

Fostering internationalisation: the benefits to home students of mentoring international students

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Abstract

There is a substantial and growing body of research on the experience of international students in higher education, much of which focuses on the disappointing levels of integration between visitors and their host community. This article reports on a study of a pilot mentoring project designed to promote interaction between home and international students. Few studies have investigated the home students' experience of internationalization. The aim of this study was to gain insights into the experience of a small group of undergraduate business students who had acted as volunteer mentors to international students. Data was collected from a survey and via qualitative interviews with the mentors. Participants in the study revealed an overwhelmingly positive attitude to the experience and reported many benefits. Although students sometimes demonstrated an over-simplistic notion of cultural difference, they also displayed an openness and willingness to interact with, and learn from, people from other cultures.

Keywords: International students; mentoring; integration

1.1 Introduction

Internationalisation is a key agenda, both in the UK and globally, for higher education institutions (HEIs). Attracting international students is a significant part of any internationalisation strategy. In the academic year 2011/12, there were 435,230 international students in the UK making up 14% of all undergraduate students and 46% of taught post-graduate students (UKCISA, 2013).

Although international students are often seen predominantly as an important source of income for HEIs, their value in terms of their potential contribution to an international curriculum is also enormous. Unfortunately, as Leask (2009) points out, this potential is rarely fully realised. Exploiting such potential requires that international students have opportunities for positive interactions with home students and people in the host community but, as many studies have shown, international

students often fail to integrate, having only superficial interactions with home students and making few 'real' friends outside their co-cultural groups (see for example Leask, 2009; Wright & Schartner, 2013). A study by Lee and Rice (2007) revealed not only that international students felt excluded by home students but also had their confidence undermined by university staff who were impatient and ignorant of the students' home country and culture. Many international students never feel part of the host community, have feelings of loneliness and isolation (Sawir et al., 2008) and in the worst cases have been victims of racist and religious abuse (Lee & Rice, 2007; Brown, 2009).

Interaction with the local community can help international students to adjust to their new environment, but negative experiences can exacerbate feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction with the student experience (Lee & Rice, 2007;

Brown, 2009). As Coles and Swami (2012) argue, positive experiences of intercultural interactions require intercultural awareness of and sensitivity towards all the participants involved in the interaction. On a culturally diverse campus, this means that home students and staff must also have intercultural competence in order to successfully communicate with international students.

1.2 Intercultural competence

Intercultural competence can be defined as the knowledge, skills and attitudes one needs to communicate effectively with someone from another culture (Byram et al., 2001) A recent report by the British Council (2013) has highlighted the value that employers place on intercultural competence and, although controversial (see for example Mathews, 2013), employability is firmly on the agenda for HEIs. Graduate employers wish to attract applicants who not only have a good degree but can also demonstrate their transferable skills. In fact, according to the British Council (2013), some employers value intercultural skills more highly than formal qualifications.

There is evidence that graduate recruiters anticipate that over 30% of entry-level posts will be taken by those who have previously completed an internship or placement with the company (High Fliers, 2013). Likewise, evidence suggests students expect their degree programme will enhance their job opportunities and 79% surveyed indicated this was the main reason for going to university (CBI/NUS, 2011). So there is a clear synergy between these two sets of expectations.

Although important for work, intercultural competence is perhaps more importantly a necessary requirement for graduates to become global citizens who can make valuable contributions to wider society. In one Australian HEI, cultural awareness is a formal component of the 'graduate qualities' students are expected to develop in order to be able to live and work in a global setting (Leask, 2009). In order to facilitate this, intercultural training and development opportunities must exist for all staff and students. This can exist through formal structures within an international curriculum as well as through less formal extra-curricular activities.

This study is located in the Liverpool Business School (LBS) at Liverpool John Moores University, a large city-based university in northwest England. Based anecdotally on our experiences teaching in the School, many of the issues discussed above, such as lack of integration and isolation of international undergraduate students, appear present.

1.3 Causes of poor integration

Reasons for poor integration are diverse and complex and a number of reasons are cited by international students in the school for not mixing with home students. These include the language barrier, but also that home students appear unfriendly.

