Lost in Transition?

The International Students' Experience Project

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Acknowledgements

Preface

This report is the outcome of research conducted by our Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning *Creative Learning in Practice* and takes forward one of the key strands of the University's Strategy for Student Learning. The strategy commits the University to developing research into teaching and learning; and to ensuring that this research informs policy development and our efforts to improve the student learning experience and CLIP CETL will continue to play an important role in this endeavour beyond the life of its specific funding.

An investigation into the experience of international students was commissioned because of the relatively large proportion on international students studying at the University and in response to issues emerging through feedback from staff, students and analyses of retention and achievement data.

We are making this piece of institutional research accessible to the wider community because we believe it can make a significant contribution to the sector's understanding of how their experience of higher education in the UK, and of art and design in particular is **perceived** by international students. In common with much of the research into international students' perceptions, it provides some challenging and in many ways uncomfortable messages. However understanding student perceptions is the first step to improving our ways of working with international students, and the University will be drawing on this data to inform our staff development, our approaches to learning and teaching and support systems.

There are also several features of this research which may be of interest across the sector. First the innovative approach interviewing international students in their first language has given us a greater wealth of data on students' perception than we believe would have been achieved if they had been interviewed in English. Secondly it is a piece of qualitative research which has a relatively large sample from six geographic regions. Thirdly our research is located within a broad knowledge of the literature and the bibliography alone provides a significant resource for future researchers.

Elizabeth Rouse
Pro Rector Academic Development and Quality
August 2008

1. Introduction

Aim of the project

The aim of this project was to conduct an in-depth investigation of the experiences of first-year undergraduate international students at University of the Arts London. The project sought
- to assess the extent to which international students integrate and adapt to a different teaching and learning environment, predominantly in the creative arts disciplines
- to identify the causes of obstacles to such integration and adaptation
- to propose ways in which these can be eased.

The investigation ranged across many topics, including
- reasons for studying abroad
- expectations (educational, cultural, social) and preparation
- language, cultural and educational differences
- financial and visa problems
- students' familiarity with the university support system and their views on its effectiveness
- interaction with UK staff, students and those outside the university environment
- language behaviour; how much is English used, and how much the student's own language
- gender issues.

It also probed issues specific to art and design education such as
- the way in which the general challenges of coming to study in the UK manifest themselves when the chosen course of study is in the creative arts
- the perception within the institution that students may not be adequately prepared for the writing element of their course in creative arts (and the specific additional problems that this may create for international students).

Notwithstanding the focus on the creative arts, the intention was that the conclusions of the research be shared widely, in accordance with the remit of our Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (Creative Learning in Practice: CLIP CETL). It is important that UK students, staff, those involved in teaching and learning, and the support services of the university understand the situation and particular needs of international students. This edition of the report focuses on teaching and learning and the social side of the students' experience. We also give full methodological details. We have reported internally on those issues that are more institutionally specific.

The research context

Existing studies of the international student experience are numerous, and range from small-scale project reports to PhD dissertations. In her survey of research,

Pelletier diagnosed several methodological shortcomings (Pelletier 2003a and 2003b), to which others can be added. Generally the field displays:
- lack of conceptual and theoretical framework
- lack of attention to difference in academic level
- lack of attention to gender differences
- lack of focus on the experience of students beyond the university environment
- lack of longitudinal studies, both of how students' experiences and attitudes change over the duration of their course, and of their subsequent careers
- lack of substance, above all in terms of size and focus of samples.[1]

There is a widespread tendency to perceive international students as a homogenous group. This view is flawed for two reasons: first, because the current UK definition of them includes only those who pay the full fees (and thus ignores EU students), and second (and more fundamentally) because it fails to treat them as individuals (Kuo 2007, Lowe and Tian 2007). The lack of differentiation between different groups and sub-groups of international students has been highlighted in some of the more original studies on specifically pedagogical issues. For example, there is a general perception that Asian students, and specifically Chinese students, bring with them cultural difference in methods and style of learning, and are thus inadequately prepared for critical and analytical thinking in western universities (Dunbar 1988; Reid 1989; Ashman and Conway 1997). As in many other cases, there is a tendency to 'orientalize' – to think of international students as 'others', and then to make assumptions about them collectively (Said 1978). Such 'cultural' perceptions can obscure the real needs of international students. The standard portrait of students from South-East Asia as 'surface learners' and 'passive non-participants' has been challenged by (among others) Chalmers and Volet, who argued that these stereotypes 'have sometimes been used as an excuse for not addressing the fundamental issue of student learning at university. When the "problem" is attributed to the students, teachers can avoid examining their own attitudes and practices' (Chalmers and Volet 1997, p. 96; and see also Kember and Gow 1991, Watkins, Reghi and Astilla 1991). In a comparative study of native (Australian) and non-native (Chinese) English speakers, Jones demonstrated that the determining factor was not cultural background but a clear explanation of what was expected (Jones 2005). Other research (Okorocha 1996a and 1996b; Li, Clark and Kaye 1997; Nishio 2001) points in the same direction, i.e. towards the need for special clarity in briefing international students about the learning environment which they are entering.

Several studies show that, for international students who come from different teaching and learning traditions, most notably those favouring rote-learning and teacher-centred approaches, it is essential to promote and facilitate extra academic support at the beginning of their studies (Beasley and Pearson 1999). Although language is often identified as a major obstacle for international students in their adjustment to university life, many studies suggest that students' understanding of academic expectations, conventions and standards at the host university is of equal importance (Samuelowicz 1987). The academic staff's understanding of the educational background of their students will further improve the overall experience of students at university and in turn mitigate mismatches between student and staff

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[1] An exception is the 'First Year Experience Survey' by Yorke and Longden, which surveyed first-year students, both home and international, from 23 UK universities (Yorke and Longden 2006).

expectations (Gill 2007, Mullins, Quintrell and Hancock 1995). Recent work suggests that innovative course design and effective student support policies enable students to develop better communication skills, critical thinking and independence right from the start, and this in turn improves their integration with local students and makes the whole transition process easier. The introduction of extra academic support such as interactive workshops, peer learning and support groups can reduce failure rates, and is beneficial to all students (Beasley and Pearson 1999; Cathcart, Dixon-Dawson and Hall 2005).

The research has been informed by a number of concepts in sociological and cultural theory. Alongside the perspective of the *other*, particularly as elaborated by Edward Said in his discussion of *orientalism* (Said 1978), discussed above, international students can be viewed in the framework of the sociology of the *stranger* (Schutz 1944; Simmel 1950; McLemore 1970) and of the *sojourner* (Siu 1952; Church 1982; Ward and Kennedy 1993; Coates 2004). These are helpful starting-points, but have been criticised as not in themselves adequate for the description of the situation of such students (Coates 2004). It would perhaps be more relevant, given the increasingly globalised academic market, to take on board the theoretical work on cosmopolitanism (Luke 2004c and Fine 2007).

Methodology

The University of the Arts, London has a high proportion of international students. According to UKCOSA the University of the Arts was ranked 15th in the list of recruiters of international students in the UK for 2005-6;[2] international students were 17% of the total students. If undergraduates from European Union are included the proportions are even higher – 32%.[3] The research focused on six geographical areas which supply high numbers of students at University of the Arts London: Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India and the USA. Some UK students were also included for comparative purposes. A key feature of the project was that the students were interviewed in their own language, by their co-nationals.[4] Fourteen social-science postgraduates were employed from outside the University of the Arts, mainly from the School of Oriental and African Studies, the London School of Economics and the Institute of Education. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed/translated.

Before being interviewed, students filled in a short written questionnaire giving basic details about their educational background, time spent in England before studying at UAL, some demographic information, how they heard of the institution etc. Interviews were semi-structured, consisting of sixteen questions. The questions covered topics such as reasons for studying abroad, expectations, cultural and educational differences in arts and design, friendship, gender issues, stress, support services etc. The interviewers were consulted during the process of finalizing the questions, to ensure that there were no ambiguities or culturally inappropriate questions. The interview lasted between twenty and thirty minutes. 141 international students were interviewed between January and May 2007 (see Fig. 1). Twenty-one home students

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[2] http://www.ukcosa.org.uk/about/statistics_he.php (accessed 11 Feb 2008).
[3] http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/600/239/ (accessed 11 Feb 2008).
[4] Or in English, if they preferred. Only a few bilingual students took up this option.

were also interviewed, for purposes of comparison, by a native English speaker. The approach of the analysis was both qualitative and quantitative. NVivo and Excel were used as the main tools for analysis, together permitting connections to be made between the interviews and the written questionnaires. The questionnaire data and interview schedule are given in appendices 1 and 2.

Fig. 1: Origins of students interviewed

	No. of students interviewed	Total no. of 1st years	%
Hong Kong	26	72	36
India	20	61	33
Japan	34	151	23
South Korea	22	178	12
Taiwan	24	63	38
USA	15	49	31
Total	**141**	**574**	**25**

The decision to conduct interviews in the students' own language had both positive and negative implications. The interviews provided rich insights precisely because the language barrier had been eliminated: students could express their thoughts more easily in their native language, and to their co-nationals. The fact that the interviewers were international students themselves also helped; many of them reported that the interviewees saw them as an 'older brother or sister'. The danger, of course, was that a high degree of empathy between interviewer and interviewee might lead to unconscious distortions. Moreover, having such a large multinational team of interviewers also brought with it problems. They had a variety of approaches to interviewing, and different linguistic abilities. Students' views were thus filtered by the translation process, and some information may have been either misinterpreted or got lost due to poor translation. The fact that the interviewers were not creative artists may also have affected the outcome of the exercise, as they may have been less instinctively insightful of the subject. (On the other hand, they might also have been less likely to lead their interviewees in this respect.) To an extent these potential problems were dealt with by intensive management of the interviewing process. Weaknesses remain, but have to an extent been offset by the richness of the data and the scale of the response which went well over the original target of 60-100 interviews. This was a conscious decision; given the nature of the responses it was felt that volume should be prioritised. If it is not always possible to be sure exactly what a student meant by a particular remark (though this could be ascertained by fresh translations from the original transcriptions), the frequent recurrence of the same points over a substantial number of interviews allow some clear conclusions to be drawn.

2. The Students

Introduction

Here are summaries of the different experiences of four individual students:

> The process that I have been through is: (1) I had high expectations about liberal teaching and learning approach in the UK, (2) I was shocked and lost; (3) I gradually learned to accommodate and to accept this approach, after doing so many projects. I can see my improvement, but it is a bit slow.
> *Taiwanese student*

> …There were no problems. It was very easy in the sense that the system is more relaxed here. if you compare the university system here with that in India or in the US, it's a lot more relaxed. you don't have that much pressure on you.
> *Indian student*

> The fact that I don't have any British friends. Well, not zero but really few…we Japanese are 23-25 years old, and British students are 19-20. I don't exactly know why I don't have friends. I believe, because they are younger than me. I hesitate to approach them…their speech is really really fast. I can understand what our tutors say though...I cannot understand my classmates' English at all…so I am afraid, I may stop speaking during conversation…I cannot continue saying words.
> *Japanese student*

> I have got BA degree in Taiwan. And, I did my Foundation degree last year and am doing BA degree now. When I was in Taiwan, I expected that I may have many chances to make many friends from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, when I am physically attending a BA course here, I seem to find it a bit different and difficult for me to mix up with other students here. UK students are generally nice, but rather distant to me.
> *Taiwanese student*

> I enjoy the fact that there are a lot of international students here at UAL and you get introduced to many different ideas and styles because we have people from all different backgrounds.
> *South Korean student*

Some recurrent themes do emerge from the various experiences of these students. Their responses to specific questions were detailed and complex. Many points, however, stretched across the spectrum of questions asked, and revealed fundamental issues of concern to them. They are discussed generally in this chapter, but are issues which crop up repeatedly throughout the report.

The Student Population: Age, Gender, Experience

The profile of the students highlighted one unexpected feature. Many of the international students are significantly older than the home students. The difference is particularly marked among the students we interviewed (see Figs. 2 and 3 below) – and indeed it appears that the more mature students were more willing to respond to our invitation – but it is also the case among UAL undergraduates more generally.

