interacted really well with everyone on the course, and I am still friends with quite a lot of French people now.'*

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

Students felt that having their time abroad had assisted them in terms of:

Future careers - *'Definitely, since looking for graduate employers, they are very impressed with the mention of the year abroad.'*

Being independent - *'It shows you can live abroad and not reliant on 'Mummy and Daddy' and are independent.'*

Language ability - *'Also being able to speak different languages, fewer and fewer English people can speak a second language.'*

Gaining work experience - *'Both (work placements) were amazing, learnt a lot of the languages in both France and Spain, I hope to get a job back there.'*

Their experience abroad also seemed to have impacted on their perceptions of international students:

*'Going abroad has made me even more aware now, that's why I am doing tandem and everything.'*

*'Otherwise I would have just lived with English people this year, but I decided I would try different cultures, and I am really happy.'*

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

As studies have revealed elsewhere, outgoing students consistently highlight the need for more support from their home university. Students attending our focus groups also mentioned this need of support:

*'I was quite shocked, we were quite young and there by ourselves, I had problems with my work placements and I needed support and there was nothing.'*

The students visiting European countries felt that it would be helpful if the university provided assistance in finding accommodation. However one student stated:

*'The resources that this University has, there is only so much they can do, got to stand on own two feet.'*

It is harder to promote outward mobility opportunities to some students due to uncertainties around costs, lack of language ability and living far away from home for a sustained period of time. Also there are problems with specific courses for which module validation is not possible at present. This makes it very difficult to be able to promote outward mobility to students on such courses.

### **Linking outward and inward mobility on the UK campus**

Students' experience abroad has clearly impacted on them in terms of their attitudes towards international students on their home campus. The student's positive experiences influenced them, creating a desire in them to help give international students a similar experience on the UK campus:

*'There was such integration there between us and such good activities run for the international students. I thought when I come back I want to help with it the other way.'*

Returning students, however, found it difficult to get the same involvement they had from their host university:

*'Here you go to events they have and there is just not the sense of community between students that we found, I think having spent so much time with international students on exchange, you get used to that and like that, meeting lots of people so we wanted to do that again, but it's a constant battle when you go to these events, it's a bit too artificial I think.'*

Students felt there were a number of reasons for these issues. Firstly many events are run by staff, and students felt that staff were less able to *'relate to the student experience.'* They also felt that *'there is not enough going on'* especially early on when international students first arrive.

*'There wasn't enough get together, you want them to have a really good social experience to be able to go back to their university and say you want to go here and do that, and I think that's one of the things that really lacks in the orientation, they might have been one big night - it's not necessarily bonding, it's just lets get drunk and go home that's not team building'.*

Students commented that one of the activities being run was possibly:

*'Too artificial, like you are being prompted, like you are being forced to do the exercise. It's the same every time. It's a shame because people won't come back, they will be put off, we see numbers decrease'.*

The main concern felt by students however was that support for students was *'a bit disjointed'*:

*'The international support thing is great. I think now there is an international student club of some sort, run by English students, I don't think there is a strong enough link between the two... there is also a student society, but it's separate... you need more of a connection between the two... If the international society were more organised and structured that would help a lot.'*

It emerged that one of the main difficulties at this university for facilitating integration appeared to be the lack of collaborative working between organisations; this includes societies set up for students, and departments within the university:

*'When they come here they are on their own, they are going to want to make friends and get involved, it's a case of the admin and all the societies across (the university) need to be organised, structured so that they are working really well for the domestic students and then the international students will just fall in.'*

This is echoed by international student support team:

*'Although we run events and activities ourselves and with the students union to try and encourage that kind of engagement and we are linked into some staff who are doing it through the curriculum on their courses, other parts of the university are just either disengaged or pulling in a different direction'.*

This disjointedness lessens the sense of unity and identity that students told us about experiencing abroad:

*'Universities in England could learn a lot from north American universities and their spirit and community. You were proud to be part of that university and wear the hoodie etc. can talk to anyone wearing the hoodie, whereas here you have no connection with someone who goes to your university, like an identity thing. I wouldn't necessarily define myself as a Hallam student.'*

However there seem to be improvements happening currently:

*'There appears to be a growing connection between the international society and the support team....It's a good idea, someone needs to define the boundaries...'*

Both students who went to European countries are involved in the Tandem Learning Project, which encourages interaction between British and international students including Erasmus exchange students. It is organised by final year students who have been abroad, and is mainly informal events based on getting people together. It also has a Facebook page with 200 members. It is run by 5 final year students (including these two students), and focuses on the social side of integration. Types of events arranged include trips to Lincoln market, football matches and pub crawls etc.

