

# **Development of a Sustainable Student Trainer Course and Resources to Support the Participation and Learning of International Students**

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## **Background**

The number of students at the University of Bath is currently 14,000, of which nearly 30% are international students. In 2009/2010 the top ten countries by number of international students were China (Mainland & Hong Kong), Germany, France, Cyprus, Greece, India, Canada, Spain, Italy and Malaysia (<http://www.bath.ac.uk/about/facts/#student>).

The Student Union at the University of Bath is actively engaged in supporting international students in a diversity of ways. SORTED is a popular skills development programme offered by the Student Union in which many workshops are delivered by student trainers (<http://www.bathstudent.com/sorted/home/>). At postgraduate level in particular, student trainers are increasingly given opportunities to teach, from demonstrating in laboratories to lecturing in their departments.

Student trainers are therefore an important resource in UK universities to support the learning of international students. However, the training courses and resources available to develop student trainers do not particularly address skills to teach internationally diverse student groups, and student trainers may not therefore be fully trained to support the learning, participation and inclusion of international students. A previous student trainer event for SORTED with focus on “Training and Development in Diverse, International Contexts” indicated that training in this area would be much valued.

The present project was conducted to create a sustainable training course and resources for student trainers, with the core value of supporting the learning and participation of international students. Practical approaches for student trainers to enable international students to share their experiences, abilities and knowledge with their UK peers were identified and used/adapted. This supported the learning and participation of international students, and contributed to international and UK students mixing with each other; co-creating a freely available e-guide presenting typical issues experienced by international students in internationally diverse teaching contexts and how student trainers can address them constructively; training and mentoring a cohort of student trainers that can in turn, train and mentor peers in the sector, to sustain the process with minimal external guidance. Training and mentoring included plenty of opportunities for all to experiment with, reflect on, and challenge a variety of approaches to engage international students.

## Process

The project team had initial network meetings in early June 2010 where the possibility of embedding the international students training within the 'training the trainers' programme already offered by the student union through the SORTED scheme was discussed. The themes to be developed and the dates for the training and mentoring were included in the published SORTED course booklet (Figure 1). In addition to the initial 'training the trainers' sessions, it was decided that a number of workshops should be co-run with the student trainees including 'Teaching internationally diverse students', 'Communicating skills and Leadership in an international environment', 'Building and Motivating internationally diverse teams' and 'Creativity, Problem solving and Innovation in an international context'.



**Figure 1 SORTED booklet with descriptions of workshops co-run by the student trainers and the project specific staff (<http://www.bathstudent.com/sorted/booklet/>)**

The access to databases to carry out a review of resources was agreed with the 'Library and Learning Centre' Head of Academic Services and further meetings took place to explore how else the Library and Learning Centre might be involved. It was agreed that the trained student trainers would gain immensely from closer links with the 'Library and Learning Centre', particularly as the MSc thesis of Hilary Tacey, the subject librarian for Mechanical Engineering, Electronic & Electrical Engineering was on 'Exploring the support needs of international postgraduates in UK Higher Education libraries' (2006). It was also agreed to emphasise the international book collection at Bath, 'Around the world in 80 books'

(<http://www.bath.ac.uk/library/about/collections/80books/>) as a resource for the project. The 'Library and Learning Centre' was invited to contribute to the student training and it was agreed that the student trainers could in turn add to

the librarian team's knowledge on the participation and learning of international students by attending courses run by the 'Library and Learning Centre' and giving feedback focused on the needs of international students.

### **Recruitment of student trainers**

To recruit student trainers, the project was advertised on the University website (<http://www.bath.ac.uk/news/2010/06/17/sorted/>). Candidates were shortlisted and interviewed. As part of the interview the candidates had to prepare a 5 minute presentation based on one of the topics they would be required to present as a workshop including communication skills, assertiveness and study skills. Criteria to assess the presentation included how well researched it was, and whether the delivery was inclusive and likely to encourage audience participation. The 8 candidates selected were from Brunei, Denmark, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Pakistan, and the UK. Half the student trainers selected were research postgraduates and half were undergraduates. All the Faculties and Departments of the University of Bath were represented (School of Management; Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Engineering and Design, and Faculty of Science).

### **Training and development of the student trainers**

#### **First phase**

The first phase of training the student trainers was in early July and gained significantly from the contribution in the form of an interactive lecture by the 'Library and Learning Centre'. The aims were to raise the awareness of the participants for the context of the project, to reflect on the value of diversity, to explore approaches that are effective in supporting the participation and learning of international students and to create opportunities to start developing resources. The training was very well received, and feedback on what was learnt included "do not put students on the spot; invite feedback/answers"; "Allow students plenty of time for interaction and discussion". As a result of the training session practical resources to include in an e-guide were drafted (Figure 2).