Fig. 2: Age Profile of First-Year Students Interviewed
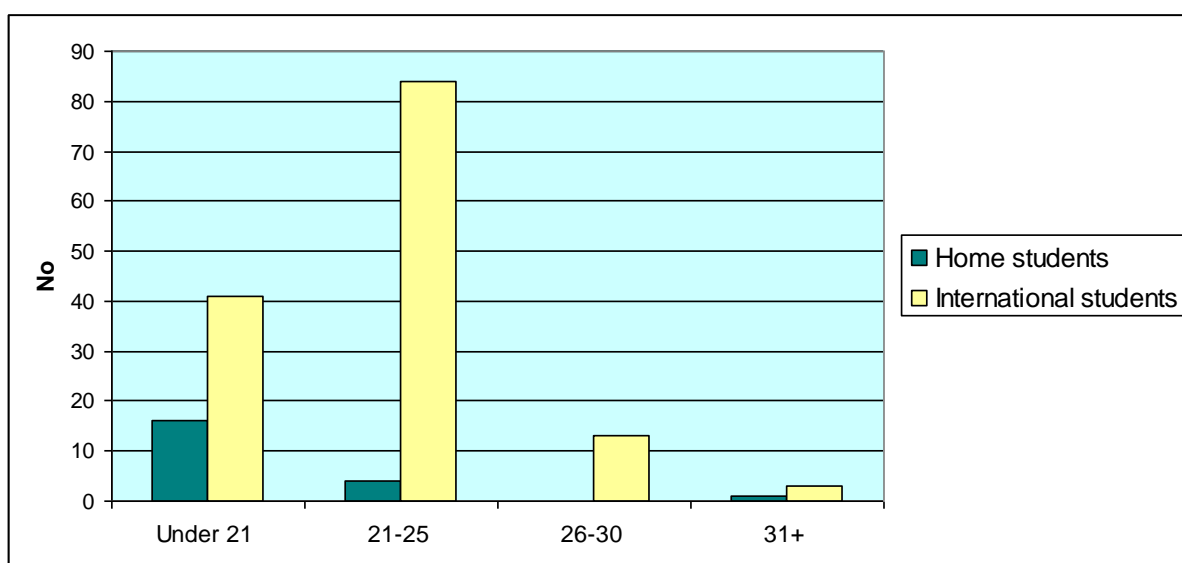
Fig. 3: Age Profile of All Full-Time First-Year Students (2006-7)
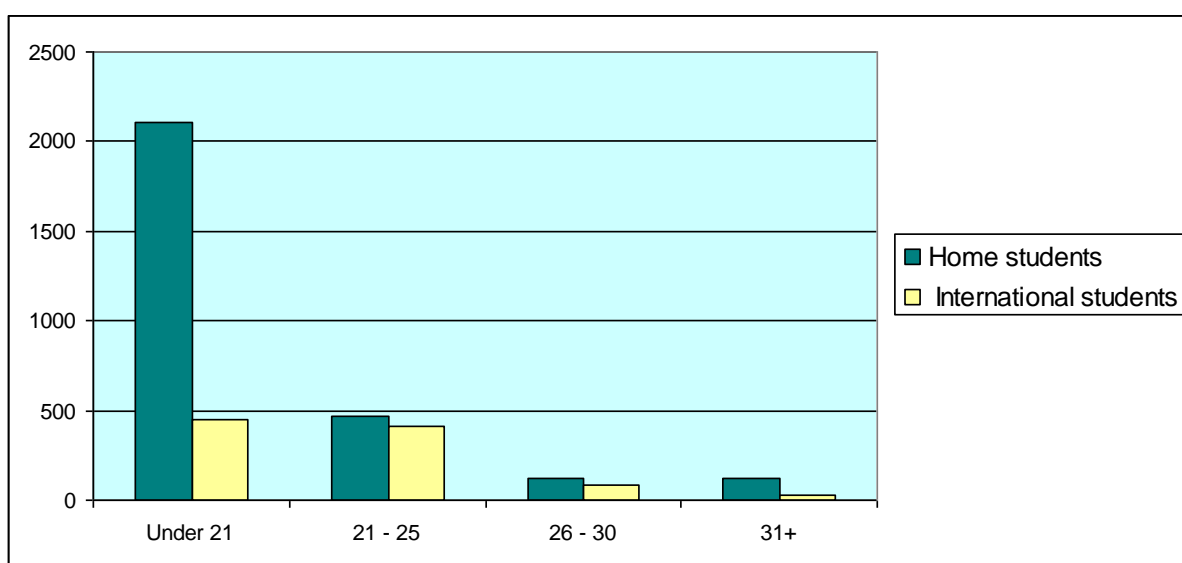
The students are generally very young. I am 24. I feel like an idiot in front of younger people. Well…I don't know what they think about me…
South Korean student

Moreover, many of them already have degrees, and some also have practical and/or work experience. This is important for an understanding of their expectations when they come to the UK. These students have if anything greater difficulties in adapting to their new environment.

The gender profile of international students fitted much more closely with that of home students:

Fig. 4: Undergraduate Population at UAL, 2005-6[5]

	Male	%	Female	%
Total Undergraduates	3,395	29	8,160	71
Non-EU	595	23	1,950	77
Our Sample	31	22	110	78

Language

Language is the most obvious and immediate obstacle for all those for whom English is not their mother tongue, and indeed to an extent for many others who do have excellent or even native English but of a different variety from UK students. It is also the most pervasive and insidious difficulty, affecting and exacerbating all the other issues which international students have to face. For example, students who are both non-native speakers and older than home students feel doubly 'different'. A sense of exclusion and isolation can easily develop, particularly if neither home students nor teachers recognise their situation or make the effort to help them integrate.

In their self-diagnosis of the language problems they face, students describe a great range of distinct but connected issues. Some have difficulty in understanding the terminology of artistic discourse. Some emphasise the difficulty in keeping up with spoken English, particularly among tutors, or fellow students. Some, including those with good or even bilingual English (e.g. Indian and Hong Kong students) find British/London English especially hard to adapt to – both because of the peculiarities of pronunciation and because of the rich idiomatic language they encounter. Even Americans report this. The difficulties can potentially extend to all aspects of study and interaction; understanding the nature and terms of an assignment, listening and following class discussion, participation in class, group work, presentations, etc. When it comes to written English there are similar concerns. Almost all students who commented on this issue say that academic English, and essay writing, are among the hardest tasks for them.

The crippling effect of poor English cannot be underestimated. For students who have crossed the world to try and settle into a degree programme, it can be very disheartening to discover that every aspect of their daily life – finding accommodation, understanding lectures, tutors, assignments and classmates, making friends – is fraught with difficulty. In such situations, students end up focusing only on what is essential, in ways which can actually prevent them from finding some of the solutions on offer:

> Yes, I am aware that there are posters which inform us that there are some support and services are available for students. However, my English is not good. I would tend to ignore some of these posters, which means that I may not use or look for these supports very much.
> *Taiwanese student*

But these difficulties are not confined to the individual. Students who have poor English, or who are perceived by others as having poor English, will not be naturally

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[5] Source: HESA.

integrated in a class; the dynamics and progress of the group can be adversely affected and the whole teaching programme can be undermined. The students concerned are aware of this and do not feel good about it; their fellow students and the tutors can come to resent it.

> It is a problem with the accent initially, but later you kind of get the hang of it. Sometimes you don't understand the slang words and I'd ask them again what it meant. Some people were really sweet and explained. But some were extremely discouraging when we used to ask such questions. They would not say anything directly to your face, but they would mean 'why are you here, if you can't speak'?
> *Indian student*

Yet the articulate and perceptive responses of students interviewed in their own language show that much could be done to improve this situation. Clearly more could be done to help students with their language needs – which are often much more particular than the generic diagnosis of 'poor English' suggests. And clearly many of the general problems of being a new student, which are simply exacerbated for those with language problems, can still be worked on. If we go no further than to ascribe difficulties of students, whether individually or in groups, to their poor command of English, we do not give ourselves the chance to help those students on issues which we can do something about; explaining what is required, managing expectations, giving guidance. If these problems are effectively tackled, the 'exponential' effect of language difficulties can be alleviated.

Stress

Another factor that runs right through every aspect of this study is the stress that international students experience. The move halfway across the world, and the new environment in which they find themselves, away from home and their established social networks, means that potentially every aspect of their new lives can be stressful as well as exciting (Gill 2007). This theme has not been discussed in detail here, since it is dealt with more fully in a separate paper (Sovic 2008). But one point is worth emphasizing. Students who have invested so heavily in this risky enterprise need to feel that they are doing something worthwhile to sustain them through this experience. If they are not given sufficient encouragement and incentives to persist, they are in danger of dropping out.

3. Teaching and Learning: Academic Culture in Art and Design

Expectations and reality

There is an immense body of literature on teaching and learning, although exploration of this theme in relation to art and design, particularly in the context of multicultural classes, is still a topic much in need of attention (Campbell 2000, De Vita 2001a).

Foremost among the students' comments are their reactions to the specific nature of teaching and learning at UAL, especially in comparison with their (very varied) previous experiences. Their comments can be grouped under a number of headings:

a) Process and product

Students are often surprised to find that in the teaching at UAL there is greater emphasis on the process of creation/design than on the end product.

> It is slightly different from what I expected. I have experienced something called academic cultural shock. Unlike Taiwan, here in the UK I have learned what they are really concerned about is more students' learning process, and less learning outcomes. My tutors here seem to me very concerned about where my ideas come from, how I develop and what research I initiate with my ideas. It is essential that the formation of ideas, conducting research and completion of my final piece of work are integrated throughout the whole process, even if the work itself is not very attractive. I am still trying to accommodate this major difference in relation to the teaching and learning approach here.
> *Taiwanese student*

Many students were not aware of this difference when they began their course. This has a particular impact on assessment, since students can fail if they do not understand that tutors expect to see evidence of the design process when assessing the work. One Japanese student ascribed their failure to pass the first year to this lack of awareness.

b) Theory and practice

Students also remark that they had not expected to find so much more importance attached to process and ideas rather than to skills. They tend to be surprised that skills are not valued more.

> The method of study here is so different, it is totally different. There is nothing based on skill here. They don't care whether you know how to draw or not. They want to know what knowledge you have. This is totally mind-based, exploring yourself kind of work.
> *Indian student*

Some students worry that they are not learning enough practical skills:

> Japanese education is passive. We are taught by teachers automatically. Just following them, we can learn those things in Japan, unlike in the UK. Here, I have to think about a concept of a work, and to create it, by which materials and with which

skills, then how I can embody my idea. If I want to use a new technique, I have to see my tutor. I need to learn more practical things from them.[6]
Japanese student

The transition to the UK system is particularly difficult for those students who have skills but whose proficiency in English is poor. They feel that what they bring to the course is undervalued, and the demands placed on them take them into what are areas of weakness for them. Their perception is that their previous knowledge is not recognized and valued as much as it could be.

c) Presentation and substance

Some students also see presentation as being given undue emphasis.

> I don't like that students often cover their poor job with their fluent presentation... Presentation is considered as the most important thing. I am not happy with that at all. However, I think this attitude is normal in the British art scene nowadays.
> *South Korean student*

d) Originality

Another point on which students comment is the stress placed on original work and an individual voice in relation to the subject:

> The education system here is very different from Taiwan. In the UK, I am encouraged to create original ideas and develop it into a piece of art. Unlike Taiwan, where people would think that I am very odd if I try to do something different, here I am motivated to do something different and am proud of being different.
> *Taiwanese student*

However, stress can be generated by the constant demand to be more experimental when students first arrive.

> I feel stress because of the repeated demand, to be *'more experimental, more experimental'.* The more I think about it, the more I am confused. I thought this way was not suitable for me. I felt I had no talent…but as a friend of mine cheered me up, I'm O.K. now. She advised me, 'just make what you want'. I realised that I forgot such a quite simple but important thing. I am doing my best to make my 'original' stuff anyway.
> *Japanese student*

e) 'Academic freedom' and tacit knowledge

Some students, however, are skeptical about whether tutors really give them 'freedom':

> Here I…. Like, if I am talking to my tutor and telling her that I want to do such and such a thing, if it doesn't suit her, she'll say, why do you have to do this, why don't you do that thing. The way they say that there is this so called freedom and you get to choose what you want, I don't think so. I really don't think so. We don't really get that much freedom.

