



# Grants Scheme 2016-17

A report on pilot projects supporting the international student experience in the UK

**UK Council  
for International  
Student Affairs**

**UKCISA**

**UKCISA GRANTS SCHEME  
FOR INTERNATIONAL  
EDUCATION**

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# Introduction

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UKCISA allocates funds to members to develop ideas and test out good practice activities which the whole education sector can learn from, adapt and develop. This publication brings together reports from 13 projects which were completed in 2017.

The broad range of projects demonstrates the outstanding support available for international students studying in the UK and the commitment of staff working with them. You will find projects ranging from student wellbeing workshops, using WeChat to engage Chinese students, online training for student reps, a student safety awareness campaign, an academic writing boot-camp, as well as a project to support academic and cultural challenges which involved substantial research.

Two projects were highly commended in the Paul Webley Award for Innovation in International Education 2017:

- **Edinburgh College's Volunteer for Success.** This is a practical solution to providing volunteering opportunities for students whose student visas prohibit them from taking up paid employment.
- **Nottingham Trent's Global Voices in Science** where international students become a resource to enhance the curriculum.

If you have any questions about the UKCISA Grants Scheme, please contact Director of Policy and Services, Julie Allen at [dps@ukcisa.org.uk](mailto:dps@ukcisa.org.uk). You can also find contact details for those who led on the projects at the end of each report.

Read on and you are certain to be inspired!

Julie Allen  
*Director of Policy and Services*  
November 2017

UKCISA projects were funded by

**UKCISA MEMBERS**



# Student experience

## Exploring the use of 'WeChat' as a social media tool to engage Chinese students University of Sheffield

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### Background to the project

The University of Sheffield currently has over 4,000 Chinese students and an alumni network of over 11,000 students. Engaging with Chinese students, encouraging their integration with British culture, and creating and promoting a globally-minded culture within Sheffield have become the key elements of the university's Internationalisation Strategy. To effectively engage the Chinese student community, innovative communication channels need to be explored and utilised.

From past experience and preliminary research, we realised that traditional social media platforms do not attract many Chinese students. This is partially due to the fact that these social media platforms have been blocked in China. Very few Chinese students have Twitter or Facebook accounts when they arrive in the UK. In addition, Chinese students have a cultural tendency to rely on their peer group as the main source of information. Often, information sent from the university via emails or Facebook, is overlooked by this group of students.

WeChat, also known as 'Weixin' in Chinese, is a social media app developed by Tencent in China. This project found that WeChat has been used by a number of institutions in the

UK, but the majority of these accounts are created for marketing purposes. By recognising the popularity of WeChat among Chinese students, this project aimed to promote the international student support services available at The University of Sheffield for Chinese students, with a special focus on immigration, integration and career placement and development opportunities. This is also a continuation of the work that the University of Sheffield has been implementing on engaging Chinese students and understanding their particular needs.

### Project outcomes

The strength of this project lies in the fact that it is one of the first to explore the use of WeChat as a social media tool to promote international student support services and to engage Chinese students. Information published via the WeChat account helped Chinese students realise the benefits of learning about British culture, engaging with the range of student communities, and integrating with the city and other international students to form part of the wider #Weareinternational campaign. It is a trusted university channel for Chinese students to receive first-hand and immediate information on immigration, integration and placement opportunities.

The project enabled the University of Sheffield to develop a better understanding of the needs of Chinese students and how services provided could be improved to support them better. The university also benefited from this project in engaging with Chinese alumni and subsequently supporting student recruitment, experience and employability.

### Set up and evaluation

The International Student Support team and the Careers Service team worked together and created a public WeChat account in April 2016. Building from the experiment, this project was launched to further explore the use of WeChat.

The project was collaboratively managed by the International Student Support Team and the Careers Service at the University of Sheffield. The project team was expanded in early 2017 with two student assistants to form a WeChat working group. All members in the group met on a regular basis and worked collaboratively on the project. The team composed and published posts (see below), responded to queries, monitored subscriptions, conducted questionnaires, focus groups and interviews, analysed data collected from students and made improvements on the forum.



An 'Ask the WeChat team' event to promote online app

Our initial posts focussed on the area of providing information on immigration and integration as well as employment placement opportunities for current Chinese students. For immigration advice, it provided information on renewing a Tier 4 student visa, working conditions, Tier 4 student visa responsibilities, safeguarding of BRP and visa implications on change of programme. Later, we added information on applying for a Schengen visa, the Doctorate Extension Scheme, Tier 2 & Tier 5 visa routes, and inviting family members to visit the UK. Our account also gave students information on 'Global Campus' which is a series of events and workshops that help students to settle into life in the UK and gain as much as possible from their experience at the University of Sheffield. In addition, the account advertised placement opportunities specially created for Chinese students, and shared practical guidance from preparing a CV to 'best performance' at interviews.