This issue of perceived poor receptivity of the host community has been highlighted as a widespread concern in various studies over the past decade, not just in the UK but across a range of international contexts (Volet & Ang, 1998; de Vita 2005; Ward et al., 2005; Brown, 2009). Further barriers resulting from cultural differences include difficulty in finding common topics of interest and some international students' discomfort with the drinking and sexual practices of domestic students (Coles & Swami, 2012; Peacock & Harrison, 2009), Wright & Schartner, 2013). Many of the students on LBS undergraduate programmes have little experience of interacting with people from other backgrounds and cultures, and can lack the motivation and skills to communicate effectively with people whose first language is not English.

The issue of 'unfriendliness' of the host has been examined further. It has been proposed that what international students sometimes perceive as 'unfriendliness' of home students is often more likely to be indifference resulting from the fact that home students see no benefit from intercultural interactions (UNITE, 2006). As mentioned earlier, successful intercultural communication can be very challenging and requires intercultural sensitivity and other attributes that currently are not fully developed on LBS undergraduate programmes.

Conversely, a study by Brown and Richards, (2012) of the attitudes of a sample of British students to the presence of large numbers of international students found that, contrary to some earlier studies, home students were empathetic, flexible and open towards the new cultures. The students

in this study were, however, enrolled on a post-graduate tourism management course. Their maturity, experience of travel and chosen course would therefore suggest a more natural interest in people from other cultures than the typical undergraduate student.

One of the less structured ways for students to learn about other cultures and enhance their intercultural communication skills is to act as mentors to international students. Mentoring or buddy schemes are often recommended as a way to help international students adapt to and feel fully part of a new student community (e.g. Leask, 2009; Sawir et al., 2008; Wright & Schartner, 2013). In 2008, 23% of UK universities ran mentoring schemes for international students (UKCISA, 2008).

2.1 This study

Many of the issues discussed above, such as lack of integration and isolation of international undergraduate students, were observed in Liverpool Business School (LBS). Relatively little formal support was provided for LBS undergraduate international students other than additional English language training and *ad hoc* support from individual tutors and programme leaders.

It is widely recognised that international students face greater challenges to adjusting to the higher education environment than domestic students and therefore often require more support (Andrade, 2006; Sawir et al., 2008). Therefore a project was initiated to develop an international student mentor scheme. The aim of the project was to provide a structure, however informal, to bring together domestic and international students to facilitate enhanced cultural awareness of the home students and provide support to international students.

The underlying philosophy was that each group of students would benefit from the project. It was, therefore, not based on a model of culture which views international students as deficient (Montgomery, 2010), but on one that recognizes the knowledge and experience that these students bring to the university.

A part of this study considers the experiences of the international student mentees. However, in the literature there is a great wealth of research into the international student experience, but a paucity

of literature on the home students' perspective of internationalisation (Brown, 2009; Brown & Richards, 2012). Therefore, due to the limitations of space and need for greater understanding of interactions from the home student, the weight of the study will focus on the experiences and learning gained by mentors.

2.2 Overview of the mentoring scheme

The project involved eight second year undergraduate students from across five different programmes mentoring eighteen international students during their first semester at the university. The mentors were recruited by invitation via an e-mail sent out to all students on Year 1 business programmes in May 2012. Those students who expressed an interest were asked to complete an application form.

International students who had been sent offers to the university were sent an e-mail outlining the project and asked to complete a mentee application form. Although the project was initially designed for undergraduates only, the number of initial responses from this group was relatively small so the offer was extended to exchange and post-graduate students. The final cohort of mentees included six undergraduate, seven post-graduate and five exchange students representing six different countries: China, India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Spain and Japan.

Student mentors were provided with initial training in induction week. This involved a three hour session covering responsibilities and boundaries, cultural awareness, and the recording of graduate skills. This was jointly delivered by the project coordinator and the Student Development Coordinator.

Mentors were introduced to their mentees at a welcome event in the third week of the semester. This was an informal event which included ice-breaking activities and communication games and enabled mentors and mentees to exchange contact details. The mentees that were unable to attend were informed of their mentor's details by e-mail. It was expected that mentees and mentors would meet approximately four times over the course of a semester but would also keep in contact via telephone and/or other electronic means. A closing event was scheduled for the second week

of Semester 2 but for several reasons, including particularly inclement weather, it had to be cancelled.

2.3. Evaluation aims and procedures

The primary focus of the evaluation was to explore the experiences of the mentors to gain insights into the value of the experience and inform further developments of the initiative. An initial stage of the study however sought to compare mentors' gains to those described by the international student mentees. The research aims are:

- to compare the main outcomes for both mentors and mentees
- to gain rich insight into the mentors experiences to identify powerful or transformative experiences
- to identify future recommendations that could be of value for others considering a mentor scheme

The project comprised two elements.

