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# Understanding the Experiences and Concerns of a Multi-National Cohort of First Year Students

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## Abstract

*Student diversity within British universities is increasing as the number of international enrolments rises. In spite of these demographic changes there is limited research into specific needs of particular nationalities and how these compare to the requirements of home students. This paper attempts to compare the experiences, concerns and learning difficulties of a group of first year students of British, Irish, Cypriot and Greek nationality, in order to develop effective and inclusive teaching strategies for an internationally diverse student cohort.*

## Introduction

Extensive research has been carried out on the experiences and concerns of first year students (Rowley et al. 2008 and McInnis 2001). Such research highlighted issues around student expectations, prior academic experiences and generic study issues, such as the ability to carry out independent study, as forming the main barriers to student progression. However, there is limited research regarding the experiences and difficulties encountered by international students in comparison to those of home students.

The internationalisation of higher education in countries such as the UK, and the transformation from "academies to global businesses" (Hawthorne et al. 2004, p150) has resulted in increased numbers of international students, and students for whom English is not their first language, in British university classrooms. In the academic year 2006-2007 almost 20% of higher education qualifications obtained in the UK were by overseas students (HESA 2008a) and this is expected to continue to rise (Carroll & Ryan 2005). At Liverpool John Moores University in 2006-2007 international student represented 11% of the student cohort (HESA 2008b). Within the University the numbers of overseas

students in each academic area differs substantially. The numbers in the Centre for Tourism, Consumer and Food Studies are higher than average with 23% of students enrolled on food degree programmes coming from abroad; specifically Cyprus.

Given the increasingly important economic role played by overseas students in the university system, there is a surprising dearth of recent research in relation to their learning needs and how these may best be met. Of the papers written, the majority are Australian-based, this is not surprising given they have the highest percentage of overseas students. 85% of these students in Australia are from Asia. Therefore in Australian research analysis of 'international students' is limited to Asian students (Hawthorne et al. 2004). Due to cultural and linguistic differences these findings cannot be generalised to all international students. International students are not a homogenous group, and there is a gap in the literature in terms of analysing the needs of specific nationalities.

It is easy to hold accountable the international students, and attribute the difficulties they encounter with the language, teaching and

learning methods to them as students. However, with increasing numbers of overseas students each year, it is becoming more important for the institutions to adapt. More recently, opinions are starting to change and the responsibility has been shifted onto the institution to adapt to the needs of the culturally diverse student population. The notion 'productive diversity' was coined by Tan & Olsen (1999) which was accompanied by the idea of trying to 'level the playing field' in terms of providing sufficient support to all students. Support is often provided in the form of general language support or pre-sessional courses, but there is often a lack of subject-specific provision (Cownie & Addison 1996).

The purpose of this study was therefore to understand the difficulties faced by, and expectations and experiences of, a first year cohort of both home and international students. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. Which aspects of teaching and learning on food degree programmes cause problems or concern for international and home students?
2. To what extent is learning in English a problem for international students for whom English is not their first language?

Collecting the opinions of both sets of students enabled differences in learning styles, difficulties and preferences to be identified. Areas that only international students found challenging in addition to those that challenged the entire cohort were recognised. This allowed the identification of effective, inclusive teaching strategies that provide students with an equal opportunity to achieve the learning goals.

## Method

The research focused on: English language proficiency; approaches to learning; teaching styles; and assessment methods, as these have all been highlighted in the literature (Coley 1999;

Hawthorne et al. 2004; Samuelowicz 1987; Katsara 2004; and Rowley et al. 2008). A self-administered questionnaire was designed to investigate these issues. Questions on student approaches to learning were adapted from the Revised Study Process Questionnaire (R-SPQ-2F) (Biggs et al, 2001).

Non-probability sampling was used due to the small scale of this research. All first year students enrolled on food degree programmes ( $n=47$ ) in the Centre for Tourism, Consumer and Food Studies were invited to participate. A total of 22 completed questionnaires were obtained; 11 from British students, two Irish students, six Cypriot students and three Greek students.

Data collected from the questionnaires was analysed using Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15.0. Analyses were carried out by nationality. Answers to questions using the Likert scale were scored (see table 3). These scores were tested for normality and equal variance of samples so that the appropriate parametric or non-parametric test could be used. Analyses to test for differences between the nationality groups were conducted using the Mann-Whitney U Test or Unpaired T-test (as appropriate). This was possible as the students of different nationalities were split into the following two groups: Group 1 - British & Irish and Group 2 - Cypriot & Greek. This was done as it became apparent that all those students who reported their nationality as Greek or Cypriot all in fact domiciled from Cyprus; some referred to their nationality as Greek due to being Greek-Cypriots. Finally correlations were carried out to test for relationships between various variables and grades; grades being used as an indicator of performance. Spearman's rank order correlation was used in all instances as the grade profile did not follow a normal distribution. All tests were carried out to the 5% significance level.

## Results

### Participant/sample summary characteristics

Table 1 shows the summary statistics for the study sample. The study sample did not include statistically sufficient students for analysis by age, gender or study-mode, programme (no Greek or Cypriot participants were enrolled on food and nutrition or community nutrition programmes).

