

Research reveals universities not yet as international as they think

July 27 2015, by Lee Page

Universities' internationalisation rankings have limited significance according to new research from the University of Warwick. This is because the way internationalisation is measured only takes into account the quantity of foreign students at each institution and not the extent to which they network with their counterparts from the UK. Thus, there is a strong emphasis on structural aspects of internationalisation and less on social ones.

The study found that the higher the proportion of international [students](#) on campus, the less satisfied students of all nationalities rated their university experiences. Professor Helen-Spencer-Oatey and Dr Daniel Dauber, from Warwick Applied Linguistics, who carried out the study, reveal that current internationalisation benchmarking is only capturing a certain aspect of internationalisation and therefore call for an agenda for social integration.

Dr Dauber explains: "Organisations, such as higher education institutions, which aim to internationalise are required to do so on multiple levels and in different stages over time. This does not only include the development of an internationalisation strategy and physically bringing students and staff together from different ends of the world, but requires a [social integration](#) agenda to fully grow into a socially viable organisation."

Both researchers argue that an 'intercultural' factor needs to be introduced as a point of reference, which takes into account the social

complexity of what they call "truly internationalised university communities".

Professor Helen Spencer-Oatey explains: "The current measurements only take into consideration the composition of people at each university, using a simple distinction between home and international students, but there are several dangers in gauging internationalisation this way.

"We've found it's actually the quality of interaction between people of different backgrounds both on campus and in the classroom that is a crucial factor for integration. However, some individuals and groups find this more difficult than others, especially members of large national cohorts."

The report, How 'internationalised' is your university? From structural indicators to an agenda for interaction, points out three fundamentally flawed assumptions about internationalisation in the HE sector – that structural internationalisation a) automatically improves students' satisfaction; b) automatically yields an integrated student community; and c) automatically leads to global skills.

Professor Spencer Oatey added: "When students leave university, they need to have built strong links with people from different cultural backgrounds and to have developed the skills needed for working in a globalised environment.

"The truly internationalised higher education institutions of the future will have to measure their success not only in terms of structural factors, but also by their ability to facilitate friendship-making and the development of those communicative skills that employers are seeking in their new employees."

The University of Warwick is leading the way in adopting these suggested changes and since 2012 has hosted an annual Integration Summit in collaboration with Warwick Students' Union and the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) – which has been attended by delegates from over 100 different UK universities and students' unions, representing England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Claire O'Leary, Assistant Director of Warwick's International Office, said: "Whilst there is a significant body of research published on the topic of integration stretching back over 30 years, many practitioners working on the enhancement of the student experience in higher and further education are largely unaware of the key findings.

"It means those with responsibility for increasing integration on our campuses are very often 'reinventing the wheel' rather than benefitting from the insights offered by this significant body of research."

She added: "Activities that encourage intercultural mixing are vital, but not enough in themselves unless they relate to institutional policy and are embedded in an institutional culture that genuinely values cultural diversity. All too often this link is not made, meaning students do not see their institution placing value on intercultural interaction and growth which can hold back the motivation to integrate."

"Our innovative collaborative triangle of academics, International Office practitioners and the Students' Union has enabled us to take an evidence-based approach to our integration enhancing interventions."

Warwick's excellence in the field of student integration was showcased on a global stage at the British Council annual conference in London on last month, where Prof Helen Spencer-Oatey and Dr Daniel Dauber shared some of their latest research findings.

The International Office and 20 of Warwick's Go Global student ambassadors also chaired round table discussions and shared their personal insights on the challenges and opportunities in integrating domestic and [international students](#) and the institution's role in equipping all students with global skills.

More information: "How 'internationalised' is your university? From structural indicators to an agenda for interaction."

www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/...rnationalisation.pdf

Provided by University of Warwick

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