The project was (and will continue to be) evaluated by student feedback through an online questionnaire, informal focus groups and interviews.

The project was also evaluated by monitoring students' participation in careers service events. For example, before it was promoted by using WeChat, an employability skill session for international students organised by the Careers Service had fewer than 10 registered students. After the session was promoted on WeChat, the number of students registered increased to more than 100 overnight.

A final evaluation meeting was also conducted within the WeChat team. Everyone who had been involved with the project participated. Data collection and analysis, student feedback, and changes introduced on the WeChat platform were discussed, and a plan for future work was drawn up.

### Timescale

The project ran from August 2016 to the end of June 2017. The work was carried out in five stages as outlined below.

Stage	Timescales	Milestones
1	August – mid-October 2016	Promoting the WeChat account
2	September – December 2016	Communicating and improving content
3	December 2016 – February 2017	First round of data collection
4	February – May 2017	Data analysis, improving content based on feedback from the first round data collection
5	April – June 2017	Second round data collection and analysis
6	July 2017	Final evaluation and report write-up

### Challenges

There were several challenges in the running of this project:

- For staff, committing time to take on the project in addition to daily job responsibilities proved difficult. This was especially challenging at the early stages during the busiest period of the academic year, ie September to early November. As the project progressed, the WeChat account attracted more followers and the expectation on the quality of the content also increased. This meant greater effort was required on preparing and composing posts



## Key findings and learning points

Questionnaires, focus group and interviews were used to gather student feedback on the work produced by the WeChat account. Key findings and learning points are:

- Cross-platform promotion is essential. For example, working closely with the university's other social media channels including the WeChat/Weibo accounts (mainly used for marketing purposes), Facebook and international student e-newsletter. Based on this principle, the project team worked collaboratively with other key sections at the university, including the Confucius Institute, the Students' Union, the Corporate Communications team and the Chinese Students' and Scholars' Association.
- The students who are following the WeChat account use a wide range of social media channels, but WeChat is their choice when asked to choose only one social media platform. Students are pleasantly surprised that the university created a WeChat account and welcome this as an additional communication channel on social media.
- The followers are not limited to Chinese nationals. The number of postgraduate taught student followers is higher than the number of undergraduate students. The account has more female followers than their fellow male students.
- Student preference on when to read posts on WeChat varies, but the most favourable time is after 6pm in the evening.
- There is no particular preference among students on the language used in a WeChat post; that is, it is not necessary to publish posts in Chinese to attract readers. The results from both rounds of data collection point to the same conclusion.
- The types of posts that attract more reads and engagement are in the subjects regarding university achievements (ranking,

and engaging with students.

- It was challenging to make improvement in addition to maintaining the daily operation, due to team capacities. Extra resources had to be obtained from other channels to fill the staffing budget gap.
- The data collection process took much longer than planned because of the difficulties in recruiting a sufficient number of students to take part in the questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. Although announcements were made on WeChat repeatedly and incentives were provided for participation, the response rate was not as good as had been expected. The reason behind this was unknown, but busy study schedules could be a contributing factor.

## Sustainability

Thanks to the UKCISA grant and the support from various departments at the University of Sheffield, the WeChat account has been further developed since it was initially created in April 2016. More resources have been made available to gather student feedback and this resulted in further

improvement. The feedback, focus group discussions and WeChat content produced are useful to create a sustainable resource depository. The WeChat account has become an important and powerful additional social media platform to widen student awareness on the support services available at the university. In the longer term, it would be useful to embed the project in the standard services provided for international students. Possible options include employing a student editor, or a student or staff volunteer to set time aside to work on the WeChat, similar to the way the University currently manages other official social media channels (for example, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). The continued running of the WeChat account also provides students with opportunities of working in a UK office environment, which further develops their employability skills as well as enriching their experience in the UK. This matches the initiatives of the Careers Service's placement programme, which provides students with a bursary as well as mentor support.

development and alumni), emotional topics and events. For example, the top three popular posts on the WeChat account are 'Our university rises in QS world ranking, we are top 100!', 'Students vote university of Sheffield top of Russell Group and third best university nationally' and 'Celebration of the Lunar New Year'. Student feedback confirms that they are proud of the University's achievements and therefore prefer to share posts on these topics with their friends and families. This also shows that original content is the key to attracting readership.

