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**Exploring the widening participation-internationalisation  
nexus: Evidence from current theory and practice**

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Manuscripts

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3 **Exploring the widening participation-internationalisation nexus:**  
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5 **Evidence from current theory and practice**  
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8  
9 *Abstract*  
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12 At the forefront of many UK universities' current strategies is a commitment to ongoing  
13 processes of internationalisation; continued progress in becoming increasingly international  
14 also sits alongside adherence to policies and practices relating to widening access and  
15 participation for home students, to achieve greater equity in terms of who can experience and  
16 participate meaningfully in university education. However, it could be argued that these two  
17 areas of focus are somewhat disparate, even at odds, with the former often being somewhat  
18 associated with revenue generation, and the latter aiming to meet goals of fairness in society.  
19 In this paper, I explore the rationale and scope for UK universities bringing these two seemingly  
20 disparate agendas more in line, with a view to achieving greater equity in the access and  
21 participation of both local and global cohorts of students in UK universities. A critical  
22 evaluation of theoretical and empirical literature exploring these two agendas elucidates the  
23 parallels in the ways both international and non-traditional home students encounter the  
24 university domain, both from a general perspective, and with a specific focus on linguistic  
25 challenges faced by these student groups. Concluding remarks outline possible directions  
26 which might better address the wide-reaching aims of addressing and nurturing the widening  
27 access/participation-internationalisation nexus.  
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50 *Keywords*  
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53 internationalisation; widening access; widening participation; student experience  
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- 57 1. *Introduction – why consider widening access/participation and internationalisation in*  
58 *tandem?*  
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3 This paper reviews recent literature in two areas of higher education (hereafter, HE) research,  
4 namely internationalisation of higher education institutions (hereafter, HEIs), and widening  
5 access to and participation in HE; this exploration is intended as a mechanism for  
6 understanding the relationship between the two. Opening this nexus up for reflection and  
7 debate is timely, given increasing calls for the social justice of internationalisation to be  
8 addressed in policy and practice. Maringe et al. (2013: 34) argue that future research into  
9 internationalisation agendas needs to consider how western universities can better ensure  
10 commitment to ‘equity, social justice and fairness’, which can be read as rationale for  
11 considering the widening access/participation-internationalisation nexus. Similarly, Robson et  
12 al. (2018) uphold the importance of conceptualising and enacting internationalisation with  
13 ‘integrity’ and morality, in order for it to be a positive force in HE. They explore the notion of  
14 Internationalisation at Home (IaH) specifically, on the understanding that home students who  
15 do not, or are unable to, seek study opportunities abroad, can also benefit substantially from  
16 ‘internationalised experiences’ in their own context (i.e. making the global, local). As a  
17 complement to their work, this paper seeks to investigate the rationale for and value of shifting  
18 the until-now typically local concern of widening access/participation in HE to a more global  
19 context. Whiteford et al.’s (2013) review of HE literature on academic standards from a range  
20 of contexts worldwide draws conclusions about the importance of extending inclusivity  
21 agendas beyond national borders so they have a more international scope, despite  
22 acknowledging the tension between commitment to local social inclusion agendas, and  
23 perceived status on the global HE stage (given pervasive beliefs that social inclusion practices  
24 can lead to a reduction in an HEI’s perceived quality/standing). Despite these challenges, they  
25 nonetheless cite the following potential benefits to students, HEIs, and society:

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28 The egalitarian view of a social inclusion agenda in higher education related to the  
29 internationalisation of higher education is that it: prepares global citizens; prepares  
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3 graduates to be globally mobile; and delivers a net social and economic benefit. More  
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5 importantly, a social inclusion agenda in higher education ultimately has the potential to  
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7 enhance our collective ability to tackle issues of global significance through an active  
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9 valuing of diverse knowledge systems. (Whiteford et al., 2013: 305)  
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14 The main reason that comparing and contrasting internationalisation agendas, discourses and  
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16 policies with those relating to widening access/participation may initially appear  
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18 counterintuitive is that the latter are funded and enacted strictly at a national level – the focus  
19  
20 is very much on improving equality and diversity (in terms of socioeconomic status; ethnic  
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22 minority status; gender; sexual identity/orientation; care leavers – to name only a few relevant  
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24 groupings) among those classed as ‘home’ students. Internationalisation agendas remain firmly  
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26 distinct, and often relate to efforts to increase numbers of fee-paying students from around the  
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28 world – the term ‘diversity’ within such agendas typically refers to nationality, and it could be  
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30 argued that national groups of students are often considered as homogenous entities by  
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32 universities, rather than there being an appreciation of their inevitable heterogeneity within.  
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38 Alongside this somewhat uncritical view of ‘diversity’ within internationalisation agendas is  
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40 the trend towards HEIs’ corporatisation, through which it is argued universities are becoming  
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42 ever-more like businesses, and students like consumers. Commentators have cautioned that  
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44 continued pursuit of such ideals will likely lead to even worsened inequality and inaccessibility  
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46 in HE (e.g. Davidson, 2015: 210). It is precisely these issues within trends of  
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48 internationalisation of HE that make it so essential for there to now be debate about how  
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50 widening access/participation ideals (as a starting point) and actions (as an end goal) should be  
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52 incorporated, to strive towards greater social justice and equality within all spheres of HE, both  
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54 in spite of and indeed because of the differential financial relationship that universities have  
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56 with widening access/participation and internationalisation agendas, and the students that fall  
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3 within these two categories. Home students from widening access/participation backgrounds,  
4 and international students, in all probability come from disparate ends of the financial  
5 spectrum, and represent extremes in terms of an HEI's financial responsibility, or indeed gain,  
6 respectively (markedly so in a context such as the Scottish HE domain, where home students  
7 are eligible for free tertiary education). While accepting the major challenges that these  
8 financial realities present, this paper nonetheless intends to make a case for identifying links  
9 between the two agendas, as a way of striving towards greater overall equity and fairness in  
10 HE.  
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## 21 22 23 2. *Methods*

