Developing Capacity for Leading International Projects in Higher Education
The authors would like to thank all those individuals in higher education and industry, in both the UK and international contexts who willingly shared their experiences and ideas as part of our research and in doing so helped us to produce this report. Organisations including the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and Universities UK were also very generous with their time and expertise.
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There are few higher education institutions that would report a disinterest in becoming more internationally connected, more open to international students or being able to offer more international research opportunities to their faculty.

Eva Egron-Polak, Secretary General,
International Association of Universities
Introduction

The importance, academically and financially, of the international marketplace to UK Higher Education Institutions is evidenced by the number of UK HEIs which have, or intend having, international projects ranging from full blown campuses, partnerships with other HEIs in international settings, joint delivery of programmes, franchise arrangements and many research collaborations.

National culture, interpersonal and contextual variables influence how these projects are led and managed. This project seeks to identify the variables, and to draw on experience within and outside of HE to identify best practice in the development of international leadership capacity. It will describe the leadership behaviours and skills of effective academic leaders in international settings, discuss the best ways to develop international academic leaders and offer recommendations that can be applied throughout the sector.

The research indicates that while effective leaders tend to be so wherever they are, there are also a set of additional behaviours, skills and attitudes that help in the international context. Developing leaders to work internationally is found to be more complex and expensive than it is for UK leaders and that the development process needs to start early, well before the international role commences. Unsurprisingly, global businesses are years ahead of HE but we can learn from them.

Context

UK higher education has a worldwide reputation which in part accounts for its ability to develop international partnerships and collaborations. Both Newcastle and Nottingham Universities have significant international exposure and recognise the need to develop and support international leadership. We also recognise that many other HEIs have similar exposure and that there is no indication that the trend towards this type of work is slowing. Along with the potential benefits the risks, both reputational and financial, are significant.

The range of business models varies enormously, and this has some impact upon how the findings of this report might be implemented. Some HEIs have campuses in other countries, often delivering a smaller range of subjects than the UK institution, focusing on local needs, others have a “single subject” presence, for example a medical or business school. Some are clearly partnerships at an academic level with two equal partners, or partnerships where the local partner provides the infrastructure and administration and the UK institution the academic input. In other cases there is a franchise style arrangement where a UK award is taught and assessed at the international location. In addition there are research collaborations which can exist separately or overlay and interact with these teaching arrangements. In all of these examples the issue of quality assurance and quality control is vital, in some the fact that it is a UK award delivered in a “UK style” is a key feature.

Issues raised during the data collection phase include: national cultural differences; simple issues of geography and time zones; legal and procedural framework differences; language differences; the fit between the international project and the home institution. The last of these can be seen for example, where the home institution is research intensive and the international project teaching only. HEIs are often sensitive about the language used, for example eschewing the use of “Home Campus” or “Satellite Campus” to avoid obvious hierarchy or status issues.

Whatever the business model, leadership at the international location and from the UK institution is seen as a key factor in the success of the venture.
Methodology

The research was conducted using semi-structured interviews with key staff in HEIs and with external bodies, the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, global businesses, and by reference to current literature.

Semi-structured interviews enabled the authors to gather data around the specific challenges facing international leaders, the key skills and behaviours of effective international leaders and the ways in which HEIs and other organisations prepare and develop their leaders.

Interviewees were chosen either for their institutions’ exposure to and experience of international ventures, because of their own particular experience, or both. More than 40 volunteers were interviewed, either face to face or by telephone/video conference. Interviewees from HEIs included HR Directors, Academic Leaders, and Staff Developers. The report authors are grateful to all these people for giving so freely of their time and experience.

The collated findings from these interviews have been compared with current literature on cross cultural leadership and developing leaders to work globally in order to make sector specific recommendations.

In interviewing and writing the report the authors were keen to focus on real life, practical examples while searching for skills and behaviours that might be useful for the recruitment and development of international leaders in HE.

The interview questions are shown at appendix 1, the list of interviewees at appendix 2.

Executive Summary

This report was written in response to the burgeoning of international collaboration in UK Higher Education, ranging from franchise arrangements with international partners to having campuses located worldwide. Data for the report was collected using structured interviews with HE colleagues already engaged in international work and from other organisations including the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and global businesses. In all, over forty people contributed to this report and the authors are grateful to them for their time and insights.

As expected issues of national culture and ways of working dominate the challenges, but other issues also arise which are part of the preparation that institutions need to undertake to attain the best from their international projects and from the staff who take part in them.

At an institutional level the report considers five stages of developing international capacity:

1. Capacity building within the institution
2. Selection of international leaders
3. Induction of international leaders
4. In-post development of international leaders
5. Career transitions for international leaders.

Under these headings the report identifies and discusses the challenges and offers good practice approaches to dealing with these.

At the level of the individual leader respondents suggest that effective leaders in the UK are more likely to be effective in the international environment/context/setting. However the report identifies three key sets of skills which are crucial to successful international leadership:

1. Self management
2. Working with others
3. Technical and business skills

The report goes on to discuss these skills and suggest ways that institutions can support the development of their international leaders.
Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged under each of the five institutional-level headings listed above. They should be considered and perhaps adapted to the circumstances and the specific needs of individual institutions. The report authors are acutely aware of the different business models and contexts in which Universities work. It is an aphorism, but none the less true, to say that there is no one generic solution to these challenges.

Building Capacity

Institutions may wish to consider:

1. How their HR Policies around recruitment and selection, performance management, reward, promotion and staff development support or work against the international project.

2. How potential international leaders are identified and enabled to gain appropriate experience and develop the skills required for international leadership.

3. How their staff development policies support international projects, and in doing this look beyond traditional staff development to the use of project work, secondments and other experiential learning approaches which can help develop capacity.

4. How the support and administrative systems at the international and home locations are adapted to support leaders, particularly in the early stages after appointment.

5. Thinking carefully about career transitions for international leaders eg building reintegration terms and conditions into discussions before an individual takes up the international post if appropriate.

Selection

Institutions may wish to consider:

1. How their recruitment processes help select the best candidates, including issues about which skills and experience they select against, the selection process itself and where interviews take place.

2. Selection criteria that highlights the international nature of the institution and reinforces that candidates may be expected to work internationally.

Induction

Institutions may wish to consider:

1. International appointees spending time in the UK early in their posting to gain an understanding of UK culture.

2. Where the induction takes place, in-country confers additional benefits.

3. Making use of experienced international staff employed by the institution as mentors and facilitators to assist in developing future international leaders.

In Post Development

Institutions may wish to consider:

1. The skills identified in the report and using a range of training and development interventions, seeking to embed coaching/mentoring, strong links to the home institution, and opportunities for reflection into the pattern of working for international colleagues.

2. Being very careful not to assume that the leadership development programmes and activities that work in the UK will automatically transfer to international settings successfully. Building or reinforcing appropriate administrative support for colleagues working internationally.
3 Accepting that developing leaders to work internationally is more complex, expensive and resource intensive.

4 Running joint development programmes with other institutions to reduce the impact of small cohorts making training difficult and expensive.

5 Coaching and mentoring opportunities for new international staff, ensuring that the technology is fit for purpose, that staff are fully trained in its use, and that coaches/mentors are appointed before departure so that a relationship can be built while both parties are in the UK.

Skills and Behaviours

Institutions may wish to consider:

1 How staff development in the institution helps to develop capacity and prepare and support individual leaders.

2 How potential leaders are developed through structured work experience to prepare them for assuming international roles.

3 Identifying and using the “window of opportunity” in the time just before and after assignment to international duties.

4 Offering cultural awareness training, perhaps using some of the commercial suppliers in the market.

5 Using international PG students to help staff understand the culture of the area in which they will be working.

6 Encourage development in the area of virtual/remote team leadership so that these skills can be applied internationally.

Career transitions

Institutions may wish to consider:

1 Using experienced international staff to help build future capacity by training and mentoring new/prospective international staff

2 Taking a more proactive stance re career management and being realistic about opportunities after any international placements.

3 Introducing formal approaches to reintegration, for example research leave, study leave etc

The Findings

Overview

The interviews provided a wealth of data about the skills and behaviours required by international leaders, the context in which they work and suggested many and varied development needs and opportunities.

A model began to emerge (A Five Stage Approach to Developing International Leadership Capacity in Higher Education) above which illustrates how a university’s own specific context and its international strategy influences its organisation infrastructure, its values and university policies and processes. This in turn influences how international work is designed and managed and therefore has a significant impact on the
demands placed on those leaders working internationally.

Central to the success of the individual as an international leader is their skill set which is presented at the very core of the model and is crucial for their success.

The model also highlights the need for institutions to continually work on building their capacity to engage and develop future international leaders and the report findings suggest ways an institution might do this.

Recruiting the most appropriate staff into international leadership roles was revealed as critical and effective inductions were essential for smooth integration.

Interviewees highlighted the importance of ongoing leadership development for in-post leaders and the model requires us to think about how we can best help international leaders with their careers if and when their overseas assignments end. The model above provides the structure for our report and allows readers to dip in and out of the report findings in ways that are relevant to them and their institution’s international business models, which all vary. The next part of the report therefore discusses the individual elements of the model in more detail.