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[6] What is clearly not coming across to these students is the specific pedagogical approach in the UK; an emphasis on teaching skills that is associated with what is known in the literature as a 'surface approach' to learning and a transmission approach to teaching. There is more likely to be an emphasis on the conceptual development of the person and a creative and explorative approach to practice here. This does not negate the role of skilled performance, but it is deemed no longer appropriate to focus on ways of making and doing things at the expense of developing an innovative or conceptual approach.

Indian student

Although recognizing a degree of freedom in relation to the work produced, some students also recognized that there were in fact tacit boundaries to what was perceived by tutors as appropriate. This 'pedagogy of ambiguity' is recognized as one of the characteristics of art and design education and probably exists in all disciplines.[7] What is acceptable as appropriate academic work often remains obscure, and tutors need to show examples and provide opportunities to discuss 'appropriate' work in the context of the subject and the course. Tutors also need to be aware of cultural difference and explore this explicitly in relation to design, markets and individual student experience.

> Some of us are international students and whose ideas are generated from their knowledge concerning their own cultures. Some of our tutors, if they are very open-minded, would accept our ideas. However, some of them may find our ideas are really odd since they don't really understand our cultural background and therefore may not accept what we have done. It depends on individual tutors. I believe that I don't have to accept every comment they make.
> *Taiwanese student*

The quote illustrates a mature attitude to independent study; the student accepts that the comments made by tutors are merely prompts and suggestions and that ultimately the responsibility for decisions lies with them. However, tutors have a responsibility here as well.

Transition and integration

a) Adaptation to the western / UK fashion world

Adapting to the cultural context and content of the course is a further and distinct element.

> Since we are learning fashion here, we are learning international fashion. It's western fashion, so in that aspect you have to grasp more. You have to learn more about the fashion in this place, what's happening in the UK, UK trends and stuff. Which is good, but that was something which was hard for me.
> *Indian student*

Students who have little knowledge of European history and cultural movements feel particularly disadvantaged.

b) Transitions from different educational levels

Students' reactions to the situation at UAL depend very much on their backgrounds. Age, country of education and level of education attained are all important factors here. Students who enter either UAL foundation courses or BA courses can have completed secondary education in their country of origin or, in some cases, in the UK. And many who enter at either level have in fact had some university education, and in some cases already have a degree.

Here are the reflections of a student who came to UAL straight after finishing high school in Taiwan:

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[7] Austerlitz, N. et al. 2008.

It is not easy at the beginning. Now I start to understand that we students need to be more aggressive, instead of sitting there and waiting for teachers to teach us... In Taiwan, students are all very passive in learning. But here, we need to find our own way of learning. I don't learn much about skills from foundation course. Instead, I learn how to think, how to imagine, how to create my own work.
Taiwanese student

A co-national of this student who finished secondary school in this country had a much easier transition; their experience would echo the responses of many home students.

The English system of teaching is ok for me because I used to study high school here. Therefore, I do not feel any dramatic change of teaching and learning from high school to university.
Taiwanese student

A further transitional experience is that from a Foundation course to the BA.[8] Many students find a significant difference in terms of teaching and guidance between these two levels.

During my Foundation course, I think the instructors took great care in taking care of the students and being attentive to their questions. Now that I've moved up as a regular course student, it's very different. During break times when I want to ask questions, my instructors tell me not to really bother them at that time but to come during their office hours. I find it difficult because any questions that I want addressed and have answered have to come at the instructor's convenience. Of course, this is not to say that they don't try to help students at all. If a student shows earnestness and a genuine interest in things, the instructors are more than willing to help. But for students who are more laid back with their studies, I think the instructors leave it completely up to them to answer their own questions and things like that.
South Korean student

There appears not to be much difference between the expectations of these students and those who already have a BA from outside the UK. Both groups have problems with the mode of independent study and HE programs here.

c) Workload and time management

Many students commented on the difficulty of adapting to the workload at UAL and above all to the way in which assignments are scheduled. This is a challenge especially for those students who already have degrees and come from a more structured system; in other words, it is strongly connected with expectation. For Indian students this is a particular problem, while South Koreans and Japanese found this hard at the beginning but like independence and self organization.

Difficult for me would probably be time management. I'm used to having a structure of 'this week you have this assignment due', and now there's a lot of 'ok in five weeks you're going to have to have this project done, you're going to need so and so done', and for me, I struggled with time management a lot.
American student

The students who are happiest with the situation tend to be those who feel that the workload makes constant demands on them. Others, however, feel that it is easy to

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[8] The Foundation year in UK art and design education precedes a BA or Fda but is after the end of secondary schooling which often culminates in A levels. The function of the Foundation year is diagnostic to enable students to begin to establish what area of art or design they might explore in their undergraduate studies.

get by doing the minimum in order to pass. On the other hand, many students complain that all the deadlines come at once, and that there is nothing for them to do during the vacation; they would prefer to have a more evenly distributed workload. Working with English as a second language means that students have an additional workload and tighter deadlines.

> I am struggling with a lot of homework. And the course time table is unclear. It should be addressed to students at once at the beginning. It might be OK for British students, but it is a big problem for us, because we require stricter time management for essays; I need extra time to arrange an essay checker.
> *Japanese student*

d) Integration and segregation

One of the most sensitive areas for students is integration. Students from very different backgrounds say that they chose UAL because of the multicultural and cosmopolitan nature of London. They also greatly value the mix of ideas; the variety of design styles inspires them, and they see the internationality of the classroom as an important potential learning opportunity. They are then very disappointed if the classes are divided according to nationality. They emphatically do not want to be put in a group of co-nationals, who are used to the same type of design. Their interaction with home students is further restricted in some cases because the classes for international students and home students are apparently not on the same day. Many thus find it very difficult to come into contact with home students, which they regret (see Ch. 4). They also feel that they often get less attention from their tutors than home students (see below). Many complain that some tutors have stereotypical perceptions about their backgrounds and too readily generalise about 'national characteristics', a tendency that is exacerbated when they are segregated by nationality (Chalmers and Volet 1997).

Clearly this is not the only obstacle to integration. Language is a much more fundamental one, and can lead to problems when classes are mixed. For example, many report that UK students are reluctant to work with them (and again, language is seen as a factor here). Frustration is especially common among more mature students, who already have a degree from their own country, and find it very hard to articulate their thoughts in English when younger students do not have the patience to listen to what they have to say.

> In our first term, one of teachers divided us into some small groups for group discussion. We had around five groups. The course director tried to split Asian students into these five groups. I was the only Asian in my group and the rest are UK students. I was very stressed, particularly during group discussion. These home students would speak very fast, which I couldn't really catch well. Although I was very stressed, I did learn a lot from it... The UK students in my class asked if they could choose team-mates whom they are happy to work with. So, the mixed-cultural idea…doesn't exist any more. My current team-mates are not those who I worked together with in my first term. They are all Asian. One of ex-team-mates asked me if I would like to join their team, which was very tempting and I hesitated a bit. I would be more likely to enjoy more self-autonomy if I joined the Asian student group. However, if I joined UK students, I would learn more, but my ideas would be dominated by them.
> *Taiwanese student*

The problem is also evident to other students (see also Ch. 4). A shocked American commented as follows:

At the beginning of the term, they pulled all of the international students aside and said 'You need to make an effort', and we're all making an effort, and the British students, they don't care, they're just like 'Ah…you don't speak English'. And, well, we do speak English. And they just treat a lot of the Asian students like idiots, as well, like the ones from Japan and Korea, I find…This Korean girl, she's got a thick accent, but they just treat her like a moron because, like, she can't pronounce r's properly. But she's smarter than they are, she's thirty, she came back to do another degree after doing two, and teaching for years and years, and they just think they're better than her because [of] better pronunciation of their mother tongue. But, can they speak Korean? No. No!
American student

The collective treatment of non-native speakers can also be counterproductive (Lowe and Tian 2007). The tendency to see Asians collectively rather than individually appears to have been at least partly responsible for another instance, where a student reported that Asians, unlike other students in the class, were given group feedback.

Some teachers are not kind to Asian students with poor English ability. For example, a teacher gives a group feedback for Asian: 4 or 5 students altogether, but an individual tutorial for European. This is unfair. Otherwise, he/she is good, though. This may be because European students are more positive and active, unlike reserved Asians.
Japanese student

It should be emphasized that the respondents also recognise that there can be genuine tensions between the needs of UK and international students:

Yes, language is a big problem for me. Some international students went to our teachers and asked if they could possibly slow down their pace of teaching and that of speaking. But, they responded to us, saying that there are some native UK students in the classroom. International students should consider that UK students have got their needs. We have to compromise with one another. Probably, they think that our English should be as good as native speakers in order to take this course.
Taiwanese student

Ways of teaching: challenges

One of the greatest differences perceived by students is between the style of teaching they encounter here and what they are accustomed to in the environment of their home system. This is the subject of the following section.

a) The challenges of independent learning

Almost all the students interviewed felt that the ethos of 'independent learning' was the most obvious characteristic of the system at UAL, and that adapting to this was the single greatest challenge for them. Although many of them recognise the virtues of such a system and welcome the freedom it brings, they also find it very hard to adapt to a teaching and learning context in which there are so few contact hours and, as they see it, so little guidance. For example, students are surprised that they are not given any textbooks, and that they are left unclear about what is expected of them, often until assessed work has been submitted and returned. Some feel that their courses could be taken equally well by distance learning. Many complained that they became de-motivated.

These general points are made by students from all regional groups. For example,

> As a graduate of a Korean university, I find the methodologies of teaching to be polar opposites. In Korea, everything is spoon fed to students. All materials and assignments, from readings to the course structure, is neatly structured so that as long as we keep on top of the work that is assigned and the instructors relay to us, we should be fine. Here, I find that all responsibility falls on the student. We are left to learn the material and basically teach ourselves while our tutors are left to chase and keep up with our pace of learning. This is very different from the system I am accustomed to where all students need to do is keep up with the instructor's pace. …As difficult as it is sometimes, I find that the independence given to the students themselves in terms of keeping up with his/her respective work is what I most enjoy about studying at the UAL.
> *South Korean student*

Even students from the USA, whose system might be assumed to be the closest to that in the UK, were struck by this:

> It's very different the way they teach in London than in America, because I did attend fashion school in America. In America, they way they teach, its more like they're giving everything to you, it's more like you're being fed. Here, they just give you more simple guidance like where to go, or how to look for something, but they don't teach you what to look for.
> *American student*

Students varied in whether they saw these differences as positive or negative. For the majority it was a challenge they were happy to face. They also varied in what they thought the advantages and disadvantages were:

> Given that we have given much freedom in respect of time management and the creation of ideas, there are advantages and disadvantages in relation to students' learning. The underlying advantage of enjoying so much freedom is that we can decide what we need to learn in order that we can produce a project. The disadvantage is that I still need some support and guidance from my teachers.
> *Taiwanese student*

Students who find the transition to a more independent system of learning a challenge also feel disadvantaged in comparison with UK students whom the international students assume, often wrongly, have been used to this all their lives:

> I think this can be said for the Japanese or Korean students in general, but I find the computer related work easy. It's easy for us to get started. On the other hand, I find it difficult to develop the philosophy on making designs. If you study in Japan, in junior-high and high schools, the teachers teach you everything... But the British students are used to studying on their own and creating the process of studying by themselves since they were in elementary school. So when I'm asked the questions like "how and why was this created?", my answers are weak, and I find that difficult.
> *Japanese student*

The demands of the course can be a cause of stress; so can the apparent lack of pressure. Some students feel that they don't work hard enough because tutors do not push them to do so. Others worry that they would go through the whole three years without much improvement.

> I had to figure out everything by myself, and it took me until just before the deadline to understand everything. But the volume of work is huge, so it was very difficult at the beginning. Of course, the tutor helps me if I ask, but there will be nothing if I don't do

anything on my own. It's like self teaching. I was confused by this system. …if you are not capable of deciding your own timetable, you would end up being totally at a loss.
Japanese student

b) Challenges in the classroom

Students find it very difficult to work in classes which have such different levels of background, age, language proficiency, experience, technical knowledge and level of maturity. This is an issue at both Foundation Degree and BA.