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26 An iterative, emergent approach was taken to this review of literature, where broad concepts  
27 from a range of previous theoretical and empirical literature were reviewed and integrated so  
28 as to glean new holistic meaning, therefore establishing original insight (Gough & Thomas,  
29 2012: 52-54). Again coherent with Robson et al. (2018), whose interview data with university  
30 stakeholders point to the importance of internationalisation being a 'transformative' force  
31 within an institution, so too does this review have at its core the goal of taking a transformative  
32 approach, namely empowerment of under-represented groups and investigation of inequality  
33 (Oliver et al., 2012: 76).  
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46 Initially, literature from the past two decades which took a critical stance on either  
47 internationalisation or widening access/participation in any HE context was sought. Once the  
48 output from the initial literature search had been thoroughly reviewed and evaluated,  
49 subsequent stages of literature searching were conducted, principally to follow up on sources  
50 that had been cited in the first collection of papers (be they empirical or theoretical works  
51 offering more depth on the issues covered). The overall aim was to be *purposive* rather than  
52 *exhaustive*, presenting an in-depth coverage and synthesis of particularly pertinent literature,  
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3 rather than including everything ever written on the topics of interest (Brunton et al., 2012:  
4 114). The intention was to focus on papers that may come from disparate perspectives or  
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6 contexts, but that had at their core an interest in social justice, fairness, and inclusivity in HE,  
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8 to infer and interpret potential overlap between the two principal topics. The aim was not to  
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10 conduct a meta-analysis of like papers, but to get a holistic overview of key patterns, trends,  
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12 and conceptualisations of the two main areas.  
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18 The specific questions I sought to address are as follows:  
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21  What overlap exists between conceptualisations of widening access/participation, and  
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23 internationalisation?  
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27 What scope is there for addressing equality of access and participation among  
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29 international cohorts?  
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33 What parallels exist in the HE experiences of international students, and those coming  
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35 from a widening access/participation route?  
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38  In addressing these, I explore conceptualisations and related policies and practices of  
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40 internationalisation and widening access/participation, focusing on emergent overlap between  
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42 the bodies of literature. To further explore them in tandem, I then problematise the notion of  
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44 diversity, an established linchpin of current strategies proposed by many HEIs, exploring how  
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46 it has been conceptualised and applied to internationalisation and widening  
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48 access/participation. This provides a foundation for outlining the striking parallels in the HE  
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50 experiences of international and non-traditional home students, culminating in a focus on  
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52 linguistic aspects of these experiences, which represents the belief that much experience of and  
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54 engagement with education is necessarily mediated through language; interestingly, it is within  
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3 the domain of linguistics/language education that most *explicit* references to the widening  
4 access/participation nexus appear to be located.  
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### 8 9 *3. Emergent themes*

#### 10 11 12 *3.1 Operationalising and problematising key concepts*

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15 A logical starting point is exploring how both internationalisation and widening  
16 access/participation have been defined, theorised, criticised, and researched, to establish what  
17 overlaps can be perceived between the two domains.  
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##### 23 24 *3.1.1 Understanding internationalisation*