**Institutional Context**

Although the focus of this research was on the development of international leaders almost all interviewees made interesting points about how an institution’s international strategy, infrastructure, processes and policies influence and impact on the leadership role.

Institutional context was therefore seen to be a significant driver of behaviour. Several business models are employed for international ventures, ranging from building a new campus in an international context from scratch through to local franchise arrangements. The roles and demands being placed on leaders in each of these different contexts therefore requires different behaviours as each leader learns to work to deliver their own strategies in their own contexts and to adapt their approaches and behaviours accordingly.

Leading an international operation whilst based in the UK presents very different challenges to leading that operation in-situ, for instance, from an unfamiliar base. In addition to the issues of organisational context discussed below, we should recognise the difference between being based internationally and remotely leading and managing an international operation from a UK base.

A number of interviewees provided examples of how an institution’s particular context impacts on the demands being placed on the leaders, especially the strategic fit between the home institution and the international venture. For example some interviewees spoke of a “mission mismatch” where the home institution is research intensive, the international arm “teaching only”. This can cause problems in recruiting the best leaders and academic staff to work on the international campus if they feel that their research will suffer as a result. This can also be reflected in differing values and beliefs in different parts of the institution.

Another interviewee observed the different values held by leaders from different contexts, and those held by local staff. They observed that their institution never had a critical mass of leaders in key positions at the international venture and therefore struggled to embed the academic and institutional values displayed at the home institution.

A PVC spoke of the need to “align aspects of the organisation such as promotion criteria, performance management, use of technology, committee structure and information technology infrastructure to the international needs of the institution”.

Interviewees also spoke of the difficulties of working at a distance from
established support systems, both administrative and what might be described as “social”. Administrative functions were often described as being less effective and embedded than the equivalent functions at home, lacking the institutional knowledge and experience which can be taken for granted in a UK institution. The social support systems are those informal co-operations and support which many people use to for help with problem solving and coping with the inevitable stresses of academic leadership.

Some interviewees raised issues about the interaction between the home institution and the international venture. These issues occur on two levels, simple logistical issues of time zones and distance. The way in which the international venture is perceived from the home institution and vice versa also impacts. In some cases staff see the other part of the institution as a separate entity, leading to difficulties in communication. The result of this is that staff in UK Universities sometimes find their international colleagues more demanding than their UK counterparts. This frustration has been seen to lead to communication difficulties and conflict. Interestingly in cases where the UK colleagues had the chance to visit the international operation, both sides began to appreciate each others’ situations. This shows the value, recognised elsewhere, that face to face communications are essential to help build relationships which later can thrive using communication technology.

The skill for the international leader is being able to meet the demands of their home institution whilst working within the constraints and cultures of the local operation. One University has set up regular video conference meetings with key academic and administrative staff taking part in three way conversations to improve and maintain good inter-campus communications.

Interviewees also talked about how approaches to learning and teaching can also be very different to the home institution and how this can cause tension;

“Students previous experience is often different. In some cultures learning by rote is more common than in the UK. Some are used to private tutors, may live at home and in a society which is more deferential to teaching staff. Their parents/family might be stakeholders in their education and therefore more demanding. And we are trying to develop them into independent learners and to challenge each other and their lecturers. This can be very difficult for those involved in teaching and particularly those involved in leading the teaching endeavour.” (Professional Services Director, UK University)

“We are quite rigid in the UK about the way exams are marked but in some cultures it’s easier to turn a blind eye. We have to be very honest about our academic standards to ensure the integrity of our degrees but in some cultures it is very important that academic staff don’t lose face – in some places they may lose their jobs very easily and we have to manage that.” (Lecturer, UK University)

Encouraging students to feel free to challenge each other and their lecturers and generally developing them as critical thinkers is also proving to be challenging for some;

We are used to free speech and being very open about what we think. This is not the case everywhere. Add to that the language challenges and what would normally be a sensitive conversation
becomes even more difficult.” (Lecturer, UK University)

Many international projects have similar characteristics to a start up, lacking a long history of how things are done. Different leadership approaches are needed to those which are effective in a well established home institution. For instance, timescales and approaches to decision making may be different in what can feel like a more business-like, entrepreneurial and commercial venture.

These are just a few ways that the institution’s international strategy, structure and processes, including preferred ways of leading, teaching and researching, all place many and varied demands on the leaders who are appointed to deliver the international targets. International leadership development therefore needs to take account of the different international contexts in which international leaders find themselves.

The Skills and Behaviours of Effective International Leaders

This section of the report describes what interviewees told us about what international leaders in HE need to be and do. It will not be a surprise to read that interviewees explained that many of the generic skills held by the most effective leaders in UK HE are a prerequisite in international roles. However, it emerged that there are some skills and behaviours which are required in abundance to be truly effective in leading international ventures. We have attempted to put some structure around these findings by placing them under three key headings;

1 **Self management** - International leaders need to be self aware and demonstrate high levels of personal resilience and tenacity combined with pro-activity and drive.
2 **Working with others** - International leaders need to possess high levels of cultural intelligence combined with well developed diplomacy skills and interpersonal and relationship building skills.
3 **Technical and business skills** - International leaders need the ability to balance the strategic and operational aspects of their roles and have well honed negotiating skills and high levels of digital literacy.

The model above shows the three skill areas in a Venn diagram, acknowledging the intrinsic interaction and overlap between the three.

**Self Management**

**Self awareness**

Interviewees told us that some of the best international leaders appear to have heightened levels of self awareness and a genuine interest in reflecting on their own behaviours and adapting accordingly. These leaders appear to understand how their own personalities, experiences and culture influence their thinking, their choices and their decisions.

"Being able to hold a mirror up to see ourselves through the eyes of others not just from our own culture but from a range of cultures is a great help when trying to work with anybody but
especially international colleagues.”
(HR Manager UK University)

Clearly if international leaders know how others perceive them and the impact they have on others it can help them to look at things from another’s perspective. Being sensitive to how their behaviours are interpreted by their international colleagues can also help them to be more flexible about learning and adapting their behaviours for the next time. They need to be prepared to attend to their own internal assumptions and emotional responses in order to make conscious choices reflect on their own cultural mindset and how it influences them at work.

"Being self aware and checking the reactions to your behaviours and your language is important." (Professional Services Manager at an international campus)

They are often the type to want and ask for feedback. They analyse themselves, see what they have done and whether it works and then adapt accordingly. One HR Manager told us that, “the ability to understand one’s impact on others and being able to reflect on how you are being received is very important and not everyone can do this. It is good to look for this ability when we are recruiting leaders and staff to work internationally.”

Personal resilience and tenacity

Interviewees mention that being away from the existing support systems, formal or otherwise is often very challenging suggesting that personal resilience is a key competence. It is not unusual for leaders and staff moving into international roles to have a higher turnover rate than those placed in domestic roles. One university had experienced this with significant turnover of senior staff in their first year of operating as part of an international partnership. Given what interviewees say about the pressures of the role it is not surprising. Putting in place good support systems for newly placed leaders is something that needs to be done in a structured manner. Interviewees often report being left to sort it out for themselves and this demands quite a lot of personal resilience.

“They need to be able to cope with constant change, with business growth, with a lack of support structures, with higher than normal staff churn, with demands from their different masters plus the inevitable communication barriers. In other words they need very broad shoulders.”
(DVC with international brief in a UK University)

Certain aspects of the role can be quite draining for some types of people. “If you don’t like networking or are not prepared to put the time in for this aspect of the job, don’t do this kind of role. It will tire you out and make you miserable. Introverts might find this kind of work quite stressful and draining.”
(Head of Administration, UK University)

Also on the subject of resilience another interviewee said,

“Our partner didn’t give us the labs we needed on time to start teaching at the start of term or the chemicals we needed to run our labs but they want us to increase our student numbers. These are stressful and tricky conversations. We also have to be flexible and creative problem solvers to get round such issues. Not everyone can cope with this amount of pressure.” (Head of School, UK University)

Resilience levels are also important in everyday situations. One told us that international staff need to be quite tough.

“When travel arrangements go wrong, your classroom doesn’t work out, your hotel doesn’t understand what you need or you don’t seem to be able to get the
“International staff need to be tenacious. They need to get things concluded/done- they need to be determined to complete the deal and be able to deal with set-backs.”
(Professional Services Director, UK University)

Respondents also spoke about the isolation which can be felt while working internationally.

The ability to socialise, join clubs and make friends was described as being very important. Institutions can help by recognising this and providing a framework in which these activities can thrive. Being isolated can also mean that international managers and staff “can fall into thinking that life is better in the home institution - no matter how much support and rewards they are given. It is easy to understand this and the senior leaders have an important role in bringing some reality to this.”
(Head of School with international partnerships.)

