



**INTERNATIONALISATION IN PRACTICE
CASE STUDY**
**PRIORITY THEME: STUDENT INTEGRATION AND
INTERACTION**
ACADEMIC AND LEARNING SERVICES

INTERNATIONALISATION AND STUDENT INTEGRATION AND INTERACTION IN THE SCHOOL OF LAW

For more Information: Dr Paul James Cardwell (p.cardwell@sheffield.ac.uk) or Dr Etienne Dunant (e.dunant@sheffield.ac.uk), School of Law

SUMMARY

This project investigated how the learning environment could better suit the needs of the diverse group of undergraduate and postgraduate international students in the School of Law. It also looked at how UK students engage with their international counterparts.

The aims of this project were two-fold, but centred on enhancing domestic-international student integration and interaction in the classroom/learning environment – a strong focus of the School's international strategy.

The first aim was to investigate how the learning environment could better suit the needs of our diverse group of undergraduate and postgraduate international students, whether in terms of academic environment (which may also include the curriculum), study skills, English language support (where appropriate) and engagement with the activities on offer in the School. The second aim was to discover how our UK students see their international counterparts and whether they see engagement with students from different backgrounds as an opportunity to develop their own interpersonal or communication skills. As an outcome from the project, a better understanding will be gained on both the issues faced by international students and the perception by UK students of international students. This will ultimately contribute to the School's efforts towards better integration within its learning environment.

WHAT ISSUE WERE YOU TRYING TO ADDRESS AND WHY?

The School of Law is justly proud of its international mix of students and staff. Law is quite an unusual discipline in that the curriculum is more 'fixed' than in other subject areas, particularly in Social Sciences, and is driven by professional requirements, even though many of our students do not go on to practice Law. Traditionally, most UK Law Schools – including Sheffield – draw the majority of undergraduate international students from countries which share our legal system based on the common law. Postgraduate students are more varied in terms of their countries of origin and the emphasis of our programmes lies on various forms of international and commercial law.



The issue we are trying to address is one of ensuring that the School continues to reflect and act on potential changes to what we teach to ensure we meet the needs and wishes of our international students. Beyond that, we want to find out the extent to which both home and international students feel part of the School in its curricular and extra-curricular activities and to ensure that we maximise opportunities for all.

METHODOLOGY

In May 2013, a series of focus groups were held to which all students in the School of Law (undergraduate and postgraduate) were invited. The focus groups held open-ended confidential discussions and students were asked for their candid opinions on a range of issues, including home-international student integration and interaction in the School, extra-curricular/social activities for Law students and the suitability of the curriculum.

The sessions were moderated by Dr Paul James Cardwell and Dr Etienne Dunant, School of Law.

LESSONS LEARNED

Student participants in the focus groups (both home and international) were asked what factors they took into account when deciding to apply to, and then to choose, Sheffield. This was very useful in terms of the emphasis placed on the curricula, professional requirements, and non-academic factors such as the reputation of the School and University, lifestyle, accommodation and safety of the city. There was a general consensus that the Law School website was helpful and easy to navigate.

The Students' Union and its reputation was a big pull factor for all students, as well as the promotion of Sheffield as a safe city, and accommodation provision. Some international students had prior knowledge through family members studying at the University, including one student who came to the Sheffield International College and was keen to stay on, as she liked the city.

For home students, the international profile of Sheffield was a decisive factor in choosing to come, though these students were generally on programmes including a year abroad already.

Within the learning environment, most participants felt group work was invaluable for integration and cited various modules as successful examples of mixing home and international students within small groups. This was felt to help form longer-term working relationships and friendships which were then sustained outside the classroom environment. Most international students felt that some UK students were very keen to mix, with others less so. Usually, UK students on programmes with a study abroad component were the most proactive in mixing with international students. Many international students felt, however, that many UK students do not mix easily. More work needs to be done here, but the students did not believe that the situation was any different in other Law Schools in the UK.

CONCLUSION

The focus groups have been very useful in finding out what our students think about the School of Law. Whilst there were many messages which were positive about what we do, and identification of some issues which it would be difficult for the School specifically to do anything about, there are some ideas and initiatives which



will be very helpful. In particular, the results of the focus groups will inform the implementation of the School's Internationalisation Strategy 2012-2017 and the undergraduate curriculum review, which started in 2013-2014.

