Can 'Skyping in global speakers change the learning experience?

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The literature around VoIP technology use for learning is often around distance and online learning. Both of which have high dropout rates. The experience of using VoIP to enhance teaching by 'VoIPing in' other academics from around the world into the UK classroom has not yet been well researched, making it an interesting topic for education.

Scan the QR code to see a short video:

VoIP:
Voice over Internet Protocol. This is commonly known under brand names such as Skype®, Facetime®, Oovoo®, Elluminate Live®

Our research on using VOIP for innovative teaching engagement in MMU is just beginning. We began by asking staff about internationalising the curriculum. It was expected that those answering were more likely to be the most interested and most internationally oriented staff, which will have effected results. In terms of knowledge around the internalisation aspects of their work:
- over three quarters of respondents knew about Erasmus mobility in Europe
- four knew of flying faculty approaches and six about franchising courses to other countries. However,
- only thirteen out the thirty-seven understood these areas as part of the University's internationalisation strategy, with 27 staff desiring more information/training around international areas of work.

This suggests that more development could be done to expand staff's understandings of this crucial strategy area and exciting developments in the institution.
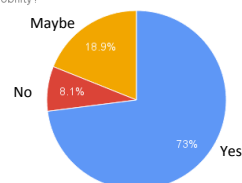
What was the Typical Pattern for Integrating Internationalisation Issues into Curriculum?

Bringing international topics into the classroom through traditional lecture and seminar formats (twenty seven respondents). Twenty-four also reported doing the same with European-related topics.

Seven staff had begun using VoIP technology to bring international issues into the classroom, five using VoIP to integrate international speakers and two using VoIP-facilitated peer-to-peer learning with students at HEI's in other countries. Two other survey respondents said they were linking students to other institutions through innovative online methods, such as blog writing and individual emailing.

Count of Would you like to know more about international opportunities for teaching, research and mobility?

Maybe 18.9%
No 8.1%
Yes 73%

Existing international experiences and networks were explored, with the idea that staff would be more likely to see the benefit of using global connections in teaching if they are engaged internationally themselves.
- Fifteen of the staff had experienced mobility in Europe through Erasmus+ staff exchanges, with two of these also having experienced mobility through this programme when they were students.
- Three staff had worked internationally in academic jobs and/or came from other countries, whereas most had attending European or International conferences
- Under a quarter indicated that they were part of European or international research networks.

These kinds of links provide fantastic resources that can facilitate finding suitable speakers for VOIP. However, some staff had more career-developed resources to be able to draw upon than others did

'Globalisation and Power' is a core level 6 unit on the Abuse Studies Batchelors Degree. It covers topics such as Trafficking, and Violence and Sexual Abuse. Countries recently focussed on include Syria, India and South Africa.

Obstacles to Using VOIP to 'Skype in the World' in the HE Classroom
- Nineteen teaching staff noted that they did not have enough time to integrate this type of innovation into pedagogy.
- Thirteen said that they did not have the international contacts to be able to do this
- Six thought that that they would need foreign language/translation support to be able to use VOIP
- Four voiced concerns about the technological infrastructure being available and/or reliable enough to be able to use it within teaching.

Although only nine staff indicated that they wanted more training to be able to use VOIP in the classroom, it is clear from initial results that many staff are unclear on how VOIP can be used (viewing it as time consuming) and do not seem to recognise that in many countries English speaking presenters can easily be found in HEI's. As all our classrooms have the capacity to use VOIP, concerns about the technological infrastructure may also be related to staff lack of IT knowledge or skills, a deficit that training could help with. Perhaps the most difficult obstacle is staff reporting that they do not have international contacts. Our small pilot project is being used to apply for further funds to create an online platform to broker such connections globally across HEI's and between HEI's and other knowledge creators, such as NGO's and businesses.