Experiences of international student mentees:

International student mentees were sent an electronic questionnaire designed by one of the mentees as part of a separate project she was undertaking for her studies. Seven of the mentees responded. This was followed up with interviews with a few of the survey respondents to gain richer insights into the mentee experience.

Experiences of 'home' student mentors:

Data to ascertain the mentors' perspective was collected in three ways. Firstly, mentors were asked at the end of the project to complete a short (half a page) written reflection of their experiences. The purpose of this was to gain a simple overview of the mentors' experiences. Secondly, they were invited to attend a focus group in order for the researcher to probe deeper into the mentors' rich experiences. Mentor interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder and transcribed. The purpose of this was to elaborate on issues identified in the written reflective account to gain a deeper understanding of their experience and to identify any particularly transformative experiences or insights gained. A purpose here was also to identify ways in which the project could be improved in future years.

Finally, the mentors were asked to complete a questionnaire in order to evaluate the project from the perspective of their self-awareness and graduate skills development. This questionnaire comprised eight Likert scale items designed to investigate students' perceptions of the role of mentoring in developing their graduate skills and self-awareness and one ranking item designed to investigate which skills they felt had improved the most. Three open-ended questions were also included to gain deeper insights into these areas. Five of the mentors participated in the evaluation. Opportunities for one-to-one interviews with the Student Development Coordinator were also offered. All of the qualitative data was collated and analysed thematically using a system of open coding. The quantitative data was then used to triangulate findings from the qualitative analysis.

3. Findings

3.1 Comparison of perceived benefits for mentees and mentors

Table 1 summarises the main themes which emerged from the analysis of the data with respect to the key benefits of the project to mentors and mentees.

Naturally both groups of students gained different types of benefits from the mentoring scheme. For the international students issues appeared largely practical: information such as signposting; registering with a doctor; local knowledge; and opportunities that helped easing the integration process, such as facilitating friendship-making, assisting language learning and opportunities for excursions. Benefits were also of a more pastoral nature, for example, providing a form of encouragement and support network.

In contrast, for domestic students as mentors, there was a greater emphasis on general personal growth. This was represented as growth in knowledge and awareness of cultural differences, meta-cognitive growth in self-understanding, and increased empathy. The indicators are that for both groups the scheme helped to close gaps that are so frequently identified across the literature. The interviews allowed for greater insight into mentors' experiences.

Table 1: Benefits to mentors and mentees

MENTORS	MENTEES
<p>A Personal Gains</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal satisfaction 2. Meeting new people from very different backgrounds 3. Confidence 	<p>A Personal Gains</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cultural experiences 2. Excursions 3. Meeting new people and access to the 'local community'
<p>B Personal Development</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased self-awareness <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Personal attributes and attitudes</i> 2. Increased awareness of others 	<p>B Psychological Support</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A friendly face on campus 2. Encouragement 3. A 'support line'
<p>C Skills Development</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communication skills <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Accommodation</i> b. <i>Meaning negotiation</i> c. <i>Dealing with 'non-communication'</i> 2. Social interaction skills <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Recognising and accommodating differing attitudes and needs of others</i> 3. Other <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Problem solving</i> b. <i>Time-management</i> 	<p>C Practical Support</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Signposting <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>English classes</i> b. <i>Where to shop</i> c. <i>Directions and travel</i> 2. Actual Support <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Registering with a GP</i>
<p>D Knowledge development</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>of other countries, cultures and lifestyles</i> b. <i>of own culture and values</i> 	<p>D Knowledge, skills and personal development</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>of LJMU</i> b. <i>of Liverpool</i> c. <i>of aspects of British culture and lifestyles</i> 2. Skills <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Communicating in English</i> 3. Personal development <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Confidence</i>

3.2. Experiences of 'home' mentors

All of the mentors interviewed reported a positive experience of mentoring and said that they would definitely recommend participation in the project to other students. They were also forthcoming in making suggestions as to ways in which the project could be enhanced in future years. Further details are provided in the discussion below and, where quotations are included, pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of participants.

