Chapter 14
Quality and Innovation for International Pathway Programs: Good Practice and Recommendations for the Future in the UK Context and Beyond

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Abstract The provision of international pathway programs as a means for international students to gain access to Higher Education is an area of activity which has developed rapidly in the UK and in several other countries in recent decades. This paper will examine a range of features which can be seen as markers of quality in international pathway programs. It will also identify areas of innovation, support and stimulus for international pathway providers, which can contribute to ongoing quality enhancements. In the process of discussing quality markers and innovative practices, features of curriculum, program design and student experience are discussed and mechanisms for the development of educationalists are explored. Reference is made to content and language-related considerations from the UK and other regions of activity and relevance.

1 Introduction and Regional Context

As Leask (2009) contends, institutional interest in aspects of internationalisation is a result of the "increased interconnections between nations and peoples of the world", produced by globalisation (p.205).

In regards to internationalisation, the author of this paper firmly believes that, 'international students are also crucial to the diversity of our campuses and the experience of UK students, both academically and culturally. When students return home

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or move on to the world of work, it is these strong professional and personal links that provide long-term, 'soft power' benefits for the UK.' (Manning in Britcher 2017)

Despite these core global benefits of international education, the economic impact of international education can also not be overlooked. In recent years, international student recruitment has become a fixed priority for revenue generation both for the UK and the international university sector at large (Hyland 2006). In line with this phenomenon, the provision of international pathway programs as a means for international students to access Higher Education is an area of activity which has also developed rapidly in recent decades. The term international pathways can refer to a range of different areas of program delivery, including International Foundation Programs (IFPs), pre-masters programs and pre-sessional courses in English for Academic Purposes. Whilst this report frequently refers to the context of IFPs, it is believed that much of the material cited is equally relevant to the other aforementioned program types.

In the UK the importance of international student recruitment to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has been partly due to a period of governmental capping of home-student recruitment, which has only been removed relatively recently (Morgan 2013), in addition to the increased burden of tuition fees passed on to UK home students. In both circumstances, as in many other countries of the world, unrestricted revenue opportunities presented to Higher Education Institutions by the recruitment of international students (beyond the EU in the UK's case) is significant. Competition within the EU seems only likely to develop more rapidly, when or if the impact of Brexit changes fee status in the UK or if loan or finance access for EU students seeking to study in the UK is more restricted.

The competitive aspect of such circumstances is highlighted further as the number of students coming to study in the UK risks ongoing decline (HEFCE 2016 and UUK 2015b) as noted in Morgan (2016) during the current period when the number of UK-educated 18-year olds is also in decline. The Higher Education landscape is further jeopardised due to the lack of clarity surrounding Brexit and the impact of other recent policy changes pursued by the British Home Office, such as removal of the post-study work visa (Paudel 2014). Due to the importance of international students to the sector Rathbone (Morgan 2016), Chair of the British Universities Finance Directors Group stresses that:

> International students are a vital part of the sector, for both financial and academic reasons; and in my view we should continue to extend the relative scale of [recruitment] for the benefit of both home and international students.

Indeed, the current situation for European student recruitment is unclear. An initial slump in the September 2017 intake, arguably created by political uncertainty in the UK has been followed by a rise in applications from the EU in 2018, perhaps indicating a-last-minute rush before the full implications of Brexit are felt (Adams 2018). Given these factors, it is perhaps unsurprising that the importance of international pathway programs has grown, given their function as a mechanism for maintaining or growing the volume of full-fee paying international students who are

eligible to study at undergraduate level. A recent estimation (Study Portals 2015) has calculated more than 1,000 programs across the world and almost two thirds of programs based in the UK.

Despite research undertaken by the UK's former department for Business, Innovation and Skills (UUK 2015a), a considerable amount of guesswork is still required when analysing the size of the international pathway market due to the mix of routes of provision and the lack of central record-keeping. According to Study Portals (2015, in Education Investor 2015) the foundation program market alone has grown to over £534.8 million ($825 million).

According to some of HESA's most recent statistics (2015) 7,990 non-UK domiciled students were registered at UK Universities for non-degree undergraduate courses, many of whom would represent registrations on IFPs or pre-masters courses, however this number will also include other non-degree provision.

The most recent data for private providers (CentreForum 2011 and UUK 2015a) shows that private providers in the UK enrolled more than 15,400 students onto their pathways in 2011 and that an estimated 40% of non-EU HEI students had previously studied via a pathway provider in the UK in 2013/2014. In line with research completed by Cope and Kalantzis (2000), Leask (2009) highlights the valuable role played by interaction amongst home and overseas students on university campuses. However, it is also emphasised that institutional engagement is required in order to create the right setting for all stakeholders to derive optimal success from the engineering of communities of students from different national backgrounds in this manner (Hellmann and Miranda 2015).