Two interviewees told us that working in emerging economies, particularly the poorer counties of Africa and Asia requires greater resilience to adversity than in the more mature markets of Europe and US. Timescales often appear tighter, workloads higher and academics have to be realistic about their research in the first year or so, which can cause a tension.

A Dean at a UK University reinforces the point about resilience and tenacity in the following quote;

Some staff seem able to adapt quickly and with confidence, others find it really hard work. Those that do well seem to be characterised by openness, flexibility and adaptability, being able to think on their feet and therefore cope well with whatever is thrown at them. They have the ability to deal with unstructured situations and a volume of detail.

Pro-activity and Drive

Interviewees stressed how international leaders need to be even more proactive, adaptable and possess even higher levels of personal drive than their UK counterparts.

Decision making can be very slow in some countries and completely the opposite in others. In the following example the PVC of a Russell Group university explains how a combination of both patience and pro-activity is often required. “Sometimes we need to accept that things can take a very long time - it has taken us nearly four years to get into China for instance. But, international leaders, at the same time as being patient, need the wit to take the initiative and the energy to drive projects forward. The skills of spotting the opportunity, grabbing it and making it happen are essential.” This often requires leaders to make autonomous decisions and take risks that they might not take at home, with fewer if any referrals back to the home institution. This ability to make decisions and take action independently was described by many as a critical skill.

Operating in international contexts is complex and subject to change. International leaders need to be able to cope with changes in plans, projects that don’t come to fruition etc. “They have to be able to accept that a lot of effort may go into something and then the project doesn’t come off. This happens often and can be very frustrating.”
(Head of School with Singaporean partnerships).

If the leader is someone who is
Some reflected on whether the skills described here are even more critical in the start up phase of international ventures and partnerships.

"Perhaps these attributes are even more important at the start up phase when high energy, the drive to negotiate, to seize opportunities and the drive to succeed are imperative. It is interesting to reflect on whether these sometimes charismatic characters are then the best people to run our degrees or manage our ventures once they are established." (HR Manager, UK University)

**Working with Others**

Cultural intelligence (CQ)

Respondents were unanimous about the need for all HE leaders and staff working internationally to possess enhanced cultural awareness and sensitivity. They talked about the need to understand body language, customs, concepts of time, manners, the way meetings are held, the way meals are taken, hospitality received and shared etc. A number made the point that not everybody is interested in people and in finding out about the cultures of others. Some do not feel that investing time in exploring cultural differences and then adapting their own approach is something that they want to do. This “cultural interest” emerged as a pre requisite of cultural awareness and sensitivity and was suggested as a key indicator of international success. It is also something that HEIs can look for when appointing leaders to work overseas. A Director of Studies commented that the leader needs to be “culturally sensitive without being over deferential.”

Cultural interest, knowledge about customs and others’ HE systems plus the personal ability to adapt one’s own approach in order to build relationships was described as a key determinant of international leadership success. It has been referred to as Cultural Intelligence (CQ) by Livermore in his work Leading with Cultural Intelligence. Cultural Intelligence can be defined as “an outsider’s seemingly natural ability to interpret someone’s unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures in the way that person’s compatriots would.” While in this context empathy can be “the ability to see and understand how other people construct reality, or more specifically how they perceive, discover and invent the inner and outer worlds.” (Casse 1981)

A Dean on an international campus spoke of something similar in a slightly different way describing the need for leaders to “Engage, Reflect, Adapt” in order to understand and adjust to their circumstances.

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1 Livermore, D (2010). Leading with Cultural Intelligence. New York: Amacon. 3-220

new environment. He expanded on this as:

- **engage**, actively seeking to be involved at a cultural level, wanting to understand, enquiring
- **reflect**, structured, intentional reflection about the experience
- **adapt**, changing behaviours and approaches to suit the situation, and engaging differently

This reflective approach can be supported by training interventions before posting and coaching or mentoring in post. It may be helpful to give leaders models to help them reflect on their own understanding, for example Browaeys and Price offer the four level model below which can provide a framework for reflection and self assessment.


### Levels of Cultural Awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Awareness of superficial or visible cultural traits - stereotypes</td>
<td>Tourism, textbooks</td>
<td>Unbelievable, ie exotic, bizarre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits that contrast markedly with one’s own</td>
<td>Cultural conflict situations</td>
<td>Unbelievable, ie frustrating, irrational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits that contrast markedly with one’s own</td>
<td>Intellectual analysis</td>
<td>Believable, cognitively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Awareness of how another culture feels from the standpoint of an insider</td>
<td>Cultural immersion, living the culture</td>
<td>Believable because of subjective familiarity</td>
</tr>
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One global HR Director provided the following example;

"The real trick for the international leader is to balance for instance his or her natural (in our case Western) sense of urgency with the local staffs’ mores and skill levels. This should not mean a compromise on quality/delivery but more flexibility to the local culture and environment. Checking understanding, without being patronising is important. Some cultures believe it is rude to refuse or disappoint, thus the unwary international leader may be surprised how easily everyone agrees to tight deadlines or budget cuts- neither are likely to be met but it would have been insulting to argue. International leaders should always check that they have understood what is being told to them."
Interestingly, one PVC with an established international campus warned of the dangers of “over emphasising difference … teaching about cultural stereotypes and … it becoming a self fulfilling prophecy”. They used the stereotype of staff in some national cultures not wanting to take decisions, suggesting that because of the stereotype, managers take decisions for them, thereby denying staff the opportunity to engage in decision making, and then saying “I told you so”. The PVC spoke of the balance between differences and similarities suggesting that it is more important not to underplay the latter.

One Global HR Director stressed that cultural differences are important but that at the end of the day we should not be afraid saying “it’s only like the difference between Newcastle and Teesside!” An experienced international operator with experience in HE and the commercial world also warned of the danger of not dealing with issues through a misplaced “political correctness”.

One HR Manager stressed that good international leaders are often working with a range of people from a range of different cultures and that the skill is in creating a new culture from the range.

Experienced leaders spoke of adapting their approach, and gave examples such as:

“The culture here makes “no” a difficult word to say so we need to think about framing questions so that a positive response is possible eg Am I right that X hasn’t been done?” “Yes you are right that X hasn’t been done.” Also if you want feedback it is sensible to explain that there will be not dire consequences!” (Head of Professional Service at an international campus)

“Extreme courtesy has been the number one skill for me and some people really struggle with this. If you are not comfortable saying that you are honoured etc and with the formality of some situations, international leadership is not for you.” (Head of School with partnership in Singapore)

However, as one international HR Director pointed out this level of extreme courtesy would not be as effective in Australia or the United States for instance.

Social mores and norms need to be observed, for example

“A willingness to go along with unfamiliar things like rounds of toasting”. “The concept of time is very different in Singapore and those of us from the West can come across as very impatient.”

The taking of meal breaks and food was raised by a UK PVC,

“they take the hour, we get a sandwich and carry on working, we think they are lazy, but it’s because food and the way it is consumed is culturally important to them – we have learned to understand this.”

So, a genuine interest in the cultures of others combined with an appreciation of difference, a willingness to try out new things and reflect and adapt for next time were all listed as crucial elements of cultural intelligence and vital for effective international leadership.

**Diplomacy skills**

According to interviewees an individual’s diplomacy skills are critical for success in international work. This applies in both the day to day management of others and in the more frequent interactions leaders sometimes have with in country officials.

“Status in Singapore is given by title and respect is offered accordingly. There is a lot of deference to senior staff and sometimes staff from the United States, the UK and Australia find this very strange.” (International Dean)
International leaders’ lists of networks and contacts might include immigration officials, diplomats, local chiefs and religious leaders. These relationships need to be carefully nurtured and respectfully maintained using extremely effective interpersonal skills and high levels of diplomacy. The skills of diplomacy are found to be important in which ever culture we find ourselves.

“Self awareness is clearly important to respondents. The ability to understand one’s impact on others and being able to reflect on how you are being received is important, as is being careful and diplomatic in our communications.” (HR Manager UK University)

“Some people find this type of work quite challenging. If you are not the kind of person who can show extreme diplomacy and use expressions like, I am honoured, you might struggle in some cultures.” (Head of School, UK University)

“The best international leaders remember names and faces and make introductions. They know what to say to people at the highest level of the organisation through to the most junior of staff. They also try to use some of the language to show willing, even if it is only hello and welcome.” (Head of School, International Campus)

Giving and receiving gifts gracefully and being happy to be photographed shaking hands was cited by some as essential to the role in some countries. Hosting dinners and being a guest of honour at formal events was often expected of the more senior leaders.

Understanding and respecting dress codes was listed by some as important. This ranged from women wearing headscarves and keeping covered in Arab countries through to the frequency of wearing more formal clothes for both work and social occasions in some parts of the world. This had been a challenge for some UK academics who are used to dressing quite informally. Respondents reiterated the importance of the dress code in different cultures.

“At this level the way you present yourself has a very important bearing, presence, dress codes, protocols in etiquette all need to be adhered to and levels of self confidence need to be very high to work with ministers etc.” (Director of an international campus)

Conducting oneself in a more business like way is often expected. Academics in the UK are often casually dressed and looking smart and making a very professional first impression in some cultures is essential as it can be seen as a sign of respect.