3.2.1. Personal Gains

In terms of personal gains, there were three main areas in which mentors felt that the experience benefitted them. All of the mentors interviewed mentioned that one of the most positive aspects of

being a mentor was the opportunity to interact with people whom they would not normally meet. Typical comments included:

'It was nice meeting different people 'cos there were different people from every other culture. So I met a few people from India, Spain and China so it was nice to get to know people from such a far-away country' (Holly)

'It was just nice to speak to someone else on my course, especially an international student who is a bit more reserved' (Ellie)

For most of the mentors, such personal gains were the main reason that they enjoyed being a mentor and why they would recommend it to others. For

Holly, it was also the opportunity to make a new friend with whom she had kept in touch regularly even after the project had ended. Friendship with home students has been reported as an important factor in helping international students feel less stressed and lonely (Brown, 2009). This study suggests that extending friendship groups can also be a significant outcome of mentoring for home students. Several of the mentors also emphasised the personal satisfaction that they gained from the knowledge that they had helped someone. Typical comments included:

'It was so nice, it just made you feel like you have done something good' (Sophie)

'I like to be useful. It just makes me think I've done something good, like I said before, and it gives me satisfaction when I can help somebody' (Holly)

Much literature has focused on the increased confidence that international students gain from positive interactive experiences with home students (see for example Wright & Schartner, 2013), but one of the most significant findings of this study was the impact that mentoring had on the mentors' confidence. All of the mentors believed that their experience as a mentor had improved their confidence both generally, in terms of meeting new people, and also more specifically in dealing with problems or situations outside of their comfort zone. This was evidenced from the survey results as well as the interviews and is illustrated by the quotations below:

'Being a mentor has definitely helped me in gaining confidence and making friends easier and quicker. I also realised that helping people, even just a normal chat, made me feel better and satisfied.' (Holly)

'I think it gave my confidence a bit of a boost. I'm not a really, really confident person, so I am happy with myself that I was able to do that and interact with people like that. I was happy to be given the responsibility and I think I got it alright' (Anna)

This supports the findings of Brown and Richards (2012) who observed that when students felt they were able to help others, not only did it boost their confidence but their own stress and anxiety was reduced.

3.2.2 Personal Development

Two categories of closely related factors emerged within the theme of personal development: the first being self-awareness and the second awareness of others. For Holly, who had gained satisfaction from helping people, she realised that this was very important for her and that might potentially be an important factor in the type of career she would consider. For Jessica, it was about becoming more approachable and this was linked to her heightened awareness of the needs of others. This is illustrated in her comments below:

'About myself I've learned that you should be more approachable. D'you know? Sort of be more understanding to their situation. So I've started saying hello to some of the students in the class just because when you hear what it's like for them, you know some of them are forced to come over and it can be very hard for them to integrate'

As mentioned earlier, home students' apparent indifference can often be interpreted by international students as unfriendliness. The above quotation suggests that it may not even be indifference but the fact that international students are 'largely invisible' to home students (Peacock & Harrison, 2009). This is evidence that the project had made at least one of the mentors more aware of the presence of other international students and more sensitive to their needs.

As Byram et al., (2001) explain, empathy is a precursor to showing willingness to modify your communication to your interlocutor's needs, a key attitude required for successful intercultural communication. Brown and Richards (2012) identified that the domestic post-graduate students in their study exhibited a high level of empathy for their international peer group. The current study has suggested that in the case of undergraduate programmes with fewer, and therefore perhaps less visible, international students, interventions such as mentoring may be needed to trigger this response.

It is interesting to note that some of the student mentors had described international students as being 'more reserved'. Peacock and Harrison (2009) observed that students were more likely to 'attribute behaviours to personality factors that may be considered to transcend culture' possibly to avoid cultural or national stereotypes. However, by making the generalisation that all international

students are reserved is creating a stereotype that is not representative of what is a very diverse group of students.

3.2.3 Skills Development

In response to the graduate skills survey, mentors were extremely positive about the opportunity mentoring had given them to enhance their CVs and thus their employability. They were aware not only that they had developed particular skills but also that they could demonstrate them to potential employers using concrete experience, as the following quotations illustrate:

'It will indicate to potential employers that I wanted to help international students settle into university life. I have improved my communication skills, both written and verbal, which would be useful, as once I graduate I hope to move abroad to work.' (Anna)

'It will definitely enhance it [CV]. I have used it in interviews to demonstrate my skills using it as an experience. I think it makes you stand out as it isn't an opportunity everyone can just get on their CV. I have found the experience interesting and eye opening, whilst at the same time learnt how to prioritize my time. This is a unique experience and I would encourage anyone who gets the opportunity to take part to do so.' (Lucy)

These comments were typical of the mentor response to this survey item demonstrating that mentors had a good understanding of the transferability of skills to employability and the employer perspective at recruitment.

