CHERIL Report

Understanding and Supporting International PGT Student Study Outcomes

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Contents

Background and aims of Research

This project responded to a sharp increase in the number of international MA students in the Manchester Institute of Education (MIE). The number increased from about 60 in 2014/15 to 130 in 2015/16, 150 in 2016/17 and around 200 in the current 2017/18 academic year. The next academic year – 2018/2019 – is expected to see another significant increase, to about 250 full-time MA students. The majority of these students are from non-western educational backgrounds (most notably Chinese), and their first language is other than English. To date, we have no quantitative evidence of differential attainment of international (versus Home) MA students in MIE. However, the current sharp increase in this student group has generated widespread and varied expressions of concern by teaching and administrative staff what may be appropriate admissions requirements and whether the support needs of the students we admit are being met (e.g. raised in SEED Strategic Admissions Group and MIE Teaching & Learning Committee meetings).

Published research suggests that our response should include a focus on English language skills (Daller & Phelan 2013), but also a more holistic look at student profiles/responses (Durkin 2008) and a recognition that factors explaining non-western students' study outcomes may be complex (Rienties et al. 2012). Thus, this project seeks to identify barriers to successful study outcomes among Manchester Institute of Education (MIE) international

MA students, and is suggesting support we can put in place to overcome such barriers. The project has been guided by the following two research questions:

1. What are specific barriers to successful study outcomes for international MA students in MIE?
2. What are these international MA students' perceptions of existing study support?

The findings will inform: a) adjustments to admissions policies, and b) further development of study support for the international MA students that we do admit onto our MA programmes. The findings should be of value to other PGT programmes in SEED and the broader University.

The project covered the following MA programmes:

- MA Education (International);
- MA Educational Leadership;
- MA Digital Technologies & Communication in Education (DTCE);
- MA Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

Methodology

Two strands of data collection developed concurrently. Both strands collected data on/from both International and Home students. The first strands was the construction of a database covering the 2015/16 and 2016/17 MIE MA student cohorts, and intended to respond to research question 1. The database covers the following data:

Background variables: IELTS scores, ULC pre-sessional enrolment, national origin, post-University professional experience (by a proxy measure – see details later in the report), and the major subject of undergraduate degree. We originally intended to include information, also, on 'non-UK English medium HE experience', but this provided impossible with available data sets.

In-programme variables: Blackboard access data and Turnitin originality scores. We originally intended to include, also, data on course unit, study skills and in-sessional language course attendance, as well as recording assessment types the students were exposed to. The attendance data was not included as this is simply not available in a suitable format. The assessment types were not included directly, but were controlled for in the selection of outcome variables (see below).

Outcome variables: semester 1 and 2 marks, dissertation marks and the final degree classification. At present, only the semester 1 and 2 marks are included in the database, but the dissertation marks will be included shortly. Thus, the present report is based on semester 1 and 2 marks only (core course units – see below).

The second strand was a survey administered to the 2016/17 cohort of MA students, and this intended to respond to research question 2. The survey collected data on the students'

experience of different aspects of their studies at Manchester, including also the various forms of support offered by MIE, SEED and the wider University (a copy of the survey appears in an appendix to the enclosed survey report).

The survey was designed using Select Survey. The survey was carried out during the last twenty minutes of five core course unit classes to maximise the response rate. This took place in the first teaching week of semester 2, between 30th January and 3rd February 2017. The students accessed the survey through a link in their course unit Blackboard space and both the PI and the RA for the project were on hand to deal with any questions or problems. No student identification was required and therefore all responses were anonymous. Of an estimated 205 students enrolled on the above MA programmes, we had a total of 165 respondents, a response rate of 80%. We therefore take these responses to be representative of the cohort overall. A second survey was carried out in August 2017 to collect data primarily related to student experience in the second semester and their perceptions of dissertation support. This was available to students through Blackboard. A total of 17 students responded to all the questions, giving a response rate of 8%, and therefore this data is not included in the findings.

The survey generated both quantative and qualitative data. The quantitative data was exported into SPSS, and with tables and graphs generated in that programme. The qualitative data was exported to an Excel spreadsheet. Each statement made by a student was given one or more descriptive labels. The statements were sorted by labels, and then counted and summarised.

A descriptive report of the findings from the student survey was circulated among all CHERIL project members. The comments received on the results were taken into account when writing the recommendations section. An enclosure to this document includes the completed survey report, incorporating the comments received. This final report was made available to all the MA programme directors for them to circulate more widely as appropriate.