As a result of these circumstances, quality and innovation are of crucial importance to allow international pathway programs to continue to thrive. This paper will examine a range of key features which can be seen as markers of quality in international pathway programs. It will also identify areas of potential innovation which could help to ensure that students taking international pathways have a high-quality experience that is sufficiently innovative and responsive to their needs and diverse backgrounds.

In the process of discussing innovative and principled practices, features of international pathway curriculum and mechanisms for the development of educationalists will be explored. In order to take into account good practice from beyond the UK, developments from the US and Europe will also be explored, so as to identify ways in which the UK model can learn from beyond the UK context.

2   Markers of Quality in International Pathway Provision

Given the broad range of pathway provision (UUK 2015a) and the proliferation of program options from within universities and the private sector, prospective pathway students are faced with a complex decision when it comes to selecting the program which they feel best fits their needs. The following section has been devised

in order to highlight some of the key features which can be considered markers of quality of which students and their advisers may seek to be aware. For the purpose of this report, the author has summarised these as follows:

- Linkage and connections with the host HEI
- Considerations related to private or university-led provision
- Program structures – one size does not fit all
- Student welfare and experience
- Experience of assessment and external/commercial examining

2.1 Linkage and Connections of Pathway Programs with the Host HEI

The connection between universities and their international pathways can be described in a number of ways, given the range of interfaces, levels and transitions which are involved. In some respects, these connections are similar to those experienced by international students within different stages of degree programmes and are reflected in the phases of international student experience as summarised and supported by the International Student Life Cycle[1] project (HEA 2015). Nevertheless, international pathway programs also have a tendency to require other forms of linkage which may or may not manifest themselves in the most optimal manner.

With regard to international pathway programs which are embedded within core university provision, it is likely that such pathways, as part of University unit provision, will demonstrate at least some features of what Weick (1976) described as the classic collegial academy that operates as part of a loosely coupled system. However, as noted by McNay (1995, 1996 in McCaffery 2010, p.51) a range of models of organisation exist within universities, described as collegium, bureaucracy, enterprise and corporation. In broad terms, in the UK and Australia HEIs have moved from the loosely coupled collegium towards a corporation model in recent years. Nevertheless, it should be noted that in any one institution more than one of these operating models can exist in different units at the same time (Bolden et al. 2008; Coaldrake and Stedman 1998; McNay 1995, 1996 in McCaffery 2010).

Given the prevalence of loosely coupled collegium connections between the international pathway providing unit within HEIs and the academic schools onto which students will progress, it should be noted that aspects of linkage between

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[1] 'The International Student Life Cycle' is a series of pedagogical resources provided by the UK's Higher Education Academy (HEA). The materials, made available on the internet, offer key guidance and support to educators linked to broad range of educational needs which international students have as they navigate the challenges from the application stage to seeking work after graduation.

schools and the in-house pathway unit can have a significant impact on the nature of provision. This can be manifested in some of the following areas of connection and associated scenarios:

2.1.1   Recruitment and Admissions: The Extent to Which Pathway Staff Are Able to Control or Be Involved in the Decision-Making Process

As professionals in the field of pathway provision, pathway educationalists and administrators should ideally have involvement in the admissions process in order to ensure that the recruited students have a realistic chance of success on the programs. The importance of associated academic staff involvement in the making of valid admissions decisions for their own courses is highlighted by Fetter (1995). This connection arguably also extends to the provision of opportunity to students who the experienced international pathways professionals deem suitable to use the program as a conversion course in circumstances where previous study has not allowed progression. Where recruitment and admissions are divorced from the expertise of program providers, there is a danger that the final international pathway cohort selected in a recruitment cycle will be less than optimally configured.

2.1.2   The Pathway Curriculum

The extent to which the pathway curriculum is informed directly by the requirements of degree programs at the HEI onto which students will progress can have an impact on the extent to which pathway programs prepare students for their degree study and equip them with the core skills required. In particular, for the case of 1-year IFPs, this consideration could be deemed as key, given that, in contrast to secondary-school based routes, they are a year shorter in structure and commonly positioned as fitting more closely with degree provision.

