

**Prime Minister's Initiative for
International Education (PMI₂) –
Student Experience Project**

Review of the Pilot Project scheme

Acknowledgements

With thanks to all those involved in the projects who contributed to this review

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Introduction and aims of the review

Introduction

Over the last three years, 39 higher education and further education institutions across the UK have benefited from PMI2 student experience funding as part of the Pilot Project Scheme. The scheme was developed by UKCISA in order to give institutions the opportunity to develop innovative projects aimed at improving the quality of the international student experience. Funding was, in most cases, set at a maximum of £5,000 and projects focused on a range of key areas, including mentoring, buddying and community-related activities, projects incorporating new technologies, employability-focused work, and projects focusing on specific groups of international students, such as those working towards a PhD, disabled students or those with English as a second language.

Aims of the review

This review investigates what happened to these projects once the funding period came to an end. It establishes how many projects have continued to develop and the impacts and benefits of these projects. In what ways have the projects developed beyond the end of the funding period? Have the respective institutions encouraged development through providing further funds or other resources itself? Have the projects been recognised more widely in the sector and what impact did the PMI funding really have?

This review also draws together lessons learnt so far in order to consider how best to spend the money allocated to the pilot project fund in the final year of PMI2 (2010-11), ie whether the scheme should continue in the same form, or whether other options should be considered.

About this review

To conduct this review, named contacts for 37 out of the 39 projects that took place between 2006 and 2009 were emailed (the remaining two were not contacted; see Appendix for details, and for a complete list of all 39 projects) to ask for further information on the development of their respective projects. 26 out of the 37 contacted responded to this request and their responses form the bulk of this report.

The 11 projects not included in this review may not have responded for a variety of reasons: change in staff from original named contact, pressure of time, or unwillingness to be involved. It cannot be said whether their lack of contact indicated a more likely negative outcome to their project. Nevertheless, over two-thirds of the projects have been reviewed and this provided a good indication of the kinds of development made and the impact of the pilot project scheme as a whole.

The 11 projects taking place in 2009-10 did not form part of this review as they were on-going.

Through phone and email conversations with those involved, this review tries to establish whether the projects have continued, or been developed or expanded beyond the end of the funding period. Did the funding have an impact greater than the sum of its parts? Have the projects been sustainable? What benefits have been seen in the institution and beyond?

Impact and developments

Overview of findings

20 out of the 26 projects reviewed were continuing and being developed in a variety of ways, as this report will show. Only one had not continued, due to a lack of further funding. One project planned to continue if sufficient funding could be found. And four projects reported no further developments because of the self-contained nature of the project itself – for example, the production of a DVD, a website or an evaluation report. But the benefits of even these four continued to be felt in one form or another.

This report outlines six key ways in which many of the projects developed. It looks at these in turn, giving examples of each.

1. Extension to a larger group of students or other stakeholders

Eleven of the 25 projects reviewed were continuing, but on a larger scale. A typical response was that whereas the project had originally been aimed at international students, it was now open to home students as well. It was recognised that not just international students could benefit from the project outcomes and that by offering new services or opportunities to all students, greater integration and involvement could occur across an institution. This had the knock-on effect of improving student services across an institution. Establishing a need for international students often led to an understanding that all students could benefit from what had been provided.

Some projects had been able to extend the reach of the project to a larger group of international students than was originally possible, or to extend, for example, the number of community organisations or schools involved in their projects.

Examples

- Huddersfield University's project providing research skills training to international PhD students has, since October 2009, been extended to home students as well. The project has now been mainstreamed and since its success on a small scale was clear to see, it was not difficult to persuade the institution to extend its reach.
- The University of Plymouth have continued their link-up with City College Plymouth, (each of whom received pilot project funding to ease the transition both for international direct entry students and for those transferring from FE to HE). Peer mentor support is now offered to both groups of students, and the collaboration now reaches around 150 students (compared to around 40 when the project started).
- University of Nottingham's *Culture Vulture* scheme is now offered to both home and international students and it is hoped that other departments will refer students to the scheme.

- Queen Margaret University's *Adopt an international student* scheme (now renamed Global Community Project) is to be opened up to all students from 2010.
- De Montfort University's *One Voice* volunteering project involving international students working in local schools has now been extended to home students as well.
- University of Glasgow's *Job-hunting package for HE students whose first language is not English* is now advertised to home students across the UK, who are also referred to the Moodle resources and the pdf because of the good quality resources, such as how to craft responses on employers' online application forms.