Initial Findings: The Database (Research Question 1)

Research Question 1: *What are specific barriers to successful study outcomes for international MA students in MIE?*

This was predominantly answered using the database that we constructed. The interpretation of this research question shifted slightly, to be more aimed at how we might adjust admissions policies for the MIE MA programmes. This shift was driven by the ever larger numbers of international students being recruited onto our MA programmes. There looks to be another major increase in 2018-19, and there is a particular and possibly problematic dynamic driving the numbers. Applicants from the Chinese market apply for places in the autumn, so very early in the cycle. This fills up the programmes, leading us to close admissions to new applicants in the winter. Applicants from other international regions, as well as home students, tend to apply much later, and they, then, miss out on the opportunity to do an Education-related MA at Manchester. Thus, the CHERIL project became a vehicle to explore how we could be more selective with the initial large numbers of

applicants from the Chinese market, thereby opening up the possibility for more diverse recruitment in the spring period.

The following initial quantitative analysis, then, is aimed at informing decisions we are currently making to optimise our admissions requirements for MIE taught MA degrees. The analysis, therefore, looks at dimensions that we might adjust, or consider, in our admissions requirements. We looked at the following dimensions, each time relating the dimension to outcomes.

- Nationality
- MA Degree Programme
- Experience (Year of Degree Completion)
- Subject of First Degree
- Type of University of first degree
- English Language competence (IELTS)
- Attending Pre-sessional English language course

We measured 'outcomes' in terms of the students' semester 1 and 2 core course unit marks. The core units makes up 60 credits of their MA degree and tends to use substantial written assignments for assessment. Our reliance on these core units in this analysis avoids outcomes that are skewed by student marks for electives outside of their central area of interest.

Nationality:

Table 1 breaks down the mean marks obtained on 60 credits of core courses of Chinese students, students from other nationalities, and UK students. The Chinese group (overall n=243) has the lowest mean mark in both 2015 and 2016, as well as overall. Follow up analyses will be needed to determine the statistical significance and power of this observation. However, with 243 Chinese students achieving a mean mark of 62.2 compared to a mean mark of 67.5 for UK nationals (n=41) and 67.0 for Other nationals (n=68) we are sufficiently confident in taking this into consideration in our admissions related discussions (see later in this report).

Table 1: Comparison of outcomes across nationalities

	2015		2016		Overall	
Nationality	CoreMean	Count	CoreMean	Count	CoreMean	Count
China	61.8	115	62.5	128	62.2	243
Other	67.4	27	66.8	41	67.0	68
UK	71.4	16	65.1	25	67.5	41

MA Degree Programme:

Table 2 compares the mean marks obtained on 60 credits of core courses completed by students on the different MIE Masters programmes. The results are further subdivided into year of enrolment (September 2015 or September 2016 start).

Table 2 shows that the Chinese students do better on the MA Ed Leadership and MA Ed (International) programmes (mean scores between 62.0 and 63.7) as compared to the MA DTCE (60.5 and 56.5), and to some extent also the MA TESOL (60.7 and 61.5). Further analyses of statistical significance are needed. If these are indeed significant differences, explanations may include: a) more challenging assessment tasks, or tougher marking, on the MA DTCE and MA TESOL programmes; b) higher calibre students are being recruited onto the MA Ed Leadership and MA Ed (International) programmes.

Table 2 also shows that the Chinese students do not have higher mean Turnitin similarity scores (SimMean in the table) than the other two groups. This can be interpreted in two ways: a) we do a similarly good (or bad) job inducting each of these groups to source use in academic writing; and b) it may be rash to make assumptions that students from particular national backgrounds will make more or less appropriate use of sources in their academic writing. Both of these conclusions 'stretch' somewhat what may be concluded from the quantitative data, and post-hoc analyses are needed.

Table 2: Comparison of outcomes across MIE/SEED MA degree programmes

Academic Plan	**Nationality**			**CoreMean***			**SimMean****		
Year	**China**	**Other**	**UK**	**China**	**Other**	**UK**	**China**	**Other**	**UK**
2015	**115**	**27**	**16**	**61.8**	**67.4**	**71.4**	**16.1**	**21.6**	**14.5**
MA DTCE	13	10	3	60.5	66.7	74.0	17.2	24.7	26.5
MA DTCE (TESOL)	1	4		66.5	70.1		15.0	25.5	
MA Ed (International)	75	4	1	62.0	68.6	67.5	17.3	20.2	17.5
MA Ed Leadership	9	6	6	63.6	68.4	71.8	14.9	19.8	20.7
MA in TESOL	17	1	3	60.7	62.0	73.2	10.7	11.2	6.7
MA TESOL (Ed Tech)			1			65.3			8.6
MA TESOL (T Educ)		2	2		62.7	71.4		11.8	6.2
2016	**128**	**41**	**25**	**62.5**	**66.8**	**65.1**	**16.7**	**15.6**	**15.4**
MA DTCE	19	12	11	56.5	64.4	58.3	15.1	21.4	17.4
MA DTCE (TESOL)		3			71.0			17.8	
MA Ed (International)	83	1	2	63.7	70.4	71.9	17.4	21.9	21.6
MA Ed Leadership	17	11	6	63.5	66.8	71.3	17.9	18.2	15.7
MA in TESOL	8	6	4	61.5	64.7	66.5	10.9	8.0	9.4
MA TESOL (Ed Tech)		4	2		70.5	76.2		10.2	7.9
MA TESOL (Intercult)		1			62.4			7.9	
MA TESOL (T Educ)	1	3		68.3	69.4		9.7	8.6	
Total	**243**	**68**	**41**	**62.2**	**67.0**	**67.5**	**16.4**	**18.1**	**15.1**