“At a recent student fair our UK visiting academics wore white shirts and university ties with dark trousers. The women wore dark skirts and white tops. This is very counter-cultural for us but the students at the fair were very impressed with our level of representation and that we looked the part. We received 150 applications for 50 places.” (Head of School with international partnerships.)

Under the heading of diplomacy a point was frequently made about how important it is that leaders from the home institution take care not to be seen as imperialistic in their views, their language, their anecdotes and their humour. Some said it was easy to fall into presenting the UK way as the best or only way and that there is still much sensitivity to this in some parts of the world. They were clear that these days, such attitudes and behaviours are inappropriate anywhere in the world and that a joint sharing of information, ideas and a collaborative decision making process is almost always the preferred option. Therefore being self aware in this respect and checking the reactions to behaviours and language is important.

In some cultures respect and therefore sometimes deference is earned by age and experience, in others by the reputation for a job well done. Where deference is based on age, for instance the skill might be to diplomatically show deference whilst at the same time finding those who will help you to deliver. Interviewees explained how in
some sensitive situations one single diplomatic error can cause a significant amount of damage that may take a long time to repair.

So much of this work depends on the context and as one interviewee told us.

“It all depends where in the world you are and who you are working with. The extreme levels of diplomacy expected in Singapore would never be required in Australia!”

Interpersonal skills and Relationship Building

Following on from the focus on diplomacy skills was a strong emphasis on interpersonal and relationship building skills. Interviewees were clear that effective international leaders require these skills in abundance.

In some cultures relationship building is a slow formal process taking many meetings until trust is finally established and work can commence. In others relationship building can take on a more task focused feel and trust to deliver is assumed at the outset. Leaders need to understand how they should approach this in their particular contexts and this sometimes involves a change in gear for them. “In the US relationships are often built on delivering the goods in record time whereas in Asia it is often more important to get to know someone well before working with them.” (Global HR Director)

Interviewees told us that watching how relationships are built in other cultures and following suit is important. Observing and asking questions can help. Deference to others’ approaches to relationship building is sometimes essential to the final outcome and some people find this very difficult if they believe their way is best.

One of the requisites of effective relationship building is tolerance, especially the tolerance and understanding of difference. The following example came from a female Deputy Vice Chancellor.

“I was delivering a presentation and was the guest of honour of the Sheik. However when lunch time came I was the only woman on a table of men who talked in their own language for the duration of the meal. Some people can handle these type of situations better than others. It takes a certain amount of patience, tolerance and cultural appreciation.”

“Staff who are warm and genuinely interested in other people are useful to us internationally. If they are able to socialise with a government minister at a cocktail party one day and persuade staff groups to shift perspective the next they are likely to succeed. They need to be prepared to put time into relationship building, sometimes bending over backwards to make things happen for someone and not everyone is happy to do this.” (International Dean of UK University)

Relationship building with staff groups was discussed. Managing people consistently and fairly was mentioned a number of times.

“Local staff often have a heightened sensitivity to being managed by an expatriate and look for consistency. Expectations of the locals may be higher than at home too. Some cultures expect their leaders to “step up to the plate” and make decisions. A diplomatic and consensual debate may be appreciated but eventually most cultures want to see leaders make decisions and not have to have to ring the home"
institutions for permission or advice. This kind of autonomy and credibility is very important for effective staff relationships.” (Global HR Director)

In some cultures the expected leadership style is quite commanding and some of our more consultative academics can come across as too soft/wishy washy/unable to make decisions.” (Head of School with international partnerships)

Unsurprisingly the cultural relationship building issues associated with teaching methods and approaches are similar to those associated with leadership. Leaders need to adapt, as do lecturers who need to be able to promote innovative ways of teaching at every opportunity and sometimes in cultures where it’s less than welcome. “The country we are delivering degrees in say they want creative and challenging citizens for the future, in other words they want us to teach their students to be like UK students but the context sometimes makes this very difficult and our lecturers and Deans need enhanced interpersonal skills to persuade people to change, to open themselves up to new ways and to stand up to the local teaching culture in a way that is acceptable.” (PVC UK University)

Simple things like keeping promises, respecting time differences and thinking carefully about the wording of an email were also listed as ways to maintain healthy relationships with international colleagues. “Don’t expect an immediate reply - they are likely to be in bed and always re read emails before pressing send to check for language ambiguities. Better still use skype!” said one experienced academic.

Technical and Business Skills

Balancing the Strategic and the Operational

Interviewees told us that international leaders need to be able to deliver on the most strategic agendas at the same time as being able to focus on the detail. They need to see the big picture, spot business opportunities, grow international work, expand into new countries or markets, expand staff numbers, build new buildings, manage complex budgets, grow student numbers etc. They also need to understand, communicate and sell the institutional vision and product. At a more operational level, HR issues in international settings are often more complex, challenging and time consuming. One senior leader explained that they may need to be prepared to be the one who got the photocopier repaired! Managing this balance of

"Don’t think you can build relationships or get things done by email in SE Asia. In India, China and Malaysia first meetings will be very polite. Only at the second and third meetings will people start to open up. You really need to meet them face to face to get cooperation and in SE Asia a £100 flight is well worth the investment.” (Head of School with international partnerships.)
longer term strategic responsibilities alongside solving the day to day problems can be very draining for some.

The perception mentioned above, that some local staff in some cultures prefer not to take the initiative or make decisions, adds to the difficulty for senior managers of being drawn into operational issues that in the UK are more likely to be the responsibility of someone more junior.

One interviewee described this as a level of flexibility and ability to adapt to different situations and levels of challenge. The skill is to “not get precious about the level at which you are operating and be willing to muck in”.

"Fully understanding the UK University’s strategies, values, principles, systems, structures, policies, management and procedures and being able to interpret them locally is a major skill. Combine this with an understanding of the international stakeholders, their culture, values, standards, demographics, politics, regions, educational expectations etc plus a sprinkle of the language and the demands on international leaders are seen to be immense." (Dean and CEO, International Campus)

Negotiating skills

Interviewees stressed that negotiation is far more complex and difficult in the international arena. Their observations are supported by Gundling (2010)\(^3\), who says “negotiating styles are deeply rooted in cultural behaviour.” He offers a model of cultural determinants to negotiating styles including: individualistic v. group; task v. relationship; direct v. indirect. Understanding how the local culture impacts on negotiating style clearly informs best practice in that locality.

Negotiation can be more challenging for three key reasons:

1 Because of different cultural systems,

"Credibility is very important for the higher profile negotiations. You have to go in numbers in some cultures, send your most senior staff and look very smart if you want to be taken seriously. This is especially important when negotiating with governments, education ministers and medical councils for instance." (Dean, Singapore Campus)

"You have to believe in what you are selling, in other words your own university and the quality of one’s degrees. When creating business opportunities you also have to have everything in place once the door is open as in many cultures speed of delivery is what we are measured on." (Head of School, UK University)

"Here it is always best not to say no face-to-face during the negotiation. Saying that you will try or will investigate further is always better received even if you have to go back eventually and say that you have tried and it has proved impossible." (Head of School, UK University)

2 Because of the nature of the subject being negotiated,

"Negotiating might be about finances at a strategic level with government ministers, awarding bodies and professional organisations. Locally the negotiations tend to be about resources like space or facilities. Individually negotiations take place around workload and staffing but also more frequently than in the UK about salaries and benefits packages especially for expatriate staff." (PVC, UK University)

"Expats from different universities and businesses often compare salaries, terms and conditions, status and job titles and that means that we have to be

both more flexible and often tougher in our negotiations." (Director, International Campus)

3 Because it can be a larger part of the role than for home based staff,

"I have to negotiate more in this job than any other job I have ever had in my life. Staff turnover is high so we have to work hard to keep the best people and this requires quite a bit of creative thinking, negotiation and persuasion!" (Senior Manager, Singapore Campus)

Given what respondents tell us about the importance and difficulties of negotiation in the international context, this skill seems worthy of additional attention in selecting and developing our international leaders.

Digital Literacy

Interviewees highlighted the challenge of communication for international staff, distance and time zones being typically stated as contributing factors; they spoke of the need to be constantly available through technology. Using iPads and smart phones to stay in touch is the norm. Working on flights and being able to access the internet wirelessly wherever they are in the world is seen to be essential. In some cultures an immediate response is more expected than in the UK and increasingly technology is part of the way teaching is delivered. The quality of IT support services however is sometimes below the standard our leaders are accustomed to in the UK, and for some universities work on the IT infrastructure is required. Learning to make effective use of the technology to help resolve these issues was seen as key. However, the need is more about being able to chair two/multi site discussions to reach effective decisions and to ensure clear accurate communications than any technical skill in using the equipment. One Dean on an international campus spoke of the feeling of exclusion during video conference meetings when the group at the far end talked amongst themselves, or he found it difficult to interject without having to talk over people. He did not see this as a deliberate affront, simply poor skills in both chairing and contributing to meetings in the video conference environment.

