

How Can Institutions Enhance the Engagement of International Students?



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Session outline:

- Key factors in international student engagement – research results from Asian Learner Experience Project (ALEP)
- Institution led projects to facilitate student engagement:
 - Peer Mentoring project
 - SPICE online induction resource
- Your context



International Student **Engagement** in UK HE

Current issues in student engagement in UK HE:

- Retention of students, relevance to curriculum, good teaching, development of higher learning attributes
- Barriers to engagement – focus on outcomes ('have' rather than 'become'), students 'outsider's in HE land.

Coates (2005): 'student engagement is concerned with the extent to which students are engaging in a range of educational activities that (...) lead to high quality learning'

Students say **engagement** is:

'Fulfilling your studies with a passionate attachment'

'The enjoyment of the challenge'

'Something meaningful and personal'



International Student Engagement in UK HE

Much better support for international students but still a range of challenges:

- New place to live and learn
- Integration into the new learning and teaching context
- Expectations vs reality
- Successes and barriers in forming multi-cultural relationships
- Cultural cliques for study, work and leisure
- Different cultural norms
- Language, especially academic English.



International **Student** Engagement in UK HE

Commonalities but also **fundamental differences**:

- Universities' profile – teaching or research focused / partnerships abroad or agents / programmes overseas with programme reps overseas or mainly UK provision
- Different support at different Universities (e.g. SHU / ENU)
- Roles of academics (Director of Studies / Personal Development Tutor)
- Student associations – status, role in students' journey
- Profile of students – PG or UG, where from, level of English
- 'International' – not a blanket term, students from China different to Indian students in learning and teaching / social and cultural norms



Asian Learner Experience Project (ALEP) – are students engaging with support on offer and what are their preferred ways of engaging with the University?

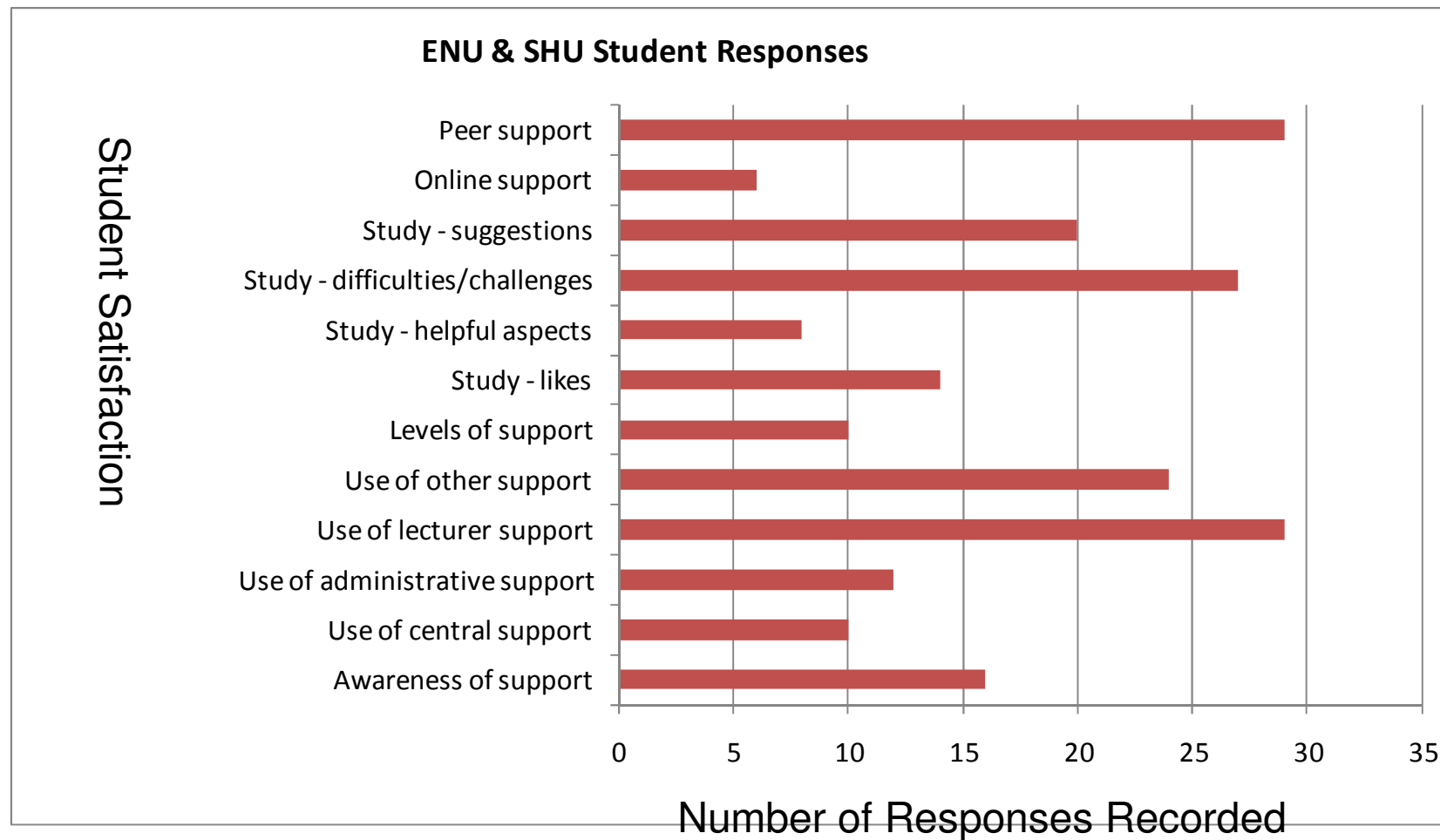
- Asian Learner Experience Project (2008-2010) with colleagues from Sheffield Hallam University involved 200 students from **Indian sub-continent** on similar programmes in Hospitality and Engineering at SHU and ENU.