* CoreMean = Mean scores across 30 + 30 credits (semester 1 + Semester 2) course units
** SimMean = Mean Turnitin similarity score across the CoreMean course units

Experience (Year of Degree Completion):

Table 3 compares the mean marks obtained on 60 credits of core courses by the 2015 Chinese students according to the year they completed their first (Bachelors) degree. Note, the Masters course started in 2015. Thus, completing the degree in e.g. 2010 means they had a five year delay between completing their first degree and starting the Masters at

Manchester. We do not have data on what the students may have been doing in the intervening years, but from experience we know that the students will have been professionally active in this period. Hence, when treating the students as a large group we feel it is possible to use the 'degree completion year' as a 'proxy' for students coming in with 'some type of professional experience' of a duration comparable to the time that has passed since their completion of their first degree.

The highlighted rows are the ones we feel there is enough data to make tentative observations. While the 13 Chinese students that completed their degree in 2012 have a clearly higher aggregate mean score, we do not feel confident to make any conclusions other than that, based on this data, the year of degree completion, and hence (when using this as a proxy) that post-degree professional experience is not something that will improve outcomes.

We observe a slight pattern of higher Turnitin similarity scores for students that come straight from their undergraduate degrees (17.7; n=60) as compared to students who have one or more years of delay between their undergraduate degrees and Masters study (11.5 – 15.0; n=44).

Table 3: Outcomes and degree completion for Chinese students; 2015 (n=115)

Degree completion	Count	CoreMean	SimMean
2004	1	45.5	10.1
2006	1	57.5	18.0
2007	1	63.5	26.3
2008	1	62.3	17.8
2010	1	66.8	6.1
2011	10	60.5	11.5
2012	13	64.7	12.7
2013	6	59.8	20.3
2014	21	61.9	15.0
2015	60	61.8	17.7
Total	115	61.8	16.1

Table 4 provides the same data for the 2016 cohort. Again, the highlighted years are the ones where we feel we have enough data to make tentative observations. By contrast to the 2015 cohort, this data shows that students who came directly onto our Masters – straight from their undergraduate degrees – appear to do better (62.9; n=77). This may be because these students have been fully focused on academic work up until the date that they started their degree with us. However, that does not explain why the pattern for the 2016 cohort is different from the 2015 cohort. The observed pattern is also somewhat contrary to the anecdotal observations of staff members teaching on the Masters degrees. That is, the anecdotal evidence suggests that having professional experience is an advantage. It may be, then, that using the year of degree completion as a proxy for professional experience is misguided. For instance, it may be that the specific type of professional experience matters (we have no data on this), or it may be that staff members' anecdotal observations are mistaken. Further investigation seems warranted.

In this data, there seems to be no pattern in the Turnitin similarity scores.

Table 4: Outcomes and degree completion for Chinese students; 2016 (n=128)

Degree completion	Count	CoreMean	SimMean
2002	1	64.0	13.6
2005	1	63.8	16.9
2008	1	67.5	21.3
2009	2	69.9	18.6
2010	6	61.1	10.9
2011	4	63.7	14.3
2013	5	64.3	14.9
2014	11	59.5	16.1
2015	20	61.4	18.4
2016	77	62.9	17.0
Total	**128**	**62.5**	**16.7**

Subject of First Degree:

Table 5 compares the mean marks obtained on 60 credits of core courses by the 2015 and 2016 cohort Chinese students according to what was the general subject-category of their first degree.

Here we observe a clear higher mean on core units for students with education-related degrees (63.8; n=47). The number of students in the three groups is large enough for this to be pursued further, through future tests of statistical significance and power.

Table 5: Subject of first degree and outcomes for Chinese students; 2015 and 2016 (n=255)

Subject Category	CoreMean	SimMean	Count
Education-related	63.8	17.4	47
Humanities and Social Sciences	61.8	16.5	154
Other	61.1	15.4	54
Total	**62.0**	**16.4**	**255**

The subjects we included in the education-related category (as listed by students on their application forms) includes: Computer Sci & Tech (Education), **Education***, Education and Pedagogy, Educational Technology, ELT, English (Education), English (English Education), English (English Teaching), English Education, Ideological and Political Education, Modern Education Techniques, Pedagogy, Science Teaching(Chemistry), Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, Teaching Chinese as a second language, Teaching Chinese as a second language.

