The Experiences of International Students in UK Higher Education:
a review of unpublished research

Project report

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This project was commissioned by UKCOSA: the Council for International Education. It follows earlier research for UKCOSA by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER 2001a and b) into the comparative academic performance of home and international undergraduate students. This analysed UK national statistics on undergraduate degree classification and found that international students get somewhat less 'good' degrees than home students in various subject areas. However, it was not possible to do similar analyses at postgraduate level, nor to explore the causes of the findings for undergraduates.

UKCOSA therefore believed further research on the experiences and particularly the academic achievement of international students in UK higher education was needed. But UKCOSA was also aware that quite a lot of work had already been done by international students themselves, particularly at PhD and Masters level, most of which had not been published.

A bibliographic search and literature review was therefore considered a necessary first step, with a focus on unpublished research. Diana Leonard and Louise Morley at the Institute of Education, University of London were commissioned to conduct it, and Caroline Pelletier employed as the researcher.

Our definition of 'unpublished' was based on Hart's (2001: 94) description of 'grey' literature: "material which is not normally identifiable through conventional methods of bibliographic control (e.g. ISBNs and ISSNs)". For the purposes of this project, this covered the following: unpublished conference papers, PhD theses, Masters-level dissertations, internal reports by individual universities and colleges, project reports to ESRC and other funders, and notices of research in progress.

The purpose of this literature search was four-fold:

1. to facilitate and encourage further research into the experiences of international students in UK higher education. This review is intended to map the field, identify key issues, prevent duplication and highlight research questions and data collection techniques.

2. to alert funders to gaps in the literature and that research is required to fill these.

3. to make international students a higher priority on the higher education research agenda and start a debate about the experiences of international students in UK higher education. It is hoped that this project can highlight some of the main themes around which the literature on international students can engage in productive debate.

4. to disseminate the findings of unpublished research. Little of this research has been widely read and only a very limited amount of it has found its way into publications, and then in an altered form. As findings are not disseminated, debate is inhibited and much research remains highly parochial, with little possibility for making connections between research studies. This project is intended to start highlighting the links and to enable researchers in this field to position their own work in some wider context.

As Walker (1999) argues, international students have always been in UK universities and nowadays have a significant impact on the economics of UK higher education. Ramsden (2001) notes that almost ten percent of all teaching income comes from non-EU student fees. However, the education of international students has never been more than a marginal interest to most academics. Through projects of this kind, UKCOSA is seeking to raise the profile of international students in the UK by means of systematic and scholarly research. Its ultimate aim is to encourage research which can underpin good practice across the sector.

It was decided that relevant research-based articles from the *Journal of International Education* should also be included in the literature review. This journal was produced by UKCOSA with support from the British Council from 1996 to 1999, having previously been published by PEPAR publications. Although the Journal cannot be said to be 'unpublished', it did not have a high circulation and is no longer published. It is therefore largely inaccessible. Its inclusion in the literature review is justified on the grounds that many articles are likely to be of interest to researchers, who however may not be aware of them. Back copies of the Journal are available from UKCOSA and articles can be photocopied on request.

Although the focus of the project is on unpublished research, it was also decided to compile a bibliography of materials published on the issue of international student experiences since 1990. This is to provide an added resource for researchers. However, only the bibliography of unpublished research has been annotated, to concentrate time and resources on this, the project's focal point.

Both bibliographies cover only English-language literature. The annotated bibliography of unpublished research is UK specific.

Structure of the report

This report accompanies the annotated bibliography of unpublished research, and presents a commentary on the literature reviewed. Section 2 defines the project specification. Section 3 presents the methodology by which the bibliographies were compiled. Section 4 is a commentary on the literature reviewed, presenting an overview of the literature in this field as well as highlighting key issues and themes. Section 5 puts forward recommendations for future research. The appendices are designed as a resource for researchers, and provide a list of organisations and JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) mailing lists contacted for the purposes of this project and which are a useful point of contact for anyone researching international students.

Section 2: Project specification

The bibliographies were compiled and annotated in ten weeks between November 2002 and March 2003 to the following specification:

- ***The bibliographies should contain material relevant to the experiences of international students***: the aim was to gather material that explores the experiences of international students in UK higher education. Material written mainly from an institutional perspective or presenting policy guidelines has therefore been excluded. This means that policy documents, staff development resources, marketing documents, in-house literature from official bodies (the British Council, UKCOSA, NUS, etc.) have not been included in these bibliographies, or only when particular titles present some insight into students' experiences.

International students were defined for the purposes of this project as non-UK domiciles (i.e. EU and non EU). This excludes adjacent but separate research concerns, such as refugee students. The bibliographies focus on research carried out with students registered at a UK university and studying in the UK. This excludes students studying in the UK on an exchange programme or on one-year programme as part of a longer study course (e.g. ERASMUS or a US or Japanese junior year abroad). This is because the literature suggests that such students face a different set of issues to international students coming to the UK to obtain a UK qualification. For the same reason, international students studying by distance learning and staying in their home country have also been excluded.

- ***The bibliographies should be selective, rather than exhaustive:*** the aim was to present the most insightful and helpful resources available to researchers working in the field. However, carrying out the selection process was clearly easier in the case of published material; by definition, it is more difficult to establish priorities among unpublished material as one has first to establish what is available.

- ***The bibliographic search should focus on research-based literature***: other kinds of documentation not informed by primary research was excluded. The focus on research-based literature was deemed to be of most use to other researchers in the field.

- ***The focus should be on the UK***: much research on the experiences of international students has been carried out in other countries, particularly (in English on) Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US. Although it is useful to examine this from a comparative perspective, to highlight possible research issues in the UK, the bibliographies focus on research with students in the UK.

- ***The focus should be on higher education and where possible further education***: the intention was to gather material on the experiences of international students in both higher and further education. However, little of the unpublished research was based in further education.

- ***The bibliographic search should cover material produced since 1990***: although research on international students stretches back to the 1960s and beyond, the focus in this project is on recent research.

- Particular attention should be paid to: (a) the students' academic experiences - relating achievement measures to the aims and objectives of the institution and the students; (b) completion rates and factors affecting them; (c) the influence of pedagogic and epistemic traditions; (d) the effects of different modes of course delivery, eg split site with second or

third year entry; (e) curriculum content and resources; and (f) welfare and pastoral issues. All these were to be understood as varying by home domicile, gender, marital status, discipline, disability and age.

Annotations

It was agreed that the annotations should cover the following issues: (a) characteristics of the students being researched; (b) main findings of the research; (c) research methodology; (d) keywords; and (e) evaluative comments on the usefulness of the material to the research community.

Element (e) - evaluative comments on the usefulness of the material to the research community – was sometimes difficult to write, for two reasons. Firstly, unpublished research covers a range of different kinds of material, from PhD theses to Masters dissertations. It may be expected that more advanced pieces of research – such as PhD theses – will be of more use to the research community, for the rigour of their research methodology and the breadth of their investigation. Good Masters dissertations, however, can provide valuable insight into discrete and under-researched issues, and also highlight the range of student experiences at different institutions. However, the standard by which one writes critical commentaries of Masters dissertations and PhD theses cannot be the same as they are not equivalent as sources of information. The annotations therefore do not aim to provide a comprehensive critique of the material, but to draw out and discuss some of the issues raised in the research. The aim is to give an indication of how useful the material might be to others working in the field.

