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Competitive and cooperative impulses to internationalization: reflecting on the interplay between management intentions and the experience of academics in a British university

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Competitive and cooperative impulses to internationalization: reflecting on the interplay between management intentions and the experience of academics in a British university

Abstract

The paper

This paper explores some of the practical tensions associated with Higher Education internationalization through the introduction of an institutional case study. The case highlights the interplay between policy-makers and academics around the emergence of an 'internationalization' agenda in a British university. It aims to illustrate aspects of the debate within the literature which discuss the gap between competitive and cooperative international motivations and to explore the impact of commercial internationalization upon the academic community. The key conclusions are that: cooperative and competitive impulses to internationalization respond to different ideological positions; linking a commercial revenue-generating approach with internationalist rhetoric may frustrate the development of an international orientation in an institution; and increasing academic disengagement with the commercial agenda possesses the potential to obstruct management intention.

Competitive and cooperative impulses to internationalization: reflecting on the interplay between management intentions and the experience of academics in a British university.

Internationalization in the UK

Internationalization has impacted widely upon Anglophone Higher Education (HE) in the past two decades, reflecting broad globalizing trends which have prompted increases in student mobility and stimulated demand for English language medium education, especially from countries such as China and India. Unsurprisingly, the UK has featured significantly within that process and, more than at any time in its recent history, British HE can be characterized as an international rather than national institution (Hatakenaka, 2004). The presence of international students has had an impact on many aspects of university activity and identity. Overseas students studying in Britain have grown not only in numbers but also in the range of their countries of origin, broadening the cultural diversity of the student community (UKCOSA, 2006). Their participation has influenced programming and curriculum, notably through the development of one-year taught postgraduate programmes in vocational subjects (Sastry, 2004; Turner, 2006). In addition, British universities have also looked towards overseas students as a source of revenue (Humfrey 1999; de Vita and Case, 2003; HEPI, 2006). Shifts in domestic UK government policy which restructured HE funding during the late twentieth century encouraged universities to attempt to maximize the revenue contribution from premium-fee-paying students, including those from overseas (Hodges, 2001; Bekhradnia, 2006).

Internationalization brings with it broader impacts than those immediately associated with the presence of more overseas students. Academic recruitment and retention issues in British universities have also had an impact on the international reach of employment patterns and organizational systems, for example (Bekhradnia and Sastry, 2005). In addition, British universities are increasingly engaging in international collaborations and partnerships, including the establishment of transnational ventures around the world (Doorbar, 2004; Liston, 2004). Moreover, an entrepreneurial, 'managerialist' emphasis to the running and organization of universities (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997; Deem, 1998) has often brought with it active, commercial International Marketing practices to UK universities aimed at potential applicants and partners. This has led to the rapid expansion of university International Offices, populated by professional recruiters and marketers, whose role is to facilitate the institutional interface with those overseas (Williams, 1997; Humfrey, 1999).

In the light of the dramatic changes outlined above, the pace of internationalization in UK HE might seem unstoppable. Indeed, the effects of an incipient international orientation to university activities have already been far-reaching. However, the evidence also presents a contradictory picture of internationalization in Britain. A range of press reports have noted the UK's declining share of the international student market, for example, reflecting perceptions about a lack of international reciprocity in British institutions compared to other global players (THES, 2000; Economist 2003 a, b; Blackstone, 2004). Such commentaries highlight something of a gap between Britain's internationalist stance and the experience of some overseas participants. As a process, therefore, internationalization within UK HE suggests a series of tensions between the expansionist aspirations of government, sectoral policy marshaled towards broad commercial international engagement and the pressures experienced by academics and students inhabiting a dynamically 'internationalizing' environment.

The paper

This paper explores some of the practical tensions associated with HE internationalization through the introduction of an institutional case study. The case highlights the interplay between policy-makers and academics around the emergence of an ‘internationalization’ agenda in the University of Newcastle upon Tyne between 2004 and 2005. It aims to illustrate aspects of the debate within the literature which discuss the gap between cited and actual motivations for institutional internationalization and to explore the impact of commercial internationalization upon the academic community.