In such circumstances, a marker of quality should ideally be evidenced in features of the curriculum which demonstrate close linkage with degree program curriculum and program design at the institution where pathway students intend to progress. This could take the form of collaboration between subject tutors teaching pathway programs with those teaching degree programs onto which students will progress. This would also ideally involve design of curriculum features or elements which are informed by degree-level provision in linked programs or subject areas. Baratta (2009) outlines a good example of how international pathways can be positioned to equip students to understand what constitutes proficient writing in their particular academic disciplines. Reichard and Stephenson (2014) also present a system for joint marking of assessments in order to build task authenticity (Alexander et al. 2008) and encourage dialogue between language and subject tutors. In addition, also in the context of international pathway programs, Manning (2009) outlines the potential benefits of moving on from preoccupations with power imbalances in staff collaborations, such as those suggested by Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002,

p.6), Bool and Luford (1999, pp. 29–35) and Raimes (1991, p.243) which Manning (2009) believes focus predominantly on practitioner status-related issues rather than providing practical mechanisms for encouraging meaningful collaboration. It is noted that such collaborations offer an opportunity to harness the diverse philosophical backgrounds of academic staff from different disciplines working in a shared international context. Linked to this view, Hoodith (2013) refers to collaborative initiatives amongst language and science teachers in international pathways contexts which foster awareness of the priorities of both sides of the curriculum and associated classroom practices.

2.1.3   Progression from Pathway Programs to HEI Degree Programs

Connection and interaction with HEI admissions officers for the purpose of setting and monitoring arrangements for progression to HEI degree programs is of key significance in order to ensure that suitably qualified students are able to join their intended degree programs but also to allow for the situation whereby students who have not met set rules of progression are not permitted to progress. This ensures that the quality of students transitioning from international pathways to degrees align with other routes into HEIs and maintains quality and respect amongst internal stakeholders. Where students are not able to progress within the institution in which they have taken an international pathway program, then another marker of quality from the student perspective is the provision of guidance and support for alternative programs at other universities which may have entry points set at lower tariffs. The annual Warwick Circle of Friends event (University of Warwick 2013) for graduating foundation year students is a good example of how one institution has sought to proactively assist certain students who are seeking alternative universities after taking a pathway program at one particular institution. Private institutions providing pathways are also often able to connect students with a range of different HEIs linked to their partnership networks. The University Pathway Alliance (UPA) an alliance of eight UK university-in house providers of international pathways is also seeking to support students who are aiming to move from international pathways onto degrees within their network. Expertise in understanding and monitoring student progression can also be identified through tracking projects such as the one described by Fava-Verde (2008) which seeks to gain feedback from post-pathway students and their lecturers in order to identify patterns of success and additional opportunities for pathway program enhancement for future cohorts.

2.1.4   Pathway Staffing

The recruitment of staff to teach international pathway programs and their connection with degree provision at HEIs is also of key significance in managing quality and in order to ensure that academic staff are suitably informed of the requirements and expectations of HEI degree provision. There are a range of typical profiles of

staff who teach content and language modules on UK pathway programs which tend to follow some of the following patterns:

2.1.4.1   Hourly-Paid Staff

Hourly paid staff who teach on pathway programs may also be experienced teachers of other levels of provision within the HEI and have affiliation to other schools or units within the institution. These staff members may have been recruited through recommendations from staff and research students within the HEI academic schools or recruited directly by the international pathways providing-unit, from a pool of local freelance professionals, including experienced HEI teachers and senior, experienced teachers of relevant subjects in Further Education or secondary school contexts.

2.1.4.2   Full-Time Staff

In certain institutions, the pathway provision may be organised in a manner which allows or encourages degree-providing academic schools to offer staff to teach on international pathway programs, within the scope of their existing workload allocation models. One example of this is in place at the University of Reading (Sloan and Vicary 2013) where it is claimed that employing subject tutors from within existing teams in university departments helps to ensure parity of module content and assessment on international pathways and linked degrees. In other contexts, the pathway providers may directly employ full-time subject teachers either with prior HEI teaching experience or with similar Further Education or Secondary School experience, as previously referenced with respect to hourly-paid staff.

