‘International Students: The Challenge of Transition’

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Introduction

- Focus of the presentation
- Definition of ‘International students’
- Growth in global student flows & future estimates
- International students in Higher Education in Ireland
  - 2012: Education in Ireland estimate 32,000
Introduction

- Importance of international students:
  - Economic contributions
  - Diversity in learning environment
  - Strategic role in reputation-building and rankings
    - Internationalisation – key indicator for quality in higher education

- Huge focus on attracting these students.... but do we do enough to assist them in their transitions?
Types of Transitions for International Students

- More extreme transitions involved

- Gale explained transitions as being two-fold: vertical and horizontal.

- Vertical transitions:
  - May be more extreme than for Irish students...
  - Lots of ‘unknowns’ (assessment literacy, expectations of international education, expectations of higher education in Ireland)
Types of Transitions for International Students

- Horizontal transitions:
  - May also be more extreme than for Irish students...
  - Moving home, country, university, language

- International students often encounter more amplified transitions
Diversity of International Students

- Not a homogenous group – huge diversity
  - Duration and level of study
    - Impacts on the their transitions and our ability to offset them
  - Cultural or ethnic orientation
    - ‘Culture shock’
      - Importance from human or pedagogical perspective?
    - Expectations of ‘classroom norms’ or ‘student/supervisor interaction’
Diversity of International Students

- Competence in English
  - IELTS scores (or equivalents)
  - National trends
  - Linguistic transition adds to complexity of teaching
    - Legal English
    - Irish terminology
Diversity of International Students

- Different experiences of pedagogy:
  - ‘Academic culture shock’
    - Engagement, lecture style, lecturer/student relationship
    - Assessment norms
    - Role of self-directed learning

- Aim: To best facilitate their learning experience – in so far as is reasonable and practicable
Best Practice

- Academic Commentary
  - Underlying philosophy?
  - The report outlines 6 ‘Good Practice Principles’
Best Practice

- **Principle 1:** Good teaching across cultures will focus on students as learners
  - View the international students as a resource for the domestic students
  - Aim to create a culturally inclusive learning environment
  - (American Law School research: Role of comparative law in encouraging engagement and critical thinking)
Best Practice

- **Principle 2**: Good teaching across cultures will respect and adjust for diversity
  - Practicality of ‘adjusting for diversity’?
  - Pre-sessional course in English/Legal English

- **Principle 3**: Good teaching across cultures will provide context-specific information and support
  - Be aware of support services staff
  - Discipline specific assessment information (terminology, style, seminar/workshop)
Best Practice

- **Principle 4:** Good teaching across cultures will enable meaningful intercultural dialogue and engagement
  - Not always viewed as important by students themselves!
  - Depends on cultural background of law students (American research)
- **Principle 5:** Good teaching across cultures will be adaptable, flexible and responsive to evidence
- **Principle 6:** Good teaching across cultures will prepare students for life in a globalised world
Conclusion

- International students undergo significant transitions in higher education

- Awareness of these transitions is key

- Do we need to adjust our own expectations of the students or reconsider our pedagogical approach?
Diversity of International Students