‘International’ and ‘internationalization’: problems with definition

At its broadest level, HE ‘internationalization’ is employed as a term which discusses increasing international engagement within universities. More detailed definitions are often both elusive and unsatisfactory, however, because the notion is contested. Variousy regarded as a channel for educational opening-up and knowledge-transfer (Bennell and Pearce, 2003), as a response to international marketing opportunities (de Vita and Case, 2003), a prompt for international research collaboration (Teichler, 2004) or as a descriptor of cross-border student flows (Humfrey, 1999), the language of internationalization has been captured within a number of different educational discourses. The concept is closely allied to broader ideological debates about globalization, and sometimes subsumed within them (Vaira, 2004). Discourse about internationalization has also closely accompanied discussions about the commercialization of HE and the emergence of ‘Enterprise’ universities (Schapper and Mayson, 2004; Edwards et al, 2003). As such, internationalization has been characterized as both an energizing catalyst for international knowledge-sharing and a negative neo-liberal ideological force, bringing the worst of managerialism into academic life.

Partly because of the pervasiveness of internationalization as a theme within HE discourse, it remains difficult to pin the concept down and relate it to practical phenomena within the routine experiences of people in universities. The high-level nature of many attempts at definition compound this difficulty. Here are two typical characterizations:

Internationalization promotes cultural diversity and fosters intercultural understanding, respect, and tolerance among peoples...commitment to international solidarity, human security and helps to build a climate of global peace.’ (International Association of Universities, cited in Black, 2004)

Internationalization at the national, sector and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education (Knight, J, 2003)

While providing a useful way of generally conceiving of internationalization as a phenomenon and providing focus for debate, these definitions relate only in the broadest sense to what people in universities do while they are at work every day. This is particularly the case because internationalization is a multi-stranded concept embracing the motivation and spirit in which international engagement is undertaken as much as describing tangible organizational activities (Carroll and Ryan, 2005).

A continuum of positions

One way of considering institutional internationalization, which attempts to capture both tangible and value-based aspects of the process, is as a continuum from ‘symbolic’ to ‘transformative’ (Bartell, 2003). In this notion, symbolic internationalization is exemplified by an institution with a basically local/national character and way of doing things, but which may be populated by overseas students and perhaps some overseas staff. At the other end of

the scale, transformative internationalization characterizes institutions where an international orientation has become embedded into routine ways of thinking and doing, in policy and management, staff and student recruitment, curriculum and programmes (Welch, 2002). A further dimension in conceiving of internationalization is the degree to which universities have approached it from a competitive or cooperative perspective (Wende, 2001). Within this analysis the market-driven competitive positioning adopted by universities in many Anglophone countries differentiates from the international orientation within non-Anglo European institutions, which have focused on international knowledge-sharing, cooperation and engagement. From this perspective, the Anglo approach emphasizes revenue-focused activities such as overseas student recruitment, the development of transnational projects and commercial partnerships (de Vita and Case, 2003). In general, the cooperative orientation relates to internationalist principles reflecting the value-based aspects of the transformative end of the continuum and challenging the ability of the competitive approach in achieving effective long-term international engagement.

