

# Chapter 11

## Refocusing the Narrative on the International Higher Education Policy



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**Abstract** The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption to international higher education worldwide. This was particularly notable in countries like Australia that have heavily depended on the income from the international student fees. During the pandemic such transactional and economy-based models of international education proved to be vulnerable to changing environment. In this chapter we argue that enhancement of international education in the future will require refocusing the narrative on international education from financial or reputational gains to student learning and experience. To do so, academic community needs to be more involved in institutional international education discussions, development and decision-making. We frame our speculation about the possible futures of international education around four areas that could inform a more engaged, diverse and inclusive policy for international education. Drawing mainly on Australian context we invite readers to consider these four areas and ways to include diverse voices into the narrative on the international education in their institutions.

**Keywords** International higher education · Institutional policy · Student experience · Teaching and learning · Academic community

### 11.1 Introduction

The past twenty years have been a transformative period for international higher education, as it has made its way to the centre of institutional and national agendas in many countries across the globe. This was accelerated by the economic globalisation and rise of information technology. The rapid developments brought concerns that internationalisation process had become rather instrumental and focussed on “more exchange, more degree mobility and more recruitment,” rather than preparing students to live and work in a global community (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011, p. 16). Some scholars have rightly pointed out that “hidden behind the rhetoric of

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maintaining and even encouraging academic and educational goals and purposes” the economic sustainability of higher education institutions has been prioritised over the values of teaching and learning in international and intercultural contexts (Ilieva et al., 2014, p. 877). More concerns about the possible future of international higher education have been recently brought by the changing global context fuelled by nationalist-populist argument of anti-internationalism and anti-immigration (Altbach & de Wit, 2018). Marginson (2020) goes further in his summary of the tensions that have existed within international student movement as “the global flows pushing against the limits of a nationally framed world” (p. 65). On top of this, COVID-19 pandemic has added another layer of complexity to the existing issues concerning international higher education, as borders shut to protect against the virus, and vaccine nationalism reinforces national boundaries. Where to now for international education?

International education is not a level playing field and the current disruption of the higher education sector had different implications across the world. Some institutions have been affected by the interrupted international student flows whilst others struggled with the transition to online course delivery. The government responses and willingness to prioritise higher education and provide support in times of external disruption have also varied across the countries (see Chap. 10). Whilst this chapter draws mainly on Australian experience, the need to “broaden the scope of the objectives of higher education beyond purely instrumental goals and rethink its humanistic potential” (Zgaga, 2021, p. 53) is important in order to learn the limitations of internationalisation as profit and realign policies and practices to better respond to possible disruptions.

This chapter is an attempt to speculate about the future direction of international education by focussing on its intrinsic value and societal impact. We argue that sustained enhancement of international education in the future will require refocusing the narrative on international education from financial or reputational gains to student learning and experience. We frame our speculation about the possible future of international education around four areas that can inform the development of the institutional policy.

## 11.2 The Rationales for Promoting International Education

Despite different trajectories of international higher education development amongst countries, at its core has been an implied understanding that international education expands people, enriches higher education and fosters world-wide community (Marginson, 2020). However, international tensions between goals of profit, prestige, soft power and cosmopolitan education have often resulting in intra- rather than international experiences, and policy discourse has primarily focussed on quantifiable elements of international education.

In countries with advanced higher education systems (predominantly western Anglo-phone countries) international education has become a profitable export industry, although still veiled under understanding and purpose of international

education as “public good.” This trend that has been described by Welch (2012) as “an opportunistic entrepreneurialism” has led to the overreliance of, for example, Australian universities on international student fees. The limited international travel caused by the pandemic exposed the dependence of the universities on the income generated from the international student fees. In Australia, where in 2019 the percentage of university revenue from fee paying overseas students was slightly over 27% (The Department of Education, 2020), many universities had to significantly cut their staff numbers and change course offerings to mitigate the sudden loss of revenue from the international student fees. This is an example of how the pandemic has highlighted the limits and vulnerabilities of entrepreneurial and economy-oriented model of internationalisation. Furthermore, the pandemic has drawn attention to the need to explore other more holistic models that focus on intrinsic value of international education and equip students with the skills to become “active, responsible and engaged citizens” and prepare them to deal with complexities of the rapidly changing world (OECD, 2018, p. 4). The tension between financial rationales and social propositions of the international education in western Anglo-phone countries has become so obvious that it can longer be ignored.