A need for:

- Better awareness of University support mechanisms on offer, and their usefulness
- Effective, "formalised" peer support (e.g. via peer mentoring scheme)
- Opportunities for social networking initiated and driven by the University
- Better social integration opportunities through social events, trips, etc.
- Career advice within the University with students from other faculties built into the programmes.

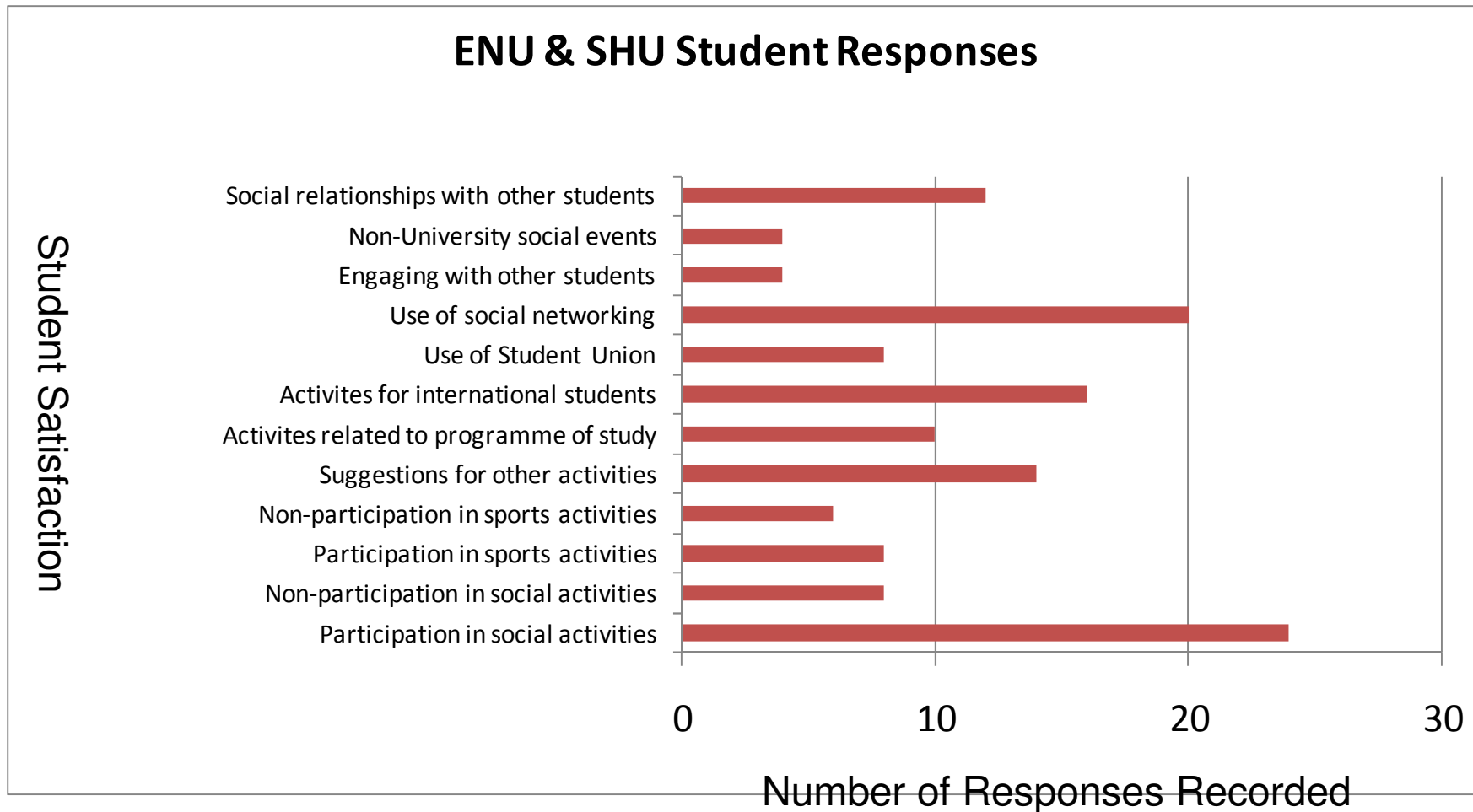


ALEP results - What support students look for at programme level?