*** The most commonly indicated subject of first degree with n=20**

In the Humanities and Social Science category, the most common subject of first degree was English (n=91), with a mean mark across the core units of 62.3.

Type of University of First Degree:

We also looked at whether it mattered if Chinese students came from so-called 'Normal' Universities – Universities with a tradition of educating teachers. Out of the 243 Chinese students in our database, 83 came from a University in China with the word 'Normal' in its name (e.g. Beijing Normal University). These students attained a mean mark across the core units of 62.5, as compared to 62.0 for the 160 students from other Universities. Given the sample sizes, we are uncertain this small difference is a significant finding.

English Language Competence:

We looked at the IELTS scores the students came in with. Note, though, that:

- Home (UK) students, students from other English speaking countries, and students with first degrees from English-speaking countries, do not need to submit an IELTS score in their application for a place.
- Students from non-English speaking countries which did (or claim to have done) an English-medium degree at a University in a non-English speaking country still have to submit an IELTS score as part of their application.
- We got our IELTS data from the University Language centre. This means that we only have IELTS scores for students who attended a pre-sessional English language course at the language centre. All students do provide their IELTS scores on their applications (if applicable – see previous two points), but the admissions office was not able to recover this data from their databases.
- For the above reason, all students who did not attend a pre-sessional English language course were considered to fit into a large group of called 'language requirement satisfied'. The IELTS requirement for unconditional admission is 6.5 overall, with a 6.5 in the writing component of the IELTS test. This, then, is the lowest possible IELTS profile for students in the language requirement satisfied' group. The group also includes Home students.
- There was a very small number of UK nationals who were educated abroad, and hence submitted IELTS scores as part of their application.

Table 6 compares the mean marks obtained on 60 credits of core courses by the 2015 and 2016 students according to their IELTS scores, or 'language requirement satisfied'. We do see a clear pattern, in table 6, of students coming in with higher IELTS scores doing better. Students that come in with a score of 5.5 (n=22) obtain an a mean score on the core course units of 58.9, students who come in with an IELTS of 6.0 (n=110) obtain a mean score of 62.1, students coming in with a 6.5 (n=77) obtain a 62.7, students that come in with a 7.0 (n=16) obtain a 65.7, and finally, students in the 'language requirement satisfied' group (n=126) obtain a 66.3 mean score. Looking at the Chinese students, students in the 'language requirement satisfied' group (n=30) obtain a 62.9 average, which is similar to the Chinese students coming in with a 6.5 IELTS. Thus, for the Chinese students, the drop-off in outcomes appears associated with the jump from 6.5 to 6.0 IELTS, which sees a slight drop in outcomes

(62.8 to 61.8), but with a more dramatic drop-off in outcomes from 6.0 to 5.5 IELTS (61.8 to 58.5).

Table 6: Outcomes related to IELTS scores

IELTS	Group	Count	CoreMean	SimMean
5.5	China	20	58.5	15.4
	Other	2	62.9	13.4
	All	**22**	**58.9**	**15.2**
6.0	China	105	61.8	16.9
	Other	5	67.7	18.8
	All	**110**	**62.1**	**17.0**
6.5*	China	72	62.8	16.4
	Other	2	65.0	15.9
	UK	3	58.7	13.7
	All	**77**	**62.7**	**16.3**
7.0*	China	14	65.6	14.6
	Other	2	65.8	15.8
	All	**16**	**65.7**	**14.7**
7.5*	China	2	64.5	11.2
	All	**2**	**64.5**	**11.2**
Language requirement satisfied	China	30	62.9	16.6
	Other	57	67.2	18.3
	UK	38	68.4	15.2
	(blank)	1	56.3	9.6
	All	**126**	**66.3**	**17.0**
Total		**353**	**63.6**	**16.6**

* These students will have needed to do a pre-sessional course based on having a score less than 6.5 on the writing component of the IELTS.

Table 7 repeats the same contingency table analysis, but this time for the IELTS writing component. Similar patterns as in table 6 can be observed. However, the writing scores seem to translate into better study outcomes than the overall IELTS score. Chinese students with an overall IELTS 5.5 (n=22) obtain a mean outcome of 58.5 (table 6), whilst a 5.5 in the Writing component of IELTS (n=83) results in an outcome of 60.8 (table 7). Chinese students with an overall IELTS 6.0 (n=105) obtain a mean outcome of 61.8 (table 6), whilst a 6.0 in the Writing component of IELTS (n=118) results in an outcome of 62.6. The pattern seems to extend to IELTS scores of 6.5, but the number of Chinese students coming in with a 6.5 in the Writing component is quite small (n=10). Inferential statistical analyses would be needed to confirm the pattern. However, if confirmed, the pattern suggests that the IELTS Writing component is a stronger predictor of study outcomes than the overall IELTS score.