There is growing urgency to shift the conversation about international education from transactional terms and monetary benefits and reinvigorate its core values that are often opaque, if not invisible, in institutional policies and practices (Uzhegova et al., 2021). Jones and de Wit (2021) argue for a need to place political and economic rationales of internationalisation into context by:

- (a) measuring the things which are important, not simply those which can be measured, (b) learning from partners and diversity of policy, practice and research around the world, (c) understanding the transformational potential of internationalisation for all—students, faculty and support staff—and its link with employability and citizenship. (p. 84)

Indeed, it is the time to move beyond measuring international student mobility and profit associated with it or positions in the international university rankings. Rather than chasing quick quantifiable results, which can disappear quickly at points of crisis, the universities should refocus on the social dimensions of international education that have a potential to bring a long-term impact. Intrinsic benefits of international education such as intercultural competence and overall international student experience should be given more priority. However, it is not just about what is being measured as an outcome of international education, but rather what the government and institutional leadership chose to pay attention to and use as an evidence-base to drive the policy. For example, results of the *International Student Experience Survey* showing high level of student satisfaction with their overall living experience in Australia (91% in 2020) have been often used as evidence of success of the international education sector with Australian Minister for Education and Youth using survey results to claim that “Australia remains an attractive destination for international students, despite the impacts of COVID-19.” (“International Students Still Rate Australia Highly,” 2021). However, if we scratch beneath the satisfactions rates, more detailed research has indicated that even before the start of the pandemic international students were far from satisfied and faced challenges making social

connections and developing sense of belonging and that universities can do better to support international students' experience (Arkoudis et al., 2019).

Linking added value of international education to employability is somewhat problematic. On one hand, it reinforces a narrow role of universities to prepare job-ready graduates which is not sustainable in a diverse global environment (see Lorenz, 2006). On the other hand, academic mobility is still limited to a small proportion of students and staff and internationalisation at home, whilst often presented by universities as a viable alternative to mobility and an indicator of the comprehensive approach to internationalisation, has achieved little progress in permeating across the universities (Green, 2021). Thus, the transformational potential of internationalisation linked to employability is yet to be equally accessible to all. Instead, universities need to focus on the intrinsic value of international education, its common good and benefit for the global society. This can also help to foreground the social contribution of the higher education sector.

### 11.3 Diversity of Global Contexts

It is important to acknowledge the diverse experiences of higher education internationalisation across the world. Strikingly different costs and benefits of this experience largely depend on how national higher education systems are positioned in the international knowledge network (Yang, 2021). Outside of the so called academic "core" are emerging economies that are seen as peripheral and require more effort and different approaches to the internationalisation process (see Uzhegova & Baik, 2020). In recent years, many such countries have achieved much progress in promoting international education as part of the overall agenda to boost reputation and presence of their universities internationally. The pursuit for global recognition is often linked to the international institutional rankings and the policies focussed on injecting additional funding into a selected group of the most promising universities. These universities are required to increase international publication productivity and recruitment of international students and staff as these are the typical indicators for ranking internationalisation in league tables (e.g. Times Higher Education rankings and QS World rankings). As governments follow the Western model of internationalisation, reproducing similar international education policies and benchmarking success against the same set of indicators, they limit their ability to suggest alternative possibilities and creative approaches to the international education that are outside of the dominant trends.

