

## The importance of developing cultural intelligence

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As two of the top host countries in the world, the United States and United Kingdom have long benefited from attracting large numbers of international students. Internationalisation dialogue and policy have primarily focused on income and reputational growth. Currently, both countries have a political climate that is challenging for those engaged in recruitment.

We would argue that although income is, of course, important, of equal importance is the opportunity for our home students to learn in an international learning environment and for all students enrolled at our universities to foster the capability to be effective contributors in our diverse societies and globalised workplaces. This is what should be driving our ambitions.

A 2018 NAFSA survey identified the ‘political climate’ as a leading concern for international enrolment management. The 2018 QS International Student Survey reported that 39% of international students from European Union countries said they are less likely to study in the UK due to Brexit (with Brexit having a negative impact on 10% of students from non-EU countries).

According to the Institute of International Education’s annual **Open Doors survey**, during the 2017-18 academic year, enrolment of new or first time international students fell by 6.6% at American universities, making it the second year in a row of decline.

In the UK, **HESA stats** show that international student numbers are growing. However, that growth is reliant on students from China, who represented a third of all non-EU students studying in the UK in 2017-18. Indian students, who represent the second largest national group, have fallen in numbers by 26% since 2012-13.

### **Globally mobile, culturally agile citizens**

In the UK government’s recently published **International Education Strategy**, the word ‘learning’ is only mentioned 19 times (and then in terms such as ‘learning provider’ rather than in phrases about aspirations for learning). The word ‘market’ is present 54 times. This is a clear indication that income is what drives policy in the UK government.

Our world needs citizens who can relate and work effectively across cultures. In both the US and the UK there are examples of excellence in internationalisation of the curriculum and developing pedagogy and policy to support and assess student learning to equip them for a

multicultural and globalised working world.

Sadly, however, these examples are not the norm. Strategies and tools to assess effective cross-cultural learning and skill development for all our students have, for the large part, been limited.

The UK strategy aims to double the percentage of UK domiciled students who participate in an outward mobility experience, be that volunteering, study or work. It states: “Supporting students to study abroad helps create a new generation of globally mobile, culturally agile citizens who can succeed in an increasingly globalised world.”

According to Universities UK’s ***Gone International: Expanding opportunities*** report, currently 7.7% of undergraduates in the UK undertake some form of outward mobility that lasts at least a week.

In the US, less than 2% of higher education students participate in education abroad programmes. Among that group, **most of the participants are white and female**.

Organisations like NAFSA: Association of International Educators have had a long-standing commitment to international education and encouraging study abroad experiences for US students.

However, they, along with other US-based international organisations, recognise that the need is not only to increase the number of US students going abroad, but also to ensure that both the opportunity and experience are inclusive, particularly for under-represented populations (students of colour, first-generation students, low socio-economic status students, students with disabilities, students from historically black colleges and universities, etc).

American and UK universities might try to progress on both fronts, but we still cannot assume that outward mobility guarantees that students will develop the capabilities for more effective working across cultures and borders. High quality intervention strategies must be part of the experience.

### **Cultural intelligence by design**

The University of Michigan Stephen M Ross School of Business in the US assessed their study abroad students before and after their global experience using the researched, academically validated Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Assessment Tool, which measures an individual’s capability in four distinct areas: CQ drive, CQ knowledge, CQ strategy and CQ action.

Measuring these four capabilities reveals how effective a person is likely to be in culturally diverse settings. Their testing revealed that the only capability that was enhanced by the global experience was CQ knowledge.

This prompted a review of all aspects of their programmes, ranging from how they selected and worked with partners to how they prepared students and what activities they asked of them when they were overseas. After these intentional interventions, post CQ assessment scores revealed significant increases in three of the four capabilities.

This, like similar studies over the past years, shows the clear need to have intentionality and design to impact student learning and give them the capabilities to be the globally effective citizens our governments and universities want. Just sending students overseas with our fingers crossed is not enough.

### **A Westernised curriculum**

With the luxury of so many international students at our campuses, it also means that there is an opportunity to raise CQ capabilities whether a home student participates in study abroad or not.

How do we ensure our home students engage with and learn from their international peers? What is the experience of international students when they study with us? Do they feel included? Is there a sense of belonging? Perhaps to some extent on some campuses.

However, if curriculum were to be used as an indicator, much more work is needed. Much of US course content is still Westernised and caters to the dominant white or European culture.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities Diversity Inclusivity Framework highlights the research of Peggy McIntosh and reveals how traditional practices in US curriculum and teaching are monocultural.

Challenges such as decolonisation of the curriculum, internationalisation of the curriculum and the development of cultural intelligence in our students remain and are important for us to improve if we are to reap all the benefits internationalisation of student enrolments has to offer.

‘Cultural intelligence’ provides a research-based approach to developing capabilities that enable people to be more effective at working or studying in culturally diverse contexts.

More importantly, the CQ Assessment, the only academically validated tool in the world that measures CQ, can be a useful tool for assessing the impact on intercultural capability, be that in relation to student programmes or staff development.

There are several university courses and programmes in the UK and US that use CQ assessments for students. It gives them an opportunity to reflect on their strengths and challenges and provides a useful reflection tool for assessing and developing skills and behaviours which lead to improved intercultural teamwork.

Other intercultural, international and global competency assessment tools are also available

and aim for the same objectives.

## **Professional development**

However, we would argue that the key to fostering successful international classrooms and campuses where we capitalise on having a diverse student body is for academics and staff to develop and enhance their cultural intelligence as part of their professional development.

Navigating the diversity in many of our universities today requires knowledge, capability and confidence for lecturers, administrators and leaders. If we are to ensure that our home students understand the value of the opportunity they have, in being part of these international learning environments, then cultural intelligence is a crucial ingredient.

Internationalisation without CQ promises no greater cross-cultural effectiveness than no internationalisation at all. Internationalisation with CQ not only enhances effectiveness; it opens a whole new opportunity to leverage cultural differences in innovative and sustainable ways.

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*This essay is the result of a call by Hans de Wit for articles of between 800 and 1,200 words on what went well and what went wrong in internationalisation of higher education over the past 25 years. At the end of 2019, he will bring all these essays together in a book.*

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