Management issues

For academic managers, a central consideration within the broader continuum of positions is how far a university seeks compliance with (symbolic) or commitment to (transformative) its international orientation. What's fairly clear from the literature is that transformative internationalization is *personal* not *institutional* – what's been called 'existential internationalization' – as much about academics' personal world-views as about anything that is achievable managerially (Sanderson, 2004). As such, internationalization can also be either *prescriptive* or *descriptive* – symbolic internationalization characterizes prescriptive managerial action, and is policy- and 'business'-led, while transformative internationalization is a descriptive phenomenon in which the personal and ideological commitment of the university community stimulates the institution's international policies and practices. The impetus for the development of internationalization within an institution differs also across the spectrum. Within symbolically international institutions, external drivers - notably commercial opportunities deriving from international student mobility - encourage a more outward-looking perspective within an otherwise domestic focus. In this orientation, international engagement provides a vehicle for the delivery of extrinsic rewards but is unlikely to be regarded as a strategic end in itself and may exist within a cost-minimization framework with accompanying expectations for tangible financial returns. At the transformative end of the spectrum, however, an institution seeks to capture and organize the outward-focused energies of people within the university community – notably academics – within policy and management and invests to support that broad aim. It is clear, therefore, that internationalization can act as a descriptor of institutional culture as well as a prescriptor within managerial policy. Within either orientation, useful business outcomes from internationalization for the institution are clear, in terms of potential revenues, widening participation, international collaboration etc. In reality, however, the term merely captures a set of values and beliefs - ethical and ideological - held by its communities which privilege either cultural diversity or cultural exclusivity. The ability of organizational plans and policies to engender such convictions remains obscure. At the same time, a focus on practical long-term international sustainability, whether in terms of overseas student recruitment, or teaching and research collaborations requires the alignment of institutional policies with both resources and people's commitment.

Positioning

Drawing together elements from the preceding discussion, it is possible to develop a composite picture of different international characteristics across the continuum, shown at

Figure 1. From Bartell's (2003) perspective, all positions on the continuum are valid – the issue confronting people in universities is to consciously reflect on their environment and determine how they want to position themselves and move within it. Some institutions across the world have opted for a tight focus on a very local context and to work within a specific environment rather than opening up to wider 'international' opportunities, for example, such as private-sector commercial colleges in the USA (Morey, 2004). This has enabled them to target specific student and staff constituencies and engage in academic partnerships that are consonant with their focused institutional mission. Most broadly-based Anglophone universities have rhetorically postured towards more transformative internationalization, though actual institutional engagement varies across the continuum, resulting from inherent tensions between internationalist values and competitive approaches. Frequent gaps between how institutions talk about international engagement and what their policies and practices actually do, therefore, appear. Schapper and Mayson (2004, pp. 191), for example, have characterized international strategy implementation in Australian universities as 'crude', as the market-driven orientation of institutional policy confronts the values manifest within the academic community.

(Figure 1)

Internationalization as a process

Within this broad context, the final 'destination' on the continuum might be less important than the process accompanying its development. Providing extensive opportunities for university people to participate in discussion and become involved in determining the scope, penetration and content of an 'internationalization' agenda seems a necessary prerequisite for 'success' however it is measured. This is particularly important given the personal and psychological elements inherent in internationalization, as people move from an ethnocentric to an ethnorelative orientation in their academic lives in order to embrace it (Bennett, 1993):

“The need to explain why internationalization...is an important issue, and an especially important one for an organization such as a university, is a primary requirement that needs to be in place prior to the systematic development of strategies. Academics generally require compelling reason and argument before accepting any institutional strategy.” (Webb, G, 2005, p.109).

Within the management and policy arena, concerns about the value of international reciprocity and inclusivity are sometimes marginalized against business concerns of revenue-generation, marketing and sustainable overseas student recruitment (de Vita and Case, 2003). Conversely, teaching and learning concerns focus on the practical challenges inherent in classroom diversity and the development of inclusive educational strategies to manage the consequences of both international and domestic massification (Biggs, 2003; Kember, 2000). Commentators have noted that these two themes are often at odds with each other, resulting in tensions between management objectives and effective educational practices. Welch (2002), for example, notes that organizational / managerial discourse stresses educational reciprocity as the motivation in many Anglophone HE contexts, while the reality as organizationally planned and experienced by people within university communities relates more narrowly to revenue-generation, markets and student recruitment. This aspect of the discourse resonates with other HE debates, problematizing the introduction of quasi-commercial practices and characterizing HE as in a globalization-generated crisis of identity (Deem, 2001; Watson, 2002).

