

# 319 Working towards inclusive internationalisation: Policy, staff perspectives and implementation

[Omolabake Fakunle](#), [Velda McCune](#), [Seongsook Choi](#)

University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

## Research Domains

International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

## Abstract

In this paper, we report on a study of the interplay between internationalisation and inclusion discourses and practices in a research-intensive university in the UK. Our analysis of institutional artefacts and policy documentation suggested that these two themes are often considered in isolation rather than integrated. We followed up this preliminary research with a questionnaire, interviews and focus groups with staff. We found that some staff had good awareness of relevant policy, whilst others had less understanding of this wider context. Some staff talked about giving close consideration to the interplay between internationalisation and inclusion, others had not thought through this integration. We discuss the importance of connecting work on internationalisation and inclusion to ensure that conceptualisations of internationalisation are not merely reflections of diversity. Our paper contributes to an identified gap by highlighting possibilities for cultural diversity to drive inclusivity in international higher education amidst globalised narratives.

## Full paper

The conceptual uncertainties around what might internationalisation of higher education mean continue to attract debate and reflection from scholars around the world. This conundrum can be attributed to three main interrelated issues. First, as recently reiterated by Marginson (2023) there remains a lack of generative connection between internationalisation researchers and practitioners, which is problematic for developing the field. He therefore called for a redefinition of internationalisation taking into account its relational dimension. This call for reimagining internationalisation links to the second issue in that there is a need for a shift from the dominant focus on the macro and meso strategic management of internationalisation processes to an integrative approach that interweaves macro, meso and micro level aspects of internationalisation processes (Fakunle, 2021). This proposed integrative approach addresses the observation in the European Higher Education Area Bologna Process Implementation Report (2020) that states that internationalisation activities are 'very general and thus offer little practical guidance' (p.124). In other words, the 'organisational characteristics' of internationalisation for institutions (Seeber et al, 2020) do not provide a full understanding of internationalisation to guide practice. Furthermore, thirdly, normative internationalisation discourse does not address the lack of insight as to how the diversity of people and ideas that internationalisation enables may result in inclusivity. This relates to a key question posed in this SRHE conference call as to what knowledges are prominent and whether there are yet unrecognised knowledges in research and practice of higher education.

To this end, our 2-stage mixed method research project explores linkages between internationalisation and inclusion in institutional artefacts. The outcomes from this work were then deepened by exploring staff perspectives as to the extent to which they make connections between internationalisation and inclusion in their teaching practice in an international university.

For the first stage of the research, we conducted a documentary analysis of internationalisation related documents across our research site which is a large research intensive university in the UK that attracts international students from over 160 countries. We produced a scoping report to complete this stage of the study. The scoping report reveals there is mostly a lack of connection between internationalisation and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion discourse across the institution. This is unsurprising given that there remains a lack of connection at the conceptual level between these two main agendas in higher education. Nonetheless, there was evidence of attempts to connect the two agendas in a few isolated contexts, pointing to possibilities. The report fed into the development of research instruments for the second stage of our study

The second stage involved 168 academic staff across three Colleges in the university. This includes 127 respondents to our Qualtrics questionnaire, 28 individual interviews and 4 multidisciplinary focus groups with 14 staff. Our thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021) of the findings reveals some staff have a rich awareness of the interplay between inclusion and internationalisation, whereas others had not explored these connections. The survey and interview data indicate differing staff level of awareness of institutional policy on internationalisation. Nonetheless, all the participants displayed keen awareness (and criticism) of normative and well-discussed economic-driven internationalisation (see Higher Education Policy Institute Report, 2023). This in turn has an impact on how staff perceive the concept of internationalisation may be connected to their practice.

The cultural dimensions of internationalisation emerged as a key theme, reflecting the opportunities and challenges with learning and teaching while encountering cultural differences in internationalised classrooms. This reflects the increasing ethnic diversity in higher education in UK institutions and globally, and the need to understand how diversity and inclusion work in practice.

The issue, however, remains regarding the conceptual void in the field (de Wit, 2023) that underpins to some extent the lack of connectivity between the concept of internationalisation based on organisational rationales (Seeber et al, 2020) and individual rationales (Fakunle, 2021) that points up a gap in the integration between higher education policy and practice (Bologna Report, 2020). Our research seeks to make a contribution by providing empirical evidence to highlight the lack of connection between internationalisation and inclusion policy, which points to a macro/micro disconnect. Importantly, our findings reveal general awareness of normative economic-oriented internationalisation discourses, and visions of inclusive internationalisation with implications for policy and practice. Our conference presentation will therefore share recommendations on inclusive practices within formal, informal, and organised spaces in internationalised classrooms. This ensures that conceptualisations of internationalisation are not merely reflections of diversity, but possibilities for diversity to drive inclusivity in delivering higher education amidst globalised narratives.

## References

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