- Students prefer the posts styled with more visual elements such as pictures, embedded videos, etc. Plain text with detailed instructions does not generate great interest.
- It has not been an issue to manage queries posted on WeChat even though there is a 48-hour time limit on replying to a query. An automatic reply is in place to ensure that students can always contact the WeChat team by email as an alternative.
- It is important to publish information when students need it the most. Posts are archived in different categories and keyword search function is added to help students find the relevant information more easily when needed.
- Student feedback collected from focus groups and online questionnaires show that Chinese students are not aware of the full range of student support services available at the university. For example, one student commented **'More information about how to adapt new culture and study style would be helpful. ... If someone (had) told me about all the services I can get from the university such as workshop from 301, writing advisory service and career services at the beginning of the semester, I guess life would be easier.'**



In addition, posts on topics about available support services at the University, for example, guidance on academic conduct and appeals, chaplaincy service and counselling service, attracted great interest among our followers. Students commented on WeChat that such information is vital for their study and life at the University, but they were not aware of the procedures and support before reading the information on WeChat.

This lack of awareness was the case across all areas that the WeChat account aimed to promote, including immigration advice, integration programmes and placement opportunities.

- The WeChat account not only helps the university to recruit students, but also helps to build a closer relationship with them. Throughout the project, the team got to know many students through both online interactions and offline events. Students provide valuable feedback and suggestions on the WeChat account, which subsequently improves the service provided through WeChat. This platform creates a better understanding and a stronger bond between Chinese students and the University.

### Recommendations for other UK institutions

- To set up a WeChat public account is easy and free. However, it is not straightforward to make the account a verified one. To do so, a China Business License is required and this can be difficult for organisations outside China. Unverified accounts still work but these will be shown as personal accounts rather than official accounts on WeChat.
- To promote a WeChat public account, the most effective way is to display the QR code of the account whenever and wherever possible. Planning online and offline events can also help attract followers. For example, the WeChat team organised an online Q&A event and offline 'Ask the WeChat team' events followed by prize draw activities to spread the word and promote the account.
- A public WeChat account is not just another official platform to disseminate official news. It is useful to post interesting content on a regular basis so that student followers can feel that they are receiving special attention. In addition, students may decide to follow the account if they read an

interesting post shared by existing followers. To grow the subscriber base, it is essential to make the content interesting so that people are willing to share.

- It is important to have a dedicated member of staff or a team in place to manage the account. One of the most important elements in managing a public account is to engage with the followers. Having a dedicated team to communicate with students is also a useful way for the University to establish closer relationships with them.
- Support from student assistants is another important factor to consider. Student assistants have much more in-depth knowledge and experience in using and managing the WeChat account. They help write the posts in appropriate language to the target audience. This identifies less well known university information and services to the Chinese student population. Use of popular 'internet language' (the informal language used on the internet that people often adopt to simplify and update formal language) could also generate greater interest from student followers.
- Public WeChat accounts are restricted to one post a day although there is a function available to include different topics within one post. It is therefore essential to plan ahead about what to put in a post and when to publish in the academic cycle.
- Involving students is incredibly powerful. A lot of feedback from students is gathered and this forms the foundation for the work and the improvement required. It is crucial to understand what students want and need and how they prefer the information to be delivered.

Mandarin) (email project lead to request)

- WeChat backstage demonstration PowerPoint (email project lead to request)
- Two facilitators who can speak Mandarin.

### Further information

**This project was run by Fang Zheng**, International Student Adviser, The University of Sheffield

#### Contact:

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### Resources

- WeChat promotional flyer, poster, postcard and plasma screen slides
- Templates for questionnaires/focus group/interview (with translation to



# International student web video information University of Dundee

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## Project aims

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The overall aim of this collaborative project between Student Support Advisors, the International Advice Service and current international students was to create a series of short accessible videos. These online resources for international students will enable new international students to better prepare themselves to come to university in the UK (particularly Scotland) and help them adjust to living and studying in a new country, culture and climate.

## Rationale for the project

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Feedback from international students told us they would like more information and knowledge on a range of subjects with regard to living and studying in the UK/ Scotland, for instance, weather/climate, time (daylight hours in winter/summer), academic differences, language, food, and culture. These are some of the most common aspects of changing country that had the most impact on students personally and they needed some time to acclimatise to these and adapt. By using the personal commentary of actual international students on the videos we believed it would help to address the needs of incoming internationals making that transition. We also thought that if student expectations can be realistically managed by providing information and support, in this way, to new international students this could enhance the overall student

experience and therefore be of importance to institutions and the sector as a whole.