2. A changed cultural mindset within an institution and the local community

Seven of the 25 projects reviewed showed a particular development in terms of those interested in its activities within the institution and beyond. One of the impacts of these projects was greater collaboration with other departments. Setting up the activities in the first place often needed to involve a cross-departmental project team, and, following the end of the project period, the benefits of this collaboration were recognised and had been sustained. A further impact was that where greater awareness had been raised of an issue affecting international students, this had led to greater take-up and interest from the students themselves.

Several pilot projects that were originally aimed at a select group of international students on a small scale were now embedded or mainstreamed within an institution's support services. Inter-departmental and/or inter-institutional involvement in the projects can change the cultural attitude of those working in an institution by broadening the perspective of staff who may not work regularly with international students. At least two projects reported that this had been the case, with one of those reporting a greater level of internationalisation within the institution as result.

Examples

- Early indications from Brunel University show that more international students have registered with the Disability and Dyslexia Service following their project on the disabled international student experience. There is now a greater awareness of the support that is available for such students.
- Heriot-Watt's *Target 50* volunteering project has led to increased collaboration with the Students' Association, who, at the time the project started, had been cutting back on what they were involved with.
- The University of Abertay's work on why non-European students under-utilise free English language classes has placed a greater emphasis at this institution on cultural issues and so they are now considering how this can be built into other university structures.
- Sheffield Hallam University's *M-Learning* project, a series of podcasts for international students, has given staff involved the skills and confidence to develop further M-Learning materials. The University has also launched an invitation to all staff and students to make podcasts on '100 things every student should know'.
- Huddersfield's previously mentioned research skills training for international PhD students has changed the cultural mindset within the School involved, and there is a much greater recognition of the benefits of engaging with and providing for international students.

- The University of Plymouth's project providing peer mentor support to international direct entry students is now embedded within the university's support facilities, and, following a Faculty restructure, more people now have responsibility for internationalisation. It is also acknowledged that there is better communication between the different stakeholders, who more regularly share knowledge with each other.
- Bournemouth University's integration & development curriculum enhancement project has, over the last three years, become a regular part of the Events Management course at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.
- Students at City College Plymouth are now benefiting from a smoother and more coordinated transition to study at the city's university, due to greater cooperation following their pilot project. Staff working together at both institutions have established new layers of understanding and cooperation, not just between academic staff, but between support staff involved in admission, student support and programme transition phases which did not exist before the PMI funding.

3. Benefits achieved beyond the original stated aims

Seven of those interviewed reported unexpected positive consequences of being involved in the projects, affecting both the students themselves, relationships between institutions and more robust links between their institution and the local community.

Examples

- Queen Margaret University's *Adopt an international student* volunteering project has led to creation of a Student Committee which is now leading on this project. This has the knock-on effect of providing employability skills for the students involved as they have been given a budget and have to come up with ideas and follow them through.
- The *Adopt an international student* project was so popular that some students, who had enjoyed their volunteering experience so much, went back over the summer to do further work at the National Trust property that they had originally volunteered at. This has led to the university considering setting up a webpage to track development on this project so that the students involved can follow progress on it after they return home and continue to feel involved. This could in turn provide a useful way of maintaining better alumni relations in the future.
- QMU have also started to see links between this project and other parts of the University. For example, they employ a Green Coordinator who runs a range of green-related projects, such as recycling, and there are ideas to link green projects to volunteering projects. QMU are in the process of becoming a Fair Trade university so they are keen to involve international students in community-based activities and encourage them to speak about the impact of fair trade in their countries.
- Huddersfield's work on research skills training for international PhD students has led to increased research collaboration with overseas partners, because the original project provided training to PhD students who were gathering data overseas and so contacts were made with local advisers. This has led to links with overseas institutions that would not otherwise have been made. And students have formed friendships outside the confines of the project. For example, one home student is now godmother to a Ugandan student's child. This project has also created a word-of-mouth reputation and recruitment to the course this project was associated with has increased (though this was also linked to fee waivers).