The students are very positive about this project, emphasising the informality and benefits to students:

*'I just turn up to the tandem events, you are not put in a classroom environment, it's great, it's fantastic, it's informal. The Spanish people think it's great they say they wouldn't meet English people otherwise as they don't speak to us.'*

The two students who went to Canada have also actively organised events in the English Conversation Club which usually attracts about 30 international students. Activities to date have included taking international students on day trips to the Peak District, an evening event to celebrate St. Patrick's Day; playing an interactive word game to introduce international students to some commonly used British phrases, and creating other opportunities for home and international students to meet.

The students had also been involved in the meet and greet in the orientation week for international students:

*'I think the international students appreciate this. Having people who speak the language helps them.'*

The students that participated in focus group discussions all felt these types of activities not only provided a '*brilliant opportunity to meet interesting people*' but found these had lead to more informal meetings with international students that could be mutually beneficial too.

## **F. Inward mobility - International student experience**

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

The inward mobility focus groups were attended by 7 students from Russia, China, India, Albania, and Malaysia. 5 participants were studying master's degrees and 2 were undergraduate students. All students were studying different programmes.

The main reasons for studying in England were the desire to travel and the standard of education, '*English education is considered to be the best in the world*'. This particular university was chosen as it is located in a large city but '*not too expensive*'.

Students seemed to have been sent an adequate amount of information from this university before they arrived here and felt this information was useful. However they suggested a few additions that may be more helpful. These were specific to their particular countries, for example where to buy Chinese food from etc. One student however stated she '*got nothing*' and felt it would have been helpful to have some information.

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

The experience of the UK campus seemed to be viewed positively and students saw their time as a great opportunity to immerse themselves in British and other cultures:

*'I am in a group with British girls, very friendly, if I don't understand something they will always explain to me.'*

*'I am very happy about the social life here. I have met lots of international students from all over the world, especially those who came here for Erasmus exchange from Spain, Italy, France and all of Europe so now I have lots and lots of friends so we spend a lot of time together. For me the most interesting part is the integration in different culture.'*

Students commented on how lectures were very different from their home countries, with less time in class but much more independent study. They also mentioned the lectures being less formal and being able to have a closer relationship with lecturers.

Socially, some students mentioned having developed friendships with a variety of other students; these were mainly international students. However some had been able to make friendships with British students also:

*'The first friend I made on my course was a British girl, it was good. I could ask her lots of questions. Easy to talk to British people, they are quite nice, but depends on their personality.'*

One international student commented specifically on the social benefits of being on an outward mobility exchange:

*'Tomorrow I am going to the pub, its time to time, last week I went to the [City] ghost tour. You meet British students and others. They are people who are open to this context because they are themselves going to Erasmus or have been there so they understand this. They are more open to this.'*

There were some clear culture shocks highlighted by some of the students:

*'I think their hobby is to get drunk, and going clubbing. I enjoy it but I can't do it everyday. For two weeks it's good because the noise is too loud and normally not go back until 3am in the morning and it makes my schedule too messy so I can't do it too often.'*

One student however had found it very difficult to make friends with anyone outside of her own nationality:

*'It's just so-so we are a foreigner here, we have no family and no friends, we are lonely. English people most of them they have family and their own friends, they do not need to treat you as a friend. They don't have to make more friends so sometimes they just say hi and goodbye and nothing more.'*

She had particularly tried to veer away from forming friendships with too many students from her home country in order to make friends with more British and international students but feels this is too difficult and as a result has felt *'very lonely'* here.

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

Students commented that academically they felt they had got a lot out of studying here:

*'I really enjoy the group work, its good experience. How to manage people, how to cooperate, how to achieve agreement amongst different group members and doing presentation makes us more confident about speaking and to say what we think. It's really good study.'*

One student commented that this university was *'very good in all areas of support, very good at career support.'*

Students also enjoyed the opportunity to be in a more ethnically diverse environment than perhaps they had experienced in their own country: *'It's multicultural, in my class there are people from lots of different countries.'*

### **Improving the inward mobility experience**

When prompted by names of international activities and events happening some international students said they felt that these needed to be *'more publicised'* as some students were not aware of them or did not receive enough information about them.