All of the issues raised have implications for developing staff who will travel and those who will be supporting and working with them from the UK base.

Institutional Capacity building

The report now moves on from the skills and behaviours required by individuals to focus on organisational-level issues and presents A Five Stage Approach To Developing International Leadership Capacity in HE.

Very few universities interviewed are at the stage of systematically building international leadership succession into their overall business plans but some are starting to think about it very seriously for the first time.

Interviewees talked about early identification of those staff having the potential to work internationally and then investing in this “international talent pool” with the aim of recruiting from it in future.
“Looking now for those who have the interest and aptitude, developing their self awareness and cultural intelligence now will have a longer term payback.” (Reward Manager, UK University)

Some institutions are starting to think about asking for volunteers for an international work, developing the cultural sensitivity of the volunteers and then giving them either international or UK-based multi cultural projects to work on. This approach replicates the examples of “international talents pools” that the authors found in the private sector. Such international projects then become the development in itself. Multi national global businesses described extensive on-line talent pools which HR staff can, for instance interrogate to identify potential candidates for the next vacancy for a CEO for Brazil or CFO for South Africa. Most universities are a long way off developing such formal and digital international leadership talent pools but some are starting to talk at the most senior level about staff with international leadership potential and investing in them now for the future.

“We use our appraisal system and on-going careers conversations to discuss staffs preferences for working internationally. We still need to get better at spotting staff with international potential earlier and getting them developed as leaders so that they are more ready and skilful when they go. One of the biggest challenges is then about sending some of our best people overseas and the gaps it leaves at home. We are having to get a lot better at succession, thinking about developing our people sooner so that we have the capacity to let people go overseas and yet still be able to back fill their positions effectively here.” (PVC, UK University)

One university talked about building a requirement for international rotations into job descriptions, interviews and appraisals, taking it one step closer to the global businesses we spoke to who would not make senior appointments to staff who were not internationally mobile.

Secondments and exchange programmes were listed as relatively safe ways to test out an individual’s readiness to work more permanently overseas.

Staff turnover at all levels appears to be higher in international settings and it is recognised that Universities need to put even more effort into this area.

“We need to think now about getting a new overseas Director ready for 5 years time. We can’t leave it to chance, anything could happen in the meantime and we always prefer internal appointments for international operations.” (UK Deputy Head of School)

There was a strong view in HE that “international experience makes international leaders of the future”. Providing staff with opportunities to teach and particularly lead projects with multi-cultural stakeholders in international settings early in their careers gives those individuals a chance to find out for themselves whether they are suited to an international role and allows the university to see them in action before making important appointment decisions.

Such individuals need to learn from their experiences, immerse themselves in the new cultures and develop their self awareness. The aim is that their experience should mean they are more competent and confident when they are moved into more formal international roles.

“Allow them to grow in the UK and on international assignments. Let them take responsibility, make decisions and mistakes. In this way they will be able to work out for themselves whether they can cope with the complexity, ambiguity, multi cultural challenges and travel themselves. Some of the international leadership programmes do look interesting but I think that the key is to get people working internationally earlier in their careers and developing their management skills earlier than we are used to in HE.” (International Dean)
"Get them to do an international research collaboration - leading the group is excellent preparation for leading a team as the same type of issues arise. Also periods of 2-3 months are important. Flying in for just a week of teaching doesn’t allow them to see what it feels like to really live and work there.” (Head of Professional Services, UK University)

Those who have studied/worked internationally are often more open to international work. Some Universities listed attendance at recruitment fairs, working as examiners and international research collaborations as ways of testing out an individual’s readiness for international work. Short secondments or exchanges of 3-6 months are also being used for those with leadership potential. This exposure to the complexity and multi cultural environment is seen as the single most valuable way of developing staff for future international leadership roles.

A number of global businesses had researched and developed competency frameworks which they use to identify and develop international leaders. Universities are starting to think about building the specific skills of international leadership into their existing leadership frameworks. In this way every Head/Director/Dean etc would be encouraged to talk about their international aspirations as part of any promotion/selection decisions and as part of the annual appraisal process. International work and the skills to perform effectively in this arena would eventually become a part of the leadership culture for that institution.

An experienced International HR Director made the following comments about it being a long game and suggested that it can take 5-10 years to create a fresh international cadre.

“You need to grow your own community of international staff. At GDF Suez we looked for people with international experience, a track record of excellent performance plus ambitions and sufficient resilience to go and to cope. We developed a Global Player Programme - participants self selected but we then interviewed them for places. Successful applicants did 3 two-week events in Chile, Vietnam and Europe for instance. They did a lot of self awareness work and some traditionally taught sessions. They always did a project set by the MD of the hosting site and fed back their work to the senior team there. We recruited 25 Global Players onto the programme each year” (Global HR Director)

“We need to start planning now by being clear about developing a pool from which to recruit future international leaders. We need to identify the ones with the interest and try to measure whether they have the aptitude and then develop them accordingly.” (Professional Services Manager, UK University)

“We also need to consider ourselves lucky if they stay for 3 years. 50% of our staff turned over in the last 3 years
and this is not a failure, it is to be expected. Some leaders would find this constant churn quite demanding to manage and it does mean we need to do even more to identify and develop the next group.” (Head of School with international partnerships.)

Universities are starting to understand that they might need to think more about succession as their start up entrepreneurs move on once the venture is established or that they may not have the right skill set for managing the steady state.

“Being there is the best preparation. Leading a multi-cultural research project, leading a new overseas programme, doing some recruitment etc. all helps. Doing things that requires them to get things done through others in the new context helps them to see how they will cope and assess whether they can adapt.”

(Head of School with international partnerships)

Evidence from interviewees highlighted that institutions need to consider capacity building at different levels. International aspirations/strategies and HR and other institutional policies all impact on the realisation of a University’s international endeavours. These policies include, recruitment, performance management, pay and rewards and promotion. How all of these policies interact will influence the capacity of the institution to deliver its international aspirations.

“Perhaps as we recruit more international PhD students, they will become our junior researchers/lecturers and could become our leaders of the future with 15 years of experience at our university. Additionally, hiring internationally mobile staff now, to work at this university will kick start our journey as they are already converted to working internationally.” (Deputy Director of School, UK University)

Selection of international leaders

This piece of research did not set out to look specifically at recruitment issues, however it is important to mention some of the valuable points raised by interviewees. There may be a tension between hiring for skills and competences versus choosing on the back of institutional knowledge and awareness of organisational culture.

The danger of accepting volunteers for international work, without really focusing on the requirements of the role seem obvious. Interviewees talked of people who saw the international assignment as an easy option, an escape from something else, and highlighted the dangers. Some applicants make the mistake of thinking that because they like travelling and trying unusual foods they will enjoy living and working internationally, which is why early exposure to the reality of international work is so important. Interviewees shared stories of damaged relationships, lost business opportunities and reputational damage that can spring from making a poor appointment. It
was suggested that selection criteria based on the requirements of a typical academic leadership role in the UK omit a set of skills and qualities needed for international leadership.

Defining such a skill set and personality profile (and possibly using psychometric measurements) against which to assess prospective international leaders against would be a more professional and systematic approach, more likely to guarantee a smooth transition for the individual and a successful appointment for the university.

In other words design selection processes to test precisely those skills and behaviours staff will need once they are in post.

Non HE organisations often recruit senior staff with the explicit condition that international work and travel are integral to the role. They use global leadership competency frameworks to assess candidates and in doing so are more likely to make successful appointments. They also include international visits as part of the selection process or interview in the country the candidate will work in.

"You wouldn’t be considered for a senior role at ICI unless you were prepared to work internationally.“ (Senior UK University Manager with experience in industry)

A number of Universities talked about how important it is to interview staff in the country in which they would be working. Senior staff might be given a couple of weeks with their families to test out whether the move is right for them on the basis that this is cheaper than making the wrong appointment both in terms of costs and even more importantly reputation and relationships.

This may sound expensive but interviewees were all agreed that it is more cost effective than making the wrong appointment, particularly at a senior level.

"If the new senior appointment is an internal hire, then a country visit is offered as part of the selection process. This is likely to be for 7-10 days. Candidates can then see the territory first hand. If the international leader is destined for a country where English is not the business language such as China or Indonesia, then a minimum of 72 hours language training is offered to both the employee and his/her spouse.”

(Global HR Director)

"This might then lead us appointing on skill rather than seniority which can sometimes bring us problems. We can’t always equate academic success and experience with being effective internationally.” (International Business Development Manager, UK University.)

"We are short of good international operators and are looking to include these abilities in the job spec for future recruitment exercises.” (Dean, UK University)

"Try to observe them as a fish out of water before you select them for international assignments.“ (International HR Director)

"We always hold interviews in Singapore so that staff can see what they are letting themselves in for and so that they understand the humidity as its very hard to explain!!”

(Director of Programmes, International Campus)

Although the project wasn’t charged with investigating selection the researchers were left in little doubt that selecting the right person is almost more important
than any training/development that might be provided thereafter.

