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## **Unlocking the untapped potential of Internationally Educated Nurse Academics in the UK**

When I began teaching nursing students in the UK, I carried with me not just my NHS clinical experience but the lived experience of working as a nurse and nurse tutor from my home country, Ghana. As an internationally educated nurse (IEN) in the NHS and now a lecturer in nursing in a UK university, I have witnessed firsthand how IEN academics enrich nursing education in various UK universities. Yet, in academic corridors where decisions are made, our presence remains underrepresented, and our voices are often unheard. My doctoral research confirms what many of us know too well: the value we bring is real- but largely invisible.

Through interviews with IENs who have transitioned into nursing academia in the UK, a consistent message emerges: these professionals bring a rich and diverse set of experiences, insightful perspectives, cultural intelligence and pedagogical depth that benefits students and their universities alike. Their unique identities and experiences enable them to approach their teaching with a global lens that fosters more inclusive teaching, challenges Eurocentric assumptions in nursing curricula and models resilience, adaptability and excellence to students from all backgrounds. Unfortunately, despite these strengths, IEN academics often feel marginalised and feel a sense of not belonging. Many experience microaggressions and some have faced challenges in professional development due to restrictions imposed on them by their visa status. Instead of being

recognised for their invaluable contributions to enriching nursing education, they are often confronted with hostility both at an individual and institutional level.

While the UK nursing workforce is increasingly diverse largely due to the sustained recruitment of nurses from abroad, there is a lack of diversity in the nurse educator workforce. Also, the patient populations in the UK are increasingly multicultural. It stands to reason that those teaching future nurses should reflect this diversity. However, a 2025 report from the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) indicates that only 13% of the nurse educator workforce are from global majority backgrounds. This reflects a missed opportunity in the nursing education sector in maximising the benefits of a diverse nurse educator workforce.

When IENs are recognised and empowered, they broaden the cultural competence of nursing education. They help nursing students think critically about care in diverse contexts, gain cultural competence and avoid cultural stereotyping. This enables nursing students to adhere to the NMC Code's requirement of "Prioritising People" by recognising and promoting diversity in nursing care. The paradigm shift embedded in nursing students by IEN academics from viewing nursing care from a dominant Western lens to a more global and inclusive perspectives aligns with the NHS core values that emphasises "Everyone Counts". IEN academics embody the diversity nursing education needs, offering meaningful representation that fosters inclusion and offer a powerful form of role modelling for students from global majority backgrounds. To ignore this asset is not just a professional oversight, but an educational failure in a time where cultural insensitivity

scandals have rocked the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and the higher education sector in the UK.

Change must start with institutional recognition. Universities must explicitly value international experience as an asset, not a deficit. This should reflect in recruitment and promotion frameworks. Induction programmes for new IEN academics must prioritise tailored support that enables them to adapt to their academic roles while preserving the distinct and unique perspectives they bring to nursing academia. Mentorship is also crucial. IEN academics need mentors, allies and sponsors who will open doors and validate their contributions to enable them to thrive in academia and achieve their highest potential. This must go beyond passive and tokenistic handouts but a committed and deliberate investment in nurturing and retaining global talent within nursing academia in the UK.

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