ALEP results – What support students want for social integration?





ALEP and 'Academic and Learning Cultures' Project with Chinese students – Indian and Chinese students

- **Chinese students** are used to class rep system – they respond well to this in China on ENU programmes but in the UK the message gets blurred with social / work commitments, the system is different.
- **Indian students** have got better spoken English than Chinese students but struggle with academic written English. Both groups find it very hard to approach people about anything.
- **Chinese and Indian students** are used to living on campus with everything planned for them, no choices, no alternatives.
- **Chinese students** react better to societies (if pitched at right level). Indian students are not sure what's involved, how to join.
- **Indian students** have to work much harder to pay their loans back home and they need career advice / employability skills.



Study skills and integration into UK HE work with students in China

- 5 month project (Feb – June 10) at partner universities in China
- Feedback from the Subject Librarian who visited all partners in May 10:
 - *The work carried out by x is very, very important as the students I met seemed to have a grasp of what was expected of them at Napier. Information literacy is important, however it seems much more relevant to the student when it is placed within the context of the academic process that they will experience at a UK HE institution.*
 - *I've met and spoken to the Chinese students who come over to Napier for the last seven years and the groups I spoke to in Zhengzhou & Jinan were so much more advanced than any I had previously met.*
 - *I hope it can continue, as it seems the obvious way of raising awareness and engaging these students with what is expected of them.*



Engaging students at institutional level – what support they need

- **Institution led projects** at the University, programme and local level which make students work with other students – integration does not seem to happen on its own (e.g. at induction)
- **PDT system** driven by career / employability
- **Culturally appropriate** – e.g. in Asian cultures, students prefer to seek academic, pastoral, social advice from peers, rather than standard university provided support
- **Value of peer power**– use of peer mentoring (for academic, pastoral and social support) as a means of engaging students
- **Technology** – use of social networking for social engagement, induction, programme study, etc
- **Relevant to own background / challenges** - student stories / voices appeal to the new students (by students, for students).

Institution led project:

Peer mentoring scheme on BA Hospitality Management at Edinburgh Napier University

- Internal TF funding
- Matching students in India with students in Edinburgh (10 pairs)
- Supportive environment – training and point of contact
- Tapping into a cultural preference to get advice from ‘seniors’ rather than the University
- Using a joint Wiki and Skype.
- Very positive response from the students in Edinburgh and in India

Evaluation

- Mentors feedback just after training (attached)
- Mentors and mentees feedback (in progress).



Institution led project – Pre-arrival induction resource SPICE

- | | | |
|----------------------|----|---|
| Student | – | developing skills and awareness, <u>not</u> information giving |
| Pre-Arrival | – | long term view of developing skills before arrival and continued at Edinburgh Napier University |
| Induction for | – | life and study at Napier including student voices |
| Continuing | -- | storing early work and developing it while at Edinburgh Napier University |
| Education | – | interactive tasks, guessing, saving work and getting feedback |

Pre-arrival induction resource SPICE



What is it?

An interactive study skills resource for Indian students on BA Hospitality Management at pilot stage (plans to develop further for all international students)

Timescale

Used successfully with 2 cohorts of students. Online version introduced in India in January 10.

What's new?

Student driven, based on student feedback, including student voices. Students complete activities and get feedback, rather than read about life and study in the UK.