The general consensus was that joining activities or getting a job may be a good way to meet people and integrate with British students, and that the university could do more to facilitate this. For international students coming to this university the major area of improvement seems to be opportunities for integration:

*'I think school does a lot for us to know each other, international student community and that, but I don't think it's enough. I'm really feeling loneliness, for Christmas I did not go home. I thought I should experience it here but it was a totally huge mistake for me. I was left alone, no one talked to me, [there was] nothing to do. I felt very upset. It affected my mood.'*

A staff member interviewed agreed with this view on the lack of integration opportunities:

*'The lack of opportunity for what they describe as multicultural experience and opportunities to meet host friends and the sense of being part of a cultural experience that was perhaps more lateral and embedded. That was what they wanted, that was what they were hoping for and they weren't getting it. It's an issue that I've been talking about for over ten years. It's a real problem as to how to create and sustain that kind of engagement; it takes people outside of their normal comfort zones I think. And it's quite clear from the research that unless you create interventions within the university then that kind of cross-cultural connection doesn't happen naturally.'*

Both staff and students highlighted the living arrangements for international students at this university to be one of the key barriers to successful integration. Student focus groups with both UK and international students gave insights into the problem of international students from the same country being put together in large numbers in their living arrangements, and how this would hinder their integration. For example,

*'A lot of Chinese students live together, they are put together'... 'They don't necessarily want that...its not very good for integration, (the university) is sort of shooting themselves in the foot, they then only spend time with other Chinese students.'*

Another factor that may compound this is the similar picture of high numbers of international students from the same country being on the same course. One international student reported:

*'Because in our class the Europeans all sit together, Indian together, Chinese together, sometimes I do sit next to the European students, I try to talk to them but they prefer to speak to the European students so I give up. In the group work our teacher says choose your group so normally they chose their own people. '*

A further issue that affects integration but is probably a more widespread problem are the cultural differences amongst students, both socially and within an academic context, as a member of staff noted:

*'I've also had cases of students who've been deliberately excluded from groups. Either UK students excluding them because they feel that the international students are going to reduce their marks, that their language isn't good enough. Or groups of*

*Indian students who exclude say a Malaysian student who is in their group, by speaking their native language and they can't be understood.'*

One home student had the following impression of Chinese students:

*'They don't do what we do, they don't drink, they don't eat what we eat, they don't like noise in pubs, they don't like anything, they like to stay quite, they are completely different, the Chinese are very work focussed. They are the opposite.'*

### **Linking outward and inward mobility on the UK campus**

A small number of students had commented particularly on how British students' experience abroad made them more open to communicate with international students. One student commented specifically about this with in the context of the Tandem programme:

*'We meet British students and others. They are people who are open to this context because they are themselves going to Erasmus or have been there so they understand this. They are more open to this'.*

*'Yeah and they are eager to learn other languages which is good.'*

On the other hand, international students expressed interest in taking part in more integration opportunities but felt that the lack of funding had prevented them from joining some events:

*'Last year I know the university organised a trip to Scotland but this year I didn't hear anything. In Chinese universities every year we hold a sports meeting, all kinds of sports a competition but here I didn't find any...maybe money is a big issue... In China we can easily find a company to donate money with advertising it is quite simple, even basketball they can fund. But here... we always find it difficult to get money to fund our events.'*

## **G. Conclusion**

### **Strengths of case study context**

The University is pursuing a number of initiatives as outlined in Section C to help to facilitate linkages with inward and outward mobility, as well as integration of international students on the UK campus. Some particularly successful projects (outlined in Section C) have elicited positive comments from both students and staff who are involved in outward and inward mobility programmes. The student-centred and student-run integration activities and event were highlighted to be an area of good practice in linking these two areas. These have attracted international students from different countries but are initiated and organised by home students who have studied or worked abroad, with support from the university's International Support Team.

The university's promotion of international mobility, and particularly outward mobility, is mainly based on a faculty/programme approach, which is described in Section D. There have been long standing partnerships and links with universities abroad and a wealth of support services and mechanisms for students going to specific countries or on certain outward mobility programmes either on a compulsory or optional basis, as shown in Programmes 1 and 2.

Home students' outward mobility experiences proved positive and the impact on them on their return to the home campus is evident from their comments in focus groups. This is particularly visible on changing their attitudes towards international peers and volunteering to support international students and therefore improving UK campus integration.