## Outcomes

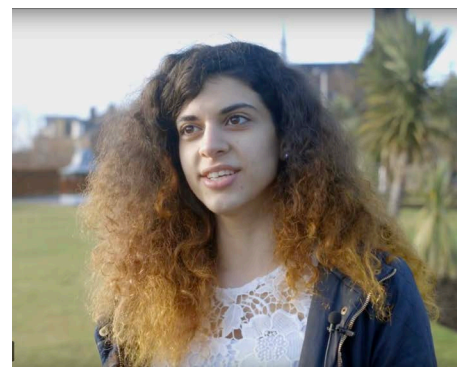
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Six videos have been produced featuring international students talking about their personal experiences. The videos can be found on the university website on the International Advice Service pages and have links from other places on the university website, eg Welcome pages and online student toolkits. They will be utilised at welcome events for new international students and on flat screens in our new “Global Lounge” when it opens in mid-October 2018. (See the end of this report for a link to the videos).

## Background

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University of Dundee sits within the city of Dundee (with a population of 148, 270 in 2016) in Scotland. The university has 18,000 students from 145 countries and 3,000 staff from 72 countries. It has around 15,000 students on campus of whom 3,000 are international (this includes EU students). There are nine academic schools and a range of directorates, including Professional Services, one of which is Student Services. Internationalisation is key to the university's strategic aims: see [www.dundee.ac.uk/international/internationalisationattheuniversity](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/international/internationalisationattheuniversity).



## Project set-up and evaluation

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The project team invited international students from different countries to help us make videos by speaking about their experience of different aspects of living in the UK/ Scotland. We were successful in finding students to represent Asia (Pakistan and China), Africa and Southern Europe. We were unable to get someone from either North or South America. We invited the students to meet with the staff organising the project and the professional videographer who would be filming and editing the project. After consultation and a discussion with this group of international students, six topics were chosen for the videos. These were:

- Accent
- Asking for help
- Culture
- Environment
- Food
- Social life

Initially we thought we would use scripts for the videos when we were planning the project, but it was decided after our discussion with the

students and the videographer that it was better that they were unscripted, as it was more natural. The students involved then decided what they would say about the different topic areas they had chosen to cover.

Our original plan was to gather the students together to film the videos at one time and provide lunch for them collectively on the day of filming. This plan had to be re-thought as it became clear that the students would have to be filmed individually on different days to fit with their schedules and other commitments. The videographer liaised directly with the students around their commitments and also his own schedule. This meant that he could spend a bit of time with the students ensuring they were relaxed and not looking anxious or nervous whilst they were being filmed. As we had chosen to film outdoors around campus we could also ensure that the weather was suitable for filming.

After filming, a rough edit was prepared by the videographer. This was then viewed by the staff involved in the project and some of the senior managers within Student Services. Some further minor edits were required and some additional filming. This was carried out over the following month, again taking into account the commitments of both the students and the videographer. The final footage was then shown to the students involved. The two students who could not attend the screening were sent the videos. Once the videos were completed they were shown to one of the university's External Relations managers for final approval for use on the website. This took longer than anticipated and delayed the evaluation process until October 2017.

## Timeline

**September 2016.** There were two initial meetings held in September

2016 to plan the project with the members of staff involved.

**October 2016.** Initially we asked international students to come to a meeting in early October if they wished to participate in the video project. After this initial discussion, it became clear that our original planned timelines were unlikely to happen, particularly as all the filming could not happen on one day as originally anticipated.

**November 2016.** The filming was not completed until the end of November.

**January 2017.** The first edit was available.

**February 2017.** First viewing of the rough edited version was available. The team suggested further edits and additional filming. The videographer had to make arrangements with some of the students and one of the International Advice Team to do the extra filming which took a few weeks to organise and complete.

**April 2017.** We invited the students involved to come and view the videos in April – those unable to attend were sent the videos to view. As the videos had not yet been seen by our External Relations team we could not get them uploaded in April as planned. The feedback from the team meant some further captioning was required.

**August 2017.** Videos were in place on our International Advice pages for August 2017 to use during our welcome activities for new international students in September 2017. We planned to evaluate the videos (see Appendix) in October 2017 with our incoming students using an online survey, which is considerably later than originally planned. We aim to share this with UKCISA in January 2018 and it will be available on the UKCISA website.