Impact

For all the uncertainties about the scope and shape of internationalization and the labile composition of the basic concepts, the literature shows a fairly clear consensus about the depth of the impact on HE and the breadth of its consequences on, 'policy-making, governance and academic work and identity' (Vaira, 2004 p.489). This lies partly in the emphasis within globalization discourse on the Knowledge Society and the correlation between, education (especially HE), knowledge production and economic development within a competitive world environment. Nonetheless, characterizing the nature of this impact and deconstructing key themes and issues remains problematic beyond the most general terms. The majority of accounts to date have confined discussions to theoretical, policy and market areas or have explored the experiences of international students rather than exploring the more varied concerns of academics and managers. Yet if the impacts of internationalization are as profound as indicated in the literature, then it must be experienced keenly by those most intimately involved in the process. An exploration of people's basic understanding of internationalization as it affects academic working practices, has the potential, therefore, to illuminate the diversity of its impacts on identity, orientation and experience, set as they are in a wide variety of local and particular contexts. It can also reveal the degree to which people perceive internationalization as a manageable process or a force outside universities' control but nonetheless shaping certain organizational responses. This is useful in illuminating how far academics and university managers feel themselves to be *victims of* internationalization or see internationalization as a conscious part of their strategic tool-kit in planning for organizational futures in which they are thoughtful and willing participants.

The project: de facto internationalization in the institution

This case study presents the preliminary outcomes of a project undertaken within the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty at University of Newcastle in 2004 /05. The project aimed to explore the impact of internationalization on academic staff in the institution and to identify future priorities and action to support increasing international engagement. The context for the case reflected the institution's status as a representative research and teaching university within the UK. Newcastle, established as a medical college in the first half of the nineteenth century, developed as a broad-based arts and sciences university during the second half of the twentieth. In the late 1900s and early 2000s, reflecting the government's stated priority of continuing to develop the UK as a provider of international HE, the university began to recruit larger numbers of international (non-UK/EU) students than previously in its history - especially from the Asian region - with numbers growing from approximately 8% of total students in 1999 to 15% in 2004/05, with a planned increase to approximately 20% by 2010 (Newcastle University, 2006).

Mirroring the experience of many HE institutions in Britain, the presence of large numbers of international students at the university was relatively novel and represented a change in focus from its traditional student community, young British nationals. In addition, in part to accommodate perceived demands in overseas markets, the university had experienced something of a shift in programming, away from undergraduate courses towards one-year taught Master's programmes (though the majority of students remained undergraduates). This shift was accompanied by a new disciplinary growth in vocational and applied subjects such as Business and Education Studies, both of which were located in the Faculty under exploration. While experiencing changes as a result of increasing diversity in both students and programmes, however, in 2004/05 the institution had not articulated a formal 'international' strategy or over-arching central policy but had sponsored a range of discussion

papers and communications focusing on international issues and establishing international engagement as a significant operational priority for the university. It had also devolved specific responsibility for their delivery to the three Faculties and the International Office. Initial management action had, therefore, been tightly focused on student recruitment activities. The volatility of the overseas student recruitment market had become clear in 2004, as the UK as a whole experienced a drop against expectations of international student enrolments (HEPI, 2006). In the face of decreasing certainties about its initial approach, therefore, managers within the Faculty began to explore broader conceptions of internationalization and to seek to understand the impact of the institution's orientation upon people working within it. This project, funded as part of two university Fellowships in Internationalization, formed part of that work. It provided an initial opportunity to explore some of the broader issues connected with internationalization as an organizational phenomenon and to investigate the ways in which the institution's emphasis was understood and interpreted by the people working there.

Institutional organization

The Faculty was composed of nine schools, including Law and English, Business and Education Studies. It was responsible for approximately half of the university's student population and for more than 50% of international students. The experience of working with international students and of internationalization, however, was very varied. In some Schools overseas students represented less than 1% of the total student population and were predominantly postgraduate research students. Others, notably Business and Education Schools, enjoyed the highest levels of international student participation in the university, more than 25% of the total, dispersed across a broad range of levels of study.