International student voice suggests that they generally value their campus experience in the UK. Those who have been involved in social events organised by home students or who had a learning experience with home students in the same academic context, especially appreciated the openness and friendliness of those home students who have also had an international experience. Another interesting finding from the international student experience is their embracement of a multi-cultural and international environment on the UK campus particularly when their course draws international students from different countries and cultures.

### **Feasibility of linking outward and inward mobility on the UK campus**

In order for societies to be able to become strong and work collaboratively they need adequate funding and responsibility as well as having the means to publicise themselves. Home students feel that a high number of events organised at key times would be beneficial to international student integration:

*'They need to have lots of regular events not occasional here and there and a hardcore set of students willing to put the time in...In Canada I was involved in 3 or 4 societies as well as international society - they have big society fairs!'* (Home student voice)

Some suggestions put forward by students to facilitate integration are outlined below:

*'Putting international students together but (not all from same country) even if you put mainly international students together'* (Home student voice)

*'The common language would be English if they don't all speak the same language that would really help.'* (Home student voice)

Members of staff also feel the university can do more to create a more international environment within classes:

*'I think there's a lot that can be done by tutors themselves, not just marching in and starting to lecture, but actually encouraging the group to create a set of dynamics....'*

*mean, it's really vital that you create a mixed environment and you set, you establish, and get ownership for, a set of ground rules which are this is an inclusive activity and you explain why you're doing it.'* (International student support team member)

This opinion was echoed by international students who participated in the focus group:

*'During our class our teacher could separate us, different students with different nationalities.'* (International student voice)

In terms of integration activities and events that involve international students, it seems there have been some challenges in the university with getting home students involved with these, as one member of staff reported:

*'You look at say our meet and greet desk or our orientation programme, the vast majority of our volunteers are international students and we are always trying to get more home students.'* (Senior staff member, International Office)

However this has not always been successful and it seems that it is important to match students carefully from different countries, according to the international student support team:

*'When we set up the mentoring scheme way back that was one of the places we went to recruit students to take part in the mentoring process. And there was a lot of interest. It didn't always work out, you know, cause sometimes someone who has been living in Spain for a year who then gets a Chinese student to mentor isn't exactly, kind of, connected into that and sometimes it can backfire a bit.'* (International student support team member)

As mentioned earlier, one of the potential reasons for lack of student involvement is the lack of incentive for students who may not see the benefits of getting involved; especially as students particularly in their final year may have a particularly large workload:

*'Tandem learning project can put time pressures on those supporting it. Although they do get paid it doesn't cover the amount of hours invested in it. Time constraints can mean attendance isn't always feasible. Despite this they do try and put on an event each week.'* (Home student voice)

However the university is considering proposals to offer students something back for the time, as a senior manager reflected:

*'What I do know is that the university is going to shift into a different gear when it comes to reimbursing students for their time. In principle, you're asking students to do things for fellow students, and you're turning a blind eye really to what their reality is...I don't have any objections to paying students to become mentors, ambassadors*

*for their fellow students. I think, in other words, to professionalise that area to make it an activity. '*

The university's international student support team are also working proactively and creatively to bring different groups of students together as can be seen in this last example:

*'And the other thing I want to do, I'm very keen to develop, is to create opportunities for students to discuss serious world events, current affairs in a cross-cultural forum. It seems to me one of the most amazing and interesting things that a university like this can offer for students to actually hear how people think from other countries.'*

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1 - Interview guidelines**

#### **Part 1 Promoting outward and inward mobility at university level**

Q1: Could you describe your institutional strategic plan of promoting both outward and inward mobility?

Q2: Could you please talk about your institutional support services to student study/work abroad programmes in terms of both pre-departure and in-country activities particularly in PMI2 priority countries?

Q3: What are your favourite models of outward mobility programmes?

Prompt: credit bearing, short term (2 weeks - 3 months), exchanges, study abroad, work placement, etc.

Q4: What groups of students are most interested in outward mobility programmes?

Prompt: age, gender, family background, subject areas

Q5: What activities do you think most attractive and effective in promoting outward mobility schemes?

Prompt: academic, social, cultural, experimental and innovative

Q6: Any of the activity/practice promoting outward mobility and/or enhancing home student international experience has involved international students?

Prompt: e.g. buddy system, pre-departure culture/country briefing, international event, society, club, English club

Q7: To what extent do you think such activities would help to improve international student experience on the UK campus?