More generally, it seems that MIE's admissions criteria for IELTS 6.5, and especially the requirement of having a 6.5 in the IELTS writing component, is justified.

Table 7: Outcomes related to IELTS Writing scores

IELTS Writing	Group	Count	CoreMean	SimMean
5	China	1	61.8	22.0
	All	**1**	**61.8**	**22.0**
5.5	China	83	60.8	15.9
	Other	5	63.4	15.1
	UK	1	61.3	17.9
	All	**89**	**61.0**	**15.8**
6.0	China	118	62.6	16.8
	Other	3	67.7	15.4
	UK	2	57.4	11.6
	All	**123**	**62.6**	**16.6**
6.5	China	10	66.7	16.1
	Other	3	68.6	20.8
	All	**13**	**67.1**	**17.2**
7.0	China	1	66.5	13.4
	All	**1**	**66.5**	**13.4**
Above 7.0 or no IELTS required)	China	30	62.9	16.6
	Other	57	67.2	18.3
	UK	38	68.4	15.2
	(blank)	1	56.3	9.6
	All	**126**	**66.3**	**17.0**
Total		**353**	**63.6**	**16.6**

Attending Pre-sessional English Language Course

Table 8 compares the mean marks obtained on 60 credits of core courses by the 2015 and 2016 students according to whether they attended a pre-sessional English language course, and if they did, how many weeks this course lasted. The only group for which there are enough students across the different conditions (no pre-sessional, 5-week pre-sessional and 10-week pre-sessional) is the Chinese group. The Chinese students who did not attend a pre-sessional course, meaning they satisfied the IELTS requirement of 6.5 overall, and 6.5 in the IELTS writing component, obtained a mean score of 62.9 (n=30) in their core course units. For those that attended a 5-week pre-sessional unit, the mean mark obtained was 62.7 (n=121) – a small difference from those not needing a pre-sessional course. Students doing a 5-week pre-sessional course tend to be those with IELTS scores between 6.0 and 6.5 (see table 6 and 7). This additional analysis suggests that coming in with an IELTS score of 6.0 – 6.5, and then doing a 5-week English language pre-sessional course unit, appears to result 'close-to-average' performance on the MA programmes. This adds validity to the MIE admissions policy, and suggests that a 5-week pre-sessional course is the right admissions condition for these students. The pattern is somewhat different for Chinese students who did a 10-week pre-sessional course. These students will have come to Manchester with an IELTS score of between 5.5 and 6.0, and they obtained a mean mark on their core units of 61.2 (n=91). Additional analyses of statistical significance and power are needed, but the difference as compared to those doing a 5-week pre-sessional course appears to be considerable. This

suggests, then, that doing a 10-week pre-sessional course does not mitigate fully these students' lower initial IELTS scores.

Table 8: Outcomes related to attendance on Pre-sessional language course

Length of Pre-sessional	Group	Count	CoreMean	SimMean
No pre-sessional course	China	30	62.9	16.6
	Other	56	67.3	18.4
	UK	38	68.4	15.2
	(blank)	1	56.3	9.6
	All	**125**	**66.3**	**17.0**
3 Weeks	China	1	67.3	13.5
	Other	1	64.5	15.5
	All	**2**	**65.9**	**14.5**
5 Weeks	China	121	62.7	16.4
	Other	5	68.1	17.8
	UK	2	57.4	11.6
	All	**128**	**62.8**	**16.4**
10 Weeks	China	91	61.2	16.4
	Other	6	64.2	15.9
	UK	1	61.3	17.9
	All	**98**	**61.4**	**16.3**
Total		**353**	**63.6**	**16.6**

Conclusion, Suggested Actions and Actions Taken

Admissions criteria for the MA Education (International) and MA DTCE have, for the 2019/2020 intake, been adjusted. Note, these changes were not driven by the CHERIL project findings alone. They were driven, also, by the larger agenda to slow down admissions numbers early in the cycle, so to extend the opportunity for admission to a wider range of students, from different countries and backgrounds, later in the cycle. That is, we wanted to 'slow' the recruitment from the Chinese market, and hence achieve more diverse cohorts of MA students. The main contribution of the CHERIL research was to ensure that the continued, but slowed down, recruitment from the Chinese market led to the recruitment of students more likely to succeed in our Masters programmes.

The admissions criteria for the two above mentioned programmes have been adjusted as follows:

- Requirement that applicants have either a degree in an education-related subject, or a degree from a top University*, or one year of education-related post-degree professional experience.

* For Chinese applicants this is operationalized through a list of top 350 Universities held by the SEED admissions office. It is unclear, as yet, how this criterion will be operationalized for non-Chinese applicants.