Secondly, much of the unpublished research has been written by international students or by former international students, and little of the research has been funded. A substantial proportion of the literature is informed by the researcher's own experience, particularly at Masters level. In reviewing findings, it can be difficult to distinguish between the researcher's experience and the results of their research process. Critiquing a finding based on the international student's own experience can be difficult, as there is no denying its validity, only its generalisability and usefulness to others. This is perhaps felt particularly acutely if one is not an international student. However, the annotations endeavour to offer a critique from the perspective of academic rigour, whilst not undermining work informed to a substantial extent by personal experience.

In summarising a piece of work, the annotations focus on research outcomes and findings. They do not therefore always do justice to the subtlety and complexity of a piece of research, for example, to its discussion of the theoretical framework guiding the investigation. Sections 4 and 5 of this report are however intended as a commentary on the literature reviewed and endeavour to capture the broader scope of research in this field.

Project outputs

This project aimed to have three outputs, all of which should be available on UKCOSA's web site:

- The current overall project report on methodology and findings.
- An annotated bibliography of unpublished research produced between 1990 and 2003, presented both as a paper and as an EndNote database. The EndNote database

can be downloaded for local use. It contains some additional bibliographic information, but is largely identical to the paper.

- A bibliography of literature published between 1990 and 2002.

Section 3: Methodology

Bibliography of unpublished research

A number of different kinds of sources were used to compile the bibliography of unpublished research. Appendix 1 lists the addresses of the web sites referred to.

Bibliographic databases

The British Library's Index to Theses provides an online, searchable catalogue of theses submitted in the UK which can be ordered through the British Library. Approximately 20 of these were deemed relevant to the project. The Index is unfortunately not comprehensive, as a small number of universities have chosen not to submit their theses to it.

Educati*on-line* is an online, searchable database of education-related conference papers. It yielded a small number of unpublished conference papers relevant to the project. These were downloaded directly from the Educati*on-line* web site.

The Educational Research in Scotland Database (ERSDAT) covers research relevant to Scottish education, conducted from 1975 to date. It includes funded research and completed postgraduate theses.

Library catalogues

Information on Masters dissertations is not collected centrally in any bibliographic database. It was therefore necessary to search university library catalogues for these (and for some PhD theses). Given the number, it was not possible to look at all of them. A selection was therefore made on the following basis: (a) the university has a high proportion of international students; and/or (b) the university had a track record of research on international students. The library catalogues of the following were searched:
Anglia Polytechnic University
Bristol University
Cambridge University
Cardiff University
Coventry University
Essex University
Institute of Education (University of London)
Leeds University
Leicester University
London School of Economics (University of London)
Manchester University
Nottingham University
Oxford University
Oxford Brookes University
Portsmouth University

SOAS (University of London)
Southampton University
Surrey University
Sussex University
University College Chichester
University of London (Senate House)
Warwick University

In addition, a number of visits were paid to the library at the Association of Commonwealth Universities, which specialises in research on international students both in the UK and overseas. The UKCOSA library also contained much relevant material.

Web sites of organisations concerned with international students

Appendix 1 includes the web sites of organisations that were visited in search of unpublished literature. These focus mainly on policy, administrative and management issues or issuing guidance to international students and were rarely a direct source of material. However, some yielded references and points of contact which, when followed up, occasionally provided access to relevant material.

JISC mailing lists

There are a number of JISC email lists relevant to the subject of international students. These allow academics and other staff to network, discuss and seek advice on a wide range of issues. A call was sent out on the mailing lists in Appendix 2, asking for references to relevant unpublished literature and if possible for the material itself. Responses were received from researchers across the world.

The archive of JISC mailing lists was also searched, for details of relevant conferences and internal reports, but this did not yield many results.

Research in progress

In an endeavour to find out about research in progress on international students, the web sites of the major research funding bodies were searched.

The ESRC Regard database indicated that ESRC was funding only one research project that was concerned with international students. This project was entitled 'The acquisition of multi-word structures : an integrated framework' and is taking place at the University of Nottingham, headed by Dr Dornyei. Based in the English department and approached from a linguistics perspective, it sets out to explore how combinations of affective, cognitive and strategic variables facilitate or inhibit lexical growth. Participants will be 100 international students studying at the University of Nottingham. The research is due to finish in June 2003. Its aim is to inform the design of L2 (second language) syllabuses through a better theoretical understanding of multi-word structures.

The CERUK (Current Education Research in the UK) web site lists current research projects in UK universities. A small number of these dealt with international students, but they had all been completed some time ago. Most were not funded. There were no currently active projects in this field.

The HEFCE web site indicated that HEFCE is not currently funding any research on international students in the UK. The Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) subject centre for Education in Higher and Further Education has little on international students.

Three other major research funding bodies – the Nuffield Foundation, The Leverhulme Trust and Esmee Fairbairn – were contacted to find out whether they were currently supporting research on international students but responses were negative in each case.

This highlights that in 2003 there is very little funded research being undertaken on international students in the UK, despite a large Learning and Teaching Research Programme. The limited historical information available from the above research funding bodies' web sites suggests that this has been the case throughout the 1990s. International students do not appear to attract research proposals and/or funding.

Bibliography of published literature

The bibliographies of a small number of key texts on international students were searched for references to unpublished research. However, this yielded limited results. Published literature makes limited reference to unpublished research. This may be because unpublished work (e.g. theses, conference papers) may often become published work in an amended form (e.g. journal articles) and is read in this form by other researchers in the field.

Three bibliographic databases were searched to compile the bibliography of published literature: the British Education Index, ERIC and ZETOC. These searches yielded a large number of items, many non-UK, the most relevant of which were selected for inclusion in the bibliography.

As one of the most comprehensive UK libraries on education issues, the Institute of Education's own library catalogue provided references to numerous works on the subject of international students.

In addition, the bibliographies of unpublished material were searched for references to further published titles. UKCOSA was also able to provide details of key texts in this field.

Section 4: Commentary

Overview of the bibliography of unpublished research

The recent unpublished research on the experiences of international students in UK institutions has been accessed from three sources for this project: PhD theses and Masters dissertations; conference papers; and internal institutional papers and reports.

Theses and dissertations form the majority of the unpublished literature uncovered.. These are mainly produced by international postgraduates undertaking research based in UK institutions (this is the case for well over half of the 45 items in the bibliography). The work is informed by and draws on the authors' own experiences as international students and on

those of (usually) their own national groups. Some of the conference papers are also written by international students.

University staff (academics, student counsellors, administrators) contribute a majority of the conference papers and all the internal institutional reports. They also contribute substantially to the published literature. Most research on the experiences of international students we found in the unpublished literature was undertaken by international students. This skew towards work *by* international students necessarily influences, to some extent, the research interests, methods and perspectives displayed. This unpublished work can perhaps best be categorised on a two-dimensional grid. One axis is student cohort (country of origin, UK institution, type of course, etc.), and the second is facet of student experience studied (language acquisition, teaching and learning styles, cultural adaptation, etc).

Student cohort

For many studies, the starting point is the student cohort from one country in one university. A typical example is Al-Harthi's (1997) study entitled *Overseas students' reaction to interculturality: a study of the experience of Omani students in England*.