Total number of participants = 22	Age group (years)			Gender		Degree programme			Mode of study		
	< 20	20-24	25+	Males	Females	Home Economics	Food and Nutrition	Community Nutrition	FT	PT	
Nationality	British	5	4	2	1	10	3	6	2	11	0
	Irish	0	2	0	0	2	0	1	1	2	0
	Cypriot	5	1	0	0	6	6	0	0	6	0
	Greek	3	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	3	0
Totals		13	7	2	1	21	12	7	3	22	0
Combined totals		22			22		22			22	

Table 1 Summary statistics for study participants

### English Language Proficiency

Out of the 9 Cypriot and Greek students, 6 took the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test, the average score was 6.1. Table 2 shows participants' responses to statements regarding their level of difficulty experienced / ability to cope with various English language skills. Participants were scored according to the response they gave (see table 3) and these were added together giving them a total score for each skill; a higher score representing a stronger feeling of difficulty experienced. Figure 1 illustrates the mean scores for each skill.

N = 9		Percentage of participants responding				
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
General	Worried about English ability to cope before came to UK	44.4%	22.2%	0.0%	22.2%	11.1%
	Still worried about English ability now	11.1%	22.2%	22.2%	22.2%	22.2%
Listening Skills	Difficult to follow lectures	0.0%	33.3%	<b>44.4%</b>	22.2%	0.0%
	Difficult to follow class discussions	11.1%	33.3%	<b>55.6%</b>	0.0%	0.0%
Speaking Skills	Difficult to get involved in class discussions	11.1%	<b>55.6%</b>	22.2%	0.0%	11.1%
	Difficult to answer questions	11.1%	22.2%	<b>44.4%</b>	11.1%	11.1%
Reading Skills	Difficult to give presentations	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	0.0%	22.2%	11.1%
	Difficult to read/understand course books	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	<b>55.6%</b>	11.1%
Writing Skills	Difficult to read/understand handouts	0.0%	0.0%	22.2%	<b>66.7%</b>	11.1%
	Difficult to write essays/assignments	11.1%	22.2%	<b>33.3%</b>	22.2%	11.1%
<b>Bold</b> - Those marked in bold indicate the answer with the majority of responses						

Table 2 Participants' responses to statements regarding English language proficiency

Phrase relating to difficulty experienced with English skills	Assigned numerical value
Strongly agree	2
Agree	1
Neither agree nor disagree	0
Disagree	-1
Strongly disagree	-2

Table 3 Scores assigned according to response given

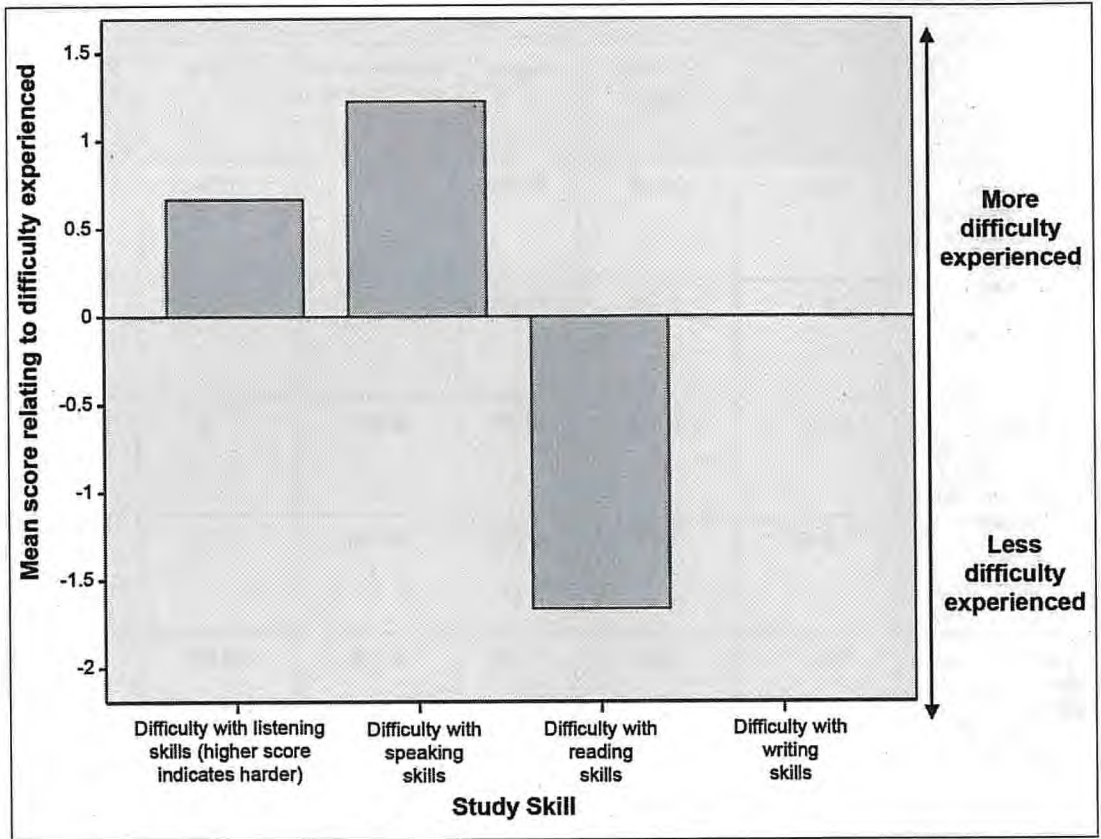


Figure 1 Accumulated responses to show students' difficulty coping with different English Language skills

