Home v International Law Student Expectations: Understanding and embracing internationalisation within the classroom to facilitate peer-to-peer learning

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Introduction to the Investigation

The need to consider the expectations held by home and international students

The pedagogical basis for the study

The methodology used

The findings and observations

Implementing *The Legal World Series*

Conclusions
Advancing existing empirical research into the expectation-reality gap within UK legal education

We investigated similarities and differences in these gaps when accounting for a student’s country of origin.

We adopted the same methodology as Dutton’s Higher Education Academy (HEA) *Great Expectations* project.

Our project also has similar features to King’s College London’s Quality Assurance Agency commissioned *Student Expectations and Perceptions of Higher Education* report, and Dangerfield’s *Expectation and Experience* study.

‘...in a system that puts students at its centre, meeting their expectations becomes the key to success...but simply responding poses dangers of commodification or reduction in quality; we must understand and manage expectation to enhance both experience and engagement.’

K Dutton et al, ‘Great Expectations: Managing Student Expectations and Enhancing Engagement with Undergraduate Study’ (Higher Education Academy 2012)
Internationalisation can be defined as:
‘the process of integrating an international, inter-cultural and/or global dimension in the goals, functions (teaching, learning research, services) and delivery of higher education’

(Knight, 2004)

There is an increase in demand in international students’ desire to study at western universities (Spencer, 2009) with the UK often being amongst the first choices for students (Arunachalam, 2008).

Yet, some universities appear to have done little to account for the cultural differences of international students (Parson and Fidler, 2005 and O’Brien et al 2007).

Furthermore, failure to address these new challenges when they arise will result in a sub-optimum learning experience for students (Ramburuth and Mladenovic, 2004).
Pedagogical Underpinning: Biggs, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, “setting the stage for effective teaching.”

Biggs discusses the challenges of a multi-cultural class, and how social-cultural adjustments can be a stressful problem for international students.

- Different nationalities see ‘questions differently’
- Difficulties include language skills, but also learning-related problems that are seen as ‘cultural’ in origin, such as reliance on rote learning, passivity and teacher dependence
- However, warns that stereotyping should be avoided (distortion of reality)
Methodology

Our expectation-reality empirical investigation was carried out in 2013-14, and then repeated again in 2016-17.

In order to gather this information we adopted the methodology of using several questionnaires.

The questionnaires were distributed to our first year undergraduates during their Legal Skills class, in October, January and March.

The questionnaires asked students to identify their ‘country of origin’ and ‘native language’, so as to allow for comparative analysis within our findings.
Key Observations:

Between October 2013 and October 2016 the expectations held by British students had lowered. The expectations held by International students had become more focussed on between 11-20 hours of contact time, compared to a larger spread of expectations found in the original study.

The expectations held by British students in January 2014 were lower than their peers in January 2017, whereas the opposite trend can be observed by International students.

Finally, between March 2014 and March 2017 the expectations held by British students and International students had decreased.
How many hours of independent study do you expect to have to complete per week?

Key Observations:

The expectations held by British students remained fairly similar between the two October studies, whereas the expectations held by incoming international students increased.

At the start of semester two the findings for British students remained constant again, although notably no students stated 26 hours plus in the new study. There were a higher proportion of International students expecting 21-25 hours contact time at this point in the course.

Finally, at the end of semester 2, the expectations held by British students increased, and a similar trend can be observed amongst the International cohort at this point in the year.
Key Observations:

The expectations held by British students between the start of the academic year 2013/14 and 2016/17 have remained relatively constant, whereas the expectations held by International students had increased overall.

After Christmas, the expectations held by British and International students had declined between the two studies.

Lastly, the expectations held by British students decreased across the studies, yet the expectations held by international students had increased.
Key Observations:

The expectations held by British students at the start of the course remained relatively constant, although notably, no students now expected to make zero presentations, whereas there was an increase in the number of International students who held the expectation of zero presentations.

The expectations held by both groups had decreased at the start of semester 2 in the new study.

Finally, between March 2014 and March 2017, the expectations held by British students had remained similar, whereas the expectations held by International students had risen with a 5% of the group now expecting to make 5 plus presentations per year in 2017.
Key Observations:

The new findings indicate that expectations held about group projects increased across both groups in the new study, with more students now expecting to have to take part in 5 plus group projects when they arrived at University.

At the start of semester 2, these expectations had decreased in the new study across both groups.

Between March 2014 and March 2017 the expectations held by British and International students had become more aligned to 1-2 projects per year.
The culmination of this study asked students whether they preferred to work independently or as part of a group, this question was posed in January and March in both studies.

It is notable that overall more International students prefer to work as part of a group compared to their British peers.

This was striking in January 2014, but this trend can be observed across the results.
The Legal World Series is a student-led initiative whereby learners share their existing knowledge/interests and engage in peer-to-peer learning.

‘Greater cultural and ethnic diversity, among home and international students...requires strategies for supporting learning within a multicultural environment’


What the Legal World Series was not.... a postgraduate research conference?
Promoting Internationalisation

Across the Series a total of 34 students from 21 different countries presented a variety of topics.

Furthermore, in collaboration with 10 Student Union clubs and societies, such as the Student Law Society, Street Law, the Cooking Society, BU Dance, and the Afro-Caribbean Society, seven themed social events were delivered, including:

- 'A Taste of Africa',
- Chinese tea,
- Middle Eastern films,
- Salsa dancing classes,
- Afternoon British tea.

Combined, students delivered 15.5 hours of extra-curricular activities.

Over the course of the Series a total of 138 students attended from 25 different countries.
Overall students were complimentary as to the success of the initiatives.

On the whole, there was higher attendance than at Law School organised guest lectures.

The Europe and Asia events had the largest mix of nationalities in attendance (from the most diverse number of countries).

Peer-to-peer support was strongest amongst the African students who attended.

Majority of non-EU students said they “felt empowered to present at future events”.

33% of student speakers said it was their first experience of delivering a presentation.

94% said they had learnt something new by attending.

58% of attendees said they met someone new as a result of attending an event.

98% said they wanted more/similar initiatives to run in subsequent years.
Facilitators’ Observations

• Students were innovative/creative in utilising a variety of visual aids throughout their presentations.

• However in the future there may be a need to vet such material, so as to avoid causing offence, or cultural controversies.

• Change in classroom dynamic, particularly noticeable amongst the student coordinators.

• Desire amongst students to bring in their own guest speakers: denied so as to keep the Legal World Series student focused. (With one exception...)

• Desire amongst students to have members of staff attend to listen to undergraduate student papers. (Choice was given to students...)

• Proposal for the future: Aligning student papers with course content? But internationalisation aim of the project may be compromised.
Conclusions

• By comparing the empirical investigations in 2013/14 to 2016/17, such shows that expectations do not remain static, and that repeated studies are required in order to keep track of changing expectations.

• The quantitative questionnaire method remains an effective methodology for facilitators to understand students’ expectations as to the delivery of the LLB programme, and thereafter either attempt to meet such expectations, or narrow the expectation-reality gap, as far as it is possible to do so.

• What is interesting is that different trends appear in different cohorts, and therefore it is not possible for us to generalise the expectations of all British and international students.

• It is imperative to ensure that there are a range of assessment methods, across the course.
Conclusions

• However there were identifiable trends with regards to group work, projects and presentations across the cohort.

• We were able to respond to this via The Legal World Series, whilst at the same time promoting internationalisation.

• Our students were more responsive to initiatives that were perceived as student-led rather than staff-led.

• Providing students with a forum to share similarities and differences in international legal systems, as well as celebrate different cultures, provides a stepping stone towards facilitating internationalisation within the classroom.