International Induction

Once staff are selected to work/lead internationally the Induction period is highlighted as hugely important for the success of the transition. Interviewees talked about the window of development opportunity, just before staff leave the UK to work internationally and of the short period just after they arrive as the most critical period for the institution to give them support. This period is also an extremely busy one for these staff, institutions need to design support and develop interventions with this in mind.

Although a number of the universities interviewed are offering cultural awareness training for large numbers of staff often combined with extensive leadership development opportunities for their UK staff, none of them are doing so systematically. They were not found to be working to identify international leadership potential and developing these staff to lead and manage in multicultural contexts specifically. In other words international leadership development activities are taking place but not in a coherent planned or necessarily the most effective way.

A number of universities provide UK Inductions for staff appointed to work in their international campuses, partnerships and franchises. Conversely staff appointed in-country often benefit significantly from spending 2-4 weeks in the UK institution to develop an understanding of the cultures, processes and the key people on whom they will soon be relying from a distance.

A number of universities appoint experienced international leaders/academics as a “international mentors” and sounding boards for others. Using returning international staff as mentors and locally based international students to brief on cultural issues was frequently suggested and for some institutions works very well.

“In-country Inductions are increasingly being arranged for those staff arriving in a new country and work place. Typically they are arranged by in country administrators and include being met at the airport, provided with a list of useful contacts, being taken to their new home and offices where they have a series of meetings with the key staff. These Inductions tend to focus on processes and systems but are deemed to be essential for settling into the new environment, particularly because very often there is very little in the way of a local infrastructure for the new manager to rely on, people to call on for instance.”

(Deputy Head of School, UK University)
One interviewee also suggested that cultural awareness works both ways and recommended programmes on How to Work with the English System and its People for locally recruited staff who are working in an English context for the first time. They recommended an interesting book, Watching the English by Kate Fox⁴.

One Institution runs a two day workshop to induct staff before they start any international appointment. This is part of a process which covers issues around: communication and simply “getting the job done” in an international environment; visa and travel advice and regulations; and ending with a de-brief on return to the home institution. One had designed on-line Induction materials for their international staff and another had developed an excellent Induction Handbook for new staff at the international campus which was also issued in advance to visitors.

“We don’t really induct our international staff and leaders very well but we are working on this. The next person from my school will go overseas mid way through 2013 so he will start to go to Malaysia in 2012 to student fairs, on an introductions tour to other partners, institutions and agents.”

(Head of School, UK University)

One University had developed Induction handbooks for each country in which they operated, written by previous international secondees for the current ones. Suggestions were made about drawing together an institutions’ experiences and publishing them as briefing notes for the use of others. “We could do post-overseas assignment interviews to gather their intelligence and share it”. (PVC UK University). This type of “Customs and Cultures booklet” is produced and/or purchased by a number of universities to present to their departing staff as part of their Induction. Another University had developed and launched a “Working in the Asian Continent” module for their international staff in conjunction with the Scottish Enterprise Team.

“We run sessions on plagiarism and critical thinking for local staff as part of their Induction to working with us. Their understanding of these two critical issues can sometimes be very different to ours.”

(Head of School, UK University)

Many institutions have a pool of international staff and Post Graduate Students who are willing to share their knowledge and experience of the country or region in which our leaders will be working. Some use this resource in a variety of ways, speaking at formal training events, mentoring and helping to devise training and support interventions which are then made available to staff about to take up international appointments.

On going development for all in post international leaders

A number of universities, including our own, are very aware that more focus needs to be placed on developing the institutions capacity to lead internationally and that we could facilitate this by designing and delivering appropriate leadership development plans and activities. The international businesses that we talked to, or heard about from others, appear to be well ahead of us in this respect. We heard about global leadership competency frameworks, international talent pools, multi-country leadership programmes and cross-world mentoring. There are undoubtedly things that HE can learn from these global players.

Interviewees talked enthusiastically about international leadership development programmes, especially the global businesses who had large numbers of managers going through extensive, multi-cultural and geographically complex international leadership development programmes. Indeed for some, all of their leadership development work had an international focus because of the reach of their products/services.

Some universities are aspiring to this but recognise that their participant numbers are much smaller and often international appointments are made sporadically rather than systematically in a cohort. This can make the logistics of running international leadership development programmes more problematic for individual HEIs.

Suggestions were made about UK universities partnering with their regional or university groups (eg other Russell group Universities) to deliver programmes for those staff with international roles. Programmes are best delivered in blocks as opposed to a more typical series of one day modules over a 6-9 month period. Travel and accommodation costs for both participants and facilitators are higher than usual. International leadership programmes are typically up to ten times the cost of a UK programme. One organisation talked about a global leadership development programme which cost £250k.

A Global HR Director explained pragmatically that the financial investment of international leadership development may cost 10 times more to develop half the numbers of staff and was realistic about the payback being smaller because much is lost in cultural differences and language challenges. They stressed however that the risks of not investing might seriously hamper the ability of a business or university to develop international capacity and thus deliver effectively. The conclusion was that if a university wants to operate globally then it has to be prepared to invest appropriately in the development of its international leaders and staff.

The content of international leadership development activities is important. Interviewees spoke at length about the skills and behaviours needed to work internationally, as described in the previous section, and programmes could be built around these quite easily. Modules described as essential included; Negotiating Skills, Cultural Intelligence, Relationship Management, Confident Decision Making, Business Skills,
Handling Resistance, Coping with Social Isolation, Managing at a Distance/Virtual Teams, Personal Resilience and Self Awareness.

Using more experienced international leaders to facilitate programmes and coach and mentor others was suggested as a way of using our own expertise and resources. There were also examples of international students helping to develop staff in some UK staff development events.

Running joint leadership development programmes in collaboration with other universities in the international settings can lead to interesting and diverse leadership programmes. For some this may mean delivering in-country leadership development events with other UK universities who are operating on the same campus/in the same region or with international universities and local training and development providers. Each university provides participants and a venue and then the programme could move around the region. "Take them around the world to develop them" was heard a few times. One of the most international of businesses we spoke to runs a programme of one-week modules in Paris, Brazil, Brussels and a range of venues in Asia for example

"Participants on our leadership development programme attend a range of modules in Lagos, Athens, Dubai and Bangkok. There is always a mixture of input, group work, case studies and multi cultural project work. We have found that since most learning in organisations is problem centred rather than trainer centred, managers learn much faster when issues/examples/case studies are presented to them in their own context." (Global HR Director)

"Move modules from country to country - seeing other sites is an opportunity in itself and is a way of developing further interest in international work. It therefore grows the institutions’ capacity to deliver more work internationally in future which is precisely what this project is about.” (Head of Organisational Development at a UK University)

A first step might be to start to build in the skills of leading at a distance and leading multi-cultural teams skills into existing UK leadership development programmes. In the same way that the Leadership Foundation’s Top Management Programme offers an international study tour, perhaps our own in-house strategic leadership programmes need to do the same and in doing so reinforce the expectation that working globally is the norm and is an integral part of leading a school or faculty. Other programmes, including the teaching certificates that new lecturers are required to undertake are also an excellent place to start exploring the challenges of teaching international students in the UK and in international settings.

Another interesting challenge is how the leadership development is delivered. The kind of approaches that work well in the UK might not fit culturally in some international contexts.

"Make sure your participant groups are truly mixed nationalities. Accept that what participants take away is watered down a bit due to it being in their second language and slightly distorted due to cultural differences. This can be quite difficult to accept as the development itself often costs significantly more to have less impact.” (Senior Manager, Global Business)

Some institutions are beginning to arrange leadership programmes for home staff at times of the year when international staff are likely to be visiting the home institution, enabling attendance at leadership development without travel just for that purpose.

Interestingly, one University was very clear that it did not want to emphasise international working in its leadership development interventions, but believed that their self awareness work and leadership programmes generally promoted the appropriate skills. They also made the point that their own UK
university had a very multi-cultural workforce so the skills being discussed here are equally important in the UK institution.

There was also much debate about how much one can really learn from such programmes. Some respondents felt that the only way to really develop cultural intelligence and global leadership skills is from real life experience.

There were some doubts about if/how 360 degree feedback exercises might work in international situations. It was suggested that it might be less than effective in the Middle East or India for instance, where age and status might prevent respondents being honest. It was agreed that it is more likely to work well in America and Australia but there was some uncertainty about success in Singapore, Malaysia and Asia generally. An interesting dilemma is whether as developers we might attempt to accommodate the culture of others too much rather than use our tools to reinforce the culture we want to promote. As an example the global businesses we spoke to used 360 degree feedback tools precisely to reinforce their keenness to operate transparent leadership cultures at their international sites.

Psychometric tools can often be used effectively in different situations/cultural contexts. Most of the well known tools (Myers Briggs Type Indicator, 16PF (Personality Factors)) are offered in different languages and norm tables for interpretation for different nationalities are also now available.