Prompt: integration with home students, international element of course/programme (curriculum, learning process), international awareness of home students, international students' engagement in Student Union's activities

#### **Part 2 Promoting outward and inward mobility at programme level**

Q1: Could you please tell us about your mobility programme first?

Prompt: programme rationale, number of students and staff involved, programme length, pre-departure activities, in-country activities, students' feedback etc.

Q2: What are available support services in your institution?

Prompt: central support, faculty/department level, financial, personnel

Q3: Are there any interesting stories in organising those activities or in-country delivery?

Prompt: students' experiences, cultural difference/shock

Q4: What are the challenges in the programme promotion?

Prompt: raising awareness of students, lack of interests or support

Q5: How did you get over the difficulties/barriers?

Prompt: mechanisms, practical ways, student and staff involvement

Q6: Do you think outward activities can also help to improve international student experience on campus? In what way?

Prompt: attitudes of home students returned from outward mobility schemes towards international students, integration of home and international students, working with international students on course

## **Appendix 2 - Outgoing mobility focus group guidelines**

### **Focus group schedule 1 (outward students)**

Part 1 (About 5 mins)

#### *Introduction*

Welcome and thanks. Self introduction.

#### *Brief description of the project*

This discussion group is to look at how to improve international experience from a student perspective. The project is funded by PMI2 which is a government 5-year initiative to promote internationalisation of HE and FE. We want to know your experience of participating in international promotion activities on campus, your motivations and expectations of participating in study/work abroad schemes, your experience abroad and whether or to what extent such experience has an impact on learning and living experience with international students on the UK campus.

#### *Confidentiality and tape recording*

We will treat everything you say as confidential all data will be anonymised before being viewed by anyone outside of the research team.. No individual will be identified in the project report. However, to ease the process of analysis and writing up we would like to tape the conversation. Do you agree?

This is supposed to be an informal session, please feel comfortable to speak freely and say what you think.

Do you have any questions about the project or about today's discussion?

#### *Student introductions*

Please could we go round the room and introduce ourselves, say your name and a bit about yourself, such as where you are from, what course you are studying and where you went on your study abroad year. (WRITE and DISTRIBUTE badges)

Part 2 (About 85 mins)

## Discussion topics

### 1. Motivations and aspirations of participating in studying/working abroad schemes (*About 20 mins*)

Have you had any experience of travelling, living, studying or working abroad before coming to university? (Prompt: To what extent would such experiences be an influential factor in making a decision to go abroad as part of your course? school, family/parents, peers influences - personal stories)

Why did you take part in a study/work abroad programme?

Show list on flip chart following the discussion:

To experience new ways of learning and teaching

To experience different cultures

To visit other countries

To gain international experience to be competitive in job market

It is a compulsory part of the course

Other

What has been the most important aspect in your consideration of studying abroad?  
(Prompt)

The course

The overseas institution

The location (country, region, city)

Language competence

Costs

Availability

Other

*For those who have been to non-English speaking countries:*

Why did you choose a non-English speaking country?

### 2. Experience of pre-departure activities and other international promotion activities (*About 30 mins*)

What pre-departure activities did you participate in?

What were the most useful? In what way?

What events and activities were organised to help you prepare for culture difference?

If you went to a non-English speaking country how did you overcome language barriers?

What international promotion activities have you been involved in?

Could you describe one activity/event that you enjoyed most?

Have you had international students involved in those activities/events to promote international awareness?

Have you made friends with any of international students who joined in your pre-departure activities or international promotion events/activities? Could you tell us about your friendship with international students?

Do you have international students on your course? How do you describe their integration with other students on the campus?

### 3. Experience abroad (*About 20 mins*)

Could you tell us about your time spent abroad? (Prompt: most enjoyable experience, interesting stories, cultural shock, getting over difficulties etc.)

How useful has this experience been? (Prompt: impact on current course and future career)

Do you think your experience abroad has had an impact on your learning and living experience with international students on the UK campus or not? (Prompt: How and to what extent, e.g. group working with fellow international students, joining the international student society/English club/international cafe, making friends, outing, cooking and eating with international students, etc.)

### 4. Improving international experience (*About 15 mins*)

What support did you have while studying/working/volunteering abroad that was helpful?

What support would you have liked that you didn't receive?

(Prompt: academic, financial, personal, institutional, in overseas institutions, etc.)

What do you think could be done to improve the international experience of both home and international students on the UK campus?