Research by academics and university support staff typically also focuses on the experiences of international students in their own institutions. This work encompasses both student experiences and the more general institutional arrangements for attracting (promotion and marketing), recruiting and supporting international students. A good example is Ames (1996) work, *Oxford Brookes: the international student experience.*

Studies by international students that are based on a particular student cohort most often look at the experiences of international students from the researcher's own country (or region) of origin. In the bibliography of unpublished research, 21 studies review (aspects of) the experiences of students from a specific country or region. Most focus on the experiences of East Asian international students, with seven devoted to (mainland) Chinese students, three to Japanese students, one to Malaysian students and one to Taiwanese students. Five studies look at the experiences of students from Arabic-speaking countries, and three papers report the experiences of European students undertaking undergraduate or postgraduate programmes at UK universities. There are no studies with a specific focus on students from Africa, Latin America, North America, Australasia, and non-EU European countries.

In addition to UK institution and country of origin, other significant parameters used to fix a subgroup of international students are level of course and gender. Several studies, for example, focus exclusively on postgraduates, and bring in issues such as adapting to different research styles, relationships with supervisors or effectiveness of international postgraduate research as a technology transfer mechanism. Only one study (Fei 2002) restricts itself to those on a particular study programme (tourism and hospitality).

Some studies use several parameters to obtain a cohort, exemplified by Bada's (1994) dissertation *Greek women's routes in postgraduate studies in Britain*. Furthermore, while many studies that are based around a particular cohort (or subgroup) of international students look at the overall experience of their research subjects, some narrow the focus to a particular facet of that experience. A good example is Taylor's (2000) *Seminar skills for Japanese students: misunderstandings and affective factors*.

Although the literature reviewed for the annotated bibliography may not be representative of the wider body of literature on international students, it is notable that the cohort most often studied in the bibliography (Chinese students) is also a major recruitment target for UK higher education institutions as of 2000. The NFER study however indicated that students from China generally did no worse or better than UK students (NFER 2001); their academic performance was broadly comparable. This was not the case, for example, for students from the USA, who on the whole performed less well than UK-domiciled students except in the case of engineering and technology. However, no studies were found on the experiences of North American students in the UK.

This suggests that the focus of research is not on those student cohorts which do not perform as well as they might in the UK HE system, and which therefore might benefit from a better understanding of their experiences and academic needs. Instead the focus is on the cohorts which higher education institutions are putting most effort into recruiting. This point is re-emphasised by noting that there is relatively little research on the biggest group of international students in the UK, those from the European Union. Such students are not a high priority in most institutions' recruitment drives as they do not pay full fees. Of course, most of these studies are carried out by students, not institutions, and reflect the students' interests. However, it would seem that while some international students warrant being the subject of an MA dissertation, others do not.

There would appear to be a link - maintained often by the international students themselves - between academic research on international students and market research to help institutions improve their recruitment strategies and 'after-sales' service. Walker (1999: 7) argues that market research has for too long dominated the agenda: "it seems that the only international student research universities are interested in is market research, on which we have surfeited." Bada (1994: 27) describes the same phenomenon in slightly different terms, arguing that research which does not provide market information will only be of interest to those carrying it out: "Here there is no expert asking for answers…and thus, the only one who may be interested in the answers is the one who gives them". This emphasis on market research has shaped to a large extent the kinds of questions which are asked of research into international students.

It should be added that the market research on international students focuses on recruitment; there is little emphasis on the longer-term value of the 'product' purchased by international students.

Facet of student experience

Several PhD theses in this study attempt to categorise the existing international student literature by the facet of student experience researched (see, for example, literature reviews in Félix-Corral 1997, Walker 1997). Any categorisation is necessarily subjective, but we would suggest the following headings as a useful taxonomy:

- practical challenges; e.g. accommodation, visas
- emotional and affective issues; e.g. stress, homesickness
- cultural adaptation and integration; e.g. developing adequate cross-cultural skills
- English language acquisition and competence
- pedagogical difficulties; e.g. seminar skills, writing skills
- curriculum and assessment; e.g. appropriate course design

- performance and outcomes.

Practical challenges include travel (the nuts and bolts of visas, orientation, reception, etc.), finance, accommodation and surviving the UK climate. These issues often arise in the research, but are rarely the primary focus of studies. They often get covered in studies by staff within universities (see Ames 1996), perhaps in part because these practical concerns may be potential barriers to recruitment.

Emotional and affective issues include homesickness, isolation, stress and pastoral care. Some studies focus exclusively on the psychological health of international students (for example, Hamid 1996, Kwok 2002, Tiktakpanidou 2000). These often draw on standardised psychological instruments in their work. Others come from a more general counselling perspective (see Okorocha 1997 and Al-Shawi 1990), using the research to suggest ways in which UK institutions can improve their counselling and pastoral care services.

Cultural adaptation and integration is a focus of several studies (see, for example, Al-Harti 1997, Tin 2000). These topics embrace (sometimes uncertainly) complex socio-political processes, and cover issues such as racism, exclusion and marginalisation. Underpinning this research is a perception and/or a finding that many international students experience culture shock during their time in UK institutions. This is often associated with the limited interaction they are said to have with home students.

English for academic purposes is a discipline in its own right, with an extensive literature. Some of the research examined in this report uses language acquisition and competence as a vehicle for exploring international students' experiences. A number of studies focus on specific aspects of academic communication, such as participation in seminars and lectures (Skirving 1997, Taylor 2000) or academic writing (Jin 1992, is good here, as are O'Connell and Jin 2001). The cultural dimension to language learning and language use is often emphasised.

Pedagogical differences are said to arise from: a cultural clash of learning styles; different expectations of staff and student roles; and culturally specific approaches to essay writing in particular and academic discourse in general. Some studies sketch out the differences between Western culture and the home cultures of (different groups of) international students, drawing on frameworks developed by Hofstede (1994, 1984) and other theorists, before looking at the specific educational cultural differences. Haowei's (2001) *The cross-cultural experiences of international students at a British Higher Education institution* is a good example.

The extent to which UK institutions should internationalise the curriculum and adapt assessment procedures to meet the needs of overseas students is a contentious issue. There are two perspectives investigated in the research. First, the institutional perspective (see Huyton 1991) which questions the extent to which UK universities meet the needs of their international students and have in place assessment practices which fairly account for achievement. Second, there is the 'user' perspective (see, for example, Grady 1996), which considers whether international higher education meets not only the needs of the students themselves but also the agendas of other stakeholders in their societies (governments, civic institutions, industry, etc). This brings in arguments about quality assurance and who should be the arbiter of quality and excellence.

In the context of this present project, these research themes lead on naturally to a set of questions regarding academic outcomes. To what extent do these aspects of international students' experiences (emotional issues, cultural adaptation, pedagogical difficulties, etc.) impact on academic performance and broader educational outcomes? For several reasons (discussed below) these are difficult questions to answer satisfactorily, and few studies (but see Makepeace and Baxter 1990) even make an attempt to explore this territory.

Methodologies employed in the unpublished research

Though the research discussed in this report varies considerably in scope, there is a striking similarity in the methodology adopted in many of the studies. Typically, there is a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches; structured questionnaires (postal or through face-to-face interview) sent to a sample of (or all) the target population are employed to gather quantitative data, and semi-structured individual and/or group interviews are conducted to provide further data and a richer picture of student experiences. Other methods are used, though much less frequently; these include non-participant observation of lessons, and participant ethnographic approaches.

The impact of funding on methodology

In general, one could say that these methodological approaches are rather unadventurous (see Preface). One may attribute this in large part to the fact that most of this research is unfunded, or minimally funded. This limits considerably the range of methodological approaches available to researchers in the field. Longitudinal research, for example, which requires longer-term funding and resources to seek out dispersed samples, is mostly absent from the unpublished literature reviewed. The one study which attempts to replicate a longitudinal perspective by examining students trained in the UK over a twenty year period acknowledges the difficulties of longitudinal work with international students: "Those who were trained between 1970 and 1990 […] were virtually to be found all over the world, so the questionnaire was the only instrument which could have been used with them" (Bullen-McKenzie 1991: 8). One can however note that researchers rarely consider using a telephone to carry out interviews with subjects at a distance, although the methodological reasons for this are not apparent.