Difficulty experienced with technical/subject-specific vocabulary was analysed separately as students whose first language was English were also asked to answer this question. In response to the statement "I sometimes find it difficult to understand some of the technical/subject-specific vocabulary in lectures" 61.5% of British and Irish and 77.7% of Cypriot and Greek students responded positively. A Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant difference in perceived level of difficulty of understanding technical vocabulary in British and Irish ( $Md = 1$ ,  $n = 13$ ) and Cypriot and Greek participants ( $Md = 1$ ,  $n = 9$ ),  $U = 37.00$ ,  $z = -1.58$ ,  $p = 0.16$ .

### Approaches to learning

Students' approaches to learning were measured using an adapted version of the Revised Study Process Questionnaire (R-SPQ-2F) (Biggs et al. 2001). Table 4 shows the statements and the percentage of students, with respect to nationality, that responded to each. The statements either indicate a deep or surface approach. A Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant difference in level of agreement with deep approach to learning statements in British and Irish ( $Md = 3$ ,  $n = 13$ ) and Cypriot and Greek participants ( $Md = 2$ ,  $n = 9$ ),  $U = 44.00$ ,  $z = -0.98$ ,  $p = 0.33$ . Differences in surface learning approach score were tested for using the Unpaired T-test. This test also revealed that there was no significant difference in scores for British and Irish ( $M = -2.46$ ,  $SD = 2.57$ ) and Cypriot and Greek participants ( $M = -0.78$ ,  $SD = 3.11$ ),  $t = -1.39$ ,  $p = 0.18$  (two-tailed). Figure 2 shows the mean scores for both deep and surface approaches for both nationality groupings.

N = 22		Percentage of participants responding				
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Studying sometimes gives me a feeling of great personal satisfaction	B & I	23.1%	53.8%	23.1%	0.0%	0.0%
	C & G	11.1%	55.6%	22.2%	11.1%	0.0%
I like to do enough work on a topic so that I can form my own conclusions	B & I	23.1%	38.5%	30.8%	7.7%	0.0%
	C & G	0.0%	44.4%	44.4%	11.1%	0.0%
My aim is to pass the course and only do as much work as I have to.	B & I	0.0%	7.7%	23.1%	53.8%	15.4%
	C & G	0.0%	11.1%	55.6%	33.3%	0.0%
I only study what is taught in class or given in the module handbook	B & I	0.0%	7.7%	15.4%	76.9%	0.0%
	C & G	0.0%	11.1%	44.4%	44.4%	0.0%
I feel that almost any topic can be very interesting once I learn about it	B & I	7.7%	53.8%	7.7%	30.8%	0.0%
	C & G	22.2%	22.2%	33.3%	22.2%	0.0%
I find most new topics interesting and often do extra reading.	B & I	0.0%	53.8%	23.1%	23.1%	0.0%
	C & G	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%

N = 22		Percentage of participants responding				
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I do not find my course very interesting and so do the minimum amount of work possible.	B & I	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	<b>69.2%</b>	30.8%
	C & G	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%	33.3%	<b>55.6%</b>
I learn some things over and over till I can remember them, even if I don't understand them.	B & I	0.0%	<b>61.5%</b>	23.1%	15.4%	0.0%
	C & G	<b>33.3%</b>	22.2%	<b>33.3%</b>	11.1%	0.0%
I come to most lectures with questions to ask the lecturer	B & I	0.0%	15.4%	23.1%	<b>53.8%</b>	7.7%
	C & G	11.1%	11.1%	22.2%	<b>33.3%</b>	22.2%
I test myself on important topics until I understand them	B & I	7.7%	<b>61.5%</b>	30.8%	0.0%	0.0%
	C & G	0.0%	<b>55.6%</b>	44.4%	0.0%	0.0%
In exams I try to memorise key sections, rather than trying to understand them.	B & I	0.0%	15.4%	<b>46.2%</b>	30.8%	7.7%
	C & G	0.0%	33.3%	<b>44.4%</b>	22.2%	0.0%
I find the best way to pass exams is to remember answers to possible questions.	B & I	7.7%	23.1%	<b>46.2%</b>	23.1%	0.0%
	C & G	11.1%	33.3%	<b>33.3%</b>	22.2%	0.0%
<p><b>Bold</b> – Those marked in bold indicate the answer with the majority of responses. Those statements shaded indicate a deep approach, those non-shaded a surface approach.</p>						

Table 4 Participants' responses to statements regarding their approaches to learning