The first of these criteria was a direct outcome of the CHERIL project (see table 5). The second criterion was an attempt to align with admissions criteria used by other parts of the SEED Masters study provision (other than Education). The third criterion is, in part, shaped by the CHERIL project. Our analysis showed that students delaying their studies for one or more years after their first degree did not, necessarily, do better in their MA studies. However, the MA curriculum development teams felt that if post-degree experience was education-related this criterion was justified.

More generally, the CHERIL project findings suggest the following admissions-related conclusions:

- The IELTS admission criteria of 6.5 overall and 6.5 for the writing component seem justified.
- Attendance in pre-sessional English language courses seems to be effective for students coming in with an IELTS profile in the region of 6.0 to 6.5, and hence doing a 5-week pre-sessional course. By contrast, for students with lower initial IELTS scores, hence doing a 10-week pre-sessional course, the results are less convincing.

The University Language Centre has, for the 2018/2019 intake, changed the pre-sessional programme to include 6 and 12-week pre-sessional course (rather than the previous 5 and 10 week options). The CHERIL project did not have input on this decision, but our data supports change of some kind. Analysis of data based on these new arrangements would be needed to assess the effect of the lengthening of the in-sessional periods.

Initial Findings: The Survey (Research Question 2)

Research Question 2: *What are these international MA students' perceptions of existing study support?*

This research question was answered by way of a survey (this appears in an appendix to the enclosed survey report). This section outlines some of the key themes arising from this student survey, and the possible implications for practice in MIE arising from those findings. A detailed report on the analysis of the survey data appears in an enclosure to this document.

<u>Study Skills and In-sessional Academic Support</u>

There are many opportunities available to students both within MIE (study skills and MIE-specific in-sessional support) and more generally through the ULC. However, it would seem that there is overlap between these types of provision, and it is not always clear to students how the different types of provision might complement and feed into each other, or what type of support might be most applicable and helpful to different types of students. This last point seems particularly pertinent to home students who generally had low attendance at study skills sessions, not perceiving them as relevant or beneficial.

Study skills sessions started too late in the course. This was partly due to timetabling issues and late allocation of TAs (practical issues which were addressed in the 2017/2018 academic year). However, there were also questions raised about the content and relevance of those sessions to students, particularly with regard to perceived overlap with other resources and courses (particularly the pre-sessional courses). There was also the suggestion that the study skills content be more integrated with course content. For those who did find the sessions relevant and helpful, the most-referred-to-benefit related to different aspects of academic writing, suggesting that this is a key area of concern to our international students.

These findings suggest that more clarity is needed on how the different types of support available fit together so that students can identify the ones most suitable to their needs as early as possible in the semester. There may also be lessons in terms of how we use the time of Graduate Teaching Assistants (an increasingly common practice) productively and purposefully in the future. There may also be an argument for a more intentional embedding of study skills into course content and materials.

One-to-one Tutorials

There was a generally positive response to the role that one-to-one tutorials, with academic members of staff, had played in improving students' academic work through feedback given. The implication is that students appreciated the role these tutorials played in the process of assignment writing. The tutorials also played a part in building confidence, giving reassurance, personal support, and developing relationships between students and lecturers.

All programmes offered tutorials to students, and every programme had students who said they had had at least one meeting with a tutor. However, there were 41 students who said they had not had an individual tutorial. There seems to be a gap between opportunity and take-up; tutorials are offered but not all students take the opportunity to have one. There are also questions as to the difference in take-up and whether students prefer course specific tutorials (which are possibly more assignment related) and/or programme specific tutorials (which might offer more generic academic support).

There is a general consensus however that these individual meetings are very important to students and they want more of them. The question, then, is how to provide more opportunities given current resources and workloads, and how to increase take-up on some courses/programmes.

Small Seminar Groups

There were two types of seminar groups run throughout the first semester in the year of the survey. The first were the small seminar groups led by TAs for Theories of Teaching and Learning, and the second type were larger seminar groups alternated with lectures for the Educational Leadership course unit.

The seminars for Theories of Teaching and Learning were well received by students, and appreciated not just for their help with understanding the content of the course, but also for offering a space in which to discuss ideas with other students and the tutor, relate theory to

practice, and develop thinking. According to some students, these seminars also provided assignment support. Unfortunately, we have no record of attendance at these seminars and hence are unable to link these seminars to study outcomes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there was a wide range of attendance patterns across some of these seminar groups, and the reasons for this would require further investigation.

There is a general call for more small groups throughout the MA programmes. Perhaps there is an argument for establishing seminar groups in some of the bigger courses if TA provision is available.

