

Editorial

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Welcome to the 2014 edition of *'Enhancing the Learner Experience in Higher Education'*, which features peer reviewed papers from the international arena. We wish to extend our sincere thanks to the authors who submitted papers, and also acknowledge and thank all the new and existing reviewers who have contributed to enhancing the quality of the papers we have published to date.

The ongoing debate on competitiveness between higher education institutions, linked to 'a better student experience' and funding, seems to be a global issue. Also central to the QAA's rigorous monitoring of students' satisfaction with the use of the National Students' Survey (NSS) is the students' voice, which is the focus of *Enhancing the Learner's Experience in Higher Education* (ELEHE). The journal aims to promote the active participation of students in the shaping of their current and future experiences in Universities.

Since our last edition, debates regarding funding and fee payments, as well as the employability of students who currently attend universities have been ongoing. Good quality learning, teaching and assessment, and the development of skills in order to prepare students for employment are central to the ethos of universities, and are echoed by students. Findings from a study of 5000 students in the UK, for example, suggests that students attending higher education institutions expect universities to deliver good quality teaching, and help them to acquire transferable skills to prepare them for acquiring and maintaining future employment (National Union of Students, 2012). To ensure good quality learning and teaching, 90.6% of participants viewed the *'teaching skills'* of the lecturer as the *'most important'* factor in achieving good quality learning and teaching (p.9). According to 83.4% of the students, the next most contributing factors to good quality teaching were *'interactive group teaching sessions'* amongst other factors such as support from library, and the use of varied methods of learning and teaching. Interestingly, *'of least importance was the availability of internet discussion forums and the lecturers' research record'* (NUS, 2012: p.9). *Per contra* to those findings, there seems to be a shift towards paperless classes, and university lecturers are expected to engage in research with expected outputs, as well as generate income. This suggests that students perceptions of what universities are about may be different to those of the government and of stake holders.

In this edition of the journal, Karupiah *et al.* present a strong argument about how higher education institutions are now running like businesses, with a view that education is a *'commodity that can be bought'*. This is followed by an overview of their study on the expectations of undergraduate students in relation to implementation of *the Accelerated Programme for Excellence* (APEX) in a public University of Malaysia. Their findings suggest that the students' expectation of good quality learning and teaching seem to correspond with those of the NUS, and that the expectations of the students on the APEX programme were sometimes different to those of the University. Although they caution universities for viewing students as consumers, they stress the need for them to adopt a more

'*outside in approach*', as their successes could be dependent on '*how well they adapt to customer expectations*'.

Tudor and Dutra report on how the UK Government aims to promote entrepreneurship within higher education institutions and how it has tried to implement this within universities. Their case study examines how the University of Northampton (as a 'Changemaker Campus') has engaged with '*the concept of social entrepreneurship amongst students in the United Kingdom*', since 2010. The main themes noted relate to the concept of entrepreneurship within higher education institutions, funding issues and the need to enhance students' engagement in programmes as well as listen to the students' voice.

In contrast to Karupiah *et al.* and Tudor and Dutra's papers, Schroeder *et al.* and Finlay's papers reflect student centred approaches and how this impacts on learning and on the lives of others. Finlay, for instance, discusses the possible benefits of focus groups for gathering student feedback – presenting a work in progress on enhancing the students' voice, using focus groups to explore learning experiences in a large class - based at the University of Mary Washington, USA. Schroeder *et al.* critically reflect on '*Big Ears-sonic art for public ears*' (a higher education public engagement training program designed by Schroeder), highlighting how it impacted on the PhD students learning, and on the children who took part in the programme. This innovative and interesting idea, involving the creation '*of sound based works in groups*', and then performing them to an audience, is reported to have benefited the PhD students and the children who participated in the project.

In the book review section, Rashmi Dravid reviews '*International Students in the Asia Pacific – Mobility and Optimism*' (Keel & Vogl, 2012). Dravid describes the way in which the authors of the book have tried to make the book appealing to a diverse audience by drawing on the historical, theoretical, global and political factors that have influence on '*transnational student mobility*', systematically over twelve chapters. Echoed within this review, and in the other papers, is the need to be sensitive to students' needs. This re-emphasises the importance of the students' voice in shaping their experience, resonating with the ethos of the ELEHE Journal.

We hope you enjoy this edition and we continue to look forward to receiving papers for future editions. We are happy to receive research reports (3-6000 words), critical case studies (3-4000 words), research work in progress (up to 2000 words) and book reviews of 500 -1000 words, with ideas that reflect the aims and scope of the journal. More information about the journal including authors' guidelines could be found on the journal website (www.northampton.ac.uk/elehe). We also have an ELEHE blog which we invite you to explore (<http://elehe.blogspot.co.uk/>).

References

Kell, P. and Vogl, G. (2012) *International students in the Asia Pacific: mobility, risks and global optimism*. Springer.

National Union of Students (2012) *Student experience research 2012: Part 1: Teaching and learning: Student experience research to gain insight into the quality of the learning experience*. National Union of Students. Available at:
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