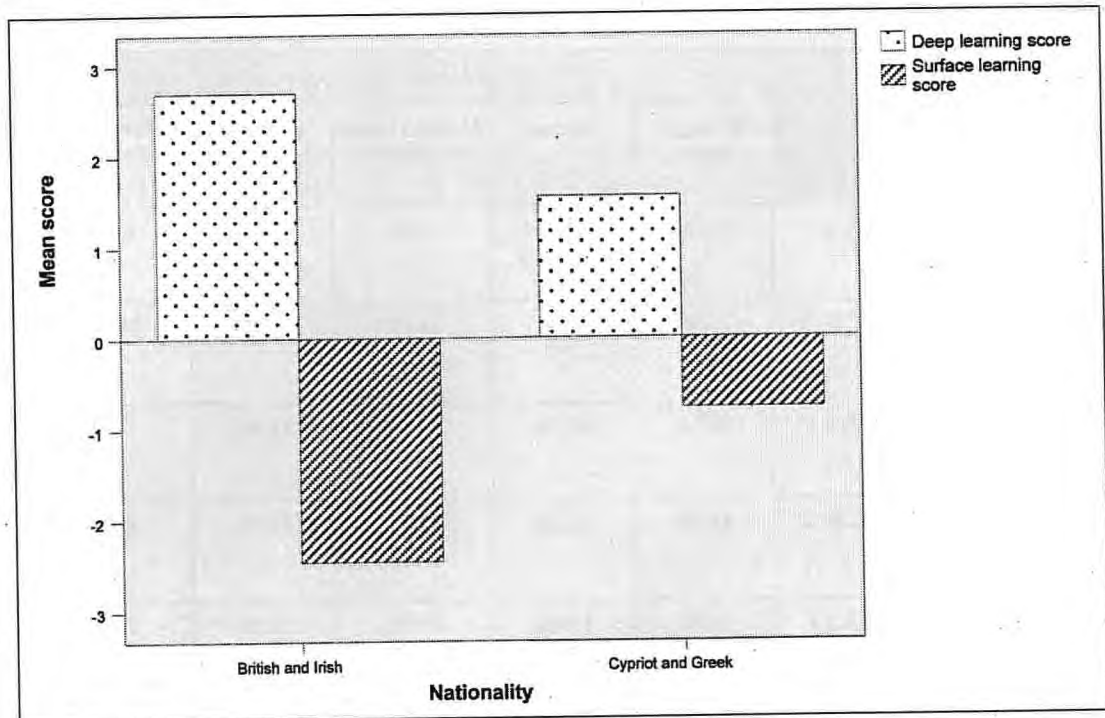


Figure 2 Graph showing mean deep and surface learning scores according to nationality

### Teaching and learning styles

Students were asked to indicate their preference for different teaching and learning methods by marking the appropriate box on a Likert scale in response to various statements. Table 5 shows the percentage of students responding to each of these categories. Opposing statements were then grouped by allocating and accumulating scores e.g. responses to "prefer to study with others" and "prefer to work alone" were put together to calculate an overall "Work alone" score, the higher the score, the higher the preference for working alone. See Table 6 for example of how scores were calculated. The same process was then carried out to obtain an "interactivity" score, a "group discussion" score and a "multi-cultural group" score. Stand alone statements were scored as previously (see table 3). Figure 3 shows the median scores for these variables for each nationality group. Analysis using the Mann Whitney *U* Test revealed a significant difference in both: enjoyment of participating in group discussions in British and Irish ( $Md = 2, n = 13$ ) and Cypriot and Greek participants ( $Md = 0, n = 9$ ),  $U = 29.00, z = -2.04, p = 0.04$ ; and in preference for online discussions in British and Irish ( $Md = -1, n = 13$ ) and Cypriot and Greek participants ( $Md = 1, n = 9$ ),  $U = 20.00, z = -2.67, p = 0.01$ .



N = 22		Percentage of participants responding				
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I prefer to study with others	B & I	0.0%	0.0%	<b>53.8%</b>	38.5%	7.7%
	C & G	0.0%	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	22.2%	11.1%
I prefer to work alone	B & I	7.7%	<b>53.8%</b>	23.1%	15.4%	0.0%
	C & G	22.2%	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	11.1%	0.0%
I enjoy learning by doing practical work	B & I	15.4%	<b>53.8%</b>	23.1%	7.7%	0.0%
	C & G	11.1%	<b>55.6%</b>	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%
I prefer lectures where I listen to the lecturer, than when I have to participate	B & I	7.7%	7.7%	38.5%	<b>46.2%</b>	0.0%
	C & G	0.0%	<b>44.4%</b>	22.2%	22.2%	11.1%
I prefer interactive seminars to lectures	B & I	15.4%	<b>38.5%</b>	30.8%	7.7%	7.7%
	C & G	11.1%	22.2%	<b>33.3%</b>	22.2%	11.1%
I enjoy participating in group discussions	B & I	0.0%	<b>69.2%</b>	23.1%	0.0%	7.7%
	C & G	22.2%	22.2%	<b>33.3%</b>	22.2%	0.0%
I don't like to take part in class discussions	B & I	0.0%	7.7%	15.4%	<b>69.2%</b>	7.7%
	C & G	11.1%	<b>44.4%</b>	22.2%	22.2%	0.0%
I feel more confident speaking in class in a group than by myself	B & I	7.7%	<b>61.5%</b>	15.4%	15.4%	0.0%
	C & G	11.1%	<b>66.7%</b>	11.1%	11.1%	0.0%
I enjoy working in multi-cultural groups	B & I	0.0%	38.5%	<b>61.5%</b>	0.0%	0.0%
	C & G	11.1%	33.3%	<b>44.4%</b>	0.0%	11.1%
I learn better when working with people of the same nationality than multiple nationalities	B & I	0.0%	30.8%	<b>53.8%</b>	15.4%	0.0%
	C & G	22.2%	<b>33.3%</b>	22.2%	11.1%	11.1%
I would prefer to participate in online discussions than discussions in class	B & I	0.0%	15.4%	23.1%	<b>46.2%</b>	15.4%
	C & G	11.1%	<b>55.6%</b>	22.2%	11.1%	0.0%
Bold - Those marked in bold indicate the answer with the majority of responses						