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27 To understand current internationalisation agendas and practices, it is helpful to first engage  
28 with explorations of what role and purpose should be enacted by the HE domain. Should it  
29 fulfil a private good? A public good? Both? Empirical work investigating universities' stated  
30 missions (seminal research being accredited to Morphew and associates) has often been guided  
31 by theoretical work from Labaree (1997), who identifies 'democratic equality', 'social  
32 efficiency' and 'social mobility' as possible purposes for education, and therefore aims that  
33 institutions can work towards:  
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45 These goals differ across several dimensions: the extent to which they portray education  
46 as a public or private good, the extent to which they understand education as preparation  
47 for political or market roles, and the differing perspectives on education that arise  
48 depending on one's particular location in the social structure. (Labaree, 1997: 41)  
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55 Analysis of college viewbooks (Hartley & Morphew, 2008) and university websites (Saichaie  
56 & Morphew, 2014) has shown that institutions tend to focus on representations of their  
57 commitment to the private good, rather than public. Particularly pertinent is Saichaie and  
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3 Morphew's (2014: 524) claim that 'equal access' is something largely overlooked in university  
4 websites. Similarly, Stensaker (2015: 105-6) argues that researchers in this field have been  
5 raising concerns about the need for HEIs to demonstrate, and fulfil, greater commitment to  
6 goals aligned with the public good throughout the second half of the twentieth century. One  
7 might conclude that these findings on HEIs' self-representation and self-promotion reflect their  
8 greater prioritising of goals which work towards the private good, rather than the public. If this  
9 is indeed the case, then it might follow that continuing to promote internationalisation agendas  
10 in their current guise (i.e., based largely on economic goals, with international students as  
11 revenue generators) would be more of a focus for HEIs, than would be exploring how such  
12 agendas could better be enacted to address their responsibility towards social justice and equal  
13 access ideals.  
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30 Helping shape an understanding of how universities see students, and their responsibility  
31 towards them, Saichaie and Morphew make an interesting point regarding the 'social  
32 efficiency' and 'social mobility' goals within Labaree's framework:  
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38 [...] social efficiency is concerned with equipping students for the needs of society  
39 while social mobility is linked to individual attainment, or helping students get ahead  
40 in our society. The difference is student as worker versus student as customer. Where  
41 the student is worker, the benefits are collective or public, as society benefits from the  
42 production of skilled workers. Where the student is customer, the benefits are private  
43 and contribute toward the student's certification and advancement. (2014: 524)  
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52 This notion of 'student as customer' has been discussed, and explored empirically, within the  
53 field of HE internationalisation in recent years. Jiang (2008: 348) provides detail about the  
54 predominantly economically-driven internationalisation agendas throughout the Anglophone  
55 world, and how international students have come to represent little more than income  
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3 generators (as noted above); Hoang and Rojas-Lizana (2015), talking particularly about the  
4 Australian context, agree that the substantial fees international students are charged have  
5 become a main revenue source for HEIs, and in turn there is 'less [focus] on traditional civic  
6 mission of higher education as teaching great thinkers, human development and creating "non-  
7 utilitarian" knowledge (Ashburn, 2010)' (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015: 4). Davidson (2015)  
8 points out that this turn towards the commodification of education, with students as consumers  
9 (as well as, he argues, their parents who are likely funding the studies), has empowered them  
10 to vocalise any dissatisfaction with the eventual educational offering. This leads to a situation  
11 where those who can pay have the power to access, and negotiate with, this commodity; those  
12 who cannot, are perhaps in less of a position to do so, which again indicates an apparently  
13 strong link between HE commodification, and issues of access and power. Jiang (2008) argues  
14 that key supporters of inherently inequitable internationalisation processes are western  
15 educational, and even political, institutions (Jiang, 2008: 352), often forcing individuals in  
16 other parts of the world to be complicit in furthering such trends by buying into the notion of  
17 western educational elitism. In line with Davidson (2015), Jiang further claims that as long as  
18 we treat knowledge as a commodity, education will continue to move away from making  
19 contributions to the public good (2008: 352). It is not hard to see how this parallels elitist power  
20 structures within national contexts (taking the United Kingdom as an example), that widening  
21 access/participation policies and activities work to overcome.

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24 In addition to theorising HE's wider purpose and responsibilities, internationalisation and its  
25 potential interaction with widening access/participation practices can be explored through the  
26 lens of literature on institutional identity, and specifically, conflicting institutional identities.  
27 Papadimitriou and Ramirez (2015) raise the possibility of conflicting facets of HEIs'  
28 institutional identities leading to powerful internal struggle, positing that competing identities  
29 may likely exert a negative impact. Also relevant is their claim about the importance of

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3 ensuring universities are being considered as closely connected to ‘the environmental  
4 conditions in which they operate’ (Papadimitriou & Ramirez, 2015: 101): for the current  
5 questions under consideration, this would refer to wider trajectories of globalisation which  
6 impact upon forces of HEIs’ internationalisation, and how these interact with widening  
7 access/participation policies and activities, which themselves sit within wider discourses of  
8 working towards greater social equality.  
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12 The important question to raise is the extent to which simultaneous internationalisation-  
13 widening access/participation commitments being made by an institution lead to a state of  
14 internal conflict (Stensaker, 2015: 109). It should be borne in mind that an institution  
15 embodying multiple identities is not necessarily negative – various aims which may suit  
16 numerous stakeholders respectively could actually contribute to an institution’s strength. When  
17 there are too many identities for an institution to effectively reconcile, however, problems can  
18 arise in sufficiently satisfying them all (for detailed discussion, see Pratt and Foreman, 2000).  
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20 Based on the findings of their work on organisational missions and visions, and employees’  
21 perceptions thereof, Kopaneva and Sias (2015: 20) argue for the importance of an institutional  
22 vision being shared among different strata of employees, and between employees and the  
23 institution itself; in the context of the widening access/participation-internationalisation nexus,  
24 this might apply not necessarily to shared visions among employees, but rather, shared visions  
25 (i.e. common goals and aims) among different policy strands within an HEI.  
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49 A final point on competing aims and identities relates to the local and global. Findings from  
50 Agnew (2012) and Trahar and Hyland (2011), qualitative studies on university stakeholders’  
51 perceptions of internationalisation ideologies and practices in the US and UK respectively,  
52 indicate beliefs that it is difficult, if not impossible, to make a sustained commitment to both  
53 the local and the global – Agnew’s participants report a belief in a ‘false dichotomy of serving  
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3 either the local or the global community' (2012: 473). In line with such researchers, I argue for  
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5 effecting a paradigm shift to move past notions of 'mutual exclusivity' (Agnew, 2012: 487) of  
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7 the local (here, as it relates to widening access/participation agendas) and of the global (here,  
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9 as it relates to internationalisation agendas), to instead understand shared ground among them.  
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11 Such a move would be consistent with arguments that 21<sup>st</sup> century HEIs should be working to  
12  
13 bring concerns at the local and global levels together harmoniously, so students can develop a  
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15 sense of 'being both a member of a local community, a citizen of a nation, and someone with  
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17 a deep concern for people in other places, with respect for other cultures and tolerance of  
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19 differences' (Zhao, 2016: 11).  
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### 25 *3.1.2 Understanding widening access/ participation*