The lack of longitudinal work means that most studies provide only a snapshot of international students' experiences as reported by the research cohort at the time of interview. Few studies provide a basis for answering questions about whether international students' perceptions and experiences change as they progress in the studies, or whether (and how) new policies, practices and attitudes are impacting on international students' experiences, or indeed how these vary between international and home students. This severely hampers the purpose of many studies, which is to issue recommendations on improving international students' experiences and institutional practices. These recommendations emerge from the authors' research but their practical value is rarely put to the test. There are almost no follow-up or action research studies, nor experimental or quasi-experimental work, to see whether implementing the recommendations, or any other initiative, brought about the intended consequences (or indeed had unintended consequences).

Without longitudinal work, it is also difficult to examine re-entry issues. There is almost no research on how international students make use of their skills and qualifications on their

return home, how long it takes them to re-integrate, how their education impacts on their professional development and competence. The cost-benefits analyses found in the literature relate to institutions only; the longer-term costs and benefits to the students themselves is rarely considered.

Access to samples

One problem faced by all researchers is how to get the co-operation of a group of international students with which to undertake the study. Walker (1997: 51) reports that she gave up attempting to interview Japanese students at the School of African and Oriental Studies, noting that:

> *...they were prime research targets for graduate students both in education and anthropology throughout London ... [and they] were suffering from research fatigue syndrome. Would-be researchers used ... incentives from free Cokes [i.e. fizzy drinks] to sums of money, only to find students becoming intransigent and loath to sacrifice any time from their course work*.

Walker's comment suggests a general over-auditing of international students and the emphasis placed on measuring their levels of satisfaction, the assumption being that international students are not satisfied (much of the literature is on their perceived problems) or could be even more satisfied (with a view to attracting more of them). This links into arguments about quality assurance and the evaluative state with its emphasis on student satisfaction.

Access seemed to be less of a constraint for those researchers who are themselves international students. In particular, studies that focus on a student cohort from an individual country achieved high response rates (often 50 per cent plus) to postal questionnaires. One explanation, perhaps, is that although most questionnaires and (even face-to-face) interviews were written and conducted in English, some supporting communication such as covering letters or chasing-up phone calls, was in the study cohort's first language. Similarly, international student researchers were often able to exploit personal contacts to find research subjects in the first place (which, of course, raises questions about the sampling frame, or lack of it), and to gain co-operation and break down mistrust through cultural and situational affinity and a shared first language. They may also see points in the data that would elude a British researcher.

By contrast, international student researchers found it difficult to secure the co-operation of academic staff in their studies.

The problems of access to international students (and home students, academics and support staff) has several implications for the research. First, the vast majority of research is with *current* students – these are much easier to reach. This means that studies yield little on achievement and outcomes, but concentrate on ambitions (motivations for studying abroad, etc.) present experiences (emotional, affective, pedagogical issues, etc.) and at best plans for the future. As an aside, it is worth noting that few studies report any attempt to obtain data on past international student academic performance (this may be because universities are somewhat reluctant to divulge this information or do not have it in an easily accessible form).

Second, much research is constructed in ways that do not allow it to be easily placed in a broader context. Many studies do not research the experiences of other students outside the narrow cohort that forms the basis of the work, presumably for reasons of access and funding. This means that it is often difficult to answer questions about how the reported experiences differ from those of home students, or whether they are specific to the particular local or institutional context or the particular nationality.

Thirdly, as the choice of cases and comparisons is often governed by the cohort to which the researcher belongs, it is not theory driven. Some studies demonstrate little reflexivity about researching outside their cultural groups. Representing the 'other' has been subjected to critical scrutiny in the literature on research methodologies, globalisation and postcolonialism (see Preface), yet this work does not inform much of the research discussed in this report. The complexities of outsider status and identity are rarely explored with much theoretical sophistication. Very few of the studies offer reflections on the issues, including ethical issues, raised by interviewing people from the same or from different cultural backgrounds and appear to approach interview and survey data rather uncritically in this respect. Furthermore, they see the UK in isolation from global trends and rarely examine comparative research.

Liu (2001: 16) for example tends to see only advantages in investigating fellow Chinese students : "easy accessibility to the target population; mutual understanding between the researcher and respondents; and the researcher's immersion in the daily life of the study group". There seems to be little consideration of the issues raised by investigating the group to which one belongs, the potential blind spots which might arise. In addition, there is the assumption that speaking the same language and being from the same country leads to interference-free communication. Other variables that may have an influence on how meanings are conveyed, such as the gender or economic background of the research subject versus that of the researcher, are not considered; nor is the possibility that students may not wish to open up to researchers who may report back to forces in their home country (the military or the police, for example)
This issue of cross-cultural research is however tackled at some length in Yeh (2001) who also discusses the problems of imposing one's own cultural categorisation upon other people's narratives. Yeh notes that this issue is particularly relevant when coding qualitative data. Researchers from different cultural backgrounds might have different concepts for categorisation.

There is little discussion on the issue of translation or on how to convey meanings which require deep understanding of the home cultures. Nishio's (1991) thesis highlights the importance of raising these issues in the presentation of findings. She states that when the Japanese students she interviewed reported having concerns about their English, they did not simply mean poor English but rather a desire to perfect it relating to expectations of complete fluency by those at home on their return. Their stated concern with money was similarly not, as might appear, a lack of it, since some, especially men sent by their companies, had very comfortable living allowances, but rather their feelings of responsibility towards the people (employers or parents) who were paying for them. These meanings can be communicated clearly to a native speaker in an interview. They may not however be so decipherable in a survey administered in English, leading to misunderstandings about student experiences.

Finally, it is worth noting that access to international students has implications for sample sizes and gender make-up. The sample size in many of the studies reviewed is small and

there is some question, depending on how the study is conducted, about the extent to which findings can be generalised. Fei (2002) interviews ten students on one course in one institution but draws conclusions about the learning experiences of Asian students on UK leisure and tourism programmes. This extrapolation should be qualified.

Many of the studies explicitly choose to have a gender balance in their samples. In some cases, however, access to the opposite gender proved a problem. Al-Mahri (1995) interviewed 21 students to investigate *Arab postgraduate students in Britain: the Aberdeen University experience.* Only one was a woman: "it proved difficult to meet female students. […] It is undesirable in Arab culture for men and women to meet unless they are related or know each other very well" (: 25). Al-Mahri managed to obtain written answers to his interview questions from two more women who he contacted through their relatives. The one women student who agreed to be interviewed did so with her husband present. Interestingly it is not made clear whether it was the women who refused to meet with him, or whether Al-Mahri himself felt uncomfortable about interviewing them. Also, the author did not consider employing a woman researcher to carry out the interviews on his behalf.

In other studies, gender imbalance reflects the make-up of the wider population of international students. This highlights that investigating the experiences of women international students raises socio-political issues, as well as particular practical problems, that many researchers are alert to, but certainly not all. There is a tendency to talk about the 'experiences of international students', even when it is clear that the research focused largely on male international students – as can be seen from the title of Al-Mahri's dissertation (Caroline Wright makes the same point in her article of 1997.) More disturbingly, figures on the gender make-up of the samples are not always provided, so that gender becomes a blind spot that cannot even be commented upon. As Leonard (1998) argues, women are positioned differently from men when they come overseas to study (as indeed when they study at home).