There are some students who are capable enough to produce a professional piece of work, whereas there are others who are completely new to the course.
Taiwanese student

I think because I did a course for 9 months in Singapore, I knew a lot of basic concepts. But many people in my class don't know these things, since I do know some things, I feel bold in class that I know things. I don't need to listen to some things sometimes. I feel like it is a waste of my time to sit there and understand these things.
Indian student

Tutors

A good tutor gives me a clear vision, tells me what is a problem, and what I should improve for the next time. On the other hand, a bad tutor is not helpful for me. For example, a teacher tells me just his personal comments or impressions, like just whether he likes or dislikes my works. Those are just his individual taste, not teaching.
Japanese student

For some students, getting the most out of their teacher is a matter, again, of adaptation to their new environment (see Jones 2005).

I think the issue concerning tutor is very important. Taiwanese tutors are more subjective. The way that you do your work could be possibly directed by what the tutor thinks this is right or not. Here, you are free to do what you like to do. But, Taiwanese tutors tend to teach you and show you more stuff, and are more likely to push you to do more work. In comparison with Taiwanese tutors, tutors here don't push you much and seem to be relatively passive. If you don't approach them to ask them some questions or for supports, they don't seem to think that they have responsibilities to tell you more than what they taught in the classroom.
Taiwanese student

Students' views of their teachers are quite polarized. What they like is enthusiasm and passion, individual attention, tutors who remember students' names and faces, tutors who encourage interaction among students, tutors who answer students' questions, tutors who make encouraging and constructive comments about students' work, and tutors who maintain pressure on students to work.

Generally, the tutor's comments and advice are very helpful. He/she is very enthusiastic about teaching, and he/she is strict to the students who don't work hard. The tutor remembers all the names and faces of the students, so for example, if you fail to hand in an assignment before the deadline, he/she will know. I had to stay on in the same class last year. My school has a very free atmosphere, but for the students also have to be careful and show that we are working hard. I remember the tutor telling us that he/she wants to see the evidence that we came to school and worked at our workspace everyday
Japanese student

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Students are less satisfied when they feel that they are not getting direct answers to their questions. Sometimes tutors are too busy to help. In some cases students say that they have given up asking their teachers and are turning to friends instead.

> I used to like my college very much, especially in my first term. But, I don't enjoy as much as my last term. Firstly, this is probably because these tutors who teach us this term are not passionate about teaching in comparison with those who taught us last term. When you ask them questions, they would give their answers. However, you seem to find that these answers to your questions are rather superficial or diplomatic. We end up with looking for these answers by ourselves, or we may have to go to ask our course director.
> *Taiwanese student*

Some students state quite directly that they feel discriminated against:

> Our teachers should really work hard in their teachings. Some teachers don't really do their teaching. One of them told us that, at the beginning of our second term, I am very tired this term and don't really want to do many teachings. Thus, we don't receive many teachings this term and are asked to submit a big project. This is not right. I pay around £9000 pounds a year, which is three times more than what UK students are supposed to pay. What am I getting here? I pay more, and also am discriminated here.
> *Taiwanese student*

Similar issues have been identified in Australian and other research (Mullins, Quintrell and Hancock 1995, Perrucci and Hu 1995).

Students – especially the more mature ones – are very positive about being taught by artists. This gives them an opportunity to learn directly from practitioners, which can also enhance their career prospects.

> They are young and many of them are on the top of their areas. I have learned a lot from them. They were one of us, having also studied at (UAL college). The ways in which they teach me give me an impression that they are trying to use peer-to-peer teaching approach.
> *Taiwanese student*

Others, however, point out that being a good artist does not guarantee similar ability in teaching.

> Sometimes, I ask our teachers some questions. What I have realized is that some of them could be excellent artists who produce a remarkable piece of work, yet they are just not very good at teaching. There is something that may be very easy for them, both as an artist and as a teacher, but that could be very difficult to us, as a student, as an apprentice. It seems to me that they weren't aware of this point yet that is fundamental, but is very easy to be taken for granted.
> *Taiwanese student*

a) Students' perceptions of their tutors

Our respondents had a lot to say about their tutors' attitudes to them as international students. They know that they have problems with language, and really appreciate it when teachers are patient and supportive:

> I really like one of our teachers who teaches us visual studies. S/he has great patience. At the end of the term s/he gave us a questionnaire concerning teaching and learning to fill in, and would offer extra support especially to international students. For instance, s/he told us that if we have problems with writing in English, we could

possibly write in our own language. We could make an appointment with him/her, and discuss how to convey our ideas in English.
Taiwanese student

Some teachers are perceived as getting irritated by Asian students who cannot speak proper English Students can be very stressed by this. Many Asian students feel that they are treated differently from UK/European students:

I feel a problem when I talk to a certain teacher, like …. while I am trying to speak to him/her as hard as I can, showing my work. …since my words are not enough or inappropriate, I can sense a negative reaction on his/her face, like, frustration or irritation. Being aware of his/her feelings, I cannot continue to talk any more…consequently, just I listen to him/her, I cannot speak voluntarily…But there is a good teacher, his/her name is …, who tries to speak to me as much as he/she can. To improve this problem, caused by my poor English, I think I have to study more.
Japanese student

The same student also commented (of another teacher):

I think he/she may get irritated to talk to us, because of our poor English. His/her treatment toward students is different, like, how to talk to students, for example, he/she doesn't come around to us while we are doing some work in class, to check what we are doing. For British students, he/she often approaches them and looks at their works and speaks to them, whereas for Asian students, he/she just walks past us without any words. He/she neither explains to the international students nor comments on our works in class. At first, he/she seemingly tried to speak to us, but gradually…he/she started avoiding Asians.
Japanese student

'Different treatment' of international students could be a result of misunderstandings which also originate in poor language proficiency. It is difficult to generalize as to whether 'discrimination', as some students see it, is a consequence of the poor language skills of students or of tutors' attitudes towards international students.[9] The problem appears to be deep-seated, and it is clear that language is not the only factor at work. This student feels that language is not a problem for her, but that she encounters a different form of obstacle:

I don't find it difficult to communicate with my teachers. The time to meet the teachers is quite short. I think it's one-way communication. They listen, but I can't have any feedback. I don't think it's a kind of communication. They think we just can't adapt to their style.
Hong Kong student

Many of the tutors who participated in university focus groups and in dissemination activities commented on the reluctance of international students to speak in class (see Samuelowicz 1987, Burns 1991, Chalmers and Volet 1997). Many students confirm this, and point to shyness, the fact that they are in a foreign country, and the fact that they come from a system in which teachers are seen more as figures of authority and the student's role is more passive. Yet they also suggest other factors at work. Some tutors are perceived as discouraging students with poor English skills from asking questions in class – although of course it may well be that they are trying to avoid putting them on the spot by asking them to speak publicly. Either way, some

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[9] On the way in which the issue of discrimination has largely been avoided in the literature on international students in the UK see Bailey 2006.

students say that they respond to this experience by preferring to talk to their peers rather than the teachers:

> Once, the teacher told me off saying that it's because I don't speak English well. And afterwards, I couldn't speak to that teacher, and I always tried to avoid him or her…this incident made me scared of him/her. I don't feel anything easy in this course. When I couldn't ask the teacher anymore, I tried to ask my friends, but there's a limit, so I usually consult the books to finish my work.
> *Japanese student*

b) Access to tutors

The most frequent complaint concerns access to tutors and communication with them. Communication with tutors is difficult; many students do not realize that many are part time,[10] they do not know on which days they are in, and do not know their email addresses. Many students do not understand what 'office hours' are for and often want to talk to tutors after class. Students' expectations may not be realistic in this respect; if so, these expectations need to be managed.

> There is only one full-time teacher on my course…I have only a few opportunities to talk them. There are specialists, such as a designer of lights on stage. But I don't know when they are at school, today, tomorrow? No notice about it. So I have to ask somebody about where our teachers are. I want to meet them and get advice from them more and more. I can contact them only in an academic lecture. While I am making some works, I want to ask, actually.
> *Japanese student*

> Many students feel that, even when they do see their tutors, the amount of time allocated is not enough for a full discussion, particularly as non-native speakers inevitably need longer to say what they want to say, and given their quietness in class there may also be more to explain to the tutor. In these situations the high student-staff ratio does not help.
> *South Korean student*

A recurrent problem appears to be that international students are disappointed when they attempt to speak to their tutors at the end of the class, only to find that they are in a hurry to leave or otherwise unwilling to talk to them. The students can be quite bitter about what they see as a form of rejection, seeing it as uncaring and even unprofessional. Students who are used to a system in which teachers are caught after class cannot understand why it does not operate at UAL. For many students it is easier to talk individually to their tutor rather than in front of the whole class. After the class feels more comfortable for them.

> There are some teachers who don't like talking to you after class. They wonder why you don't ask questions in class. But the thing is, if you don't talk in class…There are 20 people sitting in the class, if you don't understand, they just think you are dumb.
> *Indian student*

c) Formality or informality?

Many of the problems discussed above are to do with mismatches of expectations and realities. The same is true of the students' relationship with their tutors. Many

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[10] Art and design education has a tradition of have much of the teaching by part time staff. This is because of the perceived importance of having practising artists and designers as key members of the teaching team.

students are confused over this. The use of the tutor's first name, without title, is new to them and many feel that this clouds the boundaries.

> I was surprised to see the ways in which tutors and students interact here, which is rather striking contrast to Taiwan. I was really amazed to hear that students call their tutors by their first name. Some of tutors here would see you as a friend, very relaxed. On the contrary, in Taiwan, our tutors there seem to gives a more authoritative impression than tutors here. However, you may find tutors here seem to be relatively friendly here, but would still see a clear line separated between tutors and students. I must add that this line appears to be much clearer in Taiwan.
> *Taiwanese student*

However, both the relationship and the students' expectations of it can be complex. Some students criticize teachers' reluctance to discuss personal problems, suggesting on the one hand that they are unclear about the boundaries of the teacher-student relationship, and on the other that the role of student support services is not clear to them (see also Ch. 5).[11]

> I was talking to her and she said that she has faced this situation a lot, that a lot of international students come here and they want us to parent them. And to an certain extent I disagree with that, why can't they parent us? They are women, they are normal human beings, they go through same problems like others do. …Why can't they sit with us and discuss our personal problems? We come from so far away from our home, our country… There a lot of formalities with teachers here.
> *Indian student*

d) Contact and direction from tutors: students' expectations

International students *expect* to have more contact teaching and more didactic structures when they are learning. In the current climate of limited contact and large groups the opportunities for one to one tuition are curtailed. This may require different and innovative approaches to support for learning

> People complain a lot about the fact that the lectures are not condensed enough although there are so few of them. Maybe my case is extreme, but for example, I had the lectures on design only once or twice last term. And it was only in the morning. It's basically self-teaching. Maybe design courses are like this anywhere. We do have classes every week for the same hours, so it's not that the teachers aren't committed at all. My class is divided in two, and one group would be working in the computer room while the other is studying design. But even when you're doing design, there is only one teacher, so we usually end up developing ideas about our own works by ourselves. We have to do one presentation at the end, and I think it would be good if there was tutorial or something when the teachers can check our progress, but there isn't any. It's really rare that I can talk to the teachers privately about my work. They are often not at school in the afternoon. I also hear the same problem at other colleges. Of course there are some differences though.
> *Japanese student*

Tutors also need to make their approach to learning and teaching more explicit and to ensure that new students learn through a supportive approach to acquiring appropriate skills to undertake study within the discipline. Whether accurate or not, the *perception* in the following quote that there is no teaching happening between

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[11] 'The cultural values and norms implicit in counselling are essentially white, Western and middle class' (Burns 1991, p. 73).

giving a brief and the assessment of project work will be fundamentally affecting the way that a student approaches their learning in the project.

> There is no conventional understanding of teaching going on; there is no teaching delivered between giving a brief for a project and the deadline. This suggests that our teachers would not really teach something fundamental. Those who haven't got sufficient background knowledge regarding graphic design decide to transfer to do other courses after their first term.
> *Taiwanese student*

They would also prefer more explanation about theory, as for non-native speakers large amounts of theoretical reading is an additional challenge.