Write list on flip chart.

## **Appendix 3 - Incoming mobility focus group guidelines**

### **Focus group schedule 2 (international students)**

Part 1 (About 5 mins)

#### *Introduction*

Welcome and thanks. Self introduction.

Brief description of the project

This discussion group is to look at how to improve international experience from international students' perspectives. The project is funded by PMI2 which is a government 5-year initiative to promote internationalisation of HE and FE. We want to know your HE experience in the UK, your view on internationalisation of HE and its impact on your integration on UK campus. We are particularly interested in your experience of participating in international activities/events with home students on the campus which would help to improve your campus experience.

#### *Confidentiality and tape recording*

We will treat everything you say as confidential all data will be anonymised before being viewed by anyone outside of the research team. No individual will be identified in the project report. However, to ease the process of analysis and writing up we would like to tape the conversation. Do you agree?

This is supposed to be an informal session, please feel comfortable to speak freely and say what you think.

Do you have any questions about the project or about today's discussion?

#### *Student introductions*

Please could we go round the room and introduce ourselves, say your name and a bit about yourself, such as where you are from and what course you are studying. (WRITE and DISTRIBUTE badges)

Part 2 (About 85 mins)

#### Discussion topics

1. Motivations and expectations of studying in the UK (*About 20 mins*)

Why did you choose to study in the UK?

(Prompt: UK education brand, limited HE places in home country, to enhance employability, to experience English culture, to learn English, family influence, etc.)

What has been the most important aspect in your consideration of this course?  
(Show cards to prompt and ask students to pick up 3 cards in the order of importance)

The course itself

The ranking of the subject

The ranking of the institution

The geographic location of the institution

Entry requirements

Reasonable costs (tuition fees and living expenses)

Availability

Influence from peers

Other

2. HE experience on UK campus (*About 30 mins*)

Could you use a few words to describe your campus life?

(Prompt: interesting, boring, unexpected, shocking, exciting, colourful, disappointing etc.)

Why do you think so? (Examples/stories)

What aspect of the campus life do you enjoy most?

What is your most difficult experience?

*For students from non-English speaking countries:*

Do you feel the language barrier in your study?

How do you try to overcome it?

(Prompt: support from the institution, course, language centre, other social events/activities such as international society/English club)

### 3. Integration on UK campus (About 35 mins)

Were you involved in pre-departure activities for UK students to study in your home country?

If yes, did you enjoy it? In what way?

Who have you made friends with in [name of city]?

(Prompt: people from your course, people in your accommodation, other international students)

Have you made friends with home students on your course? If so, could you tell us about your friendship?

Do you have British or International friends?

If you have International friends are they from the same or different backgrounds as yourself?

What do you usually do together?

Have you been involved in international awareness promotion activities in the university?

Could you describe one activity/event that you enjoyed most?

Have you been involved in union/social/cultural activities organised by the university to improve international student experience?

(Prompt: joining the international student society/English club/international café, buddies, visits to English families, outing, etc.)

What types of activities do you think would be most helpful to support your integration on the UK campus?

What support do you think you need in order to improve your learning and living experience on UK campus?

Write list on flip chart.

## **Appendix 4 - Participant project information sheet (incoming students)**



SHARPENS YOUR THINKING

### UKCISA - Linking inward and outward mobility - Project Information Sheet

The Centre for Education and Inclusion Research at Sheffield Hallam University has been commissioned along with UKCISA by PMI2; (the governments 5 year initiative to promote internationalisation of HE and FE) to look at how to improve international experience from international students' perspectives. We aim to enhance the UK HE experience of international students from different country backgrounds. This project looks at the impact of campus activities to promote international experience of domestic students on international student integration in the UK from an international student perspective

You are invited to an international student focus group discussion to share your views on issues around campus integration and improving international student experience. Your views and opinions will help us to further understand international students' experiences on the UK campus and help to promote and facilitate international student mobility.

A report detailing the analysis of the findings from this study will be published in 2009. This should help to inform future policies and practice in promoting international student mobility.

UKCISA is UK the council for international student affairs, it is the national advisory body working to promote and protect international students in the UK. Its aim is to promote and facilitate international student mobility, to and from the UK, to help students (and others involved in international education) develop a global perspective and to contribute to human development, political stability, economic prosperity and greater intercultural understanding. Please see the website; <http://www.ukcosa.org.uk/> for more information.

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