Design and methods

The case study approach brought particular benefits to the project through its focus on the gathering of rich and holistic data, enabling the generation of a broadly-boundaried picture of the institutional environment at a particular moment in time and within its particular context (Hartley, 2004). In addition, the case method is well-placed to facilitate broad transferability of research outcomes and interpretations from the particular concerns to other similar contexts and to provide information for qualitative benchmarking and comparison (Denscombe, 2003). At the same time, however, its focus on the detailed experience of players within a particular context has useful applications at the research site to feed into policy development and management decision-making. Critical cases, in particular, can facilitate the interrogation of organizational assumptions and implicit norms (Yin, 1994). The approach, therefore, maximized the organizational 'usefulness' of the project's outcomes while maintaining its integrity as a piece of research.

The data collection took place over a period of four months. Data collection frameworks were conventional, organized by a combination of group and individual interviews with academic and administrative representatives from Schools across the Faculty, together with input from specialists, such as international officers, education developers and student welfare officers. The target population for the initial project was academic managers and academics involved in programme management and teaching international students. The project had a specific aim to explore the practical impacts of internationalization on academics' day-to-day work and identify ways in which their work could be supported in an internationally diverse environment. In total twenty-four meetings took place, involving thirty-three people. The sample selection was essentially opportunistic, based on people's willingness to participate in the project, but included discussions with at least two people in each of the Schools. The

interviews were semi-structured to enable us to probe and explore individual perceptions at the same time as attempting to reflect broadly common themes across the schools and disciplines involved in the project. Meetings lasted from approximately forty-five minutes to one-and-a-half-hours.

Research Questions

Given the open and investigatory nature of the work, the main focus for the interview questions were also broad, essentially:

- What were participants' experiences of internationalization within their working context?
- How would participants characterize the institutional approach to internationalization within their work unit / Faculty / University?
- How would participants describe future impacts of internationalization for them and the institution?
- What support did participants identify as necessary for them and their local community to respond to the university's strategic international objectives?

Interpretation and analysis of results

Interview data were recorded, transcribed, interpreted and thematically encoded. The transcripts were interrogated to utilize the richest elements of the data, particularly to record the direct accounts of personal experience. This data was then used alongside the thematic classification of results to investigate similarities and differences that might exist between particular schools or people in different positions in the organization. The results reported below are organized to reflect the thematic concerns raised by individuals and groups. The themes are illustrated with quotations from the transcript data to highlight particular issues and reinforce the directness of the impact felt by participants about certain aspects of the phenomenon of internationalization.

Results and discussion

The content of the interview discussions was inevitably varied, according to the particular perspectives of the participants and, in particular, their institutional mandate. Heads of Schools' accounts, for example, reflected specific concerns with operationalizing the general institutional focus on student recruitment. Other groups of staff articulated a broader, reflective view of internationalization and discussed its influence in the classroom, on work in general, on identity and community within the institution. Notwithstanding these broad differences between groups of participants, however, a series of clear themes emerged from the meetings, focusing on key areas such as conceptions of internationalization, international student recruitment and admissions, the impact of internationalization on professional life and working identity, teaching international students, including managing cohort diversity, staff development needs and support for international students, including induction.

Interpretations of internationalization and institutional intention

One of the most striking elements to arise from the data was concerned with basic conceptions of internationalization. Though the group universally accepted that something called 'internationalization' was a 'fact' of their working lives, nonetheless people felt uncertain about precise definitions of what internationalization meant:

‘I don't really know what you mean by internationalization.’

‘For most people this would relate purely and simply to recruitment.’

Unsurprisingly, the majority of participants engaged with understandings of internationalization that were complex, thoughtful and often contradictory. For example, they contrasted their definitions between institutional and local interpretations, between organizational and personal understandings and between the aspirational and the actual. In particular, participants differentiated 'internationalization' as an organizational process and 'international' in terms of knowledge-sharing and internationalist academic values:

'What do you mean by internationalization? The university view is a functional take, really. I doubt that it's a scholarly take...I have no idea what the School's take is on internationalization'

Intellectually, the majority of participants identified internationalization as notionally a 'good thing', if defined as reciprocal and concerned with sympathetic cross-border engagement:

'Most people enjoy having international students around – research and teaching is more interesting...We need to be really welcoming to different ways of thinking and different approaches.'