The international experience, intercultural awareness and academic level-related commitment of staff working with students from diverse educational backgrounds is of key significance to the quality of provision. Overcoming such related challenges in this area is a key aspect of curriculum internationalisation and of managing or training staff in order to avoid personal blockers linked to a lack of commitment to internationalisation (Leask 2015, p.114). The key to success is likely to lie in the mobilisation of a successful institutional strategy. Some of the potential risks involve lack of knowledge of transition requirements based on idiosyncrasies pertaining to different educational systems, non-internationalised approaches to curriculum and learning methods as well as disengagement due to a sense of lower priority in comparison to teaching activity at higher levels of study within the academy. Problems may also arise due to employment status, particularly in the case of hourly-paid staff who may be on zero-hours contracts and who may harbor a sense of dislocation from mainstream provision, due to direct employment through pathway units rather than central academic schools. As suggested by the UK's University and College Union (UCU 2014), it could be argued that zero-hours contracts are not compatible with developing a professional workforce that will deliver high quality services, due to the drawbacks in contract and employment status compared to permanent regular

work. Ultimately, irrespective of the staffing pattern adopted by the international pathway provider, the crucial factors for quality of provision can be considered to include some of the following elements:

2.1.5 Student Access to the Mainstream Student Experience at the University

Given that the primary purpose of international pathway programs is to prepare students for the experience of study at degree level within an HEI, it is logical to assume that preparation for the academic experience will be coupled with access to authentic elements of the broader student experience at the destination institution. Again, there is a range of challenges to this which HEIs should consider mitigating in order to ensure that an authentic and rewarding student experience is available to international pathway students. These challenges include:

2.1.5.1 Avoiding Ghettoisation Both Academically and Socially

Due to the fact that many pathway units provide their courses through a separate building and a dedicated team of cross curricular staff, it is often the case that even in-house provision operates as a quasi-separate unit with a different culture to many of the other sections within the university. The challenge of offering students an authentic experience under such circumstances is not inconsiderable and whilst the facilities provided by newer private pathway partnership companies are often of a high quality standard, it is arguably the case that 'in some circumstances' they may also detract from integration into the host HEI.

Even on smaller campuses an international student club or housing arrangement can lead to a ghettoisation environment (Deardorff 2009, p.212 in Andrade and Evans 2009) through the creation of a more defined and less representative sub-culture. The challenge may also be aggravated in circumstances where provision is outsourced to a location which is distant from the HEI campus or main faculty buildings. Whatever the physical proximity or distance from the main HEI locality, it is important that every effort is made by the international pathway providing unit to build bridges for international pathway students between the international pathway unit and intended degree-providing schools. This could be achieved through student mentorship, briefings, guest lectures, student visits or observation sessions.

2.1.5.2 Encouraging Interaction Between International Students and Home Students

Whilst the number of international students participating in international pathway programs will contribute to the institutions' statistics related to international registrations, it is important to note that simply recruiting international students does not

necessarily create a meaningful internationalised educational environment (Arkoudis 2010). As Putnam's (2007) investigation noted, greater diversity within the HEI community has actually led to a greater level of distrust and adequate preparation for interactions with each other is required, for both home and international students. It is also noted in this study that support needs to go beyond orientation in order to build intercultural skills. With a more specific focus on the international pathway programs, Jones (2013) states that the best kind of IFPs offer strategies to students for befriending and working with home students as this helps international students on the program and broadens the global perspectives of local students. With similar ambitions in mind, Nukui (2009) identifies a mechanism for raising cultural awareness amongst students on IFPs through the use of critical incidents, using a model inspired by Cushner and Brislin (1996) where student participants are presented with a series of scenarios in which people from different cultures interact with the intent of pursuing a common goal.

In addition, as many international pathway programs do not seek to recruit home students, in order to espouse a holistic approach to internationalisation which fosters appropriate community interactions, mechanisms should be sought to allow students on such programs to interact with home-student counterparts as, the better the diversity of the group, the better the learning (Newman 2007). It needs to be acknowledged that internationalisation is for all students at the institution. Therefore, communities should be built which include different groups of students in order for students to develop into global citizens who can work in societies where cross-cultural competence is a key asset (Shiel 2006). Another good example, linked to the fostering of global citizenship and interaction between international and home students and the involvement of staff in a pathways context is presented by Bressan and Green (2011) who describe the design of assessment tasks which require home and international student interaction and foster the development of intercultural awareness and global citizenship skills.

2.2   Considerations Linked to Private or University-Led Provision of Pathway Programs

Over the last decade, an increasing number of British universities have opted to develop strategic partnerships with private companies which recruit international students and deliver international pathway programs. However, the contention that a HEI can best serve and retain international students by outsourcing recruitment, support services and instruction to private providers is not without controversy (Redden 2010). In some cases, it has been argued that such private providers bring an associated risk of reduced academic standards due to overambitious recruitment targets and less than secure procedures (Fulcher 2007, 2009; Hamp-Lyons 2011; Lipsett 2008). A detailed and politically-impassioned account of the opposition to privately provided pathways which include teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is also available from

the University and College Union (2012), however it should be noted that the stance is not fully objective in nature. With similar concerns in mind, in a context which also overlaps with international pathway provision, Hamp-Lyons (2011) describes, in an arguably more balanced manner, the dangers of re-classifying EAP education, often a key component of pathway provision, as 'professional' or 'support' activity.