- Although Huddersfield's project, *International student teachers acclimatisation: an evaluation of the effects of different stakeholders in enhancing adaptation*, is no longer running, it has led to one of the researchers involved pursuing a PhD programme related to the topic.
- De Montfort's *One Voice* project has improved its links with local schools and this has enhanced the university's local reputation, as the parents have been extremely positive about the project and as more schools want to become involved.
- As a result of Bournemouth University's *integration & development curriculum enhancement project*, cultural awareness training is now provided to student groups working with local (and often culturally diverse) community organisations.
- There is now a greater range of ways that international students can connect with the University of Abertay pre-arrival, as their project focusing on *factors causing non-European students to under-utilise free English language classes* has led to planning for a range of podcasts on their website.

4. Consideration given to formalising projects

Several of the projects focused on the integration of international students by providing a variety of mentoring and buddying programmes. The impact of these programmes on the students concerned had led to discussions in a number of institutions about formalising these activities in some way, by making it part of the course itself, or, in some cases, providing accreditation or other forms of recognition for being involved. This is especially true where student services, careers offices and academic departments within an institution had worked together to develop a project, and where academic departments could clearly see the value of the initiatives developed. They therefore became either directly involved in the project, or at very least, helped to promote it to students.

Examples

- There are plans to make Kingston University's *Introduction to British life and culture* lecture and field trip series a course module so that students can get credit for it.
- University of Nottingham's *Culture Vulture* scheme involves events with local community alongside buddying if needed. It is now being considered whether the buddying aspect of this project this could become more formalised and/or accredited within the Schools.
- Heriot-Watt are considering accrediting the learning and development that takes place within their *Target 50* volunteering project, starting with volunteering within the University and extending this to community-based volunteering.
- Following a project looking into *factors causing non-European students to under-utilise free English language classes* at the University of Abertay, Dundee, English classes there are in the process of being turned into credit-bearing courses.

5. Further funding and staff time provided by the institution (or other bodies)

Almost half of those projects reviewed reported that funding, staff time or other resources were provided for the initiatives once the funding period came to an end. Once the value and success of the project could be seen, institutions were more likely to continue to support (and often extend) the schemes. Much of the work had been mainstreamed into regular student services, providing dedicated staff time to activities.

Often, students had become more involved, which developed their employability skills, as they took over the running of a particular activity for example, forming a committee and being provided with a budget in order to do so. If further central or departmental funding was unavailable, some initiatives had applied for and received funding from other sources, for example, from Centres for Teaching and Learning.

Examples

- Brunel University's *InterVisual* website has been given further funding for additional programming costs by the Placement and Careers Centre, and other departments keen to use the system have promised additional sums. Work is ongoing to identify a possible partner for further development and rollout.
- Newman University College are now committing to pay £7 a session to those exchange students who volunteer their time to be language tutors, and the External Partnerships Administrator (designated as this project's co-ordinator) now has time allocated to co-ordinate this and meet with the student volunteers on a regular basis.
- Huddersfield University has provided an extra £17,700 in funding to extend the training for international PhD students. Research staff time for developing and providing training has not been costed, but the staff could clearly see the benefit of it and have been happy to be involved.
- Following their initial pilot project funding of £3,950, the University of Plymouth applied to a CETL and received a further £5,000 funding over 2 years for their project on easing the transition for international direct entry students.
- One student got so much out of the community-based volunteering project at Queen Margaret University that when he won £500 in a competition to give to a charity of his choice, he gave it to this project.
- Kingston University now subsidise the *Introduction to British life and culture* course which students pay only £25 to join.
- De Montfort University's central volunteering budget will continue to fund its project *One Voice*.
- The International Student Job Club at Sheffield Hallam University has now been rebranded to become International Student Career Coaching (ISCC) and is now an embedded and integral part of the Careers and Employment Service.
- University of Brighton matched the PMI funding received for its project *Teaching and learning: the international perspective and cultural awareness*, which has led to the development of a training resource for academic staff now available in the Centre for Learning & Teaching.

6. Indication of interest in the project beyond the institution itself

Several of the projects reported interest in their work following presentations at the UKCISA conference or success in awards ceremonies (such as AGCAS). This had led, in some cases, to wider dissemination than first envisaged or to regular and widespread use of the resources by students and staff across the UK, thereby having a large impact for a relatively small amount of money.