The dichotomic models currently used to describe the uneven academic landscape of higher education, such as North–South or centre-periphery, are insufficient to explain the complex dynamics in the academic landscape. They reinforce replication of policy from centre to the periphery whilst undermining the activism of the marginalised academic communities (Kuzhabekova, 2020) or assigning them "a passive role in the interactions and exchanges" (Perrotta & Alonso, 2020). Such dichotomic models fail to acknowledge the diversity of international education policy

that exists not only across centres and peripheries but also within them. For example, such advanced higher education systems as Germany and Finland allow international non-EU students financially contribute to their education on the same basis as domestic students, whilst in Australia or the U.S. international students pay double or more of what domestic students are charged. Thus, despite the diverse experiences of countries within the rapidly evolving global higher education landscape, the dominant global higher education culture or institutional university ranking seem to set a common trajectory of the international education development reducing “beneficial diversity amongst systems and institutions” (Hudzik, 2016, p. 29).

Learning from diversity of policy, practice and research around the world proved to be especially important during the pandemic as countries were searching for best ways to deal with the crisis. According to Yang (2021), “against a backdrop of unprecedented human connectivity and mobility, being able to learn from others becomes a vital precondition for sustainable development of any society” (n.p.). The diversity of policy and practice in international higher education is often overlooked. It seems that international institutional rankings with the set of indicators created a standard system of measuring successes of the higher education institutions. However, as Kromydas rightly noted, standardisation does not create equal opportunities:

... harmonisation and standardisation of higher education creates permanent winners and losers, centralising all the gains, monetary and non-monetary, towards the most dominant countries, particularly towards Anglo-phone countries and specific industries and therefore social inequalities increase between as well as within countries. (2017, p. 7)

It is doubtful that standard ways of measuring success and competition for international prestige will produce societal benefits, embracing the diversity and ethical and reciprocal models of collaboration is therefore critical for more equitable and sustainable future of international education.

## 11.4 Refocusing the Narrative on the International Higher Education Policy

Scholars have been speculating about the future of international education for the past couple of decades, often predicating its end (e.g. Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011) or hoping for renewed focussed on its social value (e.g. Leask & de Gayardon, 2021). How can we refocus the narratives dominating the international higher education policy to ensure the centrality of the teaching contexts and the students’ learning experiences? Whilst Jones and de Wit’s (2021) argument points to the importance of shifting the discourse on international education away from economic and political rationales, it largely reinforces a dichotomised view of international education, relying on an overreliance in existing thinking, and limits speculation of next practices. Almost a decade before the pandemic Barnett (2013) noted that universities had become risk adverse and hesitant to deviate from the expected institutional structures

and norms. This impoverishes the ability of the academic community to critically analyse, challenge and suggest alternatives to the status quo. When it comes to the international education, the ability of institutions to reimagine existing policies and practices are also constrained by pressure of gaining profit and/or prestige. In the case of Australia, the surface level of the institutional policy is on the one hand often disconnected with the academic practice, and on the other hand is not influential enough to guide the direction of government policies that affect international education. We think that educational turn provides the opportunity to speculate and reimagine international education policies within contexts and landscape of higher education. A return to past practices is no longer possible because the context in which they operated has changed due to the pandemic.

A range of national and institutional contexts where international education takes place is diverse. However, foregrounding the student experiences and the activism of academic community in our discussion of the institutional policy provides some common ground and relevance across different contexts. Whilst future developments of the global landscape for higher education internationalisation are arguably beyond the control of the academic community (Altbach & de Wit, 2018), academic activism can lead institutional international education discussion, development and decision-making. After all, classroom is an important place of “global learning.” Speculating on the future of international education, we focus on four areas that could inform a more engaged, diverse and inclusive international education policy.