In contrast to some of the views expressed above, the potentially powerful contribution of University partnerships with the private sector is described by reference to the context of Glasgow Caledonian University (OBHE 2014) and their experience of working with the private sector in order to establish an international foundation college. This interaction is cited as having had a pivotal role on the wider institution's development, internationalisation and economic sustainability.

In response to the good practice sharing and communications benefits of collaborating across a linked network of pathway providers, as pioneered by private providers and consortium activity such as that led by NCUK, eight UK universities have recently joined forces to share good practice and strengthen communications through the University Pathways Alliance (UPA). Institutions of this alliance share an ethos to prioritise excellence in the in-house provision of international pathways and the support of students, parents, schools, embassies and other stakeholders (UPA 2018).

It should not be considered to be the case that all HEI in-house led international pathway provision is inherently superior to privately provided provision, partly due to the fact that many of the teaching professionals who are teaching on privately provided courses may have formerly worked in embedded HEI-led pathway courses, before private take-overs were undertaken. However, there are clear negative implications for international pathway provision, whether they be privately run or embedded within institutions, if HEIs do not position academic quality or professionalism as central to good academic practice for international pathways.

2.3   Program Structures – 'One Size Does Not Fit All'

Various factors have been identified as pushing or pulling international students towards international destinations for higher education purposes (Gong and Huybers 2015). Matters such as quality, cost, lack of local availability, and enhanced opportunity or employability upon completion have been highlighted as notable pull factors. These considerations, amongst others, reflect the wide range of choices available in the global education market (Agarwal and Winkler 1985; Bodycott 2009; Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Yang 2007). The structural differences discussed below highlight some key aspects of the diversity of provision which contribute to the many options available to internationals students seeking pathway programs.

2.3.1   Pathways and the Reflection of Subject Specialisms at HEI Level

In their investigation of the functions and aims of universities, Bolton and Lucas (2008) refer to one of the key functions of HEIs as the provision of high-level specialised education and training. It therefore follows that international pathways which are designed to lead to success in degrees at HEIs should reflect and prepare students for the specialism of those HEIs. Effectively, this means that international pathways should demonstrate some tailored provision which links with the specialisms of the academic portfolio of the HEI onto which their students are seeking to progress. For example, if an institution is known to specialise in Architecture and has an international pathway to that subject, then one would expect that the pathway design would involve research into the particular features of or skills required for that specific area of study rather than a more generic, less tailored model. Linked to this, Hunter and Whiteside (2010) describe the development of a module for their IFP, which adopts a holistic approach. This model goes beyond developing reading and writing skills by seeking to assist students in understanding the wider idiosyncrasies and purposes of academic communication in particular disciplines.

2.3.2   Language, Academic Skills and Content

In the 2003/4 academic year the UK's Quality Assurance Agency identified a series of intellectual and transferable skills which they considered to be critical at all levels of higher education. The intellectual skills identified included analysis, synthesis, evaluation and problem solving. Those transferable skills when further described included communication, teamwork and research skills (Durkin and Main 2002). Since that period, it has been common for international pathway programs to incorporate a range of academic skills provision. Not surprisingly, dedicated published resources have emerged for use on pathway programs, such as the multi-modular resource known as the Transferable Academic Skills Kit (TASK) (Manning and Nukui 2007).

In the section above linked to subject specialisms, the different academic foci of universities is acknowledged. In line with this situation, it stands to reason that different subject areas and different academic levels may need different balances of academic skills just as different subject pathways may need a different range of core modules or subject modules. This flexibility also needs to be mirrored in terms of differentiation for students who may have various personal requirements and skillsets. As noted by Manning (2013), in providing quality international pathways, one size does not fit all. This is both in terms of the needs of pathway students' and the diversity of options available to meet their requirements.

Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) describe differentiation as the process of attaining balance between academic content and learners' particular learning requirements. This objective can be seen to align particularly well with pathway programs, as educators endeavor to assist students in applying existing skills and knowledge to a new educational context, in the form of degree-level study.

According to Hyland (2006, p.73), in the context of bridging the needs of international students developing their skills for academic purposes, educational provision should recognise the importance of affective, personal and social expectations of learning. It should also embrace many aspects, incorporating learners' goals, backgrounds and language proficiencies along with their reasons for taking the course. Jordan (1997, p.1994) also takes into account factors such as learning styles, academic culture, general culture, and British life and institutions. Similarly, Alexander et al. (2008) stress the importance of accepting that in a new academic context the rules or expectations that students bring from their previous educational experiences can operate at different levels.