Examples

- QAA Scotland has used Heriot-Watt's *Target 50* volunteering project as a case study for one of their publications.
- Brunel University's *InterVisual* project is being trialled by LSE with a view to making it available to other university careers services through AGCAS. This project was shortlisted for the AGCAS ICT Award. The AGCAS conference was used to assess interest in having *InterVisual* available on a commercial basis and it is believed that future development could be sustained through external income.
- Brunel's other employability-related projects, *Moving On: enhancement of employment prospects for international students in the UK* and *Moving Into: internships, placements and high quality work experience for international students* resulted in CD outputs which were mailed to all UK university careers services. The *Moving Into* data has been put in a separate link on the Brunel website and is still available for other careers services to download. Numerous calls have been received from careers services requesting further copies or updates of both *Moving On* and *Moving Into* which would appear to demonstrate that it both clearly met a need and is highly valued by both students and advisers. This suggests that new versions would be highly valued. It is also featured on the AGCAS website.
- The production of *Discussing difference – a toolkit for improving cross-cultural exchange*, developed with funding awarded to the University of the West of England has coincided with increasing interest in research in this area. Neil Harrison at UWE is now doing some work on the psychology of how UK students' attitudes are formed through time, and which students are more likely to make links with international students.
- Interest in Sheffield Hallam's International Student Career Coaching (formerly Job Club) has been expressed by other institutions, and information on it will be shared at a forum of Yorkshire universities.
- Bournemouth University's *Keep cycling, keep safe: a cycle safety DVD for adults in the UK* has been sent to all UKCISA primary contacts and the PMI funding allowed for this resource to be widely distributed across the UK.
- At the end of 2007, AGCAS circulated the pdf resource of the University of Glasgow's *Job-hunting package for HE students whose first language is not English*. Now, about 50% of UK HEIs use it and it can be assumed that others are referring students to the pdf as an external resource. Various HEIs have asked to use the face-to-face seminars in their own in-house seminars.

Importance of PMI funding

Virtually all those involved in the projects indicated that the PMI funding had a major impact on the success of the project. A majority said that without the funding, the work would not have taken place at all, and others indicated that receiving the funding encouraged their institution to take the project seriously and in some cases, led to a contribution of matched funding or other combinations of staff time and resources.

PMI pilot project funding has gone into developing a wide range of new resources that were not previously available, such as new websites and podcasts for students, a DVD, training resources for staff, plus a range of new volunteering and other community-based opportunities.

The funding also allowed the employment of project-dedicated staff to set up new activities and paid for start-up costs. Many of the projects needed this financial injection in order to get going and have been able to manage and even develop their activities on a smaller institution-based budget once it was up and running. The funding also often provided the incentive to develop additional focused support for international students, which became embedded in the institution's regular support services once the funding period came to an end.

In several cases, the PMI funding itself and its link with UKCISA was seen as prestigious for the institution and enabled staff involved in the projects to prove their value to other staff and to bid for further funding to continue working on them.

The work of international student advisers has become much more immigration-focused over the last few years and many institutions have had to cut back some of their other international student services. Providing funding for student service-related activities helped to keep other issues facing international students on the agenda which might otherwise have been neglected in the current climate.

Conclusions

The UKCISA PMI Pilot Project Scheme was billed as “an opportunity for universities, colleges and students’ unions to expand or adapt services which support international students, and, at the same time, contribute to national and sector policy and good practice.” This report has looked at 26 of the 39 pilot projects that have been completed so far and has tried to explore whether the pilot project scheme has achieved its aims. Of those 26 reviewed, the high percentage of project continuity and indeed extension and expansion in many cases, would indicate that the overarching aims of the pilot project scheme have been achieved. Universities, colleges and students’ unions have indeed offered new services, developed new opportunities and enhanced existing activities in order to improve the quality of the international student experience.

As this report shows, much good work has been done since the funding period for each project came to an end. It has not been possible through this report to assess the impact that the respective projects have had on individual students (although some examples of this have been given), but it can clearly be shown that the institutions themselves have improved and extended their services, and they have often developed in unexpected ways. This goes beyond the original intention of the pilot project scheme, and shows that providing a small amount of funding can have a much bigger knock-on effect, not just to the international students it is planned to directly affect, but also the staff working with them, the local community and the outlook of the institution itself.

In many cases, institutions have recognised the value of the scheme and are now continuing to fund a project, an activity, a service or an initiative which would not have been developed in the first place were it not for the PMI. It has not been possible, in this review, to quantify the amount of extra funding provided but this report clearly shows that it has been extensive, either through direct funding, or the provision of staff time or other resources.