Table 5 Participants' responses to statements regarding their preferences

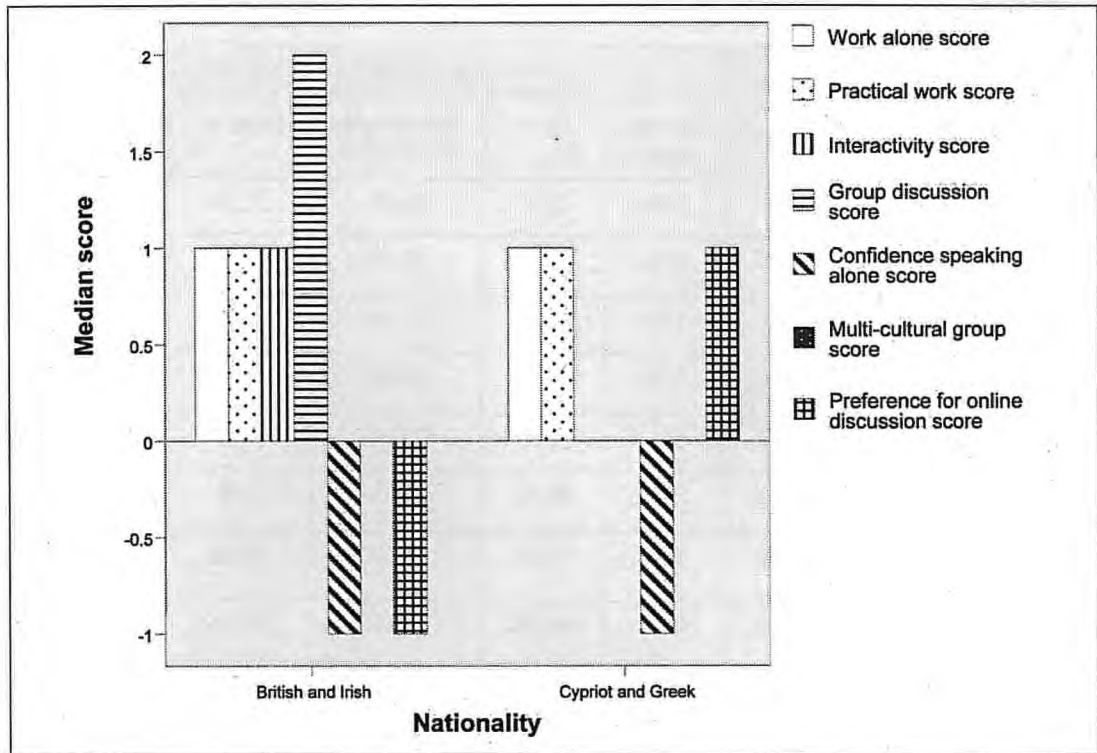


Figure 3 Graph showing median teaching/learning preference scores according to nationality

	I prefer to study with others	I prefer to work alone
Strongly agree	-2	2
Agree	-1	1
Neither agree nor disagree	0	0
Disagree	1	-1
Strongly disagree	2	-2

Table 6 Scores assigned to obtain a "work alone" score

### Assessment Methods

Table 7 show students' favourite and least favourite assessment methods and Table 8 shows the percentage of students' responding to whether or not they experience difficulties with various skills required by different assessment methods. As previously, these responses were scored and tests for differences between nationalities were performed. A series of Mann-Whitney *U* tests revealed no significant difference in any of the assessment skills between the nationality groups.

N = 21 (B & I = 13, C & G = 8)		Percentage of participants responding				
		Group assignment	Essay	Practical report	Presentation	Exam
Favourite	B & I	15.4%	0.0%	0.0%	23.1%	<b>61.5%</b>
	C & G	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	<b>62.5%</b>	37.5%
Least favourite	B & I	15.4%	23.1%	23.1%	15.4%	23.1%
	C & G	12.5%	<b>75.0%</b>	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 7 Students' favourite and least favourite assessment methods

N = 22		Percentage of participants responding				
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I find structuring essays difficult	B & I	0.0%	<b>38.5%</b>	30.8%	30.8%	0.0%
	C & G	22.2%	22.2%	11.1%	<b>44.4%</b>	0.0%
I find giving presentations difficult	B & I	7.7%	30.8%	7.7%	<b>46.2%</b>	7.7%
	C & G	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	11.1%	22.2%	0.0%
I find structuring reports difficult	B & I	0.0%	30.8%	<b>61.5%</b>	7.7%	0.0%
	C & G	11.1%	33.3%	<b>55.6%</b>	0.0%	0.0%
I find working as part of a group difficult	B & I	0.0%	0.0%	<b>46.2%</b>	38.5%	15.4%
	C & G	0.0%	11.1%	<b>44.4%</b>	22.2%	22.2%
<b>Bold - Those marked in bold indicate the answer with the majority of responses</b>						