2.4 Students' Welfare and Experience

As noted by Sibley (2015), in order to succeed in their studies, international students need to adapt to a new social and educative environment. Sibley, highlights the range of issues which international students have to potentially contend with, through reference to historical studies over the years such as Ward (1962); Zwingman and Gunn (1983). These studies describe psycho-social issues that students may experience and some methods of managing these circumstances. Importantly, a key finding from Sibely's study shows that students who are not able to acculturate to their host academic and social culture also tend to face challenges in making academic progress. As a result of this, in relation to international pathways, interventions which support student experiences and welfare through acculturation activities appear to be a very worthwhile investment for providers as these activities diminish marginalisation or acculturative stress which are debilitating for students (Berry 2005). These activities also help students to progress from a pathway program to degree-level study. If this acculturation does not take place, then pathways students risk feeling alone or restricted to an 'at-home' bubble of cultural and linguistic sameness (Hawkes 2012).

One particularly useful metaphor which highlights key features of good quality pathway provision and of the learning experience which providers should both avoid and seek to implement, compares pathway programs to either a bridge, a ferry or a ford (Jones 2013). This has been adapted and extended to add a tunnel-route in Figure 1:

The bridge	At its best, a bridge is a solid and secure form of support across the water as a two-way conduit to academic transition. However if the distance to travel is too long, then the end destination may be difficult for students to visualise and therefore to reach. Crucially, the structure will also require maintenance.
The ferry	The ferry transports students to their destination but also deposits them without the same ease of access back in the direction that they came from and without a life-vest of ongoing support from the foundation provision. In addition, dangers can arise if the vessel is overloaded.
The ford	The ford provides very little support, leaving students to have to wade to the other side with only intermittent stepping stones of support which leave crucial and unreliable gaps.
The tunnel	The tunnel allows transition from point of embarkation to destination, either from country to country via TNE routes or from private provision to HEI. However, the traveler sometimes may be less aware of their changing social and academic surroundings as they make their journey. This risks adding additional acculturation and adaptation challenges at the point of destination.

Figure 1 International Pathways as a Bridge, Ferry, Ford or Tunnel. (Adapted and extended from Jones 2013)

2.5   Experience of Assessment and External/Commercial Examining of Pathway Programs

2.5.1   Assessment

Cizek (1995), Popham (2001), and Stiggins (1995) describe the challenges facing the classroom teacher of managing the complex matrix of skills and associated activities which constitute Assessment Literacy in the contemporary context. This challenge is particularly relevant to international pathway programs given that they recruit international students from diverse backgrounds working in a broad range of disciplines. With specific reference to in-house language tests created within universities, O'Sullivan (2011, p.265–270) also acknowledges the potential threats to test quality through in-house test design and claims relating to levels of student proficiency if teachers' Assessment Literacy is limited.

In contrast, certain key points are also made about the benefits of the local contexts in which many in-house tests are created. This includes language tests which are part of modules on international pathways programs. Rea-Dickins (cited in O'Sullivan 2011) argues that, in most situations, local tests are more likely to allow

practitioners to make valid assumptions about test- takers. It is also suggested that local test developers have opportunities to focus on specific domains and contexts which are relevant to local needs.

As with any testing system, within international pathway programmes or elsewhere, what is significant in assessment is construct validity, or the extent to which the items in the test accurately represent the skills being targeted for assessment. In the past, some tests and assessment tasks have been developed using less principled approaches than those which have emerged from more recent research into assessment good practice (Fry et al. 1999, p.44).

As in other areas of education, construct validity is of key relevance to Assessment Literacy (Moss et al. 2006, p.116) and in turn to international pathways. Indeed, an understanding of this area is critical to the building of quality tests and assessment tasks, to the avoidance of the negative influence of poorly operationalised constructs (Fulcher 1999, p.226; Messick 1989, p.226), or to representations of content and academic skills in tests, commonly found on international pathway programs. Support for a more scientific paradigm for testing and Assessment Literacy can be linked back to research into psychological testing conducted by Cronbach (1990, p.192) and Messick (in Linn et al. 1989, p.16–17).