> I think it would be really helpful if the teachers would spend more time teaching, explaining, and clarifying more of the hard topics to grasp: such as theories. Yes, I can read the theories on my own from the textbooks, but I would appreciate it if the teachers spend more time teaching more of the theories portion during class to increase my understanding. The classes are only 2 hours a week.
> *South Korean student*

Learning in groups

There were different comments in relation to team working.[12] Some students enjoyed the team projects, but felt it was difficult to participate fully due to their language ability. Some appreciated the opportunities to learn from other students but some also commented on the individualistic nature of the work on their particular course, and noted a lack of team spirit and opportunity to learn from and with their peers.

Many students are inspired by listening to different opinions and seeing different styles:

> I find that I like the mix because I think that you learn so much about different design styles. Particularly the Japanese, they have, it's unbelievable, a crazy sense of design, a really adventurous sense of design and it brings it out. I think it really is terrific that there is a mix. I think that I would like a more eclectic mix in the future, but I don't think a lot of people in my class have learned to value the international students because they are wary of opening up and not quite sure how to approach them…
> *American student*

Many of these students (especially Taiwanese, Hong Kong, Japanese) are not used to group work; indeed, they have never done it before.[13] Though Indians were not used to it either, they took to it enthusiastically. One of the Indian interviewers reported that those Indian students who were involved in group/team work were happier and more integrated than those who were only doing individual projects.

> When I came here initially I used to find group work a bit hard…I think it is completely different compared to where I am from. Even the way you greet people here is different. So what else can you expect? Initially, in the first three months, it was really

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[12] On this theme see especially Samuelowicz 1987, Volet and Kee 1993, Mullins, Quintrell and Hancock 1995, Chalmers and Volet 1997.

[13] This was noted in the literature over twenty years ago: '…learning to participate in group discussion is one of the most difficult adjustment overseas students must make; a student has to assume a different role, that of an active participant, develop critical attitude to the subject matter studied, and formulate complex ideas in a foreign language in a situation where exchange of ideas is rapid' (Samuelowicz 1987, p.125).

odd and by the time I got to the Foundation course, I got used to the teaching methods and the learning methods.
Indian student

Mature international students, especially those who have been in employment and have thus learned to value team work, particularly appreciate group activity and see it as helpful to their future *curriculum vitae*. Others find it much easier to talk with fellow students during group work than to do so in a formal class situation with the teacher present. For those who find talking in groups difficult, writing for a group is an easier way into teamwork:

These same positive features have their downsides. Some perceive group work as going against the essence of creativity, which they see as an individual matter:

Let's say working in a group, you want to use black, but I want to use white, and he wants to use red. Who should we listen to? That's why no one likes to do group work in year one.
Hong Kong student

This view is of course not confined to international students:

I am on a creative course and everyone is trying to get their creativeness together, and it is quite difficult to get your voice heard and to say 'that didn't work'; to just make everything work when everyone has so many different ideas can be quite hard…
UK student

Many international students yet again find that their membership of a group of students of different nationalities and linguistic backgrounds, including native speakers, brings with it complications that can inhibit their full participation. The presence of UK students can pose particular obstacles:

Yes, I think [group work] is the hardest thing, because we do it with native speakers too. It's ok to talk with the teacher, but it's impossible to keep up with the speed of conversation of the young British girls. Although I want to contribute more, it's pretty difficult.
Japanese student

But these obstacles go beyond the linguistic:

Firstly, it is English. Secondly, UK students don't understand why Asian students spend so much time on thinking. And the ways that these two groups of students are so different. Sometimes, some Asian students try to explain what they think. These UK students just are unwilling to listen. Third, these UK students believe that they are entitled to dominate and to lead where our discussion should go, simply they are westerners.
Taiwanese student

It should be explained to students that teamwork should involve everybody:

There were 8 of us, 2-3 British students and the rest of us were Asians. They were very inconsiderate about we had to say or what we thought of the project. They would never wait for us to finish. In fact they would not even discuss with us about the project. They would do everything on their own and just tell us what we had to do. They never asked what we thought of the project. We were really patient since it was a group project. The rest of us Asians, all others were Koreans … we did not want to make it into a very serious issue and fight over small things.
Indian student

International students expect tutors to intervene where necessary:

> I feel the group work is difficult because of the strong character of each student. Many teachers try to focus on an individual student but for group work, we have to compromise and work together for a goal. However, we often did individual work instead of co-designed work. For example, now my group has six students, but each student's work clashes with the others. In this kind of situation, I want the teacher to build cooperative relations among the students in the group, but teachers do not do so. This problem might be related to the character of teachers.
> *Japanese student*

Groups may also need explicit guidance on how to organise themselves, manage their time and deliver to schedule:

> I guess a lot of time is wasted throwing out a lot of different ideas and not seeing things through. Everyone had their own opinion, which is great, you should have that in a group setting, but I think a lot of time is wasted with people going to get coffee and coming back and people have to leave early and go to work. I just think its hard to get people focused in group work.
> *American student*

To sum up, multilingual and multicultural group work is a substantial challenge. International students are acutely aware of the problems involved; teachers acquire insights into them through experience, while home students, often largely unaware of them, can unconsciously compound them. This is an area in which tutors could play a key role. Where teamwork is successful, it is greatly valued:

> I've met up with them for group projects and stuff, and we discuss academic work in shop I guess, just because that's when I do most of the discussion of academic work. Just kind of 'how did you make this?' 'how did you manage to do that?' which is actually one of the best qualities of my class, that its not competitive, you can pretty much ask anyone about what they're working on and they're pretty encouraging."
> *American student*

Coursework

There are mixed views on the clarity with which the aims and objectives of the course, and particularly the coursework, are presented. Some students are very positive:

> Well, I like the way they teach us. We get all the details about what exactly we are supposed to do, on the very first day. That is the best thing that we are ready from day one.
> *Indian student*

a) Assignment Briefs

Students are very happy when briefs are clearly structured and explained, both orally and in writing:

> An easy thing is well organized guideline or outline. A concept of a project is clearly shown at beginning. A project brief tells us what we should do, in detail, like outline, and everything necessary for research. Of course the project depends on each person, but it is interesting the process we do something different. I need just simple and clear guideline. The course gives me both. It is easy to follow.
> *Japanese student*

That does not, of course, mean that the briefs cannot be flexible, which students also appreciate. However, not all students found the briefs that clear or that easy to

understand, particularly if they are not given in writing. As usual, language can be a barrier, though the difficulties which students talk about are not confined to this; home students and international students who are native speakers also report problems. One simply found the language of the brief circuitous:

> First semester I found I really had a major difficulty, the reason being that we were handed out a brief. The brief according to them was very simple. But for me, every time I read the brief I could never understand. The language of some here, instead of being straight, is roundabout. When it was time for submissions I used to see people with different kinds of work and I used to feel that maybe I didn't understand it. So I really had a problem. This semester it has improved.
> *Indian student*

b) Guidance for research and written work

Many students complain that tutors do not explain to students how to do research and what they mean by this term.

> The hardest thing for me has been that I came from a course where I had a reading list, I had written assignments, I had to show up to lecture/discussion whatever, and then coming here where I have to keep a notebook and like if we have a design day kind of just adjusting to working in a more artistic way where it was like, 'well, go out and do design research' 'well what does design research mean?' well its just that you're supposed to go out and draw and kind of develop that…not that I didn't know what that was, but its just a different way of working and having that be my course 24/7 instead of just one of the classes that I take that's been the most difficult to adjust to for me.
> *American student*

Practices are very course specific, and tutors will need to show examples of research, journals, correct referencing etc. Courses such as fine art, journalism, or business management would require different guidelines.

> The biggest difficulty I've had so far is understanding what the tutor says when he says 'I want you to write in a journal'. Because a journal to me would be more similar to a diary or entering information or your thoughts or ideas about current projects…I've found it slightly confusing trying to really understand what they say when they say 'journal'…it's quite difficult.
> *American student*

> I really really enjoy this course, largely because I have been given a lot of spaces to develop my creative thinking. However, the most difficult for me is writing. Our teacher assigns us a lot essays to complete, but never really told us how to write. When I have got some questions, s/he always tells me to look for support from study support team.
> *Taiwanese student*

c) Feedback and monitoring of progress

There is much research which indicates that all students respond best to regular informative, appropriate feedback while they are learning (Samuelowicz 1987, Mullins, Quintrell and Hancock 1995, Beasley and Pearson 1999). This needs to be specific and focused on how they can improve. Feedback is given in a variety of forms. Students are pleased when they get it regularly:

> We are constantly getting tutor feedback in our lessons… That's usually once per term that you're getting your big feedback, but they are constantly telling you. It's very helpful.
> *American student*

> Tutors' feedback was very useful. I am not disappointed at tutors' critical comments, because their keen sense makes my work better.
> *South Korean student*

However for some students, feedback comes too late, when the project was already finished. Students wished tutors had monitored their process from beginning to end.

> And then easiest is that you don't really have much coursework, but last term our entire grade was based on one project and its not like you can get feedback before, you get feedback after when its too late and I failed the class. I'm not going to turn in a paper that I think I'm going to fail, I fully thought I did it fine, but I got it back and I got a 34% fail.
> *American student*

Students expressed a preference for legible paper-based feedback. International students also expect comments on more than their English:

> The comment was mainly about "English required" rather than comment on my work itself. I was discouraged. Yes. It is true that my English is not good because I am not a native English speaker. I know English is important. But I came here for learning design. I expected more comments, but there was only assessment on my English.
> *South Korean student*

Unhelpful feedback can be discouraging, and can result in the student no longer consulting the tutor:

> Instead of encouraging me to do that, my tutor just told me to change it, and to tell you the truth, I felt it wasn't a good way of teaching. Since then, I don't go to tutors for suggestions. Instead, I read books or ask other students that have more knowledge. I wish the tutors would give me advices that are more constructive, like 'how about this way' and stuff. But the teachers' ways with the students are all different, so I can't generalize too much either.
> *Japanese student*

d) Assessment

Those students who commented on assessment attach great importance to the marks they receive:[14]

> We don't have any exam. We just have projects to do, one per each semester. They give me a brief. We study it and start doing the project and we don't know what others are making. On the day which our works are being criticized, we bring our works to school and present our ideas. The teachers and other classmates listen to your presentation. The teachers give you the marks afterwards and post it on the board, so everyone can see the marks. The marks show how many percent you get in research, products and ideas. I think it's good to see all people's marks. Since different tutors give different marks, some give 60 as average and some give 70 as average. I can see my position in my class. …
> I think our marks are not important because different teachers will give the marks every time. Sometimes, the average is 50 and sometimes is 70. It's good to know my performance every time when I compare my marks with others. The teachers give us comments after the presentation. My classmates can also express their opinions.
> *Hong Kong student*

Comments from students support the research into assessment practice in the UK (e.g. Ridley 2004, Shreeve, Baldwin et al. 2004). Students understand assessment

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[14] On this topic see MacKinnon and Manathunga 2003, Crossman 2007.

in different ways and many focus on grades at the expense of feedback. Grades can of course cause considerable stress to students:

> I get a lot of stress because I want to do the best in everything I do. C0 mark is given when you finish the job. C+ is when it's good and B0 is really good. But I'm stressed with other schools like (another university) gives C+ and B0 more easily than (UAL college). I think grades are really important because when you turn in your transcript, (UAL college). grades are lower than other students from (another university) who give out easier grading scales. I feel stressed when I came all the way to UAL to study, and all I get is a C0. I want to get better grades. In Korea, there is a lot of emphasis on good grades and an impressive transcript. I feel as though I am at a disadvantage when it comes to the hard grading scale by (UAL college).**.**
> *South Korean student*

Again, the focus on grades is interesting. Tutors intend the process of assessment to include evaluation; it is seen as a key element in personal development. For students, with job applications in mind, the tendency is simply to focus on the measurable outcome. The full purpose of assessment thus needs to be emphasized to students. So, quite explicitly, do the criteria on which marks are awarded. An example of this is the question of 'marks for effort'. One student was disappointed at not being rewarded for effort:

> You can work so hard for weeks and come in and they say that it's crap, and almost don't acknowledge how much you've done. Even if it's not necessarily as good, it's all about the thought behind it, that's how *the marking* goes—and how much attention you've paid to certain details, not necessarily how long you've done something.
> *American student*

4. Social Interaction

Integration

> That's why I like coming to school here, because I meet people from all over the world. Like, in the States, you just meet people from—the different states! And here, I socialize mostly with Americans, I don't know why, I guess it's mostly because we have more in common. But, I do have friends from Scotland, and from Australia, Russia… you just meet people from everywhere, which I think is really interesting, because you just have completely different backgrounds, but you end up in the same place in your lives right now. It's interesting to learn about different cultures.
> *American student*

> I am very shy and find it difficult to take an initiative and talk to UK students. I have noticed that there is probably one or two out of ten international students who can get really well with UK students. But, I am not one of them.
> *Taiwanese student*

International students were asked whether they met others outside classes to discuss work. This elicited a variety of responses. Few met regularly or in an organised way for that purpose. For one course, the UK students had organised a weekly meeting in a local pub to share photographs, and a few international students took part. There were also examples of classmates going to an exhibition or a movie suggested by their teacher. Apart from these, most of the students' comments were devoted to analysing why they did not meet more to discuss work. A number of reasons were given. After class, students tended to disappear rapidly, not having time to hang around. Students who tried to fix meetings for the future tended to be disappointed; even when reminded, many did not turn up. Organising meetings was not easy unless they individually exchanged contact details. Another problem was finding suitable places to meet. Often those groups which did form ended up in the canteen for lack of a better space – which, they imply, was not ideal for talk about work.