Table 8 Participants' responses to statements regarding difficulty experienced with skills required by assessment methods

### Grades and relationships with performance

Descriptive statistics of students' grades showed that the majority of participants from both nationality groups had the majority of their marks in the 50-59 grade category (Figure 4). Although no significant difference was found between the grades of the different nationality groups, a Spearman's rank order correlation test showed a medium strength (using the definition from Pallant, 2007, p. 132) negative correlation between nationality and grades;  $\rho = -0.36$ ,  $n=22$ ,  $p=0.10$  with Cypriot and Greek nationality being associated with lower grades. The relationships between grades (as an indicator of performance) and other variables were then investigated further using the Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient. Although no significant relationships were found between English ability and grades there was found to be a significant, large strength, positive correlation between total deep learning approach score and grade;  $\rho = 0.57$ ,  $n=22$ ,  $p<0.01$  with higher deep learning scores associated with higher grades (Figure 5). Correspondingly, there was also a significant, large strength negative correlation between total surface learning approach score and grade;  $\rho = -0.53$ ,  $n=22$ ,  $p=0.01$  with higher surface learning scores associated with lower grades (Figure 6).

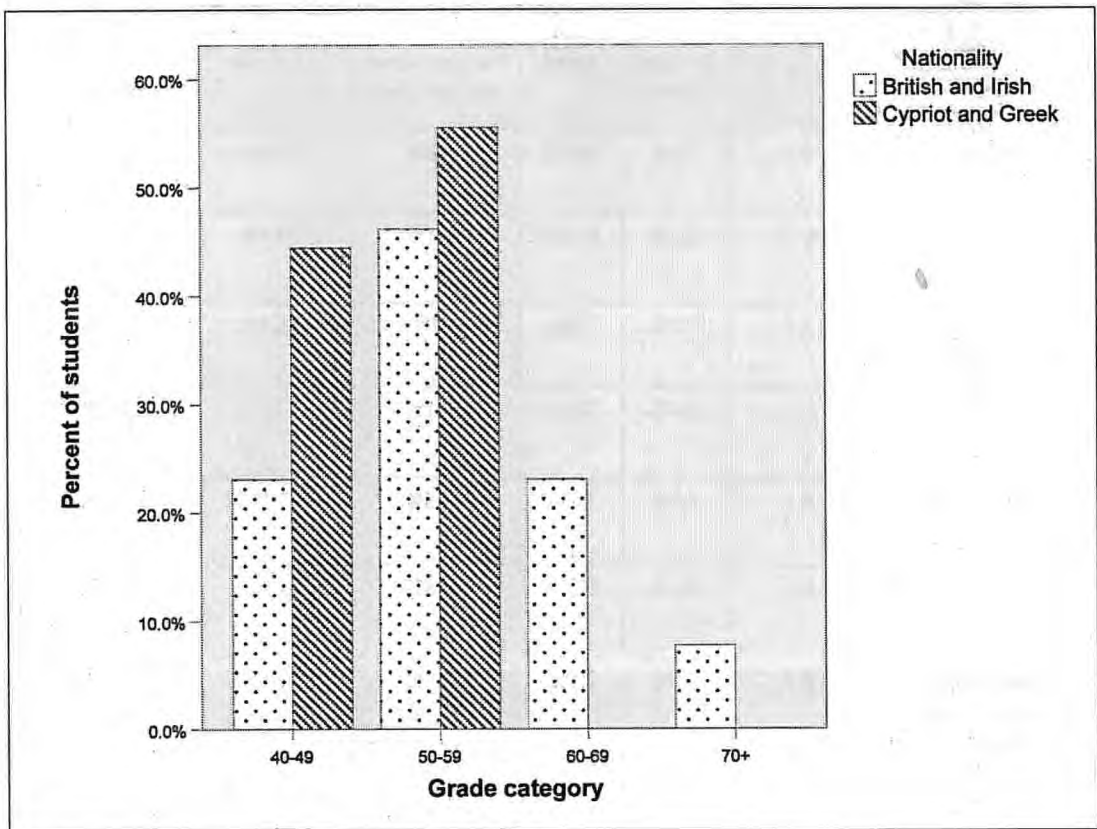


Figure 4 Graph showing the percentage of students, from each nationality group, with the majority of their marks in each grade category