**Figure 2 Cartoons produced as a result of the first phase of training of student trainers**

## Second phase

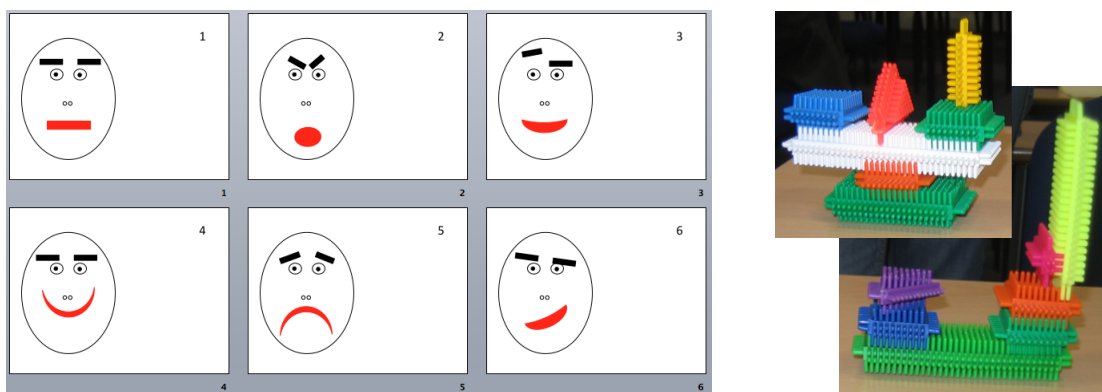
To coincide with the SORTED training of trainers previously timetabled, the second training phase was at the end of September 2010. The aims of the three-day training programme “Training in a Diverse Academic Environment” was that UK and international student trainers: develop a sense of community and explore how much they can learn from each others’ international experiences; reflect on their own experiences of learning in internationally diverse contexts; review approaches that engage international students participation and learning and practice such approaches; develop constructive feedback approaches; and deal with difficult situations. In addition, the programme sought to engage the student trainers in reflecting on how to further internationalise the programme itself.

Workshops included “Working with internationally diverse groups”, “How people learn within an international context” and “Use of resources and e-guide for an international audience”. The student trainers were filmed twice giving presentations on topics relevant to the participation and learning of international students. Detailed, personalised feedback on how the student trainers could better engage international students was given. Exploration and collection of a diversity of views and approaches was also carried out.

The feedback received showed that the student trainers greatly valued the programme “I really enjoyed and have benefitted greatly from meeting and working with everybody”; “It was really wonderful to be under your training again. I’ve surely learnt a lot”; and “I am really thankful for all the effort you put in the amazing teaching you did and improved all of us by a great margin in only 3 days”.

### 1-1 coaching, mentoring and feedback

Further to the three day training, the student trainers had 1-1 coaching sessions, mentoring and feedback to develop and deliver workshops co-run with the project specific staff including ‘Teaching internationally diverse students’, ‘Communicating skills and Leadership in an international environment’, ‘Building and Motivating internationally diverse teams’ and ‘Creativity, problem solving and innovation in an international context’. Multisensory communication approaches were used to facilitate collaboration between all participants (Figure 3).



**Figure 3** Examples of multisensory communication approaches used to facilitate collaboration between all participants on non-verbal and verbal communication

The workshops were filmed; formal and informal feedback was collected from the participants; the student trainers received personalised feedback on their performance with reference to the video recordings; and the student trainers gave feedback on the process “Thank you very much for your excellent support during the session (...) and we were all pleased with very good feedbacks from the students regarding the session too.”

Student trainers also prepared and delivered workshops for the SORTED programme (to undergraduates and postgraduates) on a variety of skills where they embedded approaches to support the participation and learning of international students.

### **Student Trainer Development Day**

To reflect on the diversity of issues encountered, the project team organised a 1 day Student Trainer Development Day at the end of November. Issues addressed included: Developing healthy boundaries; Referring students with complex needs; Design of feedback forms that are more accessible to international students; Management of an e-learning Student Trainer Area embedding the international dimension of the students, using Moodle as the software platform; and Resources for an e-guide.