Survey instruments

A quick note on some of the quantitative instruments used in the studies. Many studies draw on previous research questionnaires and standardised instruments. Jin (1992), for example, is not untypical. This study draws on 'well-established' research to frame questions on social and psychological aspects of international students' experiences, while questions about academic culture come from the author's own experience and informal discussions.

Many other studies with a psychological focus, those on stress and homesickness for example, also use a range of standardised instruments, including Fisher's Dundee relocation inventory and Goldberg's general health questionnaire (see Kwok 2002, Hamid 1996 and Tiktakpanidou 2000). Some studies use (and develop) instruments specifically designed for researching international students. For example, Ames (1996) adapts the two questionnaires developed by Allen and Higgins (1994), while Grady (1996) bases his study on Porter's 1962 Michigan International Student Problem Inventory. The latter involves a series of closed questions (with ticked box answers) covering eleven areas (admission and selection; orientation; academic record; social and personal; living and dining; health; religion; English language; student activity; financial issues; and careers and placement service). However, Porter studied international students' experiences in the US forty years ago, and like many of the quantitative survey instruments, his Inventory constructs international students in a 'victim' role, as experiencing a succession of problems or barriers and having things done to them.

Findings from the unpublished research

A number of themes emerge from a review of the unpublished research.

Problem students

Looking through the titles and annotations of the bibliography, one is immediately struck by the emphasis on the problems and need for help which international students are perceived to have. Walker (1999: 8) notes two aspects to this. The first she calls the problem approach, which is characterised by an attitude that "overseas students [are] desirable in principle but difficult in practice". This approach first emerged in the 1960s, before international students had to pay for their education. It takes a rather paternalistic interest in the perceived problems associated with studying abroad. The second approach Walker refers to as the welfare lobby, which moves from problematising to problem solving and concentrates on welfare issues. After 1979 and the imposition of 'full-cost' fees when international students became of increasing financial importance to UK universities, the problems of students were related to 'responsible recruitment' and 'after-sales service'. Specialist personnel, expert in these issues, were brought in deal with international students en bloc.

Walker's analysis of the published literature on international students is also applicable to the unpublished literature reviewed for this project. The emphasis on student problems leads to different constructions in the literature. Firstly, there is the international student as victim: under-informed, mismanaged by supervisors, poorly adjusted socially and culturally, and unable to address these problems without help. Al-Shawi's (1998) study captures this tendency in its title: *An investigation of the problems of overseas students in Britain and their perceived need for help.* Li, Clark and Kaye's (1997) research has a similarly precise focus: *An exploratory study of the problems encountered by international students.*

A related construction is that of the greedy institution, running off with the full-cost fees and offering a poor service in return – i.e. exploiting international students. Fei's (2002) study is a good example here.

A third construction, also closely related, is the international student as counselling case. This identikit emphasises the difficulties involved in living abroad and adapting to a new culture. Three of the studies in the bibliography (Gascon 1998, Okorocha 1997 and Al-Shawi 1990) focus on cross-cultural therapy and how best to provide counselling services to international students. Furthermore, many studies recommend offering counselling to international students as a way to help them overcome their problems (see Grady 1996). Makepeace and Baxter's (1990) research indicates that, despite the fact that language was the most commonly cited problem by staff, counselling was the most common action taken in response to student problems. The emphasis on counselling can be understood as part of a wider trend towards student-centred education. It perhaps says less about international students than about the liberal attitude that counselling is a valid response to problems that others might see as political, institutional and financial. It also highlights how institutions manage risk, offering counselling in part to ensure they are covered against any future complaints or claims.

Sketching out these constructions is not intended to undermine the research fatally. The counselling approach, for example, emphasises an historically neglected aspect of student life; mental health. However, there has to date been little critical appraisal of these frameworks of understanding and also little progress in their development. As is argued below, recent theoretical frameworks employed in education research more widely have had very little impact on the international student literature.

Another shortcoming with the problem-oriented approach is that some studies simply confirm what we might take to be a self evident hypothesis – that, for example, students whose first language is not English experience a greater range of challenge than native English speakers – or that underscore previous research in this area. Grady (1996), in summarising the results of Porter's 1962 study of international students at the University of Michigan, notes that: female students checked more problems than male students; undergraduates checked more problems than postgraduates; those away for more than a year checked more problems than those on shorter courses; those for whom English not their first language checked more problems than native English speakers; non Western students checked more problems than Western students; single students checked slightly more problems than married students; younger students checked more problems than older students.

Nothing in the unpublished research really contradicts this broad picture. Some studies fail to detect significant differences in experience or perception in terms of parameters like age and gender. Some add a useful gloss or two: Jiang (1994), for example, notes that on average women report more difficulties in terms of academic achievement than men, but men have more difficulties in terms of social life and cultural understanding.

The value of this type of generalised analysis to an understanding of international students' experiences is questionable. From this problem-based perspective, all the research really underlines is that the promise that UK education holds for the international student is often not matched by the actual delivery. As Felix-Corral (1997) argues, there is a mismatch between marketing of UK education (which is a success) and delivery. This tells us more about the nature of marketing and the pleasure and desires it taps into than about the appropriateness and effectiveness of the provision for international students or indeed the quality of their experiences. It does however raise concerns (not addressed in the research itself) about cross-cultural marketing, and the familiarity students may or may not have with encountering marketing in the context of education.

It is worth noting that despite the focus on student problems, there is no agreement in the literature on how important each type of problem is, nor what impact they have on students' academic performance or levels of overall satisfaction. The weather, accommodation, finances, mixing with home students, academic literacy, English fluency – the list of issues is almost invariable, but the order in which they are ranked by students varies enormously, and seems to change over time. As a result, there is often little sense of priority nor awareness of what some institutions do/have done to counter them. Despite the opportunity to challenge and explore answers in interviews, some of the qualitative research does not go much beyond opinion pollstering. For example, Haowei (2001) notes the feeling among interview participants that they lacked pre-arrival information. In a section on cultural adaptation, she quotes a student as follows: "They did help us to a certain extent. But they should be more aware of how many problems overseas students will come across when they first come here. Such as some daily details, I didn't realise the plugs and adapters here are different from

Chinese ones" (: 51). It seems fair to say that this is a relatively minor issue in terms of cross-cultural understanding. Many of the student's other complaints seem similarly superficial. Yet little attempt is made to challenge the students on their views and feelings, to explore their significance and overall impact. 'Cross-cultural problems' cover everything that's culturally different, from study approaches to socket voltage. It may lead to the conclusion that easing cross-cultural adaptation involves addressing all of these issues, which seems highly unlikely if not undesirable. It also raises the issue of how to deal with some of the problems raised by the students in the context of a higher education designed to promote independence.

As the example from Haowei illustrates, there is a tendency to exaggerate problems in psychological terms, so that surprise at differences is described as culture shock and that lack of foresight or ignorance – say, about electrical voltages – is described as disorientation. In many studies, there is a rather unrigorous appropriation of psychological language to describe experience, which does not do justice to the resources students bring nor the experiences which they face, and betrays a lack of understanding of the psychological literature.