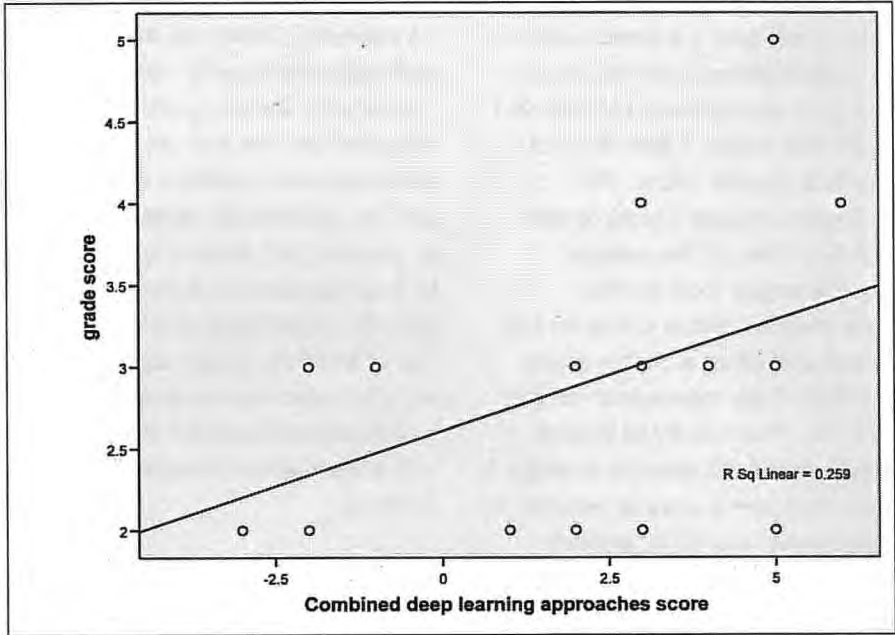


Figure 5 Relationship between total deep learning approach score and grade

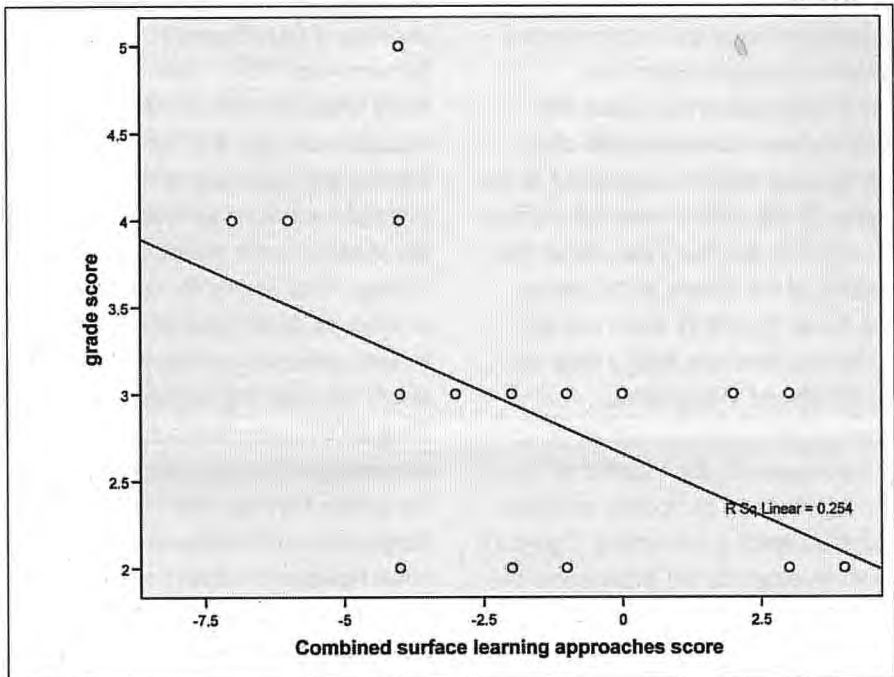


Figure 6 Relationship between total surface learning approach score and grade

## Discussion

### English language proficiency

Malcolm and McGregor (1995) report that English language proficiency is a serious source of grievance for many overseas students, because they meet the entry requirements, but then find it a shock when their English is later deemed poor and they face possible failure. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS), which two thirds of the overseas students from this sample took, is often considered the preferred test as it assesses the student's level of proficiency in all four macro skills (Coley 1999). Entry requirement for this test at LJMU is 6.0. The majority of students from this sample scored 6.0 with one scoring 6.5. IELTS examiners consider a score of between 9.0 and 7.0 as "acceptable" and 6.5 is "probably acceptable" (UCLES, 1998). This suggests that the students from this sample are likely to experience some extra level of difficulty in coping with certain language aspects of the degree course, despite this less than 25% have used the language support services at the university. However, it may be that ability increases rapidly once the student arrives or the recommended IELTS examiners scores are higher than necessary, as before starting the course two thirds of students were concerned with their English ability to cope with the degree but at the end of semester 2 only a third were still worried (table 2). In addition, this study also shows that whilst the grades of the Greeks and Cypriots tended to be lower (Figure 4), there was no significant difference between their grades and those of the British and Irish students.

In terms of individual skills, the majority of students find listening and particularly speaking, more difficult than reading and writing (Figure 1). Katsara (2004) investigating the experiences of Greek students in British universities found similar findings, highlighting the main problems with language to be: listening and the pace of delivery

of lectures; and speaking and lacking the confidence to join in class discussions.

An interesting finding was that of technical/subject-specific vocabulary; more Cypriots and Greeks agreed to experiencing difficulties with this than any other of the skill statements and in addition over 60% of British and Irish students also agreed. This is obviously an area that isn't covered in general university language support and therefore highlights the need for further subject-specific language aid. Carroll and Ryan (2005) suggest using straightforward terms and avoiding metaphors in a multi-cultural classroom and providing students with subject-specific vocabulary lists as additional handouts.