## Challenges

- Working with many different students with different time commitments proved to be challenging as our plan to have everyone together doing the filming was not feasible.
- We had to fit in with the other work that the professional videographer had planned.
- The weather had to be taken into account as we had chosen external locations on campus. This was quieter and there was less likelihood of interruptions than inside buildings during the semester although we did have to factor in occasional sirens and aircraft noise.
- We also had to take into account the views of our External Relations team within the university as they manage the website content and this led to delays in getting students to see the videos and give us their feedback.
- The extra edits and filming required meant using the budget allocated originally for catering.
- Staff availability due to sickness and leave also impacted on our estimated timescales.

## Sustainability

The videos should be useable for several years as the topics the students are talking about on the videos are not going to change. The project should be able to be replicated in other universities using their own international students.

## Learning points

We would allow more time for the project and also devote a larger budget to the videography to cover further editing or filming required. It may have been better to involve our External Relations team earlier.

## Recommendations for other UK institutions

- Ensure that you have a professional videographer with the ability to do editing as this makes the process easier for both the students and staff involved. The end result is much better – more professional and watchable.
- Budget for any extra editing and filming that may be required.
- Having a small project team and not too many students involved helps to make the project more manageable.
- Involve students: they like to be asked and to get involved.
- It is important to get a balance of viewpoints from different perspectives and cultural backgrounds.
- Get your web team involved at an early stage.

## Further information

**This project was led by Joan Muszynski**, Student Support Advisor  
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and

**Susan Scott**, International Support Advisor  
s.d.scott@dundee.ac.uk  
International Advice Service,  
Student Services, University of  
Dundee

### Link to the videos:

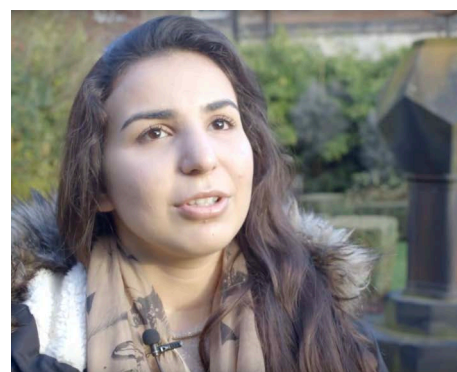
<https://www.dundee.ac.uk/international/support/>

## Appendix

Proposed evaluation for international student web video information project, University of Dundee.

1. Have you viewed the International Student Videos about living in the UK/Dundee on the International Advice website page?
  - Yes
  - No

- 1a. If yes, are these videos helpful to you as a new international student?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Unsure
2. When do you think these have been most helpful to you as a new international student?
  - Before applying for a place at university
  - On arrival at the university
  - Some time after arrival at the university
  - Unsure
3. When would you suggest that new international students should be able to see these videos?
4. Are there any other topics you would like to see available for new international students on video?
5. Where would you suggest that these videos be best placed for new international students to view?
  - University International Advice website pages
  - Admissions pages for international student applicants
  - University's Welcome pages
  - University Facebook page
  - YouTube
  - Other (if other please state)
6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the videos?



Above and on page 7: stills from six videos featuring international students talking about their personal experiences about living and studying in Scotland.

# Developing an online representation training tool for global students

## Heriot-Watt University

### Overview

Heriot-Watt University (HWU) is a global institution with students studying at five campuses around the world; in addition to students studying at Approved Learning Partners (ALPs). Student representative training is only available face-to-face in Scotland, and only a small number of Class Reps can participate per year (approximately 120). Limited training provision exists in the Dubai and Malaysia campuses, and there is no training provision at the ALPs.

HWU recognised the need for all Class Reps to be provided with training to allow students in all locations to contribute to and enhance their learning experience.

The project aimed to create an online training tool for Class Reps, which would be hosted on HWU's Virtual Learning Environment (MLE), Vision. Hosting the training modules on Vision would allow all HWU students to participate in the same training regardless of where they were located.

### Set-up

The project team comprised:

- **Paul Travill**, Academic Registrar, Heriot-Watt University
- **Denise McCaig**, Student Engagement Manager, Heriot-Watt University Student Union
- **Pamela Calabrese**, Quality Enhancement Officer, Heriot-Watt University

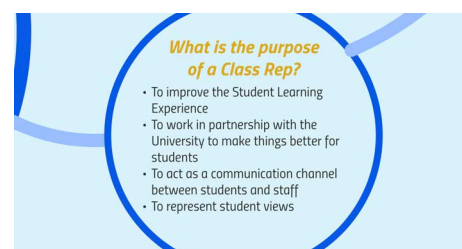
- **Ian Glen**, Systems Business Analyst, Heriot-Watt University
- **Rebecca Maxwell-Stuart**, PhD Student, Heriot-Watt University
- **Caroline Dobson**, Virtual Learning Environment Enhancement Manager, Heriot-Watt University

Heriot-Watt Student Union (SU) took the lead with the project, researching online Class Rep training provision in other institutions to learn from best practise and to avoid any common pitfalls.