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28 For those involved in widening access/participation, it is uncontroversial to propose that HEIs'  
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30 responsibility in committing to equality and diversity does not end with ensuring parity of  
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32 access, but extends to participation throughout one's time as a student, and finally to ultimate  
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34 attainment in terms of degree awarded. Not only is this commitment vital for policies and  
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36 activities enacted for home students, but it is important for HEIs to ensure engagement with  
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38 these issues as they relate to international students as well. Based on findings relating to lower  
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40 levels of participation and attainment of Chinese students in UK HEIs, Iannelli and Huang  
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42 highlight how institutions should demonstrate responsibility for ensuring students' meaningful  
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44 engagement in their learning experience, rather than just reaping benefits from fee-paying  
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46 students:  
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52 HE institutions are becoming more and more aware that these financial gains cannot  
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54 come without changes in the academic system. It has become imperative that  
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56 universities provide induction programmes, facilitate integration, rethink their  
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58 pedagogical approaches and provide cultural expertise. (2015: 819)  
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3 This echoes Richardson's argument for a more holistic approach to supporting students from  
4 non-traditional backgrounds, based on his evidence of lower degree classification attainment  
5 of ethnic minority students; I would argue that the following point holds as true for international  
6 students as it does for home students from ethnic minority backgrounds:  
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13 [... ] institutions of higher education need to monitor the academic attainment of  
14 students from all ethnic groups at both the course and programme level and to provide  
15 them with guidance and support to ensure that they can study in an appropriate and  
16 effective manner, and thereby have an equal chance of bringing their studies to a  
17 successful conclusion. (Richardson, 2008: 48)  
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26 Richardson has since claimed it 'ethically dubious' (2015: 288) for HEIs to provide access to  
27 any student (again, his focus being those from ethnic minority backgrounds) without also  
28 ensuring provision of appropriate support to facilitate successful completion of the programme  
29 of study. I again propose that this is equally applicable to international students – to enable  
30 them to embark upon study without providing thorough support and guidance (academic or  
31 pastoral), tailored according to an understanding of commonly expressed needs from  
32 individuals in such a cohort, would indeed be unethical. Consistency in findings reported by  
33 Richardson (2008; 2015) on UK students from ethnic minority backgrounds, and Iannelli and  
34 Huang (2015) on Chinese international students in the UK, in terms of lower attainment  
35 compared to more 'traditional' groups (i.e. 'White', and 'home', students respectively in each  
36 study), provides further rationale for seeking to explore the complex interconnectivity that lies  
37 between internationalisation and widening access/participation agendas in UK HEIs.  
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### 54 *3.2 Conceptualising diversity in HE*