Apart from counselling, it is also often suggested that the problems of international students can be addressed by giving them more information, the idea presumably being that if they know more about what problems to expect, they can prepare for them better. There is no denying that providing international students with enough information to enable them to make informed decisions and sufficient preparations is crucial. However, there is lack of knowledge and research-based evidence on how to address many of these problems. As was stated earlier, little research is carried out into the effectiveness of proffered solutions. Also the lack of longitudinal work means that it is difficult to know how problems are dealt with by international students over the longer-term.

As Caroline Wright points out (1997: 107), the issue with having international students as the problem group is that it makes the student the problem and higher education the solution (by offering counselling or more information). Such an approach is unhelpful. She argues: "Experiences of racism, culture-shock, poverty, inappropriate provision, etc., have as much to do with British society as they do with individual overseas students". Furthermore, "improving the experiences of overseas students is not just about a new policy-and-resources initiative imposed from the top, but requires real and sustained dialogue between all groups in the HE sector, as well as a recognition of the active steps overseas students have always taken to help themselves".

On the issue of problems, finally, it is worth noting the mismatch between the views of many researchers in this field and the international students' sponsors. Al-Mahri's (1996: 33) study is one of few to investigate the sponsors' views on their students' cultural adaptation and integration. Interviews with cultural attachés indicate that "students are generally thought to adapt within the first three months and very few students find it difficult to continue beyond this time". For the attachés, any problems are due to poor selection: "when suitable students are chosen from the beginning, they can continue without difficulty". In this study, the sponsors laid the cause of any problems squarely at the feet of their own students. This perhaps highlights the pressure put on students by their sponsors to succeed and the lack of understanding likely to be demonstrated if they encounter difficulties. However, it is difficult to tell whether the sponsors' perspectives are rooted in either national pride or based on a

realistic assessment of students' abilities. In the latter case, much of the UK research on international students comes across as rather patronising.

Homogenous students

Where more recent research and writing has begun to deepen perspectives is by demolishing the (lazy) assumption that international students form a homogeneous group. There is a huge diversity of cultural, linguistic, pedagogical, social and vocational backgrounds. People have widely differing motivations for, and expectations of, studying abroad. And just as it is often unhelpful to see international students as having a common set of interests, issues and problems, so one should not switch these generalisations to easy sub-categorisations like country of origin (as is argued by, for example, Nishio 2001 and Felix-Corral 1997).

A common problem faced by researchers however is the extent to which generalisations can be made meaningfully. When is it useful to talk about the experiences of, for example, Japanese students, and at what point does it stop being useful and become a caricature? The following quote from Li (2000: 21-22) illustrates the problem: "many researchers have shown that international students coming from different backgrounds have different needs and problems. The most obvious are the differences shown by international students from Asian and Western countries". Whilst recognising diversity, at what point can one start grouping together all Asian and Western countries?

It is important to note that it is not only researchers who run the risk of homogenising the experiences of others, but the research subjects themselves. Al-Mahri (1996: 33) quotes a cultural attaché as follows: "our youth is educated with good Islamic manners, good knowledge and sense of Western culture. In the West they take what is good and leave what is bad". References to 'the West' occur frequently in interviews without much critical questioning or critical engagement with how 'the West' is constructed by some international students.

Cross-cultural adjustment

A major theme in the literature concerns cross-cultural adjustment issues. Several studies usefully explore the cultural dimension in, variously, English language acquisition, classroom behaviour (contributions in seminars, approaches to group work, etc.), student/teacher relations, and academic writing. This is an area where there appears to be a lack of awareness (on all sides) and huge potential for misunderstanding. Jin's (1992) study of the cultural gap between British tutors and supervisors and Chinese international students found that both groups lack explicit awareness of their own and the other's academic culture, noting that academic cultural problems are often disguised by the high English language competence of mainland Chinese postgraduates studying in the UK.

Fernandez's (1994) study uses linguistics to look at the ways in which both the cultural conventions and the social situation in which language interaction is embedded shape international student experiences:

> *Those who are novice members of a discourse community may not be familiar with the conventions that shape its genres and consequently they may not be able to communicate effectively and creatively within these restrictions…overseas postgraduate students may find it difficult to write academic essays successfully within*

> *restrictions with which they are perhaps not fully acquainted. Furthermore, this lack of expertise in the particular discourse community they are engaged in is likely to reduce the possibility of a desired impact on their audience. This pedagogical position links directly with Kress's emphasis on the need to bring the conventions of social interaction into focus so that students can analyse critically and challenge established traditions under which they are writing in order to be able to give the intended image of themselves through their writing and achieve their goals as writers* (: 18)

In discussing Kress's work here, Fernandez raises the question of whether students are to be encouraged to assimilate the cultural ways of thinking and talking of the most powerful socio-cultural groups, or whether teachers should raise the students' awareness of the ideology behind the cultural discourse conventions as a first step to empowering students to effect innovation. This is a critical issue for TEFL and EAP teachers, as it implies that in order to promote a fit between the students' cultural identity and the culture in which the students want to participate, teachers need to be aware, and in turn make clear to students, that "language forms are not neutral, i.e. they are not devoid of ideology and therefore can be used to reproduce or change socio-cultural practices, even within the context of a Masters course of study" (Fernandez 1994: 64).

The power relations involved in cultural 'adjustment' are further made clear by Fernandez:

> *If strict adherence to discourse conventions are required without sensitivity to cultural differences, then the senior members of the community are in effect reinforcing their power over students who must relinquish their ways of expressing themselves so that their writing is considered acceptable according to the established standards* (:30)

Fernandez's study draws out some of the critical issues regarding quality assurance and international students. Quality assurance processes are generally portrayed as the guarantors of 'excellence' in higher education and vital to protect the image of British higher education overseas. However, they can also be used to disqualify alternative approaches to studying and portray the international student as in permanent deficit.

Although Fernandez's work employs a variety of theoretical paradigms, many studies discuss cultural adaptation and academic literacy without specifying and/or employing 'commonsense' theoretical frameworks and so do not appear fully to account for the process of cultural 'adjustment'. There is often an assumption that the sole outcome of adjustment is adaptation. This is particularly well explored in Gascon (1998), who critiques the notion of 'cultural shock'. Particularly dominant in the literature on cross-cultural adaptation, culture shock was originally defined by Oberg (1960) as a medical condition describing feelings of disorientation following a person's exposure to a new culture. It could develop into physical symptoms precipitated by anxiety at having lost all familiar symbols of social intercourse. Gascon develops a model which shows how adjustment takes place along three dimensions: affective/emotive, cognitive/perceptual and behavioural. He thereby aims to provide a set of alternative possible outcomes to 'adjustment': returners, escapers, beavers (who find solace through hard work), time servers, and participators (who bring about change).

As Gascon argues, most of the present day cross-cultural literature has an emphasis on the negative consequences of adaptation and focuses primarily on identifying adjustment problems. His study emphasises the opportunities for growth, quoting one student: "I think I

have learned more about myself being away from home than I would if I had stayed at home" (:117).

Few other researchers see the positive side of 'culture shock' or related dispositions, such as homesickness. Most studies imply that the experience of living in a new culture is an unpleasant surprise, as expressed through a host of symptoms - stress, homesickness, isolation, etc. - few of which are ever critically discussed. Less attention is paid to the factors that determine what reaction a person is likely to experience and how long they suffer from these side-effects of international study. As Adrian Furnham (1997) argues, the notion that culture shock is universal and universally unpleasant needs to be empirically tested. There might well be sensation-seekers who do not suffer adverse effects but instead enjoy the highly arousing stimuli of the unfamiliar.