Although its impact is not quantified in this review, wider dissemination of the project outcomes is apparent in several cases. Dissemination through UKCISA’s website, publications and conference were integral to the scheme, and some projects were also promoted via other sector bodies, such as AGCAS. Some schemes have clearly spread beyond their immediate locality to positively affect students at other institutions.

Although the funding for the scheme has been comparatively modest (some £170,000 over the three years covered in this review), the results appear to indicate that the impact has been both significant and widespread. It has encouraged institutions to innovate and expand and develop a wide range of additional support services for international students and is likely therefore to have contributed to the increase in satisfaction ratings between 2006 and 2009.

The future

There is one final year of PMI funding to allocate. Based on the findings of the review, the options for 2010/11 are:

- the pilot project scheme could continue to run as in previous years.
- the criteria for awards could be altered to include allocating funds to previously-funded projects which, with a small amount of extra funding, could upgrade their systems or develop new ideas.
- the scheme could be extended to encourage several institutions who have worked on similar projects to join together to pool resources and develop their existing projects on a larger scale.

Whatever the decision on the future of the pilot project scheme, it is clear that the work done so far has made (and in many cases, is continuing to make) a real impact on the experience of international students in the UK, though often its reach is felt beyond this, through better staff training and cultural awareness, through increasing internationalisation and through a greater acceptance that the needs of international students can be applied positively to all students.

Appendix: list of pilot projects

*indicates participation in this review

2006-07

*Bournemouth University	An integration & development curriculum enhancement project
*City College Plymouth & University of Plymouth	Easing the transition FE/HE
Sheffield Hallam University	Learning & internationalisation
Kensington & Chelsea College	Effective remote interviewing
*Oxford Brookes University	Preparing for “life after Brookes”: support for PGs in final year
Greenwich Community College	Developing employment skills and enhancing international experience
Anniesland College	International e-buddies resource
*University of Glasgow	Job-hunting package for HE students whose first language is not English
*Brunel University	Moving on...enhancement of employment prospects for international students in the UK
*Sheffield Hallam University	International student job club
University of Leicester	Work experience scheme for international students in Leicester
University of London Union ¹	Residential training event for International Student Officers

¹ Not contacted for this review, as was a one-off event, which served as a pilot for future events organised jointly by UKCISA and NUS organised jointly by UKCISA and NUS

2007-08

Edinburgh's Telford College	BLISS: blogging and buddying to give information to international students
*University of Plymouth	Easing the transition: peer mentor support to international direct entry students
Heriot-Watt University	Safe City guide and map for international students in Edinburgh
*Kingston University	Piloting a short course: 'An introduction to British life and culture for all new Kingston University international students'
*Brunel University	Moving Into... internships, placements and high quality work experience for international students
*Heriot-Watt University	Work experience and graduate employment programme and database for international students
*University of Huddersfield	International student teachers (non-EEA) acclimatisation in Huddersfield: an evaluation of the effects of different stakeholders in enhancing adaptation
*University of the West of England	Discussing difference – a toolkit for improving cross-cultural exchange
Staffordshire University	Intercultural mentoring (pre-arrival, on-arrival and post-arrival)
*Heriot-Watt University	International student peer mentoring scheme
City of Sunderland College	International work placements (vocational teacher training)

2008-09

*University of Abertay, Dundee	Understanding the factors which cause non-European students to under-utilise free English language classes
University of Birmingham	Exploration of non-attendance at induction by specified groups of non-UK students
*Bournemouth University	Cycling safety – a road safety DVD for international students in the UK
*University of Brighton	Teaching and learning: the international perspective and cultural awareness
*Brunel University	What is the disabled international student experience?
*Brunel University	InterVisual – on online, interactive recruitment and careers education tool for international students
*De Montfort University	One Voice
*Edinburgh's Telford College	Hospitality training for employability and lifelong learning (HOTELL)
University College Falmouth	Help me – I'm an international student: reaching out to international students
*Heriot-Watt University	International student volunteering – 'Target 50'
*University of Huddersfield	A framework for research skills training, support and e-supervision for international PhD students
*Newman University College	Exchange students as language tutors
*University of Nottingham	"Culture Vulture" – a new approach to hosting aimed at integration between UK and international students
University of Portsmouth ²	C-Shock: a virtual environment containing culture shock elements, games and quizzes for international students to combat culture shock
*Queen Margaret University	Adopt an international student
*Sheffield Hallam University	M-learning: delivering international student support via mobile technologies

² Not contacted for this report: project outcomes did not successfully meet original project aims

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