Parallel Session 2 Virtual Exchange

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*Internationalisation in Chinese Higher Education: promoting equitable international and intercultural experiences through virtual exchanges*

The purpose of this paper is to provide an understanding of internationalisation in higher education (IoHE) in practice, as well as of its conceptual dimension, and to highlight the ways in which virtual exchanges (VE) promises to be the ideal context for sustainable and equitable international and intercultural experiences. This paper shares insights from a transnational project (UK and China) on internationalisation at home (IaH) in the context of Chinese Higher Education. The project ‘Enhancing Internationalisation of Chinese Higher Education Institutions: An Intercultural Approach, 中国高校国际化建设：跨文化的路径’ is a partnership between Newcastle University, UK and Harbin Institute of Technology, PRC. The project seeks to investigate opportunities and issues in internationalisation of Chinese HE with focus on internationalisation at home. The current strategy of the Chinese Ministry of Education in relation to ‘opening education to the outside world’ focuses on the promotion of student mobility, the development of joint international degrees along with teacher training and ‘study abroad’ programmes. However, despite the increasing number of students and staff able to study and work abroad, the large majority of those involved in Chinese HE does not get access to such opportunities. In our project, we are particularly interested in how the physically non-mobile majority of students and staff understand and experience internationalisation. We report on our preliminary findings that show that students, staff, and administrators at HIT see VE as an opportunity both for themselves (individual level) and for their institution (strategic level). In the participants’ views, advantages of VE over physical mobility include sustainability, replicability, digital skills development, and environmental friendliness. More importantly, VE might provide an inclusive way of accessing an international and intercultural experience to students and staff members who cannot take part in international physical mobility programmes for various reasons (e.g., caring duties and limited financial means). The paper offers an exploration of internationalisation in the context of Chinese Higher Education and it argues how the development of VE has the potential to enhance internationalisation and global engagement of Chinese HEIs.

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