### ***11.4.1 Getting the “Process” Right***

Rather than focussing on outputs, the priority of the international education policy should be given to the process itself with a strong consideration for student needs and global learning experience. One of the key components of internationalisation process, that is not limited to a student’s ability to undertake study abroad, is internationalisation of the curriculum. The implementation of internationalisation of the curriculum and support of staff development need to be embedded within departments and therefore have direct implications for institutional policy (Beelen & Jones, 2015). Universities often declare their aspiration to internationalise the curriculum, for instance, the University of Melbourne stated the aim to “ensure that curriculum is informed by a global range of perspectives” as one of its strategic priorities until 2030 (Advancing Melbourne, 2020). However, the implementation process is often left to individual academics to navigate and there is a lack of clear guidance or supportive mechanisms from the institutional policy.

In 2020 Australian universities had no choice but to allocate resources to transitioning to online teaching and learning in response to closed borders and lockdowns. If institutions are serious about internationalising the curriculum it will require similar efforts and resources. Drawing on the experience of Australian universities, it would

also require addressing such institutional issues as staff casualisation and prioritisation of research over teaching. With a large proportion of current undergraduate teaching in Australian universities delivered by casual staff and international dimensions of academic work of many full-time academics being predominantly centred on research, for academics to buy into the redesigning curriculum to include diverse perspectives and voices requires substantial incentive and reward from the institutional internationalisation policy. Dedicated roles can also be designed, like those created for online teaching and learning, to promote internationalisation of teaching and learning within the university, address potential challenges and develop supportive institutional climate by establishing communities of practice.

However, it is not only *what* is being taught at the universities but also *how* it is being done. It is important that university leadership through resources and policies prioritises student engagement in teaching contexts. This is something that requires urgent attention from Australian universities where international undergraduate students have consistently rated satisfaction with their learning engagement much lower than other aspects of their student experience, such as skills development, teaching quality, student support or leaning resources in the *Student Experience Survey* (Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching, 2021). Learning engagement in this survey included such aspects as interaction with other students in and outside the classroom and sense of belonging to their institution. Interaction between international and domestic students does not always occur naturally (Arkoudis et al., 2019), positive social learning relationships between students need to be encouraged through a careful design of programmes and group work:

Programme designers need to develop a holistic, integrated view of their programme, balancing size and scale with sufficient diversity and opportunities to develop cross-cultural and interdisciplinary learning relations. (Héliot et al., 2020, p. 2368)

There are existing resources that provide guidance on how to enable interaction between domestic and international students. For example, the *Interaction for Learning Framework* that consists of six interrelated “dimensions” such as planning interaction, creating environments for interaction, supporting interaction, engaging with subject knowledge, developing reflexive processes, and fostering communities of learners (Arkoudis et al., 2010). The “planning dimension” is a fundamental in this framework as it is where teaching practices are aligned with the course objective, learning outcomes and assessment tasks that give a clear message to all students of what is important in the curriculum.

To achieve a holistic and integrated view of the course or programme and internationalise the curriculum, in addition to the institutional support, resources, and policy changes, requires breaking the academic silos and developing a shared direction and ownership of curriculum (Green, 2021). The rapid changes and adjustments in higher education that commenced in 2020 might present an opportunity to shift the institutional culture to create more connections and engagement between rigidly predefined academic roles within and between the disciplines, fuelling collaboration across the silos of university policies and practices.

### 11.4.2 *Global and Local Connectedness*

As higher education institutions position themselves internationally, it is expected that they would act as an “anchor” between global and local, creating pathways for global interconnectedness to be relevant to local community and providing outlets for local knowledge to address global issues. Whilst Australian universities have been successful in recruiting international students, they have failed to address growing misconceptions about the value of international education to local communities and society more broadly. A dominant market discourse surrounding international education in Australia has led to a widespread perception of international students as “consumers” and “cash cows.” Over the last decade this has been amplified by “the political and legal *Othering* of globally mobile students by national governments” (Marginson, 2012, p. 10) with international students being treated as outsiders by the nation-state regulation. Such non-citizen identity of the international students in the country of education have become evident at the start of the pandemic when the Australian Prime Minister at that time shamelessly stated that international students could make their way home, absolving government responsibility and commitment to safeguard their welfare during the crisis.

