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## Internationalisation of the Curriculum: Challenges and Opportunities

Sue Robson, Newcastle University, UK

### ABSTRACT

'Internationalisation' is a pervasive but contested concept in contemporary higher education (HE), and poses both critical challenges and development opportunities for universities. Recent research suggests that while many HE institutions (HEIs) have an internationalisation strategy, there are limitations to the ways in which institutions approach internationalisation (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2015). Attention is often paid predominantly to recruitment of international students and staff, and to mobility, with targets for the number of students and staff engaged in international programmes or research. Increasingly universities that seek to be truly internationalised are thinking beyond these structural factors, to more comprehensive approaches (Hudzik, 2011) that will enable all students and staff to have an 'internationalised' experience. This opinion piece addresses a key dimension of a more comprehensive approach to internationalisation, the internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC) as a means to develop global mindsets, skills and understandings.

**Keywords:** internationalisation; curriculum; global learning experience

### Definitions of IoC

IoC has been much debated and variously defined as: the incorporation of an international or intercultural dimension into the content of the curriculum, teaching and learning arrangements, and support services of a programme of study (Leask, 2009; Leask & Bridge, 2013); providing students with different cultural perspectives and developing their intercultural skills and sensitivity (Zhou & Smith, 2014); a response to the changing needs and expectations of students, to enhance their university experience and to prepare them for the world of work (Mak & Kennedy, 2012); and preparation for socially responsible citizenship (Clifford & Montgomery, 2014; Reid & Spencer-Oatey, 2013). The content and structure of the curriculum, and the teaching and assessment methods employed will influence the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.

### Motives for IoC

The emphasis placed on the various dimensions of IoC will reflect how the institution, the discipline and individual academics and policy makers conceptualise internationalisation (Clifford, 2013). There are many examples of the incorporation of an international or intercultural dimension into the content of programmes of study, from opportunities for outward mobility to the inclusion of international modules within programmes. For the non-mobile majority, internationalisation at home may involve virtual mobility and other strategies to bring home and international students together, within and beyond the classroom. Perhaps too often IoC focuses on inputs rather than outcomes, when the institutional motive for internationalisation is to attract students to programmes (Leask, 2014).

IoC can however provide an opportunity for a more radical review of current provision. More far-reaching curriculum reform and innovative pedagogical approaches may be required to foster the values, skills and dispositions associated with engaged global citizenship (Jones & Killick, 2013; Jackson, Robson & Huddart, 2012). Culturally responsive teaching can help to ensure that domestic and international students have opportunities to interact with each other, to develop a sense of responsibility towards themselves and others, and to develop the self-efficacy and resilience they will need to live and work in diverse cultural environments (Clifford, 2013; Zhou & Smith, 2014; Mak & Kennedy, 2012). This might involve consideration of whether modules or programmes could be more integrated, enhanced and developed with regard to the contexts, values and understandings underpinning the curriculum content; the processes of teaching and learning; the ways in which we invite students to engage with learning, and how we assess that learning (Hudzik, 2011).

### Opportunities for research and development

HEIs around the world are aiming to internationalise, and this involves both collaboration and competition (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2015). Universities are inevitably concerned about their position in global rankings, which are considered "the new currency

of quality” (Tadaki, 2013). The dimensions used in league tables and global rankings to measure HE internationalisation are invariably structural, for example, numbers of international staff and students; number of international exchanges; number of international joint publications. While these are undoubtedly important dimensions of an institution’s foundations for internationalisation, they may be considered as merely the prerequisites for the university’s developing international outlook and culture (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2015). As internationalisation becomes increasingly important to HEIs, it can be viewed as integral to the strategy for achieving fundamental institutional goals (Green, 2012). By thinking more explicitly about where and how internationalisation happens in practice, perhaps new conceptualisations about the quality and value of internationalisation can be generated.

Many of the existing studies of IoC focus on one institution or a disciplinary case study. More collaborative and comparative research might usefully consider how knowledge is alternatively constructed and valued in different disciplines and cultures (Leask & Bridge, 2013); how professional practices differ across contexts; and how students’ holistic experience can promote intercultural learning alongside their core disciplinary learning. A more comprehensive framework for institutional benchmarking is called for. The Higher Education Academy’s commitment to support universities “to achieve a high quality, equitable and global learning experience for all students” (heacademy.ac.uk) led to the development of an Internationalising Higher Education Framework. The framework offers guidance for universities, programme leaders and tutors seeking to deliver a more global and inclusive learning experience to students. The framework can provide a structure for universities wishing to benchmark their position against other HEIs, or to enhance internationalisation at an institutional, programme, module or individual staff/student level. It is intended to assist the sector in a key aspect of internationalising: to prepare graduates to live in, and contribute responsibly to, a globally interconnected society. The negotiation of a more flexible curriculum that responds to the needs and expectations of the diversity of students, and addresses the challenges faced by local and global communities, will help to ensure a more grounded approach. This is surely a more appropriate hallmark of quality.

### Biography

Sue Robson is Professor of Education at Newcastle University where she leads the Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (HE) Research Group. Sue’s current research focuses on the internationalization of HE; innovative teaching and learning in HE; reward and recognition for teaching excellence in HE; and entrepreneurial educational leadership.

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