### **Public Engagement in an International Research Context**

The student trainers were invited to co-run a workshop for the postgraduate skills training programme on “Public Engagement in an International Research Context” and to collaborate with Bath Taps into Science, which won the award for the best Science event in National Science and Engineering Week in 2009, providing the opportunity for students trainers to learn skills to engage with the public and to discuss aspects of the British research funding and culture that they may not otherwise encounter.

(<http://www.bath.ac.uk/research/pgskills/courses/modules/RP00149.htm>)

### **Dissemination of the project by participation in conferences**

To further and diversify the training opportunities available, all student trainers were offered the possibility of co-participating with the project specific staff at two conferences to disseminate the project: a roundtable discussion at the TIS International Conference - Internationalisation of Pedagogy and Curriculum in Higher Education: Exploring New Frontiers in June 2011 at the University of Warwick.

(<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/eventsandnetworking/annualconference>); and a presentation at the UKCISA Annual Conference, in June/July 2011, at the University of Bath.

(<http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/training/conference/index.php>)

### **Evaluation**

The evaluation criteria and evaluation methods included qualitative, quantitative and observational methods. After the first workshop co-run with the student trainers it was decided that an alternative format to the evaluation form was needed as international students struggled with the language used (figure 4). A friendlier, less wordy format was adopted (Figure 5).

**SORTED**

### Training Feedback Form

Your views on this training course will help us improve our training provision.  
Thank you for your help

**Title of Training Session:**  
**Date of Training Session:**  
**Name of Trainer(s):**

The training was:	Agree					Disagree				
Useful	5	4	3	2	1					
Interesting	5	4	3	2	1					
Enjoyable	5	4	3	2	1					
Clearly presented	5	4	3	2	1					
In a suitable venue	5	4	3	2	1					
Well delivered by trainers	5	4	3	2	1					

Please let us know what skills you developed in the session by completing this sentence: "When I finished the session I felt able to..."

On a scale of 1-5, how competent were your skills in this area before and after the session (1 being not competent, 5 being very competent)?  
Before:

After:

Was anything missing from the session?

Is there any other training you would like SORTED to provide?

**Figure 3 Original workshop feedback form which some international students struggled to fill in**

Communication Skills and Leadership in an International Context  
Course feedback

Have you enjoyed attending this course?

In your opinion, what are the 3 most relevant topics covered?

Would you recommend this course to your colleagues?

19 October 2010

**Figure 4 Workshop feedback form adopted that is less wordy than the original format used**

Anonymous group-feedback during and at the end of each workshop, individual anonymous feedback, observation of behaviours during the workshops, analysing the written contributions of participants produced during the workshops, and analysis of video-footage of the workshops were used to evaluate to explore whether the teaching practice of the student trainers reflected the expressed core value of the project. Email, telephone and video conferencing were also used.

## **Results**

31 students enrolled in the workshops, of which 20% had home fee status. The nationality of the 80% remaining students enrolled was Chinese, Bulgarian, Thai, Japanese, Italian, Malaysian, Romanian, Russian, Ugandan, Indian, Bangladeshi, Spanish, Syrian and Tanzanian.

Approximately 70% of the students enrolled were postgraduates and 30% were undergraduates. All the Faculties and Departments were represented (School of Management; Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Engineering and Design, and Faculty of Science), 50% of those enrolled being from the School of Management.

The most popular session in terms of number of enrolled participants was “Communicating skills and Leadership in an international environment”.

Analysis of the feedback, and the records collected (written and video footage) showed that student trainers enabled international students to engage and participate, and that international students mixed well with UK students to share experiences, abilities and knowledge.

Training student trainers to value and respond to the needs of international students can contribute to the improvement of the overall experience of international students so that international students can better value attendance in UK Higher Education. Specific feedback that acknowledged the importance of privileging international diversity in the workshops included “awareness of cultural differences”, “international perspectives” and “good to reach out to 5 different cultures”.

## **Sustainability**

The student trainers that participated in this project will contribute to the training of the next cohort to be selected for the academic year of 2011/2012.

The contribution of future cohorts to the on-going training of the ‘Library and Learning Centre’ staff regarding international students as well as future collaboration with Bath Taps into Science is very much welcome. In addition SORTED has been contacted about the availability of student trainers in this project to train other students and cultural groups at the University.

The resources produced will be freely available on line (<http://www.bathstudent.com/sorted/home/> and <http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/>) so that they can be used by the sector in the training of student trainers, contributing to the sustainability of the project.

By training student trainers to better support the learning and participation of international students, the experience of international students can be enhanced, contributing to sustaining and improving the satisfaction ratings of studying in the UK.