

Student Transitions

Learning and Teaching Enhancement Project Report, May 2016

Project Title: Understanding International student transition to HE using Collaborative techniques.

School & department: MACS

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1	<u>Names and Heriot-Watt University contact details of project team (please identify the project lead/ report author):</u> <table><tr><td>Dr Tessa Berg (lead)</td><td>Ms Emma Guion Akdag</td><td>Ms Jenny Coady</td></tr><tr><td>MACS</td><td>SML</td><td>MACS</td></tr><tr><td>Heriot Watt University</td><td>Heriot Watt University</td><td>Heriot Watt University</td></tr><tr><td>t.berg@hw.ac.uk</td><td>e.guion_akdag@hw.ac.uk</td><td>j.coady@hw.ac.uk</td></tr></table>	Dr Tessa Berg (lead)	Ms Emma Guion Akdag	Ms Jenny Coady	MACS	SML	MACS	Heriot Watt University	Heriot Watt University	Heriot Watt University	t.berg@hw.ac.uk	e.guion_akdag@hw.ac.uk	j.coady@hw.ac.uk
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2	Key words:<i>Internationalisation ;student transition; rich pictures</i>												
3	The problem being addressed, with background and context: On arrival at a new campus in new country, international students are at a crucial stage in their academic careers, transitioning from study or work in their home countries to study in an unfamiliar environment in a different country. The transition time can be relatively smooth and uncomplicated but for many it can be stressful and difficult. Our research used collaborative group work techniques to gather information along with focus groups discussions. A collaborative drawing technique known as a rich picture (RP) was employed in order to gather insight into transition. Picturing in stories has the vast capacity to communicate irrespective of possible language, culture and education barriers. The RP is a familiar tool used in computing information systems (Berg & Pooley 2013) to gather understanding about human activity for system design to assist the exploration of different worldviews within a complex situation. Seventy-two students at three different universities in Scotland took part in this research. A student-led analysis of 23 RPs provided a nuanced understanding of social, cultural, economic and academic issues that are of concern to many international students. This analysis sought to identify areas that could be further investigated in order to improve the international student experience.												
4	Project overview & aims: Aims: The facilitation of RP workshops and the data-gathering process was to: - provide international students an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of living and studying in a new environment												

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	- provide international students with an opportunity to express their views on transitioning to this new educational environment - enable students to break down any possible language barriers by communicating through collaborative picturing and visual diagramming - facilitate a positive social experience in a supportive environment for international students to meet together informally and compare their experiences - encourage international student empowerment and assist in the building of a resilient international community The analysis of data collected using the RP tool was to : - build on current understanding around social, cultural, economic and academic issues faced by international students - provide insight into more tacit perceptions from international students such as emotion, sentiment, reaction and mood Additionally, the dissemination of findings from the intended research project will benefit international students by: - raising awareness amongst teaching (and potentially administrative staff) of challenges related to difficulties with language and culture which may affect both academic and social adjustment - facilitating discussion re the implementation of appropriate measures to insure the full benefits of having an internationally diverse student population are recognised - providing valuable insight for teaching staff into the international student experience which could also be of benefit home students intending to 'Go Global' - opening dialogue at Learning and Teaching Strategy meetings on how best to support international students
5	<i>Activities and details of project steps taken to achieve aims:</i> • Advertise for students to attend workshops • Arrange vouchers, as thank you gifts, for those who attend workshops • Write presentation and instruction material to be used in workshops. • Facilitation of five workshops at three universities (3 in Heriot Watt, 1 Stirling and 1 Edinburgh) • Employ five Information System (IS) students for analysis work. (IS students were sought because they have studied project analysis and the rich picture tool in their recent coursework) • Audio files transcribed by IS students • 23 Rich Pictures (RPs) analysed by IS students. Assumptions, emotions and key project themes (cultural, social, economic& academic) cross compared with the audio transcript • Analysis of RPs input to Excel spreadsheet for each workshop. Every icon in every RP was considered as to whether they fall into the key themes by IS students. • Home locations of international students mapped in world map