The pandemic heightened existing issues of discrimination and racism towards international students in the community. A report on the experience of international students before and during COVID-19 (Morris et al., 2020) has shown that students experienced more discrimination during the pandemic because of their racial-ethnic or cultural background with more than a quarter of 724 surveyed students reporting that they have experienced more discrimination. Similar sentiments have been echoed in another report (Berg & Farbenblum, 2020) revealing that students experienced racism in the form of verbal abuse or people avoiding them because of their appearance. Within the universities, however, there were some positive changes. According to the *Student Voices: Domestic cohort engagement with international students through COVID-19* report, a large majority of Australian students changed their attitudes towards international students during the pandemic and increased appreciation of the challenges associated with living away from home and sense of isolation (Lawrence & Ziguas, 2021). The issues of discrimination and racism are not unique to Australian context and it is important that they are acknowledged by the universities and addressed in the institutional policy with more efforts in place to integrate international students on campus and within a wider community.

What binds us together is that we are human. We have more commonalities than differences and should reimagine community engagement and interaction based on these similarities rather than differences. Interaction with the local community can ease cultural adaptation of international students (e.g. Gautam et al., 2016) and contribute to improving the student experience. To achieve this will require specific strategies that include engagement with the greater community and bringing a community-based approach to internationalisation processes (Marangell et al., 2018).



Whilst community work is often left to informal or extra-curricular student experience, to reach the diverse student population it is important to incorporate community-based projects into the formal curriculum. Otherwise, these projects remain limited to those students who have time outside of their studies to engage in them (e.g. those with no childcare responsibilities or financial difficulties). To change course structure and include community-based projects into the formal curriculum will require support of the university leadership and academics, as well as more involvement of professional staff to connect students with organisations in the community.

Community work does not only benefit international students in Australia, domestic students can gain a lot from close engagement with the multicultural and indigenous local community. Cultivation of global competencies is incorporated in graduate attributes across Australian universities with most universities stating that their graduates will be “responsible and effective global citizens” (The University of Adelaide) able to “engage with national and global issues and are attuned to social and cultural diversity” (The University of Melbourne). It is important for universities not only to ensure the availability of opportunities for local students to engage within multicultural and diverse contexts throughout their studies but that these interactions are coordinated and well-designed. As pointed out in a recent study by Tran and Bui (2021) who explored the social impact of Australian students’ learning in the Indo-Pacific via the New Colombo Plan (NCP) from the host perspective:

There should be a more coherent and coordinated mechanism, co-designed by the government, home and host universities and host organisations, to help NCP alumni maintain deeper and ongoing connections with their host communities. (p. 439)

The authors also noted that close engagement with host institutions is important to achieve mutually beneficial cooperation. As noted earlier in the chapter, there is a lot that can be learnt from diversity of policy and practice in other parts of the world.

Whilst the pandemic and closed borders limited study abroad opportunities for students for some time, the social and cultural diversity within Australia itself presents untapped opportunities for building connections as the country recovers from the pandemic. In addition, the accelerated use of technology over the last two years may offer additional ways for building global and local connectedness that have been underexplored in the past.

### ***11.4.3 Multidisciplinary Perspectives and Policy Co-design***

Speculating about the future of higher education internationalisation Hudzik (2016) suggested that faculty would have more at stake in the defining of international policy as “internationalisation offers opportunities to strengthen research and scholarly capacity and impact the content and pedagogy of teaching and learning” (p. 27). This requires dissolving the institutional structures that silo disciplines and teaching and limit the possibilities for including engagement with diverse multidisciplinary perspectives in teaching contexts. This can be achieved through dispersed leadership

model based on sharing of knowledge and experience through communities of practice. Such co-design of practises inclusive of different voices can provide an evidence and experience base to inform and guide the policy direction (an example of such model is presented in *Transversing Learning and Leading Collaboration* chapter). It is important that universities create supportive environment enabling such communities of practice to review and critique curriculum and pedagogy of teaching and learning. Academic participation in such initiatives need to be rewarded and acknowledged at different levels of the university structure, making it as important as engagement in research activity.