'The richness and the mixture [international students] add is wonderful. Educational, broadly. We should be celebrating that students from China are coming here. It puts it into perspective.'

This gradualist conception resonated strongly, participants felt, with long-standing internationalist academic values. Overwhelmingly, however, the direct impact of institutional internationalization within participants' own experiences focused on increasing numbers of overseas students and an emphasis on recruitment in international markets. This reflected a managerialist agenda about which a number of the participants were overtly cynical and with which they expressed compliance rather than commitment. From the start therefore, the discussions tended to develop with a sense of conflict between cooperative and competitive impulses to internationalization:

'This is a cynical exercise in money-raising and it will all end in tears'

In spite of varying conceptions, however, one thing that emerged clearly was the significance of the impact of internationalization on people's working lives and identities. Irrespective of position in the university, people characterized internationalization as one of the most significant issues in their work and one which dominated other, more traditional concerns, especially research:

'It's an absolute nail in the coffin because there's no time for research.'

Paradoxically, most participants also identified that relatively little conversation about 'internationalization' took place, either in terms of engagement or as a management process, within their immediate work areas – apart from the university's acknowledged focus on recruitment. In particular, they reported very little focus on discussing, for example, the pedagogical issues that flowed out of increasing student diversity and noted a lack of infrastructure from which to stimulate such discussions:

'Not much conversation in the School about internationalization – some individuals are good, but the majority doesn't want to know.'

Victims of irresistible international forces

Taken together, the sense of confusion and the relative impact that people accounted, therefore, constituted a fairly negative conception of internationalization as a force within the institution:

‘At best we are resigned to internationalization. Basically people see it as work, it’s a problem, it’s a risk.’

‘The majority cope, but all find it difficult’

The majority of participants identified themselves as ‘victims’ of internationalization in some ways. Teaching large numbers of international students in large classes or administering international programmes was regarded as damaging to personal careers and promotion potential in the university:

‘[Some colleagues] are very concerned and spend a lot of time with the students. There is a closely intertwined combination of academic and pastoral. One colleague pretty well abandoned his research career to do this. You can’t do the two things – forget it.’

‘Research dominates. People with large teaching loads are told they have not got their act together.’

Certainly participants universally experienced internationalization as something which was being imposed managerially, rather than a phenomenon in which they had initiated participation:

‘A failure of leadership – people are not taken along with us.’

They also allied it closely to commercialization and the institution’s preoccupation with what its conception of a competitive market-place:

‘The culture among us is resigned acceptance at marketization – varying degrees of resignation and disgust.’

This response resulted essentially from what participants regarded as the necessity of responding to policy and managerial imperatives from the centre of the university. Even in schools which had worked with a community of international students for some years, recent changes in programme and recruitment emphasis - especially towards mass recruitment from Asian markets - were regarded as paradoxically undermining international reciprocity and openness rather than expanding it:

‘It doesn’t feel so international any more, to be honest...I used to think that it was incredibly rich because of all the international diversity and lots of international examples. Now it is less so.’

Internationalization, work and the institutional agenda

In addition to this unease about the particular institutional motivations towards a market-based internationalization policy, participants also identified it as one force among many others pressurizing long-held expectations of life and work within the university community.

Explicitly, therefore, they linked internationalization negatively with other characteristics within the Enterprise University model: work proliferation in the teaching, learning and student support areas; increasing commercialism in the university; and an undermining of traditionally-valued academic identities in research and intellectual contexts. In this environment, therefore, basic conceptions of internationalization expressed by a range of people in the Faculty characterized it as part of a wider, implicit globalization agenda, with its particular emphasis on changing academic work, corporatism, and managerialism. They regarded concerns with markets as the strategic underpinning for HE activity rather than any interest in intellectual reciprocity or international openness. In a general sense, this view was expressed more explicitly in those schools which had undergone the most profound and rapid changes to the constitution of the student body, and in schools offering professional postgraduate education programmes.