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	- Produced statistical mapping charts of key themes - Proposal written and accepted for Enhancement theme conference in Edinburgh, June 2016 (IS students presenting) - Proposal written and accepted to present at European Educational Research Association (ECER) conference in Dublin, August 2016
6	Key points including challenges your team may have encountered: This project involved collecting audio and visual (collaborative pictures) data from international students across three universities. The data was then disseminated by 3rd year information System (IS) students. The students transcribed, coded symbols, collated data into spreadsheets and presented at conference. The project ran smoothly throughout. All five workshops were well attended, the IS students were diligent and keen to work on the analysis and present at the conference. The main challenges have been to coordinate the student workload in line with their university study and to organise and keep track of project funds in line with student payments. There were some initial issues with marketing the workshops in Heriot Watt to the wider international community but this was overcome by asking J. Hansen, Director of Learning and Teaching to help with advertising.
7a	Describe specific project outputs so far: The project has produced a considerable amount of raw data. This data has been in the form of both visuals and audio focus group discussions. The data has been disseminated into information by five students using a crowd based content analysis approach. The transcribed audio discussions have been coded alongside the rich pictures focussing on the 4 key content themes. All assumptions of analysis (pictures can be subjective in meaning) have been taken into account. The analysis has been presented on an Excel spreadsheet and has, to a limited degree, been statistically examined. Further work is required to explore the information and determine impacts that can be delivered within academic material. It is envisioned that a forthcoming educational (focussing on internationalisation) journal article will be a likely output of this project.
7b	Media output? No
8	At present, Heriot-Watt University has a focus on student retention. It is the belief of this research team that by focusing on various aspects which may be a cause of concern to international students, as determined in the study, this could help facilitate a better understanding of International students' problems. This would then enable international students to become further integrated into their new learning environment, therefore enabling greater retention.

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	One of the key graduate attributes set out by Heriot-Watt University is the idea of a 'global' graduate who 'is able to appreciate and respond to cross-cultural diversity'. Another global graduate attribute is the ability 'to apply knowledge and skills in international and multi-cultural academic or professional contexts'. Whilst there are a number of initiatives available to promote global graduate attributes at Heriot-Watt University, it may be beneficial to more fully integrate international students in the social, cultural and academic life of the University. There is a tendency for some students to stay within their own cultural groups, which may lead to little integration or peer learning occurring across cultures. By facilitating more ethnically diverse student groups, this could help our graduates 'to appreciate and respond to cross-cultural diversity', and as a result, gain more insight into other cultures and ethnicities. The University is focusing on the "Go Global" initiative and it could be stated that several of the issues discovered in this study may be issues Heriot-Watt students might face if they choose to study abroad. Furthermore, a better understanding of what it means to study in a different educational environment could help to encourage more inter-campus transfers.
9	<i>Describe how you are sharing good practice within Heriot-Watt and beyond. In particular, give details of any liaison with other universities in Scotland (e.g. plans for papers, attendance at conferences):</i> This project has involved three Scottish universities. The following provides information regarding confirmed conference attendance: A student-led lightning talk will be presented at the 'Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education' (QAA) Scotland Enhancement Themes conference on 9 June, 2016, Edinburgh. It will be an ideal opportunity to share practice, discover areas for collaboration, and meet colleagues in the higher education sector. The Enhancement Themes are selected by the Scottish higher education sector and they provide a means for institutions, academic staff, support staff and students to work together in enhancing the learning experience. In addition, the Themes promote the collective development of new ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching. The current Enhancement Theme is 'Student Transition'. A paper has been accepted and will be presented at the 'European Conference on Educational Research' (ECER) Conference. This highly-reknowned, international conference will take at University College Dublin from 22-26 August, 2016. ECER aims to create an inclusive platform for initiating, reporting, discussing and promoting high quality educational research, that not only acknowledges its own context but also recognises wider, transnational contexts with their social, cultural and political similarities and differences.
10	<i>Next steps:</i> Further examine and disseminate the data for academic journal write-up.
11	<i>Additional information:</i>

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