2.5.2   Experience of External and Commercial Examining of Pathway Programs

The origins of an external examining system in the UK in its most common form lies in the nineteenth century when Durham University was first established and an agreement was developed with the University of Oxford. This agreement aimed to increase and support the pool of assessment expertise and to demonstrate the reliability and validity of awards (HEA 2012). Whilst external examining is common place across undergraduate and post-graduate provision within the UK, the adoption of external examining within international pathway programs is less uniform. This might be due to credit frameworks and internal QA units which have tended to focus attention predominantly on provision, which is considered core from FHEQ level 4 onwards.

Again, referring to assessment literacy linked to international pathways programs, Manning (2014) highlights the need for pathway professionals to extend their skills in assessment. Working with external examiners on practitioners' own courses and acting as an external examiner is one way of developing key assessment skills which can enhance the quality of pathway provision through the continuing professional development of both language and content tutors.

External, and allegedly 'standardized', high-stakes and commercially-operated EAP tests are ever growing in impact (Blue et al. 2000, p.8). It is therefore logical to consider that familiarity with large-scale assessment practices associated with English for Academic Purposes should form part of the international pathways teacher's Assessment Literacy toolkit, in order to inform in-house standards and quality.

Whilst examination boards are frequently criticised due to the powerful influences they can have on individuals and institutions (Shohamy 2001), there is a

strong case to argue that the overlapping foci of psychological testing and language testing through the USA's Educational Testing Service (ETS) has proactively encouraged the exchange of key theories and concepts across these two influential testing domains. It is also clear that the wide-spread nature of such tests, used for admissions purposes and providing opportunities for international pathways teachers to train as examiners, serves to heighten practitioner awareness and professional development through the facility to critique and gain inspiration from large-scale commercially provided tests.

3 Suggestions for International Pathway Providers Regarding Areas of Potential Innovation, Support and Stimulus for Scholarly Activity

3.1 Cross Curricular Collaboration

Although it is inaccurate to suggest that all international pathway programs are designed in such a way as to facilitate optimal communication streams, it could, nevertheless, be argued that the structure of many international pathways is apt for fostering a cross-disciplinary collaboration amongst peers. This is mainly the case due to the collocation and shared management of subjects from across the curriculum, as described by Barron (2003) and Hyland (2006). Examples of this in the IFP context are described as follows by Manning (2009):

- IFP modules are often designed in and managed from within faculties and departments across the institution, thus creating opportunities for the development of a program specification which comprises methodologies and approaches grounded in a range of disciplines and philosophies.
- Innovation and advancement are often facilitated as new developments can be channeled to the IFP via multiple routes established by teaching and learning colleagues located in numerous faculties and departments.
- Representation on IFP committees and Boards of Studies is usually indicative of the curriculum breadth and the varied stakeholders across the University. This can provide a rich diversity of institution-wide input to inform the development and implementation of policies and procedures.
- IFP students are simultaneously multifarious in nature and yet collectively idiosyncratic in their shared 'international' status. Irrespective of the intended academic discipline, this often engenders a dynamic shared interest amongst tutors who pursue the same goal: teaching a single cohort of international students that is comprised of both culturally and educationally diverse individuals. This also seems to lead to a heightened peer identity amongst IFP tutors of very different subjects.
- IFPs often benefit from a cross curricular team of external examiners who are able to review and scrutinise teaching and assessment procedures for a single program, whilst bearing in mind a range of different subject-specific philosophies.

3.2   Learning from Alternative Pathways Providers Beyond the UK

Whilst there is arguably much to learn from the range of international pathways providers and different levels and foci of provision that are currently found in hubs of activity such as the UK, due to the global focus of international pathways, it would also be restrictive and contrary to the principles of curriculum internationalisation not to take into account innovations which emerge across the wider academic world. In addition, given that the pathways market has been structurally quite unregulated, taking steps to consider what developments in terms of provision have occurred in international contexts seems particularly worthwhile. A sample of practices from across the world which could be explored or learnt from are described below.

3.2.1   Universities of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands

The higher education system in the Netherlands has a two-track system, offering a range of higher education and research opportunities. Students who wish to pursue a more vocational approach may opt to follow a pathway at a University of Applied Sciences. Typically, in this form of provision, work-based internships are embedded as a compulsory element of undergraduate education and replace the requirement for empirical enquiry which is more common at a research-led university (Cazemier 2015). Undergraduate study at a University of Applied Sciences is usually in the form of a 4-year program in contrast to the 3 years at a research led university. Such models demonstrate routes to tertiary education which go beyond a skills deficit approach and offer food for thought to other international pathway providers and emerging new universities, especially in the light of possible future expansion of more vocational apprentice-related degree options. There are parallels between this model and new inroads made by universities into degree apprenticeships.