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3 To further understand internationalisation and widening access/participation it is useful to  
4 focus on diversity, a concept integral to both, and at the heart of exploring their overlap. A  
5 major underpinning of the integration of widening access/participation and internationalisation  
6 agendas is understanding ‘diversity among a student body’ as something that goes far beyond  
7 just ‘a range of nationalities’. Hartley and Morphew’s (2008) content analysis of US college  
8 viewbooks indicated that this narrow view of diversity is represented in such promotional  
9 material – these HEIs tend to present an internationally diverse student body, but not  
10 necessarily one that is diverse in terms of race or ethnicity (Hartley & Morphew, 2008: 686-7).  
11 They explicitly comment that they encountered hardly any representations or even mentions of  
12 ‘non-traditional students’ (ibid).  
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27 Viewing complexity within diversity from another perspective leads us to the question of  
28 diversity within groups of international students from the same country, again, students who  
29 may often be perceived as forming a homogenous group. Richardson makes the following point  
30 about understanding the heterogeneous reality of any national context:  
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38 In most countries, there is a dominant ethnic group together with one or more minority  
39 groups, and structural inequalities impair the educational aspirations and the  
40 educational achievement of people from ethnic minorities. (2015: 286)  
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46 He raises this on the basis of his work on inequality in attainment in UK HE according to ethnic  
47 groups – such lack of equality, he argues, is of course likely evident in all national contexts,  
48 and this is essential to keep in mind when considering groups of students from various countries  
49 who emigrate to embark upon HE study. It would be erroneous to overlook such issues of  
50 equality and diversity that inevitably exist in the home contexts of international students as  
51 well, given increasing willingness to acknowledge and address them among cohorts of home  
52 students (there is a vast body of literature that compares participation and attainment of home  
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3 students according to ethnicity – see for example in the UK context Richardson, e.g. 2008,  
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5 2009, on attainment, and 2010 on approaches to learning and attainment; See et al., 2011, 2012,  
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7 on participation; see also Hofman and van den Berg, 2003, on attainment among different  
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9 ethnicity groups in the Netherlands). Furthermore, Richardson (2015) points out that beyond  
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11 ethnicity, issues may also relate to gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, disability and so  
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13 on. Iannelli and Huang emphasise this point in their comments relating specifically to  
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15 socioeconomic status among Chinese students in the UK: they claim that the students that come  
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17 here are those that, typically, are able to self-fund:  
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23 Due to the loosening of restrictions by the Chinese government and the increase in the  
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25 number of wealthy families, who can afford to send their children to study abroad, self-  
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27 sponsored students have increased considerably. In the last 10 years, around 80% of  
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29 Chinese master's students and more than 90% of undergraduate students were self-  
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31 sponsored as they were least likely to receive funding from the Chinese government.  
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34 (2015: 811)  
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38 This means that the Chinese students (and likely also many other national groups in UK HEIs)  
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40 that are accessing HE in the UK are actually only a very limited representation in terms of  
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42 socioeconomic diversity in that country – many students who have the means to travel abroad  
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44 for HE likely exemplify something of a financial elite (see also Vandrick, 2011, on 'students  
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46 of the new global elite'). From a widening access/participation perspective, we could therefore  
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48 say that this somewhat limited diversity within this national group should be addressed – of  
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50 course, the question that remains is how.  
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### 54 55 *3.3 The student experience* 56 57 58 59 60

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3 In outlining the approach to this review, it was stated that at its core was a transformative ethos,  
4 relating ultimately to the empowerment of relevant stakeholders. To this end, it is essential to  
5 focus on evidence from literature relating to the student experience, as further justification for  
6 identifying scope for crossover between widening access/participation and internationalisation  
7 discourses and agendas. Richardson (2015) provides justification for attempting to address  
8 complexity associated with the university experiences of non-traditional home students and  
9 international students alike, acknowledging that, following his own work on differential  
10 attainment according to ethnicity among UK-based students, there is now scope for exploring  
11 ‘academic attainment in (a) international students, (b) students for whom English is a second  
12 language, and (c) students with previous experience of other educational systems’ (2015: 288).

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27 It is important to emphasise that I am not wishing to fall into the trap of viewing any group of  
28 students as homogenous (linking with the discussion above). Furthermore, in covering  
29 problems that certain (groups of) students may encounter, I am not claiming that these problems  
30 are a direct result of their being an international student, for example – rather, I am raising for  
31 debate the intervening factors that might contribute to any difficulties. As Richardson has  
32 noted, with reference to student ethnicity and attainment: ‘[...] ethnicity per se is almost  
33 certainly not the effective variable influencing students’ academic achievement. Rather, it is a  
34 proxy for other factors that are confounded with ethnicity but which have yet to be identified’  
35 (2015: 287).

### 3.3.1 *Establishing parallels*

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Evidence from literature indicates that the underpinning commonality between international  
students on one hand, and non-traditional home students on the other, is the potential for  
mismatch between students’ existing knowledge and expectations, and the reality encountered:  
what knowledge/experiences/qualifications do they arrive with, and to what extent do these