Silos also exist across different phases of learning and impede the development of a holistic international education policy. The report by the Group of Eight Australian universities highlighted a reduction in the languages offered at Australian universities from 66 to 29 between 1997 and 2007 and called for urgent action emphasising that

The languages crisis Australia is experiencing cannot be solved by one sector of the education system alone. A coordinated national approach involving schools, community groups, universities and state and territory governments is required. (2007, p. 1)

Without a co-designed policy that involves stakeholders and representatives of various levels of learning the national policy risk to remain localised and disconnected with the real needs. The fact that language studies were identified as a “national priority” under the Australian Government *Job-ready Graduates Package* adopted in 2020 to guide government funding of the universities, did not appear to save the language programmes from closure. When university enrolments dropped due to the pandemic, language programmes were amongst those affected and some universities discontinued offering of Chinese, Indonesian and Japanese programmes (Asian Studies Association of Australia, 2021). The financial sustainability seems to outweigh the value of foreign language and cultural studies as an important component of the international learning experience of Australian students. Despite its multicultural and diverse population, not to mention the Indigenous languages, Australia is at risk of remaining largely a monolingual country.

Finally, students as the main stakeholders in international education should be invited to co-design the institutional policy on international education. “Students as partners” approach has already been gaining its momentum in learning and teaching, described as:

A collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualisation, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis. (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, pp. 6–7)

By engaging students as partners in the international education policy development and implementation not only can intuitions gain from students lived-experiences and perspectives, they can also shift the existing entrepreneurial and economy-oriented model of higher education where students are viewed as “customers.” As Green (2019) notes, the existing “student as consumer” rhetoric might make “university management more eager to listen to their “customers” than their staff” (p. 24) and strengthen student voices demanding for significant policy changes.

### ***11.4.4 Teaching-Research Nexus in International Education***

Next practices should include research so that the extent to which students achieve the learning outcomes and graduate attributes connected to internationalisation can be better understood. A recent study by Whitsed et al. (2021) who interviewed academics serving on editorial advisory boards of international higher education journals highlighted a limited focus of existing research on exploring the connectedness of internationalisation to the imperatives of the local context and evaluating the real impact of internationalisation on graduates. Some of these limitations may be addressed by the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). SoTL enquiries can measure the impact and effectiveness of the initiatives related to the internationalisation of curriculum or incorporation of student peer interaction on students learning and development of global competencies. Importantly, collaborations across different disciplines and institutions will strengthen policies and practices and offer a strong evidence-base for further development. Such enquiries not only can better inform our understanding of students' global learning but also build a base to push for more significant changes in the institutional policy and processes. This would require strong leadership on the part of the institution to facilitate SoTL communities of practice, where ideas and research findings can be shared and further developed. University leaders can also provide means by which academic activism is informed through SoTL and further reinforced through performance development frameworks, in order to recognise and reward such scholarships.

Focussing on graduate international students that present a large proportion of overall international students, Sharma (2019) points out that research and scholarship do not guide policy decisions affecting these students and calls "to rethink convention" and introduce diverse students' stories and perspectives into the agenda of scholarship, arguing that

A more broadened and complex view, coupled with new perspectives, will help to liberate us from the limited role of academic service in the margins of institutional organisation and conversation, helping us provide better support for students, provide more significant intellectual and educational leadership to our institutions, and thereby make more significant contributions to society. (2019, p. ix)

Such scholarship can also lessen the existing "deficit" discourse around international students and support student activism. Developing deeper connections with students and leveraging their voices can help to move away from overreliance on student surveys that provide surface level information on how students are experiencing the current changes and what international education really means for them.