The institution

Building on these early levels of concern about the impacts of internationalization, within general discussions of the phenomenon, participants went on to express their perspectives about the institutional agenda. These discussions further compounded earlier expressions of unease about the coalescence of internationalization with other negatively-constructed changes in the character of working life in the university. Participants recognized the relative recentness of the institution's international imperative and gave some consideration to its motives. For most, in spite of the potential for the enrichment of the university community that thoughtful internationalization might bring, they expressed concern about the narrow, reactive conceptualization offered by the institution - especially about what they perceived to be an acute managerial focus on marketing and student recruitment to secure revenues:

‘The School’s message is more programmes, more students...There’s a general view that we can recruit more and more students...It’s numbers-driven.’

‘We are not pushing the [internationalization] agenda for purely financial reasons [in this school], though the pressure has been intense.’

They also expressed doubt about the contrast between organizational rhetoric and their own experience of managerial intention in the institution, reflecting, for example, Welch's (2002) discussion of internationalization in the Australian context. Participants felt that such a strong focus on this particular agenda signaled a significant shift to short-term financial horizons at the centre of the university rather than consolidating around a more stable, sustainable position. Internationalization was regarded as a fundamentally destabilizing force in the institution, therefore. Though the majority, especially Heads of Schools, articulated an acute sense of the financial crisis within British HE and the need to secure novel sources of funding, and most participants recognized the relationship between international student fee-income and jobs, nonetheless the juxtaposition of these two issues - internationalization and job security - was widely viewed as problematic, contributing strongly to the negative constructions associated with internationalization itself:

‘We must recruit international students or we won’t be here. It’s a grim reality.’

Internationalization and reciprocity

Another characteristic of internationalization as experienced by people in the university was as an inward-operating phenomenon rather than one that encouraged in reciprocity or openness. To some degree, this reflected the institution's historical focus on direct

international student recruitment rather than investment in transnational or other international partnerships or projects. It also reflected the particular work concerns of the interview population. A number of participants identified both the desirability of more outward-looking perspective on internationalization for themselves and also for the student population, however. They expressed particular concern about a perceived parochialism of UK students which they regarded as domestic in perspective and assumption about the HE education experience:

‘There are huge benefits to home students but I don’t think they see them...Where this all collapses is when Brits start to interact with [international] students and do group-work and then they retreat into their own comfort zones.’

For many participants, therefore, the strong marketing and recruitment emphasis that they perceived in operation in the university was doubly-problematic, not only in its organizational short-termism but in limiting the potential benefits that more broadly-conceived reciprocal internationalization might bring.

Needs and priorities identified in the interviews

The strong theme to emerge from the early parts of the interviews was that people across the Faculty experienced internationalization negatively, as frustrating and contradictory. Aspirationally, participants saw the clear benefits of international exchange and reciprocity for the whole community but identified the particular focus articulated by the centre of the university and reflected in their day-to-day work lives as dominated by specific, challenging and narrow concerns which militated against the realization of internationalization’s positive potential. In spite of this, participants regarded internationalization as something that would remain a long-term feature of their working lives. Their main concerns for the future were for more involvement in determining the shape and style of international engagement in the institution and a desire to make a shift towards a more transformative and inclusive approach. This underlay proposals that they made for provision of improved resource support and resource hypothecation to enable more sustainable international inclusivity and also the achievement of the broader benefits of international exchange.

In terms of academic practice, participants identified a range of specific supports to enable them to shift to a more sustainable international focus in their day-to-day work. First, the articulation of a clear organizational international strategy, more broadly-based than simple but demanding student recruitment targets which participants felt took no account of the volatilities of the international environment. This, they felt, would galvanize policy and management initiatives to underpin international transformation in the university and would develop transparent management structures, roles and responsibilities to deliver the business outcomes, effectively supporting the academic community. Such a strategy would also, importantly, hypothecate resources to ensure the delivery of the strategic aspirations. Second, they sought consultation, communication and involvement in both strategic and operational discussions about the approach to internationalizing the institution and setting priorities at work unit level. This, they felt, would begin to support the process of engagement within the whole academic community rather than confining it to those who were most significantly impacted by increasing student numbers and would generate a more sophisticated understanding of internationalization within the community.