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3 adequately equip them to participate fully in, and successfully complete, their intended  
4 programme of study? Drawing on Bourdieuan notions of ‘academic capital’ (e.g. Bourdieu &  
5 Wacquant, 1992) in their content analysis/critical discourse analysis approach to mission  
6 statements of US universities, Stich and Reeves claim the following:  
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13           [... ] the more academic capital one possesses, the more likely one is to attend and easily  
14 navigate prestigious, high-ranking tier 1 schools that highly value particular types and  
15 quantities of knowledge – an educational narrative that favors a traditional liberal arts  
16 education. Privilege, then, begets privilege, as these individuals become further  
17 immersed into the elite cultures of prestigious institutions and later profit from their  
18 pedigree and credentials. (2016: 117-8)  
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29 The point here is reproduction of privilege: attempting to address such problematic inequity is  
30 precisely the ethos of much widening access/participation work in the UK and elsewhere;  
31 however, it seems this is also an extremely important consideration, given the information from  
32 Iannelli and Huang (2015) above, regarding the somewhat limited representation from across  
33 the socioeconomic spectrum (and likely other spectra) among international students as well.  
34 Iannelli and Huang (2015: 820) raise another pertinent issue regarding the relevance of having  
35 accrued suitable academic capital prior to embarking upon a programme of study as an  
36 international student. On the basis of their findings, they argue that Chinese students who  
37 actually have prior first-hand experience of the UK education system (i.e. those who have  
38 completed the final stages of their secondary schooling, and sat standardised examinations in  
39 the UK), are likely to achieve higher attainment at university, than those without this secondary  
40 schooling experience.  
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57 In the way that newly arrived international students may face challenges in adjusting to  
58 unfamiliar academic systems and demands (see also recent work from Bamber et al., 2019, on  
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3 international students' adjustment to postgraduate study in the UK), it is often the case that  
4 non-traditional home students may too feel themselves insufficiently prepared, given a  
5 (comparative) lack of previous knowledge, experiences and qualifications, that would provide  
6 them with the appropriate quality and quantity of academic capital (as Stich and Reeves argue).  
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13 Brown et al. (2016) raise some valid issues for consideration relating to how non-traditional  
14 students may access, and crucially process, information about HEIs during the decision-making  
15 process about where to apply, and why. They argue that while increasing amounts of  
16 information about HEIs, and the application process, is made available online, thereby  
17 improving overall equality of access among different groups of students, there still may exist  
18 inequality in how this information becomes processed. They come to the following conclusion  
19 based on their interview data with students from typically underrepresented groups in the US:  
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31 [...] first generation and low-income students may be less likely to have the digital  
32 literacy skills needed to contextualize and translate this information to their own  
33 situation. Thus while access to information may be unbounded, access to the kind of  
34 knowledgeable translators that can help students make sense of and apply information  
35 is critical. (Brown et al., 2016: 112)  
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44 I propose that similar issues with processing available information may also be encountered by  
45 many international students – the reasons may be linguistic (perhaps their English language  
46 skills are not yet at a level to be able to confidently navigate the information about applying to  
47 and studying at HEIs in other countries), or indeed, it may be a similar issue reported by Brown  
48 et al. (2016), that international students without family members who have already experienced  
49 studying abroad may feel devoid of a strong support network of 'knowledgeable translators'  
50 who can expertly guide them through the process. Many HE practitioners have likely seen how  
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3 a lack of prior familial experience with studying abroad can for some students negatively  
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5 impact their academic progress, and their emotional wellbeing and resilience.  
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9 The notion of ‘processing information’ may not only apply to students being able to understand  
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11 systems for applying to, and engaging with, HEIs, but also to their capacity for engagement  
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13 with the academic content they encounter. Richardson (2008) points out that students from  
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15 disadvantaged home and educational backgrounds may struggle to cope with the academic  
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17 demands placed on them in HE, given limited opportunities to develop effective study skills,  
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19 and limited guidance in doing so. He acknowledges that patterns that hold for international  
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21 students may well parallel those for under-represented home students, such as students from  
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23 different ethnic minority groups (2008: 46). Again, staff working with international student  
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25 cohorts may well have witnessed these students encountering difficulties in developing  
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27 effective study habits and strategies to adequately cope with the demands of an entirely  
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29 unfamiliar education system.  
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### 34 35 *3.3.2 Linguistic aspects of the student experience* 36 37

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39 Finally, it is worth considering in some detail the issue (touched on above) of under-represented  
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41 home and international students’ linguistic repertoires – how they enable/hinder students  
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43 participating in academic and social university domains, and how they are valued by a range  
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45 of stakeholders. In myriad ways, students in both these broad categories bring with them  
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47 diverse and varied multilingual repertoires: as discussed in the literature, under-represented  
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49 home students perhaps possess repertoires which incorporate competence in ‘community’  
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51 languages, and/or skills in different English varieties (which may be the standard variety  
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53 expected and valued by HEIs, or a different regional dialect – in some cases, students may be  
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55 skilled in deploying both); for international students, it is likely that they have skills in a first  
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57 language other than English, as well as English itself – often having learned English in formal  
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3 classroom settings throughout compulsory education, these students will likely have been  
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5 taught with a standard English (e.g. British or American) variety as the benchmark, which is  
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7 frequently the case in classrooms around the world (see Preece, 2019, for detailed exploration  
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9 of the linguistic repertoires students in both groups bring to university). Similarly, in his case  
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11 study of four multilingual students from a widening access/participation background at a UK  
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13 HEI, Martin considers students' multilingual repertoires, and how they are often seen as a  
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15 hinderance rather than a resource by the institution (see also Preece, 2010: 3). His findings  
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17 reveal, however, that when students feel their multilingualism to be valued, celebrated, and  
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19 seen as a resource meaningful and useful to the learning process, they become empowered.  
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24 Martin likens the way that home ethnic minority students' multilingual skills are overlooked,  
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26 or even seen as obstacles, to the way that official discourses surrounding internationalisation  
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28 processes have turned a blind eye to the potential benefits of recognising and facilitating the  
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30 development of students' multilingualism. Migge's (2019) recent reflections on HEIs as  
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32 multilingual spaces also explicitly make links between these two groups of students, claiming  
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34 that many international and non-traditional home students often find themselves discriminated  
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36 against based on their written and spoken English being discordant with standard academic  
37  
38 English norms. However, she argues that HEIs do not often view this as discrimination as such;  
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40 while there are calls among those in the field of linguistics to add 'language' to the list of  
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42 protected characteristics which are the cornerstone of institutions' equality, diversity and  
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44 inclusion agendas, this has not yet gained more widespread traction beyond that subject area.  
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51 Kaufhold (2018) is also interested in multilingualism in HEIs, and her work within the Swedish  
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53 context is based on an understanding that conceptualising the various 'codes' (i.e. languages)  
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55 and 'registers' (i.e. different ways of using a given language) as entirely separate entities is a  
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57 less facilitative approach to supporting students' academic writing, than viewing their language  
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59 skills more holistically. Her longitudinal case studies of two students indicate that incorporating  
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3 students' multilingual repertoires into academic writing pedagogies and practices is a  
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5 mechanism for empowerment:  
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9 [...] approaching students' academic writing in multilingual settings from a  
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11 translanguaging perspective entails that the attention shifts from the transfer of genre  
12  
13 knowledge to the negotiation of the writer's linguistic repertoires (Canagarajah, 2006).