Behind this comparative failure to meet regularly to discuss work lie more fundamental problems of social interaction. The respondents identified a number of factors in this. Language, yet again, was a barrier, on both sides. Non-native speakers felt uneasy with the colloquialisms of native speakers, but many of them also detected a reluctance on the part of home students to be patient. Even when they are, the conversation is an effort on both sides, and it is often easier not to bother.

> I kind of run away from it. It's ok with students who speak simple English, but it's hard to understand the young UK students, and the conversations don't last long or get awkward because I ask them to repeat so many times. If it's someone who is interested in Japan, he or she listens to us patiently, so it's easier to become friends, but if not, it's difficult.
> *Japanese student*

Where home students appear not to want to talk to international students, this makes those with inhibitions about their linguistic ability even more nervous, and can easily drive them to the easier option of talking more with their co-nationals, i.e. back into the trap of segregation. At worst, this can quickly lead to isolation:

> I met a really shy Japanese guy. I'm pretty outgoing and I like talking to people, but he was just afraid of talking in English. He pretended to listen to iPod so that people won't talk to him, and he doesn't have to talk to them.
> *Japanese student*

Older British students were better at making contact with international students.

> There might be a generation gap. Inside the school, British classmates willingly talk to me, but if we leave our classroom, even one step, they stop talking to me and seem to enjoy chatting with other British. I hear that in another class, in which there are some mature British students, Japanese often have lunch with them. So I think this might be a matter of generation. I have friends who are mainly from Japan or other Asia.
> *Japanes estudent*

Such contacts, however, tended to remain superficial as the students did not have that much in common (and mature home students often had family commitments etc.).

> I have one British friend that I met at a bar. He is much older than me, but it's nice to talk to him because he is used to speaking to Japanese people, and tries to speak slowly with simple words and phrases. I see him speaking to British people sometimes, but he talks very differently.
> *Japanese student*

Differences in age, maturity and level of education play a less obvious but equally important part. Older international students who already have a degree find that even if communication with the typical young British fresher were easier, there is little to talk about.

> In my class, many classmates are British students and this circumstance itself is no problem to study, but many of them are so young like 18 or 19 years old and they seem to want to talk only among them. I sometimes feel difficult to talk with them. In relation with this issue, their childish behavior makes me feel a bit negative to talk.
> *Japanese student*

There are many references to the widespread phenomenon of people with the same origins forming groups to the implicit exclusion of others. There is a perception – also referred to in the research literature – that 'Asians stick together' (Baker et al. 1991, Chalmers and Volet 1997). Given the nature of the present research it will hardly be a surprise that the emphasis in these interviews is on UK students 'sticking together':

> I only meet them at school, but I feel that UK students are always with UK students only.
> *Japanese student*

> They're really xenophobic…I've tried to get on with them, like I'm not even being pushy, not like, 'Hi, what's your name? I want to be your friend!'. But I'll just be like 'Hi!', you know just getting acquainted, and they just want to have nothing to do with you unless you're British, like they're really stuck-up.
> *American student*

They are seen as coming from similar schools and backgrounds and an identical culture, knowing the system, not having language issues, and therefore also having in common a much greater familiarity with what is expected of them in the transition to university. In the new social context of the university and the class, these are the most natural bonds to be formed.

> All of the British girls would sit together on one long table! And all of the internationals would sit at another, just because we felt comfortable; it was really more interesting to

talk amongst each other and learn more things, and the other girls were all happy and talked about what they saw on TV, and we have us, just talking about where we're going next. It was nice, but you do notice a divide.
American student

These are common experiences in universities with a high proportion of international students in the English-speaking world (Volet and Ang 1998; UKCOSA 2004a).

International students' perceptions of UK students

How do international students see home students? The picture here is bleak. Many felt that home students tended to be reserved, even cold – or just unwilling to make an effort.

They are shy, timid, or so proud. I think most British students have one of these three characters. They are also very young, so there are many UK students, who are reckless. They don't care for international students. For example, they don't say again or speak slowly, when someone does not catch their speaking. So, I hesitate to say something to them.
South Korean student

They are very nice people, very easy-going. But then, you have to have a very good hang of English. If you can't have a conversation with them fluently, they can't be bothered to be friends with you. They will be nice to you, exchange pleasantries, but they will not bother at all to get to know you better. Obviously, if you can speak the way they do, if you can understand their sense of humour, then you can definitely be part of them as well. But, generally it is not easy because they have their own set of friends, the British get along really well, they don't want to mix up with international students. It is so true.
Indian student

The UK students really have some attitude problem. They never come to you, you have to go to them and you have to ask them. Some of them really have a problem. Even though you go to them, they don't pay attention. Sometimes I feel bad. But not all are the same. My classmates are quite friendly, so it is fine.
Indian student

Some students do recognise that patience and persistence are required:

Like I said, I am an introvert, so I find it a little difficult in general, not just with UK students. But, they are ok, they are kind of friendly. But it is hard to get to know them because they are like, you know, Oh you are an Indian. I think, that's the way I feel. Or like, you are not British, so they stay away from you. They think of you in a different way. But then once you get to know them, they realise, Oh ok, you know, she is a nice person. Then they start talking to you. So it has not been that difficult.
Indian student

But not all 'last the course' in this arduous task:

In both my courses the UK students have been the most rudest and bitchiest and anti-social people I have ever met. they don't talk to us, no. And they seem to turn their nose up at us. And feel like they for some reason are much more superior and we are the inferior. Specially in this course, last course, my last course was much, it was a smaller group obviously, there was only about 16 of us, 20 of us. So we did all get along more. But I have found that the British home students can be really really rude. Like I kept thinking that it's ok, its just feels that way at the moment, it's the first day, then it was two weeks, and then three weeks, it was an year, You know what I mean.

> And this year... Its attitude. And this year, like it's really...I have. See, because my thing is that I'll always make an effort. I remember yelling at my friends when they used to come back and say the British girls are so rude. Because I live with two other girls who are in the same university. And they are all in different courses. So we talk about the university in general. And they keep saying...why are they so rude...why are they so this...why are they so that.... And you know I used to keep saying, yelling at them and saying 'Relax, you know, its the first year. These problems will arise, you'll find your friends.' And now I am the one who is turning around and saying, you know… There is no point making an effort.
> *Indian student*

Obviously this is a point which would benefit from follow-up study.

International students thus feel that it is constantly down to them to make the first move; yet they commonly describe themselves as being shy, 'not the kind to take initiative'. They say quite explicitly that they need help to integrate. That this is about much more than language is evidenced by these quotes from American students:

> I'm friends with a couple of British students, but… there are these two kids …. that I'm good friends with, but they hang out with their other British friends on weekends, because they have a life established already, and so it's hard to become friends with them, just because they already have existing friendships. I guess that would be the hard part. At school we get along, but out of school, it's harder to get to be a new member of an already existing group.
> *American student*

> If you're a shy kid, especially on Foundation, it took two months for me to really meet someone, I didn't have any numbers in my mobile. That's depressing, you know? But, at the same time, what's the school meant to do about that? You can't really force people to trade numbers and things. But, I think their way of handling things was, having lecture and then having everyone go into the canteen and saying 'oh, just mingle with each other'. I always hated icebreakers when I was younger, but I think I wished that we had some kind of icebreakers that first couple of months, because there was nothing. I mean, I'm already self-conscious being in a foreign country and then I'm just expected to just go up to introduce myself to people whom I've never seen in my life who have an accent that I'm not really familiar with and they know I'm a beckoning American straightaway, and coming from a country that's hated by most of the world. I'm not another cowboy, George Bush-lover, I can't control my accent; it's very funny. But, at the same time, I can't really blame them, because I feel like I've turned into that way myself.
> *American student*

The difficulty of 'breaking the ice' is substantial, and failure can be distressing.

> I think it is extremely difficult to me. As the same age students, UK students are usually only willing to talk to those speaking fluent English. If I talk to them actively, I don't get a lot of respond. Therefore I feel upset.
> *Taiwanese student*

Efforts are poorly rewarded, at best with politeness, which however could be turned on and off at will.

> One time, one of my British classmates was so nice to me in the morning, but next day, he neglected me. I don't know what happened and felt so strange about his attitude.
> *Hong Kong student*

When there is more than that, it still tends to be superficial; one person defined these relationships as 'hi-bye friends'.

It may also be significant that international students find it easier to get to know UK students if they are from an ethnic minority. One Hong Kong student said that s/he spent most time with ethnic Chinese students who had settled in the UK; a Korean was close to Japanese and black UK students. Another reported that this had led to a further grouping:

> I don't have many British friends here. I find it easier to make friends with these British born African students. They seem to me are much easy-going. Our class seems to have divided into three groups of students. There are white, black and Asian students, and there is not much interaction between white students with the other two groups. Some of these white students would greet me when we meet on the corridor. But, some just ignore you.
> *Taiwanese student*

The role of the institution

What role does the institution play? How can the university help to improve social interaction among students? At the moment it appears from student responses that some strategies for dealing with the substantial number of international students are unintentionally making the situation worse. It appears that special orientation sessions for international students set the tone for what can become a pattern of separate treatment. On some courses international students are then segregated when classes are organised, apparently in the belief that this will make for more effective teaching. There are differences in the provision for language support. The reasons for these decisions may be perfectly sound, but the cumulative effect is that international students are repeatedly separated from the student body as a whole. This gives them little incentive to feel that they are an integral part of the university.

The international students feel that more could be done by the institution to foster a sense of belonging. They are not alone. As this home student observed,

> …the way the international students are integrated with home students isn't really concentrated on by the management of the college. They don't seem to be aware that an international student, say from Japan, has to come half way round the world to a country that they may not have been to before and settle in; and on top of all that personal upheaval they have to do the college work, as well. There must be some way they can make international students feel more comfortable and have stronger relations with home students.

That the attempt is being made is undeniable; but it needs to be sensitive and balanced. Some students reported that they had been told at induction that they had to 'make an effort' to integrate. This was felt to be counter-productive, as they did not detect many signs of effort being made by home students or for that matter by the institution itself. Put bluntly, they feel that it is for the 'host' community to fulfil its basic function of 'hospitality' and take proactive steps to encourage integration.

Students pointed to a number of areas in which integration could be helped. One is accommodation; where students live is an important part of how they interact. Integration is much better if they live together with UK students, either in halls of

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residence or privately. Another is group work. Indeed, this presents the most obvious institutionalised opportunity for social interaction. If students are not engaged in group work they are much less likely to feel that they are part of the university. Ensuring that group work is an essential element in as many courses as possible would make a substantial difference to integration.