Building from this basic set of concerns, participants identified a series of staff development and training needs, ranging from the creation of academic practice networks in which to share ideas and talk about international inclusivity and share best practice between schools about

managing the process of internationalization; practical skills development in teaching and learning areas; and cultural awareness training for a range of staff groups. Finally, they identified a clear requirement for student support at the university. Suggestions ranged from expanding and developing academic induction and skills support programmes to rethinking curriculum to enable better access for students coming to the university, especially those on one-year postgraduate taught programmes - regarded as especially demanding in terms of student adaptation. In addition, participants identified a clear need for support for domestic and overseas students in the development of inter-cultural competences and in diversity awareness.

Drawing the project outcomes together

Taken as a whole, the data from the Newcastle project revealed an interesting interplay of compliance and resistance with the institutional intention of becoming an 'international' university, positioned within a competitive framework. The interview accounts resonated strongly with the literature discussing the process of internationalization in other countries and located the institution largely towards the symbolic end of the international continuum. Most participants in the project did not characterize Newcastle as an international institution, therefore, in spite of its focus on overseas student diversity. Rather, they asserted that internationalization was subsumed within other strategic, financial and managerial aims. The institutional approach was underpinned, they felt, by a strong market-oriented rhetoric, the development of programmes to meet overseas student demand and the development of exacting targets for student recruitment into the future. This management and policy agenda was transparent to the participants and to a large degree they were compliant with it, if privately disquiet. At the same time, the attitudinal resistance to that agenda which participants expressed derived from a sense of a greater desire to develop a more reciprocal and broadly-based cooperative approach to internationalization, more consistent with academics' intellectual values and a desire to engage with international exchange and knowledge-sharing. The overall sense that emerged from the data was of decreasing compliance with the institutional approach rather than increasing engagement. The key source of disjuncture between institutional intention and academic values focused on the legitimacy of pursuing international engagement as an explicitly commercial activity. In terms of international engagement it seemed clear that the institutional focus on increasing overseas student participation as a catalyst for internationalization served to some extent to undermine and frustrate academics' personal internationalist orientations.

Conclusion

The progress and experience of internationalization in UK HE, illustrated by the case-study, throws up a number of resonances with the wider literature. Participants identified a clear set of operational activities which they believed would enable Newcastle to develop as an international institution, all of which are reflected at the transformative end of the international continuum. These issues reflected their perceptions that sustainable long-term internationalization could not be effected simply as a revenue-earner but must receive investment as a strategic aim in itself. Certainly, the widespread disengagement expressed by study participants and the negative connotations placed upon the institution's particular approach towards internationalization highlighted a lack of long-term sustainability and the disruptive capacity of motivational disunities among the institutional community. Ultimately, the emergent international positioning within the institution seemed dialectical. Academics intellectually distanced themselves from the competitive, market-focused conceptions of internationalization, both framing and engaging with more contingent and reciprocal perspectives in interpreting and implementing international policies. Yet they were also

compliant with the central policy targets. The power of the academics in implementing the management strategy seemed significant but understated. The business-driven approach adopted by the institution inculcated a counter-culture of cynicism and resistance. Ultimately, the case study highlighted the difficulties of linking a commercial revenue-generating approach with value-based internationalist rhetoric, given the expectations of international reciprocity and cooperative engagement inherent in that discourse. Certainly the case reinforced the notion that competitive internationalization remains largely confined towards the symbolic end of the continuum, since academic disengagement with the commercial agenda possesses the potential to obstruct further movement. In ensuring the long-term delivery of sustainable internationalization it seems clear that a dialogic approach supporting engagement is essential. Effectively capturing the academic community's emergent sense of international reciprocity in policy designs may be one way not only to position the institution further along the international continuum but also to develop sustainability in the delivery of the business outcomes of the process.

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Figure 1: The International continuum