Action learning is used in a number of the international leadership programmes we heard about. Mixed groups working on similar challenges in different contexts has proven to be a powerful way to developing leadership skill and increasing cultural intelligence. One interviewee suggested using Skype for international action learning sets but the authors found no examples of it working well.

“A CEO should come back to the parent company 2-3 times a year to be reminded of the prevailing culture. This is where you can do some intensive support/development, arrange meetings, updates etc make them feel included.” (HR Manager, UK University)

Coaching and Mentoring

Coaching and mentoring, sometimes by experienced international leaders, was regarded as highly effective by many.

“Coaching helped me to prepare for my international assignment. It required me to reflect on my changing role and which bits of my style I needed to adapt to be successful in the new international environment. Whilst we are not doing a lot to develop our international leaders specifically at our university, our generic leadership development and especially our UK coaching is good and begins the very important process of self reflection and self awareness.” (Head of School, UK University)

A number of universities have introduced international “buddies” and staff new to international work often travel for the first time with an experienced colleague. There is something very powerful about experienced staff talking about how they have done it previously and what they have learned.

“Matching them with a buddy and then getting them to Skype weekly is one strategy that could work.” (Deputy Head of School, UK University)

“I would have really appreciated talking to someone who had been out before me and who could give me advice and help with understanding my boundaries-a kind of international mentoring scheme is possible once international staff numbers grow.” (Senior Lecturer, UK University)

A coaching/mentoring solution can be most effective for a number of reasons, not least because it is entirely focused on the individual and their specific challenges and can be planned around their own work schedules. An
experienced international HR manager also talked about how, in some cultures, she had observed that some staff felt unable to be honest in groups and how they seemed to prefer to work one to one especially on challenging issues.

“We have identified two coaches in Malaysia who we have met and can trust to coach our senior staff out there as and when they need it.” (Leadership Development Manager, UK University)

One coach, experienced in working internationally, and in using skype/video conference offered the following observations.

“Meeting the coach face to face before leaving the UK helps the communication and also allows the leader to understand how coaching works and how it can help before, good preparation for later long distance coaching. Helping the leader by being flexible over time, a midnight call for the coach reaches the leader at her/his most receptive, not at the end of a long day. Coaching alone will not work, the leader also needs the foundation of local support to deal with problems and challenges once in post.”

Our appointments are for one year only and all Programme Advisors are mentored by more experienced Programme Advisors, perhaps the person who is stepping down from the role or from someone who is retiring. This support for our Programme Advisors also shows our partners that we are very serious.” (Senior Lecturer, UK University)

Keeping a diary/reflective journal and talking to a coach about it was recommended as a way to really focus the coaching and also to develop a more reflective and self aware leadership style. Writing an online blog was suggested by one very experienced international leader in HE who saw it as a way of developing the self awareness of the individual writing it whilst at the same time educating those who were reading it about the highs and lows of international work.

Interviewees spoke of using those experienced international leaders to support the development of the current and future generations of leaders. Examples of this exist, some formal arrangements, often people using their own networks and seeking out a mentor from that network.

“International leaders are often working in two very different higher education systems and sometimes two or more University cultures so they are required to learn a number of new systems very quickly. Medics are also trying to get to grips with another type of health service and the demands of the British Medical Association. Sessions with HR staff, Finance staff etc. are also essential as often the processes and legal requirements are different in each country.”

(Head of School, UK University)

“We need to tap into the ones who are out there now-getting them to run seminars when they are back in the UK, to motivate others to want to work internationally and to put off the ones who might be thinking about applying for the wrong reasons. We need to get our experienced international leaders to mentor the next generation.” (PVC UK University)

A PVC with responsibility for international campuses spoke of the need to use the skills developed during international assignments, to help others to progress their career through international work. Using the skills and experience of people in this way sends a message to other colleagues that international work is not only essential for the institution, but helps to progress careers, thereby increasing the number, and hopefully quality, of people willing to engage with international capacity building efforts.
International leadership development providers

Commercial training providers are used by some universities for their cultural awareness training.

Some interviewees talked about collaborating with The British Council, The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and The British Embassy. A number reflected on the possibility of running in house programmes with other in-country UK PLCs eg Shell, Proctor and Gamble etc and of setting up partnerships with in-country training consultancies as local providers of staff and leadership development.

The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education delivers a range of international leadership development opportunities. Their flagship programme, The Top Management Programme has always had an international week included and uses a 360 degree tool which measures an individual's cultural sensitivity. They run a whole range of tailor made programmes for UK and international leaders, in 25 countries to date, usually from specific international regions in a kind of twinning arrangement. The focus is clearly on skills development but there is always an emphasis on the bridge to business development. The LFHE thinks hard about how it benefits the UK economy as well as individual HEIs. They work in priority countries talking advice from outside agencies and all their international leadership development programmes are independently evaluated by the British Council. Interestingly the LFHE do not deliver cultural awareness training preferring to expose senior staff to real life cultural differences on their programmes and helping them to work it out for themselves. The total immersion/exposure at this level proves to be more effective than blanket cultural awareness sessions. Mixed groups of international leaders work side by side on specific challenges and are encouraged to constantly reflect on their own and others perspectives.

The LFHE is the only organisation that specifically runs leadership programmes for HE in international settings. One interviewee suggested that there could be real benefit in funding two people from two different campuses from the same institution to attend the same LFHE programme together.

There are a number other commercial training providers, a number of whom are business psychologists, who deliver a range of services including cultural intelligence training for staff of all levels. Most also support organisations to develop their international leaders to manage multi-cultural teams and manage global staff remotely. Their work is often rooted in research. Some work with businesses as search consultants selecting staff for international roles/assignments with sufficient cultural intelligence and coping strategies to make the international appointment a success. Some are currently working with a number of universities.

This section has described some of the ways universities and other organisations are working to develop their capacity to work globally. We hope it has provided some useful ideas and examples of what can be achieved. The section finishes with a quote from a UK PVC who previously worked internationally as an academic himself.

"In HE we don't prepare our academic leaders well to work internationally. I

A couple of weeks truly getting to the heart of our institution and understanding what is distinctive about us is essential. We also work with them on thinking through what they will need to do to deliver the strategy locally.”

(Head of School, UK University)
am afraid that they often have to work it out for themselves. Some time ago I attended a British Council study tour of Japanese businesses and saw how much resource they put into developing their international leaders. One business had a training complex where staff were trained in technical skills and creativity and also in living and working internationally. Developing their leaders’ cultural sensitivity was paramount. They had a complete mock up of a British home in which the staff were taught how to host and be hosted in a British home. I suddenly realised that we have a very long way to go in UK HE!” (Faculty PVC, UK University)

Career transitions

For leaders and staff who spend significant time at an international location, two – three year secondments are not uncommon, these career transitions points can be a significant issue. It may not be so for those people who are UK based, either remotely managing international work or making flying visits to the international location. Some institutions may have staff in more than one of these broad categories.

For staff returning to the to UK HE system however, things may be more complicated. Since they left things may have changed in their neighbourhoods, social circles, the university and wider HE context leading to issues around reintegrating into their families, roles, and the wider university. Interviewees spoke of different working practices and pressures when working internationally, including different levels of support, having to make decisions in isolation and more, all requiring the individual to begin working differently. On return, staff returning may have to re-learn UK ways of working, a culture shock in reverse.

Regular contact with, and visits to the home institution can help alleviate some of these issues thus reducing the surprises a returner might otherwise encounter. In some cases it was found that there was an expectation that there would be a promotion to reward the period of international service. Alternatively a more senior role may have been offered to encourage the leader to move overseas and this may have been a promotion or title that they might not have received had they stayed in the UK. This can cause difficulties with titles and salaries at the point of return. These type of expectations therefore need to be managed and where appropriate met. A PVC from a research intensive university pointed out that promotion criteria are often heavily weighted towards research output, and that universities now need to consider at institutional level how to best recognise and reward international activity. Much of the above relates back to capacity building, and the fact that universities do not always have a sufficiently large pool of talent prepared for international assignments and are therefore recruiting people into these leadership roles earlier in their career than might otherwise be the case.

Some institutions recognise the skills and experience accrued during international work and actively seek to use that when an individual returns, others are less focused on this.

“We need to be sure about peoples’ careers. We work on the basis that if we think they are good enough to represent
our university in Malaysia for instance then we would definitely want them back in an equally senior role. Whilst we can’t guarantee precisely which role they will return to, we do need to be able to promise them that their time overseas will not damage their careers and more likely enhance it. Then, whilst they are leading our overseas campus we need to continue to spot future opportunities that might work for them on their return.” (Pro Vice Chancellor, UK University with international campus)

Research intensive universities and their staff appear to accept that they may be more of a focus on teaching for a while as a partnership or campus becomes established. There was no talk of research sabbaticals for returning international staff, more an emphasis on trying to establish research cultures in the international setting for future cohorts.

Comments in previous sections of this report about using returning international secondees to help develop and mentor the next generation are clearly relevant here and link back to issues of capacity building.