> There is not much need for us to participate in group discussion much. Besides, we are not really encouraged to take part in many group-based activities by our teachers. International students from Asia are generally very shy when they first to this county. We really need the college or our teachers to facilitate engagements between and among students. Alternatively, they can help to initiate interaction among students, which is very important to international students. I am a very shy person and often go with Japanese, South Korean and Hong Kongese.
> *Taiwanese student*

The dynamics of group work are never easy, and as seen above, many factors are at work here, including language, age, experience and (in a few cases) gender. Many of the comments on group work suggest that students look to the teacher to ensure that all students participate and pull their weight. This is not necessarily how teachers see their role, and many students imply that the group is assigned a task and then left to fend for itself. Home students also find group work a challenge. A more proactive policy here would help integration.

A final area for further development is the support given to the social life of students. Encouraging international students to participate more fully in the activities of the student union would be just as important a way of demonstrating that they are welcome, and that the university wishes to match its deserved international academic reputation with a reputation as a genuinely cosmopolitan community.

5. Other Issues

Recruitment and admissions

The general points emerging from students' accounts of joining the university again illustrated the need for students to have more understanding of what was involved.

Students had been attracted by the reputation of the institution, London and the UK. They were also attracted by the international mix of students they would be joining and the potential this offered for future networking. However they were rather bemused by the process; some came through agents while others had applied directly. They would have welcomed more pre-admissions dialogue with the university, especially about their language skills, to ensure that they were on the right course and level with a clear understanding of the progression opportunities. While the university required a specific IELTS score some students felt that IELTS did not measure their capacity to cope with teaching and learning activities in English. They perceived their own language limitations and those of some fellow students as impacting negatively on their learning.

Students indicated that written information is not in itself enough and that university prospectuses tend to have a marketing flavour. There is therefore a danger of setting up unrealistic expectations both of university life and life in London.

It was particularly important to students to start on what they felt was the right course since changing course was perceived as very difficult.

Support, facilities and infrastructure

University of the Arts London, like most UK universities, has considerable publicity around all the facilities and support available to students including induction, website, leaflets and posters. However students in our sample tended to know very little about what was on offer. This seems to come from the degree to which such services (counselling; dyslexia support etc) were not part of their home educational experience.

> Student support? We don't have such a system in colleges back home, where student bodies represent you throughout. They should tell us how useful these services are and how exactly we are supposed to use them. If you haven't heard of it or used it before, you are not bothered!
> *Indian student*

The implication of this is that we cannot inform students about these services and support simply by conventional modes of transmitting information.

Many felt that they had been told little about these services beyond the fact that 'they are there' – and many, coming as they do from cultures in which such services did not exist, had little incentive to find out more. Australian and American research have demonstrated that interaction with home students leads to international students making greater use of the available services (Westwood and Barker 1990, Quintrell

and Westwood 1994, Perrucci and Hu 1995). Clearly the distribution of literature about these services, the web pages, and mentions of them at induction are not enough on their own to ensure take-up.

Students' attitudes to what for many of them is an entirely new concept will vary. Thus many do not understand the differences between Student Services, Study Support and the Student Union. Some assume that support for international students consists of nothing more than help with language and advice on visa applications. Even when students do know about these services, they often just assume that they are just for UK students. Moreover, tutors also differ in the extent of their knowledge about these services, so the quality of the advice they are able to give is also variable.

The implication of this is that we cannot inform students of these services simply by transmitting information through conventional modes.

Counselling

Several students were pleased that there were Chinese and Japanese counsellors since this gave them an opportunity to talk in their own language at times of crises.

On the other hand, the concept of counselling is alien to many. Students are told about the existence of the counselling service, but they do not understand what it is; that it is confidential, that there is no stigma attached to using the service, etc. They are thus unlikely to overcome their initial preconceptions and take the first step towards something that could be of invaluable help to them. Clearly more could be done to get the message across. However, it has to be accepted that this 'Western' concept will never gain universal acceptance (Burns 1991), and it should not be expected that all students will be able to bring themselves to use these services – not least since, in unburdening themselves to a British counsellor, international students may feel that yet again they have to expose themselves to differences in attitude, potential misunderstandings etc.

> I think more psychological or mental care for students is necessary. Counselling? Well, I know, UAL has such a service. Yet, Japanese, well, Asians are different from Europeans….like how to think or feel. We are different. Oh yes, if some counsellors who can understand Japanese thinking, I want to use the service. My friends also insist that at UAL there are such a lot of Japanese students, but why doesn't Japanese staff exist, who can care for us at school? I totally agree with her. When we need a counsellor, it means our situation is not normal, like depressed, or mentally exhausted. Under such a condition, how can we explain our situation in detail in English to English speakers, who have no cultural background? It is bizarre, we cannot be advised by native Japanese staff, when we really need help. I think we absolutely need a Japanese member of staff.
> *Japanese student*

According to one study, female students are more willing to use these services than males (see Chang 2007). On the whole, though, international students – including Americans – would prefer talking to friends rather than seeking help from a counsellor.

I think that like my group of friends and colleagues would be able to help me just as much as any of those services offered by the university.
Indian student

There is a tendency for many international students to assume that the counselling service is basically for home students. American students, however, see it differently:

Counselling services and stuff? That's geared more towards students that don't speak English as a first language, it just doesn't really apply to me, you know. If I needed support, I wouldn't go to the international department, because it's not the same cultural clash that you're going to experience if you come from Korea, or like, Taiwan, or India, you know? It's not really a problem for me; I mean, it's different from home, but…it's the same language, so that helps in the first place.
American student

Dyslexia support

Others remarked that the dyslexia support had been useful:

I have used the dyslexic support, which is really good. It you need it you should use it. Some people are embarrassed about it. But the amount of help they give you is outstanding.
Indian student

Other students are unaware of the concept of dyslexia. For international students there may also be a grey area between difficulties with language (and particularly English orthography) and specific disability, an area which is still largely unexplored in the pedagogical literature.

Careers advice

Another area of difficulty was careers advice and help with employment. Many international students are older and more mature, and have already had experience of work in their own country; they may thus be more immediately concerned about their career prospects than some younger home students. International students tended to find it hard to find work placements mainly because of language difficulties, lack of a UK network of personal contacts and limited understanding of how their chosen industry or area of professional practice worked in the UK. Sometimes they did not find easily available information such as how to get a national insurance number, again illustrating that if students do not expect the information to be available they will not look and so will not find it.

Arguably universities also underestimate the additional help that non-UK students may need with the employability agenda both conceptually and practically.

Language classes

Students need the university to look at their experience holistically. There is some suggestion from students' comments that because various aspects of their experience are organised by different sections of the university there can be a

planning gap which leads to for example timetable clashes between additional English classes and core course activities.

Students would also have welcomed more intensive and targeted English language support. In practice the university often has to have groups of students of different language levels and /or courses and subjects in the same class for reasons of resource efficiency. This requires very skilled teaching for each group to find the classes valuable especially since students particularly value help with the specific language of the discipline as well as particular forms of language development. These include listening, grammar, pronunciation, idiom, communication in groups, oral presentation, academic/essay writing and formal letter writing. A general course covering all these superficially may be of use to the students whose English is weak, but many more have specific needs:

> I used language support at beginning. It might have been useful, but not interesting for me. I had already fulfilled the English requirement to enter this course before enrolment, but I joined an English class. My class was advanced. Maybe that's why, the content was rather academic. But when I arrived in the UK from Japan, I needed English for communication, not academic. I couldn't listen to and understand what native speakers said at first.
> *Japanese student*

A specific example is the many students who point to the need for classes focusing on listening. This would be of value to the many students whose theoretical and written grasp of English is good but who find it daunting to listen to native speakers in the UK. Students from India and Hong Kong in particular make this point.

Student Union

The participation of international students in the Students' Union is not high. There is a perception that it is largely for home students. The respondents felt that the Union would be of more value to them if it organised more social activities, both for international students (societies for different nationalities) and to help integration with home students. Sport, film, dance, karaoke, yoga and meditation were mentioned in particular – i.e. activities which help remove the prominence of language as an obstacle. Another untapped potential source is special societies for particular groups of students.

Hardly any of the respondents knew anything about the Student Union buddying system.[15] The few who did had mixed opinions and felt it needed to be better developed and supported.

On the whole students did not feel that the student representative system was very helpful. Many were completely unaware of the existence of student representatives, and wished that they were better publicised. One observed that it was difficult to meet the class representative. Two of the respondents said that they actually were class representatives; one knew little about the student union, while the other felt that there was little for them to do.

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[15] Australian universities seem to be ahead of the UK in respect of mentoring programmes. See the studies of Westwood and Barker 1990, Austin, Covalea and Weal 2002).

Accommodation

Most participants were quite critical of university accommodation. Some of these were London factors of cost and the nature of the surrounding area. However, students did not all find the halls natural places for social interaction:

> We just have one common area where the TV is, which is not the place everyone goes to. So it's very much centred around who you know from your flat, who you know from your course, who is in the building. And then you meet those people and hang around with those people. Or, by chance, if you pass someone in the laundry room, you start talking to them. There is nothing to bring us together as such.
> *Indian student*

Clearly there may be problems of unrealistic expectations among some students, but the level of criticism suggested that there are real underlying local issues for the university to explore. Students found it stressful to have to sort out issues in a foreign language. In general universities might benefit from more knowledge of how accommodation services meet or do not meet students' expectations.

Facilities

Our participants had many complaints about facilities. High fees have raised their expectations. The criticism extends to many aspects of the campus provision: lifts, toilets, canteens, food and shops. However libraries were the exception and were regarded highly:

> All are connected, so I like, especially libraries of 6 schools. A lot! I can use all libraries and also borrow any books, and can see a variety of works of students from different schools, in different fields. This is most enjoyable.
> *Japanese student*

> And the library, amazing resources, I was quite surprised to see that I could rent movies from the library. That was quite nice. I don't pay for renting movies, pick up from the library, watch and return.
> *Indian student*

> It is enjoyable to see many people with a variety of background.
> *Japanese student*

Students also appreciate the function of libraries as meeting-points. However, the libraries did not always meet expectations in relation to multiple copies of key texts and opening hours.

Again there were very high expectations that were not always met in relation to technical equipment and IT, particularly the extent and provision of equipment and the level of technician support. Materials fees were resented in the context of high international tuition fees. Arguably universities, operating within a culture of financial stringency, fail to indicate this in recruiting publicity, leading to expectations that can never be fulfilled.

6. Conclusion

This report has highlighted a number of issues that need to be addressed. We would be surprised if any of them are unique to our university. The literature, educational press and anecdotal evidence suggest that the experience of international students in the UK is often far from happy and productive for them. Through our methodology we have been able to gain considerable insight into the students' perceptions and experience. It is in everyone's interest in UK higher education to gain greater understanding of the perspectives of international students and recognise that we need to address the issues outlined in this report. It is also likely that any such changes in ways we work will benefit all students.

As well as raising awareness this report gives us evidence for a number of forms of intervention. The challenge this offers those of us responsible for improving the quality of teaching and learning in the UK is significant. Interventions could include the following:
- a better match between language support for international students and the language requirements to be a successful student, including working in groups with home students
- language awareness staff development activities for academic and support staff
- staff development activities that aim to enable participants to experience what it might feel like to be an international student
- awareness-raising activities with all staff that we operate in a global world and that this requires cross-cultural understanding and empathy
- enhanced activities for students in induction/orientation to make as explicit as possible what is expected of a successful student in the UK
- work with home students to raise awareness that they too are joining a global world of employment, and that successful communication in English with people who do not have English as their first language is as much their responsibility as it is of the international group.

These issues are not unique to international students. The literature suggests that they are also pertinent to students from working class backgrounds, minority ethnic groups and those with disabilities. It is also likely that any such changes in ways we work will benefit all students.

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Appendix 1: Statistics from Written Questionnaire

Fig. 1: Responses to the question 'How did you hear about UAL?'