Assignment Support

16 course units were named as having good assignment support and the key common themes arising from the comments given with regards to what students consider to be helpful assignment support included: the quality and usefulness of the feedback received on drafts or outlines; the role and importance of one-to-one tutorials and sessions; the ability of tutors to clarify expectations and requirements for the assignment; and offer guidance that supports and stimulates thinking.

However, each of these themes is also mirrored in the comments that students left regarding how they would like to see assignment support improved. Some students also made practical suggestions about alternative ways of structuring assignments (including a presentation element, and/or dividing the assignment into smaller, graded parts rather than one large one). Assignment support was also linked to academic writing, and the implication is that students need more support in what critical writing looks like at MA level in an MIE assignment.

It would seem that the current provision for assignment support is perceived as sufficient and helpful by many students, but not by others. The challenge, then, is how to ensure that assignment support for all courses meets the expectations and needs of the majority of students. Perhaps it would be helpful to look at how assignments are structured within programmes and ensure that there is a variety in both the format and end product of assignments. Perhaps there is also an argument for ensuring a spread of deadlines for outlines, drafts and so on throughout the first semester.

Opportunities for Sharing and Communication

Students want more opportunities to share with each other, with tutors, and others, for both academic and social purposes. There were particular concerns from shy students who struggle to ask questions in class, and to meet and mix with others. Perhaps this suggests that academic and social needs cannot be separated easily and that to ensure the well-being of all students, MIE needs to address ways to encourage and help those students who struggle more in this area. Perhaps this area also links to suggestions for more practice-based opportunities for students, and although placements might not be either desirable or an option for these courses, the university has many opportunities for volunteering that might be brought to the students' notice.

Other Aspects

The intercultural simulation, done with two of the MA programmes early in the year, is highly rated by all students who have had the opportunity to do it. It provided an opportunity for sharing with, and getting to know, those from other programmes, highlighted some of the expectations for MA students, and was instrumental in encouraging some students to ask for help early on rather than hide their needs. It appears to be a helpful exercise to do at the beginning of the year, and consideration should be given as to whether it should be rolled out across all school MA programmes.

It seems that not all students felt that they had received sufficient and specific information during induction week about various aspects of the course, and this has implications for the content and focus of induction week and the first week or so of the course.

Conclusion, Suggested Actions and Actions Taken

Actions are underlined.

Study Skills:

- Move study skills forward – possibly beginning in induction week with optional library visits, information on how to find resources, introduction to Learning Essentials, University Apps and so on. As a direct result of the CHERIL research, action in this direction was taken in the 2017-2018 academic year.
- Make it clear (possibly providing a visual pathway) how the different types of academic support available (MIE Study Skills, ULC in-sessional courses and so on) link together so students can make informed choices about the sorts of support that will best meet their needs. This would include the nature and timings of all support available. This could be used very early in the course, possibly during an initial meeting with academic advisors (see 9.2), to identify needs and guide students towards the support they need. We intend to act on this for the 2018/2019 intake.
- A more embedded and collaborative approach to study skills, where the content of those sessions are developed collaboratively by all staff, and where study skills are also embedded into each course (see EDUC70021 for an example of how this might happen). Action has already been taken. Specifically, a new compulsory course unit for all MA programmes (except MA TESOL) has been designed (EDUC60111), and this unit is closely linked to the study skills provision, including having the same Graduate Teaching Assistants assigned to both this new unit and the study skills provision.

One-to-one Tutorials

- Consider the possibility of assigning an academic advisor to each student at the beginning of the year. This may help with diagnosing any special support needs early in the year, and provide a reference point for students throughout their MA. Action on this has been slow. We struggle to put in place meaningful 'academic advisor' structures; the large number of students that need to be assigned to each staff member prohibits meaningful one-to-one interaction.

- Further investigation needed into what happens in individual tutorials, what exactly students find most helpful about them, and the value added by them. No action has been planned as yet – this might be a good student project (MA or PhD).

Small Group Seminars:

- Consider using small group seminars (run by GTAs) for more of the larger course units, and offer course specific training for the GTAs on these courses. This will be explored in more detail for the 2018/2019 academic year. GTA training takes place in October every year.
- Further investigation into attendance patterns and the reasons behind these patterns for small group seminars. We will try to put in place a more effective attendance monitoring system in 2018/2019.

Assignment Support:

- Ensure that at least one course module per MA programme offers an alternative assignment structure to the more traditional, one long essay at the end of the semester approach. This could be in the form of a presentation followed by a written rationale/text (see for example EDUC70090), or a two or three-part assignment that gives students the opportunity to receive grades and feedback on their work earlier on in the semester (see for example EDUC70021). Encouragement to programme teams to explore alternative assignment formats is ongoing.
- Critical reading and writing skills should be embedded into assignment support and/or vice versa. This is already happening (EDUC70021) or beginning to happen (EDUC60111).
- Further investigation into the different types of assignment support currently on offer and how students' expectations are realised or not through the support given. This might require further research; it is again a possible student project (MA or PhD).