The findings from the survey, perhaps unsurprisingly, show that verbal communication was the graduate skill mentors felt had improved the most, and this was clearly supported by the qualitative findings. There were three areas of oral communication development that were apparent from the data; meaning negotiation, accommodation and dealing with 'non-communication'.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, mentors seemed to recognise that successful communication requires effort from each participant and that meaning has to be jointly negotiated, in other words interlocutors have to work together to understand and be understood.

Mentors also demonstrated that they had developed their ability to adapt their language to their interlocutors. Strategies mentors mentioned included speaking more slowly, avoiding colloquial language, varying vocabulary, use of paraphrase, repetition and writing things down. Several of the mentors commented that the 'language barrier' had been one of the main challenges at the start but that it had become easier as they had become more skilled and confident. The following quotation highlights those initial difficulties:

'I think especially from day one when we did that sort of spot-the-difference with each other we realised that we were both calling things different names. And even when I was trying to speak I was just thinking "well she didn't understand that so I need to use a different word" or vice versa - sort of trying to think of things to say. I think language barriers are quite a big difficulty' (Sophie)

The quotation below illustrates how the communication became easier:

'She couldn't understand much at the beginning so I learned how to interact with her and stuff like that, and so she was quite happy' (Anna)

The same student describes some of the accommodation strategies that were used:

'So for her I would sometimes repeat myself or speak a bit more slowly or even sometimes write it down for her to see if she would get it. So then she was fine, she was happy' (Anna)

One of the challenges that students faced was dealing with non-communication. Some student mentors were frustrated when they texted or e-mailed mentees but received no response. Different mentors had different strategies for dealing with this. One mentor realised that her mentee was 'ignoring' her messages because he did not really want her help and came to accept the situation. This problem could have been related to cultural differences in pragmatics and interpretations of politeness and 'face'. In some cultures 'silence' or ignoring a message may seem less face-threatening than a more direct approach (see for example Fujio, 2004).

In order to avoid future frustrations, several student mentors suggested that mentees be provided with guidance about how to engage with mentors and what is acceptable behaviour. Ideally, however, all students should be provided with more training in intercultural pragmatics so that students are more able to more critically reflect on any communication breakdowns.

3.2.4 Social interaction skills

In terms of social interaction skills, the mentors interviewed seemed to be able to recognise that mentees have different needs and attitudes and demonstrated how they were able to adapt to and accommodate the needs of others in their interactions. In the previous section, it was noted that some mentees did not reply to messages. Although mentors found this frustrating, they did seem to appreciate that this may be due to the differing needs and expectations of mentees. As Jessica explained:

'So whereas one of them wanted to be a friend some of them just wanted to meet up now and again. And some of them just wanted you to help them with queries. So one of them phoned me and asked how they could register with a doctor, and things like that. It's just - you got to be, you sort of - to know what they want from you kind of thing' (Jessica)

3.2.5 Knowledge development

Most of the mentors interviewed stated that they had learned something about the country and culture of their mentees. Mentors' accounts suggested that some of the mentees had also become more aware of some of their own culturally determined values and attitudes. For example, there was an incident in a museum when one of the mentees decided to take some photographs of a group of school children, and the accompanying mentors had noticed that the school teachers were looking rather agitated by this. There was the realisation that this behaviour is not appropriate in the UK but is acceptable in other countries. Attitudes to taking photographs also came up in discussion of another incident where a female mentee did not want to be photographed possibly because of religious attitudes. This will be discussed further in the following section as mentors seemed to have a very superficial understanding of the issue.

4. The challenges

We have seen how the project benefited both mentors and mentees with some students gaining a great deal from the experience. However, as with any pilot project, there were various limitations and challenges experienced. This section will attempt to explore some of these in order to inform future developments.