	No.	%
Friend or personal recommendation	43	30
Internet	23	16
Agents at home	17	12
British Council	10	7
Other	28	20
Combinations of the above	20	14
Total	**141**	**100**

Fig. 2: Responses to the question 'How much did you know about UAL before you enrolled?'
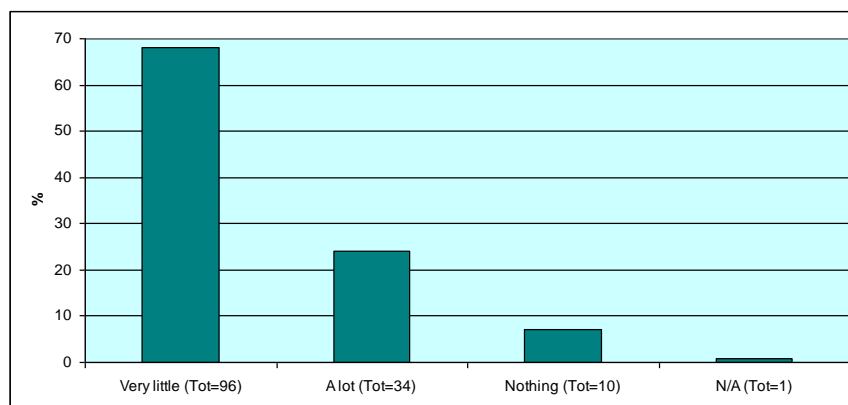
Fig. 3: Responses to the question 'How much did you know about your programme of study before you enrolled?'
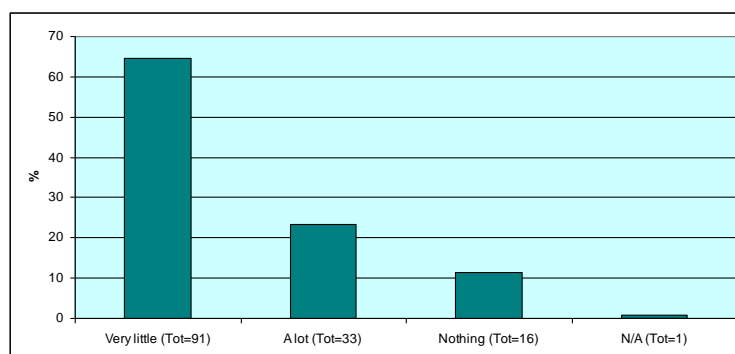
Fig. 4: Responses to the question 'Did you study in UK before coming to UAL?'
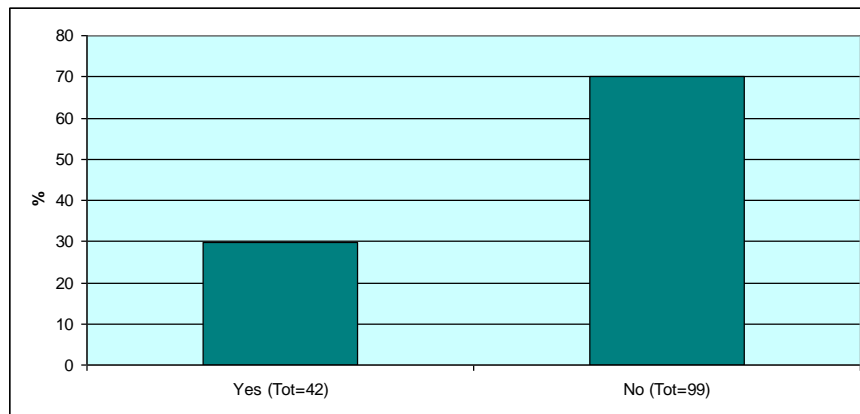
Fig. 5: Responses to the question 'If you were living in Britain before arriving at UAL, for how long was this?'
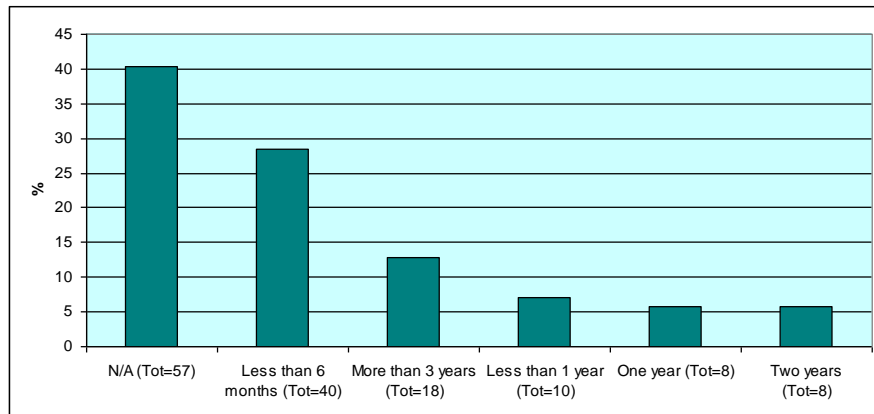
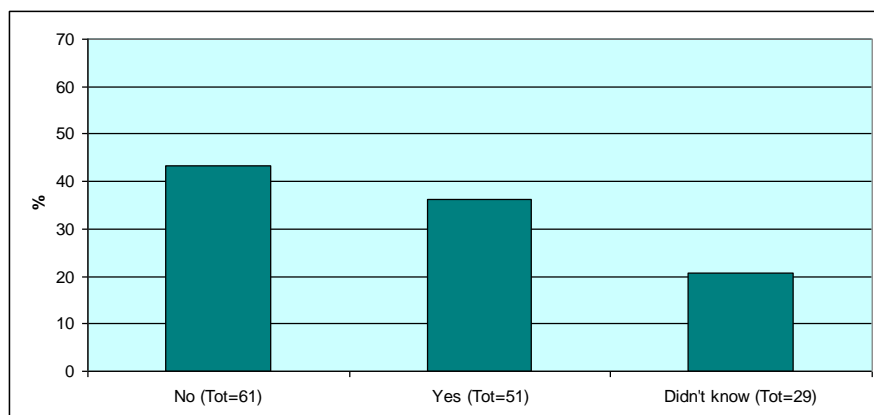Fig. 6: Responses to the question 'Did you join an Orientation course?'

Fig. 7: Responses to the question 'Did you receive an invitation to an induction programme?'
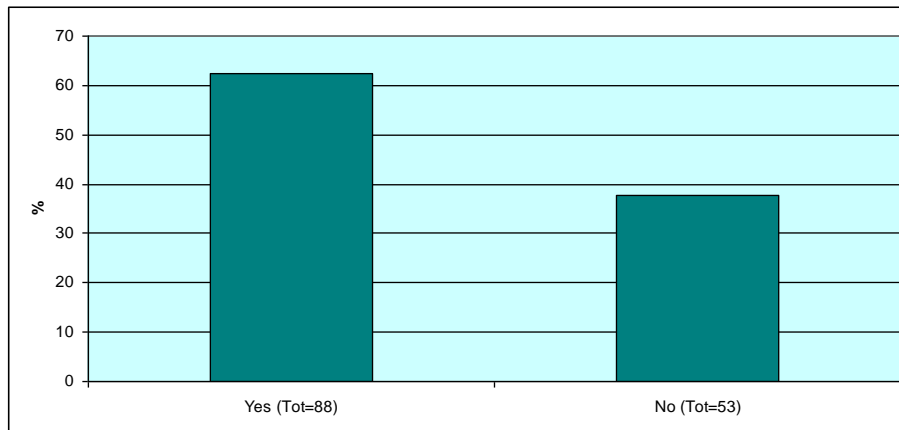

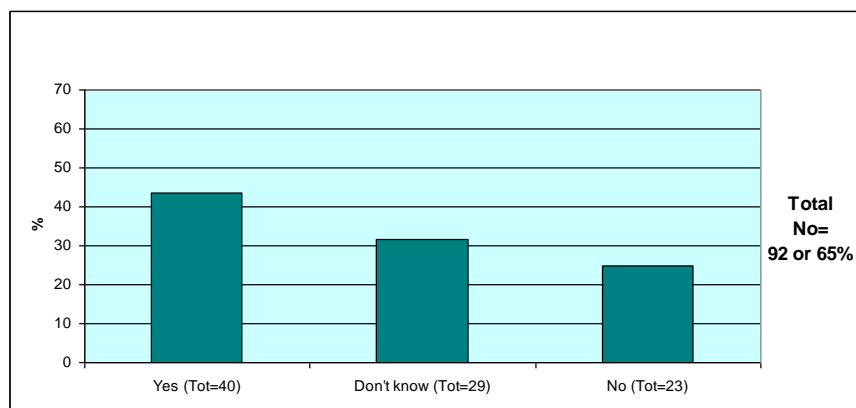Fig. 8: Responses to the question 'Was the induction programme useful for you?' (from those who attended).
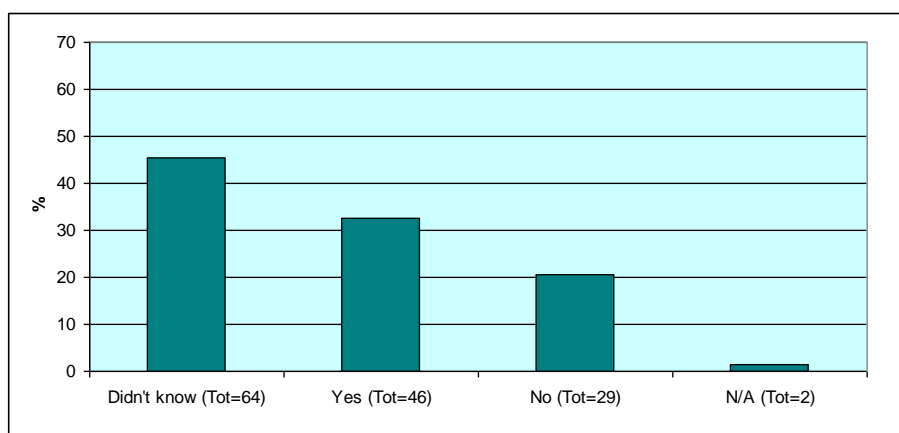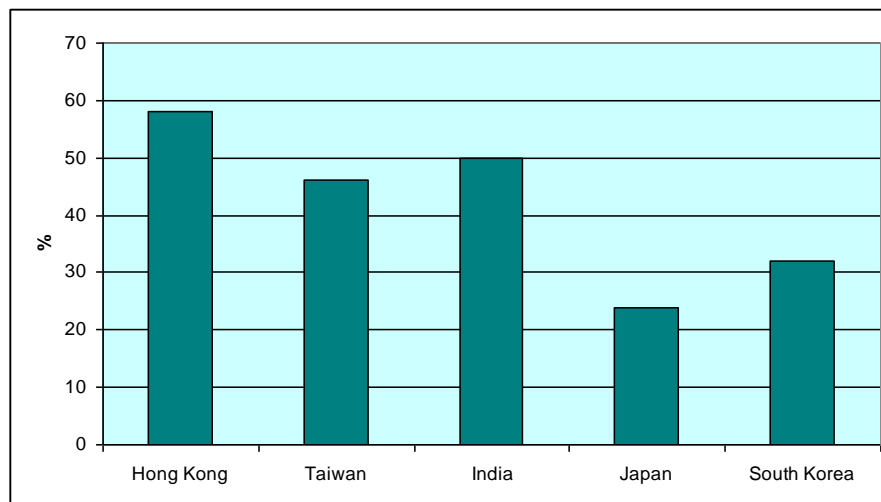

Fig. 9: Responses to the question 'Over the summer, did you join ELUPP?[16]

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[16] English Language University Preparation Programme.

Fig. 10: Background of students who did not know about ELUPP

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

1. Why did you choose to come to UAL?
2. What course are you studying?
3. Is your experience so far what you expected it to be?
4. What do you find difficult and what easy about being on this course?
5. Have you found it easy to adapt to the English system of teaching and learning?
6. Can you give us an example of something positive that you have learned here?
7. Do you think language is an obstacle to your study?
8. Do you meet up with other students outside classes to discuss academic work?
9. How easy is it for you to meet UK students?
10. How satisfactory is your accommodation and has it enabled you to meet people/make friends?
11. Do you feel that your gender is a relevant factor in your studies? How?
12. What, if anything, do you find stressful on this course?
13. Have you used the student support system at the University? If so, was it useful? Could it be improved, and if so, how?
14. What do you enjoy about studying at UAL?
15. What aspects of studying at UAL do you find most problematic?
16. Name three things that you would change if you were able to do so.

For further information on this project, please see

http://www.arts.ac.uk/clipcetl-internationalstudents.htm

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