The existing Class Rep training delivered in Scotland was prepared by Student Partnership in Quality Scotland (sparqs), and this formed the basis for the online Class Rep training. The sparqs training takes two hours to deliver in person, whereas the online training takes approximately one hour to complete.

### Content

The sparqs training content was adapted into four modules, each



An illustration of Prezi module 1

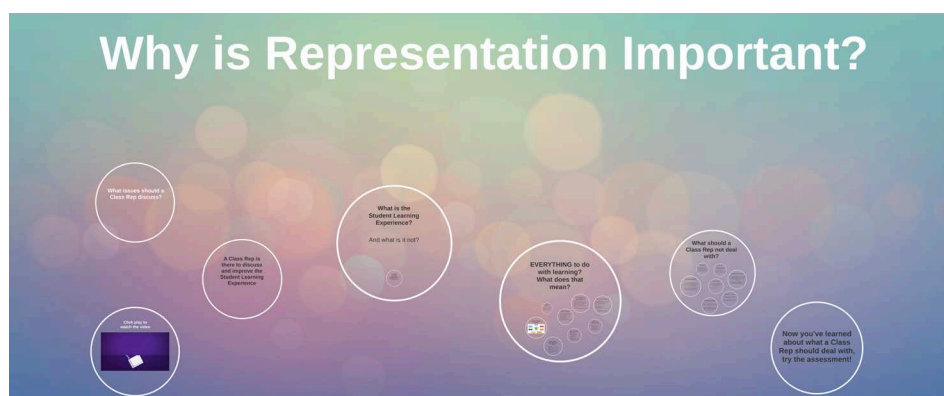
covering a different element of the Class Rep role. In addition, the content was tailored to be HWU specific, using HWU terminology that would be familiar to students globally.

The modules are:

1. Your Rep role
2. Why is representation important?
3. The Class Rep cycle
4. Attending meetings

### Development

The Student Union hired a student intern to work on creating the online Class Rep training tool. The intern worked closely with the Systems Business Analyst and the Virtual Learning Environment Enhancement



An illustration of Prezi module 2

Manager to learn how to use Vision, and how to create engaging and interactive content.

From the research of other online Class Rep training systems, it was decided that using Prezi would be an effective method of delivering the information to students. PowerPoint was considered for use but this was felt to be rather dull and flat, whereas Prezi allowed special effects and seemed to be more popular among School Officers. In addition, many lecturers use PowerPoint, so Prezi was seen to be something different. Using video alone was also considered but this did not take into account different learning styles. Prezi has a mix of video and text, allows students to work through the material at their own pace, and to move back through the presentation to check details. Prezi also allows videos to be embedded, so that students would not have to visit different websites to complete the training.

Four Prezis were created, one for each module, and each contained at least one video explaining the concepts and aims of the module.

Based on consultation with existing Class Reps, the videos are short, informal and chatty; recognising that the Class Rep role is a co-curricular role rather than an academic credit-bearing role.

Once students have worked through the Prezi modules, they complete a multiple choice test. Following recommendations from other institutions, to pass the online test a student must achieve 100%. Students may take the test as many times as necessary to pass.

## Evaluation

The project was evaluated in two stages. Initially student representatives in Edinburgh were enrolled onto the Vision course, and could complete the



An illustration of Prezi module 3

training modules. The student representatives provided feedback to the Student Union on content, factual accuracy as well as tone and style. The feedback was incorporated into the online training, which was then opened out to student representatives in Dubai and Malaysia to trial. Further feedback from these students was received and considered.

## Timescale

Activity	Timings
Establishing project team	June 2016
Researching other institutions*	July-September 2016
Recruiting student intern	October 2016
Developing content	September-November 2016
Creating training modules	November 2016 – January 2017
Testing online training (UK)	February-March 2017
Evaluation of training	April 2017
Testing online training (Dubai and Malaysia)	June 2017
Completion of final training	July 2017
Advertising and roll out to all students globally	September 2017

\*The Project Team met with the University of Edinburgh to discuss their online Class Rep training, and discussed at length the issues and pitfalls they experienced to help us avoid them. The Student Union led this review of existing best practice and also looked at online society training from Manchester Metropolitan University Student Union which is

hosted on Oppia. Other online training systems were looked at as part of this process.