First of all, the evaluation focused mainly on the mentor experience and only a limited amount of data was collected from mentees. Of the seven mentees that responded to the survey (less than half of the total number of mentees), two had clearly not had positive experiences. In addition, three of the mentors did not take part in the evaluation suggesting perhaps that their experiences were also less positive. In order to gain an understanding of the full range of experiences, it is necessary to try to capture both positive and negative stories and to gain deeper insights from the use of more qualitative methods. Despite these limitations, however, the findings do concur with the few existing studies related to UK student perceptions of the internationalisation of HE such as Brown (2009) and Brown and Richards (2012).

Increased confidence was a key outcome for the majority of the mentors. However, when asked if they would be willing to present to large groups of students for recruitment of future mentors, all but one felt that they had the confidence to do so reflecting that this was an area that still required further development. As a reward for taking part in the project mentors were offered further training by an external provider and asked to identify areas for further personal development.

Several of the mentors requested assertiveness training. Participation in this training revealed that confidence and assertiveness were areas which students still felt weak, particularly in relation to group work. Discussion with students revealed that they lack the skills to be able to deal effectively with certain types of student, particularly those that try to dominate group work. There appears to be an assumption in HEIs that by setting group assessments students will automatically learn the necessary skills to work in teams. Some of the skills required, such as assertiveness, may need to be taught. As Leask (2009) noted in her study, it is not only

international students that require support in doing group work.

Mentors clearly recognised the value of mentoring in terms of enhancing their employability. However, it remained a challenge to recruit mentors for the following year. One of the mentors in this study agreed to help in the recruitment process by giving presentations to most of the Year 1 students in LBS to promote the benefits of the project. Despite receiving over seventy expressions of interest, only twelve students actually completed an application form and attended training. This represents less than 2% of the LBS Year 1 student population. Peacock and Harrison (2009) suggested that although the business studies students in their research recognised that interacting with international students can be positive for employability, the students did not appear to have an intrinsic interest in international perspectives in comparison with those students studying subjects in the creative arts and media. This suggests that there is a need to stimulate interest within the business curriculum.

One of the key aims of the project was to raise home students' awareness of other cultures and there was evidence that this had been achieved to some extent. However, although most reported that 'their eyes had been opened' their cultural awareness appeared to be at a very superficial level and could be based on simplistic and potentially harmful stereotypical assumptions about particular cultures and religions. For example, in explaining the reason for a female student not wanting to appear in a photograph, the discussion focused on whether Muslim women are 'allowed' or 'not allowed' to be photographed.

Similarly, in response to a question about how training for mentors might be improved, it was suggested that mentors might be provided with a table summarising cultural differences they might encounter. This reveals a simplistic understanding of the complex nature of culture and how this may affect people's values and behaviour. If mentors are to move beyond this initial stage of cultural awareness, opportunities for further training and reflection must be provided. Since cultural awareness is essential for international business, it should be a core component of all business programmes and if universities are to truly internationalise, cultural awareness should be part

of an international curriculum for all students. As Leask (2009: p208) argues, there is a 'need to ensure that an international curriculum develops the skills and knowledge required to prepare all students to live and work in a global setting' and this is now recognised in the University's new international strategy. The challenge now is to develop both formal and informal structures within the University to enable that goal to be realised.

It became evident that mentors required more support with reflective writing and in keeping a log to share and articulate their experience. This could have been facilitated by using the e-portfolio and mentors were encouraged to use this but chose not to. Another challenge therefore is to build training in reflective writing and recording experiences into the e-portfolio into the project which is difficult given the scheduling difficulties of working with students across programmes. Being able to critically reflect is an important skill not only for learning at university but also for professional development and other domains of life. However, as Coulson and Harvey (2013) point out, effective learning through reflection requires a high level of cognitive and meta-cognitive skill that many students in higher education do not innately possess. Therefore further consideration of how quality critical reflection is incorporated alongside the mentoring scheme is necessary.

5. Conclusion

This exploratory study has shown some of the benefits and challenges of using a mentoring scheme to bring international and home students together for mutual benefit. It has provided a small but much needed window (Brown, 2009) into the home student perspective of the internationalisation of universities. As several studies have shown (Brown, 2009; Leask, 2009; Wright & Schartner, 2013), just having people from different cultural backgrounds together on campus does not automatically lead to mutually beneficial intercultural relationships. Mentoring can contribute to this but it needs to be supported 'within a dynamic and supportive institutional culture of internationalisation' (Leask, 2009: 207). As institutions continue along the path of internationalisation, it is essential to explore the experiences of all groups of students and staff to understand the effects of this process and to exploit its potential to the benefit of all.

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