**Conclusion**

Exploring the nature and challenges of international working in Higher Education has left it difficult to conclude anything other than that a university wishing to succeed with any international project needs to be sure that its international aspirations are clear, are embedded into its HR/Organisational Development strategies and that staff of the appropriate calibre are selected, developed and supported in their changing roles.

Whilst each institution and the context in which it works will differ, the common themes identified in this report should help institutions to review their own international working practices against the authors “Five Stage Approach to Developing International Leadership Capacity Model” presented here.

Whilst this report did not set out to consider recruitment and selection, it was a key theme of many of the interviews and has emerged as an area worthy of further research. In the meantime universities could use the Skills/Behaviours of Effective International Leaders Model presented above to draw up a recruitment and selection framework. This could be used to assess the readiness and skill of potential leaders and staff for international work.

The UK HE sectors international aspirations are played out in universities in different ways in each institution. It has been a fascinating and fruitful area to investigate and the authors found much enthusiasm and commitment among the interviewees to reflect and work to improve their approaches to developing their international staffing and leadership capacity. It is hoped that the findings, themes and recommendations presented here have some resonance and real use for each institution in its own particular way.
### International Leadership Development - a joint project between Newcastle and Nottingham Universities

**Interview questions HE version**

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#### International Context

1. What is the size and scope of your international operation, (e.g. which part(s) of world how many locations, how many staff, how many senior leaders, how long in operation, is it a partnership etc?)

2. Please list what you believe to be the key differences between what you know about the culture of the off-shore operation(s) and that of the “home” university?

3. How are the demands being placed on your international leaders different from those being placed on your home University leaders?

4. What, if any are the key differences between your HR/Staff Development processes overseas compared to that of the UK university (e.g. appraisal, induction, performance management, objective setting etc)?

#### Skills and Behaviours

5. Please list what you think are the most critical skills and behaviours of international leaders and managers working in the specific international contexts your University is operating in?
6. How are these different from the skills and behaviours required by UK university leaders and managers? Typically, how do you think the best leaders obtain these skills?

7. Please note what you observe about those leaders who work internationally most effectively? What is it that makes them exceptional?

8. What have you noticed about those leaders/managers that have less impact/more difficulties when working overseas? Are these difficulties in every overseas location or is it specific to a geographic region or area?

9. Please list which particular interpersonal skills you think are critical to successful overseas working for leaders and managers? What happens when these are not present?

10. If you work effectively overseas, how did you personally develop the skills? And which key skills do you think were critical to your own success?

### Developing International Leaders

11. Does your university’s appraisal/PDR system facilitate a discussion about leadership aspirations, development needs and particularly international aspirations? YES/NO

12. How does your university currently identify people with the potential to lead overseas?
| 13 | Please list what you/ your university is currently doing/planning to do to develop your internationally based leaders and managers through programmes, coaching, online learning etc? |
| 14 | Please describe how you/your university induct your international leaders into their new roles and contexts? |
| 15 | Please list those methods of leadership development for off-shore staff that you have found work/don’t work so well and where? Do you have different approaches to development for staff in UK and those on international campuses? |
| 16 | What adjustments, if any, have facilitators of leadership development made to their style of delivery and what has been most effective? |
| 17 | Does your University’s International Strategy have an international leadership development element/plan? If so, would you be happy to share it with the project researchers? |
## International Leadership Development - a joint project between Newcastle and Nottingham Universities

### Interview questions (Non-HE Version)

| Name |  
| Position |  
| University |  
| Date |  

### International Context

1. What is the size and scope of your international operation, (e.g. which part(s) of world how many locations, how many staff, how many senior leaders, how long in operation, is it a partnership etc?)

2. If appropriate please list what you believe to be the key differences between what you know about the culture of the off-shore operation(s) and that of the “parent” organisation?

3. How are the demands being placed on your international leaders different from those being placed on your UK leaders?

4. What, if any, are the key differences between your HR/Staff Development processes overseas compared to that of the UK (e.g. appraisal, induction, performance management, objective setting, salary, reward etc)?
**Skills and Behaviours**

<table>
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<th>5</th>
<th>Please list what you think are the most critical skills and behaviours of international leaders and managers working in the specific international contexts your organisation is operating in?</th>
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<tr>
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**Developing International Leaders**

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<td>Does your organisation have a global leadership development strategy/plan? If so, would you be happy to share it with the project researchers?</td>
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<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alan Younger</td>
<td>Head of School, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andrew Marton</td>
<td>Vice Provost</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andrew Wilson</td>
<td>Director of Capability Enhancement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Harvey</td>
<td>Pro-Vice Chancellor for Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Baldwin</td>
<td>Head of School, Biomedical Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Day</td>
<td>Pro-Vice Chancellor for Medical Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Ennew</td>
<td>Pro-Vice Chancellor for Internationalisation and Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Seal</td>
<td>Deputy Head of School, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Locke</td>
<td>Director of International and UK Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie Gilliland</td>
<td>International Partnerships Manager and Principal Lecturer, Business School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ehsan Meshabi</td>
<td>Dean (Singapore) and Chief Executive (NUIS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ella Ritchie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helen Cameron</td>
<td>Human Resource Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jackie Storey</td>
<td>International Administrator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Janet Fletcher</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer in Human Resource Management</td>
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<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Leopold</td>
<td>Deputy Director, Newcastle University Business School</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Rayment</td>
<td>Principal Lecturer, Accounting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julie Dickens</td>
<td>Human Resource Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marian Phillipson</td>
<td>Human Resource Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max Wood</td>
<td>Head of Estates and IS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merilyn Parker Armitage</td>
<td>Assistant Director of HR/Head of People and Organisational Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming Tham</td>
<td>Sub Dean &amp; Director of Operations, Chemical Engineering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pamela Graham</td>
<td>Equality and Diversity Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Burns</td>
<td>Director of Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul Byrne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul Milner</td>
<td>Former Global Human Resource Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Mitchell</td>
<td>Dean, and Director of Studies in the School of Psychology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phil Bradley</td>
<td>Dean of Academic Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Birmingham</td>
<td>Head of School, Marine Sciences &amp; Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Boggie</td>
<td>Reward Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard da Costa</td>
<td>Independent Coach, Part Time Lecturer and Ex-Global Human Resource Director for GDF Suez</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Rob Daley</td>
<td>Researcher Development Co-ordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Curtis</td>
<td>Director of Learning &amp; Teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robin Middlehurst</td>
<td>Director, Strategy, Research and International</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roger Barton</td>
<td>Regional Chair in Clinical Medicine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rosalind Beaumont</td>
<td>Professional Development Manager- Academic Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sean Matthews</td>
<td>Director of Studies, School of Modern Languages and Cultures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharmishta Chatterjee-Banerjee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve Williams</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom Cross</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tony Stevenson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trevor Bolton</td>
<td>Dean of Lord Ashcroft International Business School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vanessa Hammond</td>
<td>Head of Administration, Medical Science</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This information was correct at the time of the interviews – March 2012
### Appendix 3

**Steering Group Members**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>University</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ella Ritchie</td>
<td>Project Chair</td>
<td>Deputy Vice Chancellor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Newcastle University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynne Howlett</td>
<td>Project Manager and report author</td>
<td>Leadership Development Manager</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Newcastle University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Ennew</td>
<td>Project Member</td>
<td>Pro-Vice Chancellor for Internationalisation</td>
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<td>Nottingham University and Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martin Cussons</td>
<td>Project Member and report author</td>
<td>Deputy Director of Professional Development</td>
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<td>Nottingham University</td>
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Further Reading


The Authors

Lynne Howlett

Lynne Howlett is Newcastle University’s Leadership and Management Development Adviser, employed to facilitate the development of its most senior leaders in line with the University’s business goals and priorities. Lynne’s current areas of interest include leadership talent management processes, leadership frameworks, development centres, international leadership and executive level coaching. Lynne’s work in the field of leadership succession won Lynne a Leadership Foundation Fellowship and a Times Higher award for Outstanding Contribution to Leadership and Management Development in 2006.

Lynne holds a degree in English from Newcastle University, a Postgraduate qualification in Human Resource Management and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. In 2010 she was awarded the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development HR Practitioner of the Year award and the Leadership Foundation’s Staff Development Practitioner of the Year award. Lynne’s part time work is supplemented by occasional consultancy/coaching work which includes her role as Regional Coordinator (North East) for the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

Lynne can be contacted at lynne.howlett@ncl.ac.uk or by telephoning 0191 222 3415.

Martin Cussons

Martin Cussons is Deputy Director of Professional Development at the University of Nottingham. His key role is leadership and management development, including working with the campuses in China and Malaysia. He collaborates with the HE Midlands Staff Development Partnership, most recently helping design and deliver a regional leadership programme and facilitating regional action learning sets.

He is a Fellow of the Staff Development Forum, partly awarded as a result of his international work, and Chartered FCIPD. He has been an active branch member, helping set up the branch mentoring scheme. His first degree is in Professional Training and Development and he has an MSc in HR Management and Training.

Martin can be contacted at martin.cussons@nottingham.ac.uk or on 0115 9515982