### Approaches to learning

Several Australian studies document that students' approaches to learning could be a major problem in terms of coping with degree level study. International students tend to be surface learners; learning by memory and favouring rote learning, rather than learning to understand (Hawthorne et al. 2004 and Samuelowicz, 1987). Greer (2001) explains that many native students coming into higher education are also only familiar with this type of learning and lack many of the skills required to be successful autonomous learners. Results from this study to some extent disagree with these findings. Mean scores for deep learning (defined as when students focus on underlying meanings, themes, principles and applications rather than simply rote learning to pass an exam (Biggs & Tang 2007)) were positive. This indicates an agreement/adherence with this style. Mean scores for surface learning were negative, indicating a disagreement/non-adherence with this style. This could however be due to students responding to how they think they should be learning, rather than how they actually are. Further analysis is therefore needed in this area.

In terms of differences between nationalities, although British and Irish students showed on average a slightly higher agreement with deep learning and lower agreement with surface learning approaches than Cypriots and Greeks, the results were not significant. It is likely that these small differences are down to surface approaches seeming to be the easier method if there are extra language complications, rather than significant cultural differences, the latter being reported as a substantial factor in why Asian students tend to use surface learning approaches (Hawthorne et al. 2004).

Correlations carried out exploring relationships between approaches to learning and grades showed some important relationships. Figures 5 and 6 show that a deep approach to learning is associated with higher marks, and a surface approach with lower marks. This is what we would expect to see, given the importance put on getting students to adopt a deep approach by universities and researchers in the field.

### **Teaching and learning styles**

Research regarding teaching styles suggests that overseas students tend to be passive recipients of knowledge favouring traditional lectures over more interactive methods of teaching (Samuelowicz 1987). Cook & Leckey (1999) propose that native students tend to struggle moving from their experiences at school; based on small class sizes, close contact with teaching staff, and frequent and prescriptive feedback to more formal lectures which tend to favour a more independent style of learning. Results from this study show agreement with these findings in terms of students' preferences. The majority of British and Irish students preferred interactive seminars, whereas the majority of Cypriot and Greek preferred formal lectures (Table 5). However, it does not follow that this is because overseas students are passive recipients of knowledge and native students struggle with formal lectures.

A significant difference was found between nationality groups in enjoyment in taking part in class discussions. The majority of Greek and Cypriot students reported not to enjoy taking part in group discussions whilst the British and Irish students enjoyed this style of teaching and learning. Carroll and Ryan (2005) state that the faster students must respond, as required when speaking in a group discussion, the less willing international students are to participate. However, international students showed a strong preference for online discussion. This type of discussion allows more time for reflection than in-class discussion. Therefore designing learning and teaching activities that require on line participation may increase international student engagement.

### **Assessment methods**

The preferences of students for different types of assessment provides an internal insight into students' learning styles, skills and techniques.

75% of Cypriot and Greek students' favourite assessment method was the essay, reinforcing their preference for written rather than oral assessment methods. Katsara (2004) reported that Greek students struggled to relate to elements of the British educational system such as assessment differences, as in Greece it tends to be 100% examinations rather than different coursework methods. British and Irish students selected a range of methods suggesting broader assessment experience or a lack of constraint as a consequence of language. In terms of least favourite assessment method, presentations and examinations ranked highly with both nationality groups and therefore more needs to be done in preparing students for such tasks.

## Conclusion

Conclusions are made in providing answers to the research questions:

1. *Which elements of teaching and learning on food degree programmes cause problems, or could be areas of concern, for international and home students?*

Both home and international students agree with experiencing difficulties with technical/subject-specific vocabulary and so additional language support is required by subject tutors in addition to general language support that is provided by the university.

Although students showed a tendency towards a deep approach to learning this should be encouraged further as there is a relationship between this approach and performance. International students need additional help and guidance due to added language complications and perhaps the style of learning and assessment they are used to. Both sets of students appear less comfortable and confident with presentations, general speaking tasks, and examinations. It is important that students, particularly international students, in the early stages of their degree are given plenty of time to prepare for group discussion, whether formal or informal, so that they can engage more with the task.

2. *To what extent is learning in English a problem for international students, for whom English is not their first language?*

After almost a year of studying for a degree a third of Cypriot and Greek students were concerned about coping with a degree in English. Although there were no significant difference in terms of performance or difficulty experienced with various skills between home and international students. Although they did receive slightly lower marks and experience slightly higher levels of difficulty. Cypriot and Greek students

were least confident with speaking tasks.

Therefore strategies should be developed for engagement with these learning and teaching methods. For example early formative feedback should be built into the curriculum before summative assessment in such methods is carried out. In addition to this, other forms of interaction, such as online discussions, should be included in the assessment strategy.

Finally, an interesting aspect of this research was that there were few significant differences between home and international students, the only difference really being in enjoyment in participating in group discussions. The results suggest that whilst international students may struggle slightly more due to the added difficulty of carrying out a degree in a second language, many of the issues such as presenting, examinations and technical vocabulary are experienced by both sets of students.

Despite the limitations to this study it provides particular insights which can be used to help enhance teaching practise.

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