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15 [...] Multilingual repertoires [...] not only include the knowledge of and ability to use  
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17 features associated with two or more language codes but also features associated with  
18  
19 distinct registers. (Kaufhold, 2018: 2)  
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24 The 'translanguaging' approach Kaufhold refers to has been defined as 'the act performed by  
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26 bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features of various modes of what are described as  
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28 autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential' (García, 2009: 140).  
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30 Translanguaging considers an individual to possess an integrated, complex and holistic  
31  
32 linguistic repertoire, rather than a series of disparate and distinct codes and registers within the  
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34 brain. Kaufhold's claims about the benefits of a translanguaging approach to supporting  
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36 university students' academic skills has been proposed by others in the field (e.g. Canagarajah,  
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38 2011; Caruso, 2018). Preece (2015) makes similar claims about valuing the varied linguistic  
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40 repertoires of BME (black and minority ethnic) home students enrolled in an academic writing  
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42 course as part of a university's widening participation offering, as they relate to the students'  
43  
44 wide-ranging cultural and international backgrounds. While categorised as 'home students',  
45  
46 those participating in her study came from ethnically and culturally diverse family  
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48 backgrounds, representing a varied spectrum of international experiences and influences (this  
49  
50 reinforces Li and Hua's ethnography of the social networks of five male students in the UK,  
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52 which elucidates the complexity and ambiguity of linguistic, cultural, ethnic and national  
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54 belonging and identities, as negotiated by the participants who might fall under the category of  
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3 ‘Chinese’; Li and Hua use translanguaging as a way of understanding how individuals embody  
4 and explore such positionings, through language use). Preece argues that these identities should  
5 be taken into account and supported by the university, by ‘creating a transnational space’ in the  
6 institution for these students to make an impactful contribution (2015: 273), rather than  
7 institutions seeing their linguistic and cultural repertoires as falling short of the mark, and  
8 falling short of expected norms (which aligns with claims of empowerment made by Kaufhold  
9 and Martin). Drawing on Blommaert (e.g. 2008), Preece describes this as ‘imposed  
10 normativity’ (ibid: 272; see also Hill, 2011: 216). She explains that ‘the linguistic diversity  
11 [these students] imported into higher education from working class migrant communities in the  
12 UK was marginalised and they were ascribed an institutional identity as a remedial user of  
13 [academic language]’ (ibid). She develops this point to explain that all students, regardless of  
14 linguistic, cultural or national background, need to learn ‘academic language’ as a skill’ (ibid:  
15 273).