## Challenges

The project timescale had to be altered from the original project bid as initial research and content creation took longer than anticipated. The existing content was Scotland-focused and all material developed had to be edited to cover generic Class Rep skills that would be applicable globally.

Much of the content that worked well when delivered face-to-face was either not appropriate or difficult to convey via online training. It was easier (although still time-consuming) to rewrite the key parts of the training to suit an online learning environment rather than adapt the existing content. Changing to a global context also took time, as there were elements of training (such as the links between Class Reps, School Officers and the Student Union) which were not globally applicable, and these had to be managed accordingly.

Encouraging student representatives to take part in the evaluation was difficult due to the timescale changes: the evaluation was happening in the UK at a busy time for students, so that there was a delay in the Student Union receiving the feedback (initially the plan was to gain feedback at the start

of semester one). This, in turn, caused delays in getting the training to global students for testing. (On the positive side, student officers were more experienced and able to provide useful feedback by the time they reviewed the content.)

## Sustainability

The project is sustainable and relevant for all students studying at a HWU campus or at an ALP. The content is skills-based and covers the essential elements of being a Class Rep; skills which are universal regardless of location. By focussing on areas such as negotiation, report writing and communication, the training is future-proofed as regardless of changes to the Class Rep system, these core elements will remain.

## The future

The training covers generic skills and systems that are applicable to any study location. The next steps will be to create tailored modules for students at each campus which provide campus-specific information. For example, the UK-based students may have a module on the role of the Student Union in student representation; a module which would not be relevant for students at the Dubai campus, where a Student Council module would be appropriate.

## Reflections and recommendations

Working with the VLE was challenging and took time to understand and develop the training tools. Having a student intern with the technical insight for this was invaluable to the project and kept it on track. The intern gained valuable experience by becoming an 'expert' user who was able to facilitate learning for others. The VLE offers a number of options



Online Class Rep training - attending meetings video still

and it is anticipated that these will be more fully utilized in the future.

The VLE creates an accessible platform for any HWU student to self-enrol on the training, allowing any student interested in student representation to learn more in their own time. Having the training open to all students has additional benefits such as the promotion of the Class Rep system and also to allow more individuals to gain the necessary skills to make changes and enhance the student experience.

Self-enrolment and data collection is something that was left late in the project, and, in the future, will be implemented at an early stage to ensure that accurate lists of student participation and completion can be extracted. At the moment this is a manual process which will take increasing time as the training expands. An unintended, and positive,

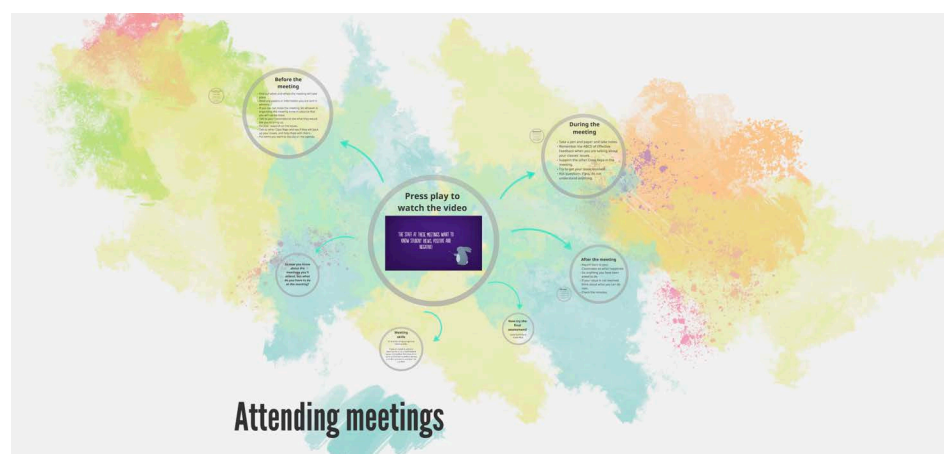
consequence of this project was to highlight a core area of student life which requires better data management and the University will be taking this forward for future releases of this service.

## Further information

**Denise McCaig**, Student Engagement Manager, HWU Student Union  
**Contact:** d.mccaig@hw.ac.uk

The **Prezis** used in the online training can be found at <https://prezi.com/user/de8o-7khiwe2/>

The **videos** used in the online training can be found at [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAAgpkeESSgl2F-tOzsp\\_Vw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAAgpkeESSgl2F-tOzsp_Vw)



An illustration of Prezi module 4

# Volunteer for Success Edinburgh College



This project was highly commended for the Paul Webley Award for Innovation in International Education 2017.

