Brookes Briefing

Teaching International Students

The goal of Oxford Brookes' International strategy is to 'develop Oxford Brookes' worldwide presence and profile as a university that is international in its mission and outlook, making a difference wherever it operates in the world'.

One facet of the internationalisation agenda within UK Higher Education Institutions is the recruitment of international students. Brookes is proud to have more than 3000 students from 130 countries choosing to make Brookes their home. This makes Brookes an internationally diverse campus. It affords opportunities for students from every corner of the globe to interact with each other, open their eyes to perspectives they have not previously considered, and enrich understanding of cultures other than their own (Killick, 2018). A diverse community also offers different lenses through which students can view the world, determine how they choose to engage with it and make a positive difference (Magne, 2019).

However research suggests that interaction between student groups is sometimes limited (Sherry, 2010). Many international students experience deliberate acts of exclusion. These can give rise to feelings of isolation, confusion and disappointment (Jinag, 2021; Weng et, al 2021) and impact on students well-being (Russell et al, 2010).

The recruitment of international students brings with it responsibilities for the host institution. Education systems and pedagogic approaches vary significantly across the globe. Anyone who travels to a new country will encounter culture shock (Furnham, 2019). Those who travel to study will also experience 'learning shock'. Griffiths et al (2005) define this as, 'experiences of acute frustration, confusion and anxiety experienced by some students, who find themselves exposed to unfamiliar learning and teaching methods, bombarded by unexpected and disorienting cues, and subjected to ambiguous and conflicting expectations.' (ibid p275). Whilst learning shock may be experienced by any student entering for the first time into unfamiliar territory, for international students this is compounded by language and an alien environment. Any institution that recruits international students therefore has a duty to make the implicit explicit, and the obscure, transparent. The principles and practices outlined here will help you lessen the 'learning shock' and welcome our international students with confidence.

Principle 1. Consider the individual and their well-being

No two international students are the same. However students who travel to the UK to study may have encountered similar experiences that impact on their journey to, and arrival in the UK. For example, all applicants must have the necessary grades to access a course: international students must also have the required IELTS score (ielts.org, no date). International students need significant funds in their account before their place is confirmed.

These must cover their full international student fees, travel, accommodation and living costs (ukcisa.org.uk, no date). There are VISA requirements, and of course many international students will undertake a physical journey by air or boat, crossing borders, encountering customs and arriving tired to a new environment.

Some students may have arrived in time for an international student induction and settled into halls. Others may arrive a few hours before the course begins, or even a few days late, due to unforeseen delays. This is the juncture where we need to consider Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (Maslow, 1943) because, if a student is exhausted, hungry or disoriented they will be in no position to function, absorb information or participate in learning activities.

- Offer and/or make sure international students attend a practical 'welcome' or induction, that deals with immediate needs including accommodation, finance, registration with a GP, and orientation of local supermarkets, laundrettes, and support services.

- Be cognizant of the varied journeys that have brought those individuals to that first classroom encounter. Ensure you are approachable and able to signpost students to appropriate support.

- A sense of belonging is crucial to student retention (Thomas, 2016; Tinto, 2010). More importantly it is key to individual well-being and resilience (Roffey, 2013). Develop a range of activities that provide opportunities for socialisation and which facilitate peer learning and group discussion.

- Promote co-curricular opportunities such as Brookes Edge. Point to extra-curricular activities and social societies and explain how they complement the learning experience.

Principle 2. Explain the culture of academic study and assessment in the UK

Climates, cultures and politics shape the provision of education across the globe. In some cultures male and female are segregated in the learning environment (Roula, 2004). In war torn areas, 'school' may be in the basement of a building, only when electricity is running, with books smuggled from the library or found in the rubble (UNICEF, 2021). In remote and rural areas it is not uncommon to find small classes with age ranges spanning four or five years, under the instruction of one teacher, all engaging in one project at various different levels. Some pedagogies are dominated by 'text book learning', and where resources are scarce, sections of books may be read to the students who develop the necessary skill of learning by rote (Editorial, 2020). Other educational cultures promote the notion of developing opinion. Some students will arrive in the UK from strict regimes where every moment of their schooling day is accounted for, watched over and disciplined (Wu, 2016). Others may have experienced much more relaxed approaches where forest school and creative pedagogies are employed and learning is led by the learner (Cerino, 2021).

It is important to be aware that gaining education to the point of entry into HE, may in itself be an incredible achievement given the circumstances of that individual. It is also important to acknowledge that learner experiences will be varied and that the pedagogic approaches used within your programme may be unexpected and alien to some of your students.

- Explain the approaches we use in the learning environment. Make them explicit. For example, discuss the structure of the timetable. Explain that scheduled sessions such as

lectures, seminars, laboratories, studio time are a small part of the learning activity designed to underpin the more substantive, autonomous, private study.

- Use [Academic Advising](#) sessions to help students build a personal study plan and strategies to help them accomplish their personal study goals.

- Include discussion on academic literacies such as: why we 'read' for a degree; how to search for and filter articles; how to critically engage with texts; how to construct academic writing; how to cite relevant sources; and the use of assessment criteria.

- Design dynamic learning sessions with multiple activities to enhance learning. Explain how active learning, cognitive and constructive approaches enable students to build knowledge and critical thinking skills through activity, peer learning and group work (Biggs and Tang, 2007).

- Provide clear guidance on the non-negotiables such as academic integrity and submission deadlines.

Principle 3. Be inclusive in your practice

An international classroom has huge potential to enrich the learning experience (Magne, 2019). Skilled inclusive facilitation can maximise learning opportunities and enable students to fully engage with learning activities and resources, and succeed in their studies (UoP, no date).

- Design inclusive learning activities and resources that promote and facilitate active engagement. Start with low-stakes activities, then build and scaffold more complex tasks.

- Invite interaction. Build a culture of engagement and positive reinforcement so that individuals increasingly develop the confidence to contribute. Ensure that different voices are heard.

- Use assessment as an opportunity *for* learning. Explain the tasks and criteria clearly and ensure that your marks and feedback reflect these. For example, if work is articulately presented and can be understood, award the marks. If the grammar can be improved, explain how, but do not deduct marks unless grammar is specifically listed in the marking criteria.

- Signpost to expert academic guidance.g. Student Support Coordinators, ISAT team, CAD, and opportunities such as Global Buddies. Avoid 'language of support', use 'language of opportunity' and explain that using these services demonstrates a positive desire to succeed.

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