Yeh (2001) problematises the whole issue of cross-cultural communication by arguing that identities are constituted by many different kinds of cultural allegiances. Sharing a common 'postgraduate culture' enables students from different national cultures to communicate effectively. This challenges the 'cultural misunderstanding' thesis found in much of the rest of the literature. Yeh's work emphasises the multiplicity of identities which come into play in any encounter. The interesting question here is under what conditions are different aspects of the student's identity brought out; when is an international students made to feel international, or Japanese, or a student, or a shy person, a middle-class person, a woman? How do these different identities combine, relate to each other and how do they impinge on the student's experiences?

Theoretical frameworks

As Walker (1999: 7) argues "international study has been seriously undertheorised in Britain". The discourse on international students tends to be rather pragmatic, implicitly positivistic, and ungrounded in any of the educational disciplines (educational philosophy, sociology, history, economics, etc.). Although there is some discussion of the educational benefits to institutions, this is rarely presented in the context of current higher education policy and governance, i.e. as located within an audit culture concerned with performance indicators and massification. This means that the experiences of international students are often examined without consideration of the environment that frames them.

Walker (1999: 7) attributes this lack of theorisation and politics to the company international study has tended to keep: either with the "bleeding hearts welfare lobby – and currently with blatant commercialism. With respect to the latter it seems that the only international student research universities are interested in is market research". Walker's own (1997) thesis examines the commodification of international study; the start of the burgeoning marketing departments and International Offices. Hers is one of few studies to explore the relationship between international study and policy changes in UK higher education.

Education and psychology are the main disciplines within which the students are (formally if implicitly) located and their work examined. But researchers who do use explicit theoretical frameworks tend to draw them from particular aspects of (mainly American) sociology, such as role theory or cultural difference theory. Psychology offers some theoretical perspectives in exploring intrapersonal student experiences, although it is psychology of a certain kind, emphasising communications problems rather than power relations or other environmental factors. This has a tendency to medicalise and socially decontextualise stress, isolation, etc.

While as noted effective support services, such as cross-cultural counselling, are essential, there are dangers of reducing major socio-economic and structural barriers to the level of individuals or groups. So, e.g., while some authors use the term 'discrimination' (Marangou 2001), this is seen as a product of individual misunderstandings or prejudice, while institutional racism is rarely mentioned.

The most sophisticated studies are from applied linguistics. E.g. Busher (2001) is one of a handful of studies that demonstrate how theory can be usefully deployed to explore the experiences of international students. In looking at the construction of identity through language and power relationships, he uses Foucault's ideas and the power/knowledge thesis to suggest how students' limited understanding of the discourses and cultures of successful academic practice makes it difficult for them to establish effective work-related identities and undermines their institution-oriented perceptions of self. His research investigates how students struggle with, and adapt their existing identities to meet, the demands of the academic discourse communities of which they want membership:

> *For full-time international students in particular, these questions are entangled with issues about how they experience adapting to the expectations and processes of a particular society, the host macro-social community to which they come, and how this in turn leads to them to develop new literacies that affect their personal and work-related identities.* (:6)

Recommendations

Finally, a word on the suggestions often issued as conclusions to much of the research reviewed. These recommendations address three principal audiences. First, UK institutions, providing them with a plethora of suggestions on how they can develop better policies and practices with regard to international students, including, it is worth noting, actually implementing their current policies. (For example, in Katsara and Gil (1999) there is some suggestion that institutions may on occasion waive their stated requirements on English language competence rather than turn away potential customers.) Second, there is advice directed to prospective and current international students. Third, and most politically sensitive, there are recommendations to other overseas stakeholders, particularly to governments in developing countries, on how they might get more from their investment in international studentships. Not untypically, Felix-Corral (1997) suggests that to improve international postgraduate education there should be an ombudsman for grievances; training in research methodology and academic writing; personal (or cultural) tutors for overseas research students; and that overseas sponsors should themselves monitor and assess the quality of British university products. Her point is relevant to international developments in quality assurance, as encouraged by the Bologna process.

Many recommendations however betray a lack of understanding of how higher education in the UK works, beyond the level of the individual institution. Although they may be well-argued and clearly presented, there is little awareness of the processes by which policies, practices and organisational structures in higher education can be made to evolve.

Section 5: Recommendations for further research

A review of the unpublished literature, as provided in section 4, highlights many gaps in the research on the experiences of international students. This section endeavours to summarise these, particularly from the perspective of UKCOSA's interest in the links between student experiences and academic achievement, and its desire to promote research-based good practice across the UK higher education sector.

Performance and outcomes

UKCOSA's original ambition in commissioning this project was in large part to develop hypotheses about the links between student experiences and academic achievement. The literature reviewed to date suggests that this issue has seldom been explored.

The data on the completion rates and levels of achievement of international students is limited, particularly at postgraduate level. The factors and processes affecting completion or academic performance are under-researched. As stated in section 4, most of the research has been carried out on *current* students. By necessity, this excludes students who have either completed their studies or dropped out of them. Given the high drop-out rates at postgraduate level generally, one can assume that this is a significant issue for the majority of international students. Only Makepeace and Baxter (1990) and NFER (2002a and b) have made a serious attempt to assess the success or otherwise of international students. As the former report, obtaining the co-operation of institutions was very difficult.

More broadly, there is very little research into what affects academic achievement. The studies reviewed for this project focus on one or more aspects of students' experiences, and many make recommendations to try and improve these experiences. However, the links between these variables and the academic outcomes of international students are unexplored. An initial research question remains, therefore, whether academic performance varies by institution; country of origin; gender; subject studied; entry level; previous academic achievement; first language; method of assessment; course structure; and student economic background – and how these variables interact.

A related issue is whether the outcomes achieved by international students represent a good return on investment by sponsoring agencies and families, particularly in developing countries. This applies not so much to the achievement of international students as to the effectiveness of their education in achieving the sponsoring agencies' objectives, such as, for example, technology transfer, or improved individual earning power. Policy at the Department for International Development has shifted in the last couple of decades from sponsoring student places at UK universities to fostering education initiatives in developing countries. However, many of the international students in the UK are still sponsored by their governments or employers to bring about change on their return. Little research has been carried out into the extent to which these objectives are met, and whether education represents the most effective means by which those objectives can be met. Families and individuals' own resources also constitute an important source of funding for international students, and the same kinds of questions can be asked about their return on investment.

It is worth noting the few UK tracer studies which do exist. Maxey and Preston (1994) examine some of the barriers to knowledge transfer, noting that the inefficiency of the process is widely recognised among the students themselves, their tutors, sponsors and government representatives. The authors recommend that institutions provide some pre-return orientation and training in communication. There are also a number of tracer studies

on refugee students and how they re-integrated after having attended further and higher education institutions in the UK. These include two works by Preston on Namibians (1993, 1994) and Unterhalter and Maxey's (1996) *Educating South Africans in Britain and Ireland: a review of thirty-three years of sponsorship by the African Educational Trust*. These studies are however specific to long term refugees and their relevance to other groups is perhaps limited.

The employability needs and requirements of students in the UK has contributed to policy discussions for some time. However, the debate does not extend to international students and there is little research into whether their employers' needs are met by current UK university provision. This issue is beginning to be tackled in the United States (Yang *et al* 2002), but to date little has been written for the UK context.

Perhaps these issues can best be summarised by pointing out that overseas study involves three stages: pre-study, in-study and post-study. The first of these is to some extent covered by market research provided by organisations such as the British Council and individual universities (see for example Ames 1996). Most of the literature reviewed for this project focuses on in-study issues. However, there is a real dearth of research on post-study issues, particularly if academic outcomes are included here.