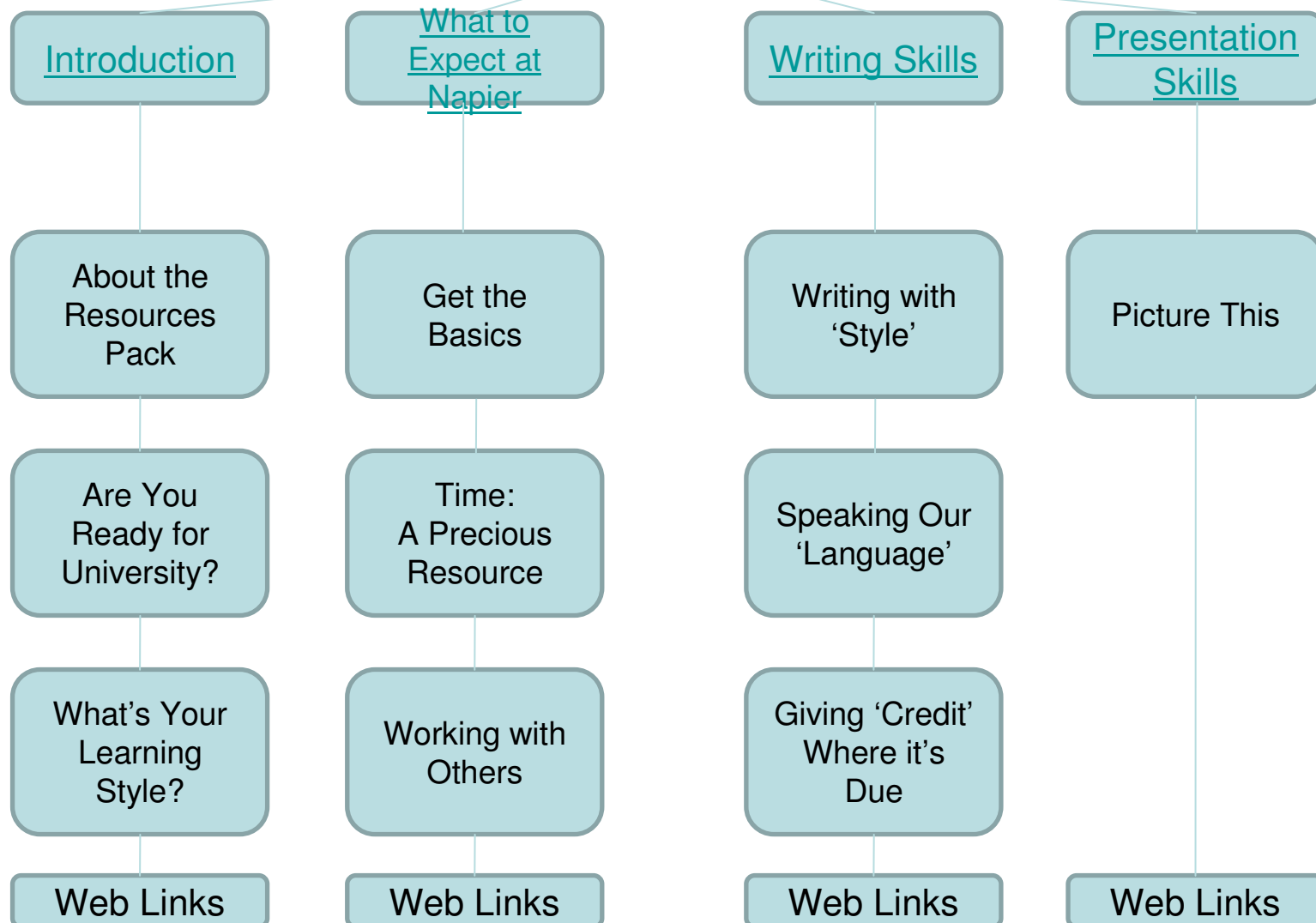
4 strands:

- life and study at university,
- expectations of you as a students, incl time management, tutorial work,
- academic writing,
- presentation skills.

SPICE

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"We need to do so many things to come here, by coming here. So many problems, financial problems, staying away from home, not differently completely - on the face of the coin, environment. Like culture, social group, everything. The most essential thing is time management. And be humble, like if you think, if you see that a person is looking down, I say no, just don't think negative if you are positive ... everything's fine. Because if you look at it in a negative way, yes, you will feel that that person is looking down upon you. Here, you are not white, you know many people here face, I think, that just because we are not white, we are Asians, and they think they have a problem, but actually the problem's not there. Because they have it in their brains, that's why they feel depressed. It's just like, you speak up and you talk"



Students Say ...

Kaveri



Sumit

Save All

"(Be) ready to give your 100%. If you give your 100% you will get good marks. That is the thing - and don't expect that everything is ready for you. You have to work so that you can get something - don't rely on, don't believe in your seniors if they have passed by copying someone or they never come to lectures. What they copy from somewhere and they never caught - don't believe in that because it not gonna help you at all. So, be prepared and if you are coming here, give your 100%. It's, I believe that if you are coming here, you are not a student, you are an Indian ambassador over here. You are representing India, you are representing any other country you are coming from. So if you are doing bad, your are - no one knows you, they only say that Indian guy have done that, that Indian student has done that. So make sure you don't spoil your name and your country. "

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Student engagement in your context

I will take away / try to adapt in my context the following ideas:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Discussion





International student engagement – a look ahead

- HEA driven
 - TIS project underway including resource bank and workshops
 - 11 June event HEA Scotland.
- Possibly more diverse picture in each HEI which makes any blanket recommendations even more difficult, so good practice rather than 'one size fits all'.
- In my context – further development of projects discussed above and research informed developments to stay in touch with the students.

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