3.2.2   Community College Pathway Programs in the US

Another HEI access structure which is very worthwhile for international pathway providers to reflect upon is a system in action in the US. This system offers a two tiered two-plus-two articulation route, in conjunction with Community College pathway programs (Bali 2015). Via this pathway, students are required to complete 2 years of core courses based at a community college before transferring to a university for the final 2 years of study. This enables students to work towards an undergraduate degree at some of the most prestigious universities, whilst making a considerable cost saving on tuition fees. In such circumstances, the degree costs approximately half of the usual fee, and yet takes the same customary 4 years to complete. There are clear benefits here to students in terms of finance and positive

linkages with community colleges. This could potentially inform innovations further afield, if visa regulations are adapted to allow for these changes. Such a model would serve to establish better connections with existing colleges of further education which, in the case of the UK, have struggled to compete internationally in recent years due to a range of reasons and governmental restrictions linked to regulations for student visa issuance.

3.2.3 Transnational Education (TNE) Provision Based Outside the UK

The number of international branch campuses (as defined by the OBHE 2013) has risen over the last decade, from 82 branch campuses in 2006 to 162 in 2009 and 200 in 2011. The OBHE envisages that this figure will have reached 280 by 2020.

International provision based fully or partly overseas through branch campuses or other articulation arrangements can also contribute intelligence and expertise in international pathway provision to the wider sector. In particular, this might involve the development of academic and program delivery good-practice linked to the learners' educational requirements in the target region, including an understanding of the idiosyncrasies of working with mono-cultural groups. A relevant example of localisation of the pathways curriculum is evidenced by Lange (2012) and the management of transnational QA processes which deal with student integration issues when students seek to progress from overseas articulations to UK-based course elements.

3.3 Professional Networks and Scholarly Activity

Over the last decade, along with the international development of pathway provision, the breadth of networks which have emerged as sources of support and stimulus for pathway-related scholarly activity have increased in volume and more direct linkage to the international pathway field. With regard to pathway practitioners linked to the field of EAP, professional bodies include:

- The UK-based professional network and email-discussion list provided by BALEAP
- The US-based online-discussion platform offered through the TESOL International Association
- The Australian-based email forum provided through the Association for Academic Language and Learning
- The internationally-focused UK/internationally-based email-discussion list for practitioners in English for Specific purposes, provided through the IATEFL ESP Special Interest Group

The growth of international pathways has meant that the scope and coverage of the above organisations, their discussions and conferences are now frequently relevant to international pathway providers who are engaged in language and academic skills training. However, it was not until 2008 that a dedicated international pathways publication first emerged in the form of the InForm journal. As noted in the first issue of InForm (Manning 2008), the journal was '…launched with a view to providing a forum for the discussion of IFP-related teaching and learning issues which recognizes the breadth of the IFP curriculum and extends beyond the boundaries of English language teaching.'

As evidenced by some of the references linked to this article, the contribution from the sector has been both cross-curricular and insightful since the journal commenced. An annual conference is also held. Given the development of networks of privately provided international pathways, opportunities now exist for conferences and professional exchange which extend across networked international pathway colleges from the same organisation. In many cases this has enabled practitioners who are employed within such private university partnership institutions to network and collaborate with colleagues from all over the world. A recent development in the UK is the University Pathway Alliance (UPA 2016) which allows a network of university-led foundation providers to share good practice related to international pathway provision. It is hoped that in the years that follow additional support resources will emerge so that pathway international academics can continue to share their expertise in order to benefit the related programs and the experience of international pathway students.

4   Conclusion

It is clear that international pathway provision has matured over the last decade and that there has also been significant growth in volume and diversity of provision. There are notable areas of quality which can inform future provision and a range of pitfalls which practitioners can learn from in order to seek to avoid the negative experiences of others in the delivery of their own programs.

Given the range of provision across the world, it is pleasing to note that there are good examples of innovation and alternative routes which will continue to provide a source of inspiration to improve student support and curriculum design in future years. Now that networks and support resources have more widely recognised the academic distinctiveness of international pathways, this also offers an exciting platform for information sharing across institutions and borders with the global student at the centre of the provision. This opens up important avenues for curriculum internationalisation for pathway programs which in many cases are inherently even more internationally positioned than the degrees which pathway students subsequently progress on to.

The author hopes that, as practitioners continue to capitalise on the ever more developed academy of international pathways, the academic credence afforded by other

members of the academy who specialise in alternative levels of provision will also continue to strengthen, so that that the key role of international pathways is given even more value and the opportunities for cross-curricular collaboration can be harnessed optimally.

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