Comparative approaches

Many studies tend to examine one particular student cohort. There is very little comparative work, either between (a) different groups of international students, or (b) international students and home students. The first of these issues is mentioned above. The second, comparing the experiences of international and home students, could generate hypotheses about reasons for differences in outcomes.

Most studies on international students are also conducted from the perspective of international students or staff teaching international students. Far less is known about the viewpoints of either home students, members of the receiving community, or indeed students' own spouses and children. Research involving home students, including their perceptions, attitudes and interactions with international students and their families, may illuminate existing research on cultural adaptation and integration, and place other experiential issues in a broader context.

Internationalising higher education

Much of the staff development literature on the subject of international students recommends certain kinds of changes in the content and process of higher education. It is said that such changes can benefit both international and home students by bringing an international perspective into classroom discussions and encouraging academic staff to re-evaluate their teaching methods.

However, there does not appear to be much direct investigation of how these changes in practice impact on the 'international classroom'. One might wish to investigate the extent to which the presence of international students has really changed either the process or the content of educational activities. Research with academic staff could help establish the extent to which change has occurred on their courses as a result of increasing numbers of international students. One could also consider the costs and benefits of these changes. Most

importantly, one could investigate how these changes impact on the academic achievement of international and home students, in order to make an assessment of how effective such strategies are and the potential benefits.

A related issue is the lack of research on the political economy of overseas students. Lacunae include the impact of international students on host universities and on the academic departments or graduate schools in those universities; the non-academic costs of international students to institutions; and the costs of recruiting and retaining international students. As (Walker, 1999: 11-12) argues:

> The precedent in Britain is for resources to be thrown at investigating recruitment trends, strategic plans in respect of international marketing, financial considerations and welfare issues. This contrasts sharply with the dearth of research interest in academic and curriculum issues, specifically those related to the impact on standards and quality of educational experience for growing numbers of students without the cultural capital to invest in optimising the educational experience before them. […] That international study is universally beneficial or that it can be exponentially developed in higher education, is an unchallenged axiom espoused by self-interested parties which has not been tested by research.

The policy context of higher education

As section 4 points out, there is much research on the cultural adaptation and integration of international students, and the pedagogical difficulties they encounter in UK higher education. However, there is little debate in the unpublished literature about how UK higher education is changing and how this might affect both students' experiences and the outcomes of their education. Understandings of the current state of higher education are rarely employed in researching international students. Similarly, debates concerning wider participation and new forms of knowledge do not seem to have influenced the research agenda of those concerned with international students, despite affinities between the literatures. One could argue that analytical frameworks deployed in the wider literature on higher education in the UK, or in North America and Australia and New Zealand, could provide new methods of analysis for those researching international students. It would also be helpful if published literature examining policy issues – and government White Papers - could identify the arguments relating in particular to international students.

Under-researched student cohorts

There are significantly more studies on international students from some of the biggest suppliers of students to the UK, for example, China and Malaysia. There are far fewer studies on international students from high-income countries, for example, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA. There may be very good reasons for this; students from these countries may come to the UK on exchange programmes rather than as registered students. However, there might also be the assumption that because some of these students will have English as a first language and will know Western models of academic discourse, they will not have the same problems (or offer the particular benefits) as other international students for whom English is a second language. Going back to the issue of comparative studies, however, it might be useful to know more about these students both in their own right, and to compare their experiences with those of other groups of students. As stated under 'performance and outcomes', this may illuminate differences in academic outcomes and the reasons for them.

There is little written on gender in relation to international students in the UK. Of course, this also characterises the higher education literature as a whole, but it is particularly evident in the literature concerning international students. When gender is tackled as an issue, it is often approached using the problem-based framework described in section 4. Furthermore, attention is rarely paid to gender *per se* but to women students. As Wright notes (1997: 94):

> The under-developed state of this field, coupled with the all too frequent tendency of commentators to see gender issues as supplementary questions to be tackled only when the general work has been done, make this gap unsurprising, if lamentable.

Bada's (1994) study is one of few to highlight the broader social and political context within which women postgraduates study and the way this shapes their experiences and expectations. Her work suggests that re-entry may pose a specific set of issues for women, as they return to more explicitly patriarchal societies than the one they studied in. It also suggests that international study may be framed quite differently for women than for men; for example expectations (both the students' and their sponsors') regarding skills transfer are very much influenced by gender considerations.

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Appendix 1: web sites explored

The Africa Education Trust
www.africaeducationaltrust.mcmail.com/uk.html

American Association for Higher Education
www.ashe.org

Association of Commonwealth Universities
www.acu.ac.uk

The British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP)
www.baleap.org.uk

The British Education Index
http://www.bids.ac.uk/

BOSS: British Organisation of Sikh students
www.boss-uk.org

British Council
www.britishcouncil.org

The British Library's Index to Theses
http://www.theses.com/

Commonwealth Secretariat
www.thecommonwealth.org

Council for International Students
http://www.cisuk.org.uk/about.html

Current Education research in the UK
http://www.nfer.ac.uk/infoservices/ceruk.asp

Department for Education and Skills
www.dfes.gov.uk

Edinburgh University, international office
http://www.ed.ac.uk/internat/

Educational Research in Scotland Database (ERSDAT)
http://www.scre.ac.uk/is/ersdat/

Educati*on-line*
http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/

The European Association for International Education
www.eaie.nl/

The International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE UK)
www.iaeste.org.uk

IDP Education Australia
www.idp.com

Kaleidescopic Magazine
www.kaleidoscope.co.uk

Leeds Metropolitan University: International Student Support Homepage
http://www.lmu.ac.uk/stuserv/internat/

NAFSA: (US) Association of International Educators
www.nafsa.org

National Foundation for Educational Research
www.nfer.ac.uk

National Postgraduate Committee
www.npc.org.uk/

Observatory on Borderless Education
www.obhe.ac.uk

Scottish Council for Research in Education
www.scre.ac.uk

Sheffield University web page for international students
www.shef.ac.uk/ssd/central/international/contents.html

Society for Research into Higher Education
www.srhe.ac.uk

Staffordshire University: International students counselling page
http://www.staffs.ac.uk/services/ldc/pt2/su-io.htm

Study in Australia
www.studyinaustralia.gov.au

Study UK
www.studyuk.hobsons.com

Times Higher Education Supplement
www.thes.co.uk

The UK Council for Graduate Education
http://www.wlv.ac.uk/ukcge/

The UK Executive Council for Malaysian Students
www.ukec.com/

UKCOSA
www.ukcosa.org.uk

Universitas 21
www.universitas.edu.au

World University Service UK
www.wusuk.org

Zetoc (provides access to the British Library's Electronic Table of Contents of current journals and conference proceedings)
http://zetoc.mimas.ac.uk/

Appendix 2: JISC mailing lists joined

ADMIN-UKCOSA: this is a private mailing list managed by UKCOSA

UKCGE: UK Council for Graduate Education

POSTGRAD: Postgraduate issues discussion list

LEARNING-IN-HE: issues relating to learning in higher education

ISL: Improving Student Learning

ACADEMIC-LITERACY-CULTURE: Academic writing and reading

UKCOSA-CERTIFICATE-STUDENTS: for students of the Certificate for International Education Professionals run by UKCOSA

INTERNATIONAL-OFFICERS: for international officers in higher education

WRITING-DEV-ART-AND-DESIGN