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34 In terms of again drawing parallels in the experiences of non-traditional home students and  
35 international students, students from both groups may often bring with them linguistic  
36 repertoires which in some way deviate from the expected standard English norms of HE in the  
37 UK. Hill (2011: 214) equates the requirement of universities for students to write in a certain  
38 way with requirements about who is and is not welcome in HEIs – she argues that those  
39 embedded in HEIs are keen to admit students who they feel are similar to them, and possess  
40 the same cultural capital, rather than those who differ in any way. Aligned with the  
41 translanguaging pedagogies referenced above, Hill proposes solutions which go beyond  
42 standardised linguistic norms:  
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56 Open acknowledgement of writing as a social system that separates, and of the  
57 advantages of [standard English], should be part of the curriculum for any university  
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3 degree which relies on formal written communication as an assessment tool. There is  
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5 no need for writing development to be remedial or stigmatized; it should be a positive  
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7 process. [...] Embedding development within modules, genuinely formative feedback,  
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9 peer involvement and a variety of resources can all be brought to bear, but it is only  
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11 through engaging individual students and academics in the idea that this is a worthwhile  
12  
13 use of their time and energy that these strategies will be successful, and that inherent  
14  
15 elitism as manifested in expectations of student writing will be challenged. (2011: 218)  
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20 As this is true for home students, it is true for international students as well, as Preece (2015:  
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22 272) claims in her identification of parallels between ‘working class linguistic minority’  
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24 students on one hand, and those who are ‘users of World Englishes’ on the other (i.e. varieties  
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26 of English which have emerged from parts of the world not typically classified as Anglophone  
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28 countries). Although Preece (2015) recognises the potential for there being similarities among  
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30 non-traditional home students and international students, in her more recent work (Preece,  
31  
32 2019) she has argued for the multilingual repertoires of these two groups of students being  
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34 valued in markedly different ways, based on observational and self-report data from student  
35  
36 participants. She claims that while BME home students’ deviations from standard academic  
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38 English norms are seen as deficient and problematic, those of international students are valued  
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40 and supported, and even seen as ‘prestigious’. However, I would argue that many of the issues  
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42 and experiences faced by the home students in her research apply equally to international  
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44 students (the potential for this overlap is acknowledged on one occasion by Preece, but her  
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46 main argument develops around the differential experiences of the two groups). Take, for  
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48 example, the following excerpt:  
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56 One of the [home student] participants’ first experiences at university was an English  
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58 language diagnostic test. On the basis of their results, they found themselves required  
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3 to take the academic writing programme. While the programme was designed with the  
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5 intention to improve their prospects, its language-as-problem framing contributed to  
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7 views of their multilingualism as an obstacle to their academic success. The deficit  
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9 framing of the programme also meant that it became associated with language  
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11 remediation rather than language development. (Preece, 2019: 8)  
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15 Preece contrasts this with the international students in her study, who felt much more  
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17 favourable towards prestige varieties of English, which are considered appropriate in the  
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19 academic domain (ibid: 11). While I do accept the difference Preece outlines on the basis of  
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21 her data, I would argue that it tells only part of the story, as it overlooks the fact that  
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23 international students will frequently encounter the scenario described in relation to the non-  
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25 traditional home students, namely, being identified as linguistically deficient and training being  
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27 offered (either on a voluntary or compulsory basis) to support their academic language  
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29 development, so it is brought in line with the accepted institutional norms (earlier empirical  
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31 work supports this stance, and its relevance in other Anglophone settings: see Ryan and Viète,  
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33 2009, on ‘discourses of deficiency’ that often surround international students in Australia; and  
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35 Marshall, 2009, on English as a second language – ESL – students having their multilingual  
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37 repertoires seen as a ‘deficit’ in the Canadian context). A possible reason for Preece’s  
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39 somewhat surprising findings may be due to approaches to data collection. The participating  
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41 international students were in the subject areas of TESOL/applied linguistics (2019: 4); having  
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43 an applied linguistics background myself, I argue that such staff members are necessarily more  
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45 attuned to, and expert in, issues relating to second language acquisition and usage, and therefore  
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47 react very differently (likely, more positively) to international students’ multilingual  
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49 repertoires, compared to staff members in other subject areas. It is something of a unique case,  
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51 which may well contribute to Preece’s findings that such repertoires were seen as desirable and  
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53 valuable in the academic context. Work by Tian and Low also offers a challenge to Preece’s  
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3 contention, with the following claims about the linguistic experiences and concerns of Chinese  
4 students coming to study in the UK, and the roots of these issues:  
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8 During both secondary education and tertiary education, students in China have few  
9 chances of practising their academic writing in English, as the Intensive Reading  
10 courses through which students learn English mainly focus on ‘grammar, vocabulary,  
11 and reading aloud’ (p. 27), rather than on speaking and writing. The wash-back effect  
12 of the university entrance examination on the teaching and learning methods in China  
13 results in a lack of attention to the development of writing skills in students, as the main  
14 form of the examination is multiple-choice questions. As a result, in comparison to  
15 British students, Chinese students at UK universities face additional challenges. They  
16 have rarely, and at times never, done any real academic writing, which normally needs  
17 a great deal of reading – a very time-consuming task for Chinese students. (2012: 303-  
18 304)  
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34 Despite some thought-provoking and nuanced points raised by Preece (2019) about the  
35 differential ways that non-traditional home and international students’ linguistic repertoires are  
36 valued, Tian and Low’s comments above appear far more comprehensive in summing up the  
37 typical experiences of international students in this regard.  
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#### 45 *4. Conclusions, and next steps*

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48 My aim with this literature review has been to explore in some depth the existing justification  
49 for the need to consider how we now move forward in order to address issues of equality and  
50 diversity among international student cohorts, in the way that so much good work is being done  
51 around the UK with non-traditional home students. I hope to have shown that my intention at  
52 no juncture was to overlook the positive progress being made by many HEIs, but it was rather  
53 to pass comment on more systematic patterns and problems that remain to be addressed. I have  
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3 sought to raise awareness of progress still to be made from a more holistic interpretation of  
4 social justice issues in HE, so that HEIs can continue to strive in becoming open, accessible,  
5 equitable and fair, to all kinds of students wishing to study there. My goal is for this paper to  
6 be a preliminary step in setting the agenda for HE decision-makers, practitioners, and those in  
7 education research, to tackle timely challenges in the current socio-political climate in the HE  
8 domain, with a belief that greater equity in HE leads to greater equity in society more broadly.  
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