Opportunities for Sharing and Communication:

- Plan an events programme (trips, social events) for students throughout the year. Perhaps staff could also attend where possible. In 2016/2017 more such events happened than in previous years, but with a 'dip' again in 2017/2018. Organisning such events takes up a lot of academic staff time; we may wish to explore how programme administration can aid with the organisation of events.
- Encourage student led study groups. This has not yet been explored.
- Set up a session with some university societies or programmes during induction week to inform students about opportunities to meet and work with others while at university e.g. Volunteering and Community Engagement Team, The International Society and so on. This is gradually happening; e.g. talks by the student union and volunteer offices during induction week.

Other Ideas:

- That all students on all MA programmes do the intercultural simulation. This simulation was extended to one further MA programme in the 2017/2018 year, and we hope to have this for all our MA students in the 2018/2019 academic year.
- Create a short 'film' around the theme of 'Advice I would give myself if I was starting the MA in September', or something similar, to create a link between outgoing and incoming students, and provide an insight into what it means to study on an MA course from the perspective of other students. Such a film has been created by the CHERIL project (Susan Dawson). It was trialed in the 2017/2018 academic year, and we will use this more fully in the 2018/2019 induction programme.
- Sessions during induction week that provide details for all course units and optional study support available to students. Already happening, but this can be made more systematic in the 2018/2019 academic year.
- Possible session during induction or early in study skills on what it means to be a reflective and independent learner on an MA course. We have not yet acted on this.

Challenges to Moving Forward

Challenges that we face in the implementation of changes, and continuing areas of good practice, include:

- Changes in staffing in leading roles: Directors of T&L, as well as Discipline Heads, tend to be for 3 year tenures only. This is often too short to make more fundamental changes. Programme Directors tend to be in post a bit longer – however, these staff members usually have full teaching and research loads, and the time they can devote to managing their programme is somewhat limited.
- Reliance on Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), which may or may not have teaching experience/backgrounds. The GTAs are all PhD students in Education-related disciplines. They do not all have teaching experience, they seldom have experience of higher education, and their experience is sometimes from different educational cultures. Thus, the use of GTAs cannot replace the expertise of permanent academic members of staff, and hence we need to be careful not to over-use GTAs.
- Lack of embeddedness of academic advisor system. This is an ongoing challenge. Academic staff members' workloads are too demanding for them, in addition, to offer meaningful, individualised academic advisor support. We are exploring whether GTAs can be used more in this role – however, see the previous point about not over-using GTAs.
- Lack of focus on Teaching & Learning in the University. The University rewards research performance with promotion; there is not the same reward for exceptional teaching and learning. The University is trying to innovate, and there have been a lot of initiatives to change the culture. However, promotion on a 'teaching & learning' or 'scholarship' route is subject to frequently shifting expectations and understanding within the University. More clarity might enable academic staff with teaching & learning interest to devote more time and energy to this crucial aspect of University life.

- Increasing student numbers every year, with staffing increases naturally lagging somewhat behind. This has changed the study experience of our students significantly over the past few years. However and encouragingly, under current MIE leadership, the situation seems better than before.

Overall Summary and Conclusion

This CHERIL project may be seen as a contribution to the second goal in the Manchester 2020 strategic plan: to deliver an 'outstanding learning and student experience' (The University of Manchester 2015, p.16). It has done so by examining the way we recruit students onto the MA programmes, the perceived needs of our MA students, and the academic and student satisfaction outcomes we achieve. Going forward, the CHERIL project will help enable the recruitment of high quality students and improve the support we offer them to succeed.

The robustness of the research reported herein was affected by the challenges we faced in obtaining data for our database. In particular, the University does not have a central information store that includes all of the types of data we wished to include. Consequently, we had to combine data from Blackboard, the University Language Centre, the SEED admissions office, and the MIE programme administration office. This was a substantial data collection and manipulation challenge. Moreover, we were not allowed, by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), to combine the different sources of data we had collected into a single large database. In addition, UREC required the final large database to be devoid of any primary identifying information (names or student ID numbers). We satisfied the UREC requirement by having a data engineer from the University Directorate of Student Experience merge the different sources of data, and anonymising the final database before it was returned to us. Thus, we overcame the challenge, but it delayed the project work by about 3 months.

We believe the research has been innovative, both in its success in building a unique (to the University of Manchester) database, and in the various ways forward that we are able to suggest.

Through dissemination at local events (HE Research Education Showcase held on 07/07/17), we found that a team in Public Health are doing similar research as ours. We are exploring areas of collaboration.

We have spent most of the funds available to us in our budget. There is a small amount of money left, we believe, for attending a conference in the coming year. We will make a decision in this regard in the next few months.

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