Sharma (2019) also suggests establishing an interdisciplinary field of research on "international student study" to explore students' experiences and ways of navigating the changing higher education landscape, where scholars, members of academic support services, career centres, recruitment and student affairs could work together to lead the "institutional conversation, programme-building, and policy-making" (p. viii). Such collaborative process is an example of SoTL in practice. It would be

beneficial to include students as partners in these SoTL activities. In doing so we could move away from treating students as subjects of research to inviting them as co-researchers and co-creators of a shared understanding of international education that can inform policy.

## **11.5 Future-Proofing International Education During Times of Disruption**

International education is vulnerable to a range of possible future disruptions, whether it is related to international politics, climate change or another pandemic. Without a doubt the impact of these disruptions will depend on the local context in which institutions are situated, but it will also depend on what is perceived as a core value of international education. Whilst international higher education has made its way to the centre of institutional and national agendas, the issues and concerns that surround it today are not much different from those raised over the past decades. A rapidly expanding scale, in particular in countries like Australia where international student numbers have almost doubled in a short period of time (between 2013 and 2019), has amplified some of these issues related to discrimination, lack of opportunities to engage with peers in and outside the classroom and sense of belonging to the institution. Two years of pandemic have shown the fragility of the perceived “success” that is based on the neo-liberal paradigm and the need to refocus institutional policy on international education to better prepare for possible future disruptions. How can the universities do better?

The education turn presents an opportunity to refocus the narrative on the international higher education and to move away from a narrow view of international education as physical mobility, which continues to dominate the discussion in western Anglo-phone countries as the international travel resumes post-pandemic (de Wit & Jones, 2021). International education needs to become a core business of university educational policies where student learning and experience is front and centre. To achieve this, it is important to develop a shared understanding of the value and purpose of international education and engage in a collective action to shape institutional policy. This requires refocusing institutional policy to better support interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary collaborations across the university through communities of practice and university wide incentives and to invite students to engage in these collaborations as partners genuinely listening to their voices and paying attention to their experiences. To shift the narrative away from “purely instrumental goals”, universities need to break the silos between classrooms, departments and universities and to allow generation and sharing of knowledge through SoTL enquiries that highlight the impact of international education on student learning and experience. Afterall, universities have an important role to play in promoting social impact of internationalisation, including tolerance and empathy for diversity.

In this chapter we argued that the involvement of the academic community in guiding institutional policy and creating a long-term vision of international education that foregrounds student experiences is crucial in order to truly rethink the value of international education. The classroom experience is where maximum traction can be gained through creating learning discussions where students from diverse backgrounds feel comfortable communicating and express their ideas. The importance of shifting a learning approach from content dissemination to student learning and engagement has become even more urgent with the transitioning to online teaching. Returning to campus will not automatically result in more student engagement and there is more pressure on academics to create conditions for positive student interaction. Internationalising the curriculum and incorporating peer interaction within academic courses cannot be achieved without distributed expertise approach to curriculum design and shared ownership and responsibility amongst course coordinators, teaching academics and learning advisors. Equally important is a supportive institutional culture that incentivises and rewards such initiatives and encourages communities of practice.

The pandemic and remote learning heightened areas of student experiences that have already proved to be problematic, such as student well being and connectedness within student learning and experiences, as well as within the university. This can no longer be addressed by band-aid solutions and requires urgent attention and clear direction in the university policy. More focus on diversity can be a starting point. Treating international and domestic students as two separate groups generates a false dichotomy which is unhelpful in that it creates the perception that there is some homogeneity within these categories and difference between them. By facilitating opportunities for purposeful and inclusive engagement in the classroom and promoting positive social learning relationships between all students, it is possible to create spillovers of such engagement beyond the classroom to the local and international community. Expanding efforts to include engagement with the greater community and bringing a community-based approach to internationalisation process will both better serve the international student population and create a more well-rounded internationalised university experience for all students by harnessing the inherent diversity of the local community and acknowledging our social responsibility towards it.

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