## Project aims

- To address the significant impact on the publicly-funded Further Education (FE) sector of the removal, in August 2015, of part-time work rights for Tier 4 students. This is a particular challenge for students on vocational courses.
- To equip Edinburgh College's international student graduates with extra skills and confidence gained from volunteering to excel in their future careers.

## Summary of project outcomes

Throughout the academic year 2016-17, Edinburgh College connected more than 30 international students with various local volunteering opportunities, including a charity shop, animal rescue centre and numerous charitable fundraising events. With over 60 volunteering experiences in total, the feedback from students on what they gained from their volunteering and from local charitable partners was overwhelmingly positive.

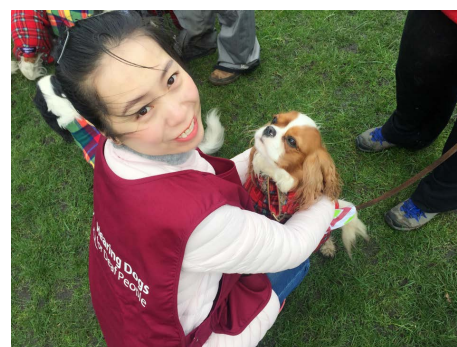
The significant benefits of volunteering is not limited to those international students with a work prohibition and extends to all Tier 4 students at degree level and above.

## Background to the college

Edinburgh College is one of the largest publicly funded FE colleges in Scotland with approximately 20,000 students across its four campuses. Edinburgh College welcomes a small number of international students each year (including students on Tier 4 (General) visas and short-term student visas), primarily to enrol on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, Access, Higher National Certificate or Higher National Diploma courses, or to enrol on Edinburgh College's International Foundation Programme.

## UKVI rules and guidance on volunteering

International students on Tier 4 (General) or short-term student visas at publicly-funded FE colleges have not had permission to work during their studies since August 2015. A key aim of the project was to address the adverse impact of the removal of such work rights. Critically linked with that aim was to ensure the project did not breach relevant UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) rules on work and volunteering. The Tier 4 Policy guidance and short-term student visas guidance states that all short-term student visa students and Tier 4 migrants can volunteer. However, the relevant UKVI guidance makes an important distinction between *voluntary work* and *volunteering*.



Xu Jie from China, studying English for Speakers of Other Languages (Academic Year 2016-2017). Volunteer at The Great British Dog Walk, a fundraising event organised by Hearing Dogs for Deaf People.

*Voluntary work* is only permissible for those migrants with work permission. In developing the project, Edinburgh College's priority as a Tier 4 sponsor was, therefore, to ensure that the College's short-term and Tier 4 visa students participated in permissible *volunteering* opportunities only.

In determining whether an individual is volunteering or doing voluntary work, the relevant UKVI guidance lists factors which are indicative of acting as a volunteer – volunteers do not have an employment contract, do not take the place of an employee and usually help a charity or voluntary or public sector organisation. Voluntary work, however, is normally a more formal contractual arrangement (that is, individuals must attend work at a particular time and carry out specific tasks) and the employer has a contractual obligation to provide work. As detailed below, the project primarily promoted one day ad hoc volunteering

opportunities with local charities. Consequently, the Volunteer for Success project could safely operate within the UKVI work prohibition for Tier 4 (General) and short-term student visa students.

## How the project aims were achieved

### Step 1. Identify suitable volunteering opportunities

Having established the legal framework for the project, the next stage was to identify suitable volunteering opportunities with local charitable organisations. This was achieved through members of the International Team attending the Edinburgh Volunteer Fair, the Recruitment and Jobs Fair at the College or using personal charitable links to organise either one day volunteering opportunities at local charities or selecting one-day charitable fundraising events for international students to take part in.

As well as ensuring the opportunities were UKVI compliant, another key priority was to identify opportunities which were local and allowed students to prioritise their studies. Most volunteering opportunities took place in the Edinburgh area, were accessible by public transport and on Friday afternoons or weekends. In response to requests from charities, most one-day volunteering opportunities were only available for between two to six students.

Volunteer for Success offered a total of 13 volunteering opportunities with seven external charities including Barnardos, SSPCA, Hearing Dogs for Deaf People and Re-Act (Refugee Action) Scotland. The International Team also contacted local college teams to identify suitable internal opportunities, including the Sustainability/Community Garden Team and the Tourism and Hospitality Team. Volunteer for Success offered international students seven college-

based volunteering opportunities, many led by the College's own community garden co-ordinator.

### Step 2. Inform international students and generate interest

Having identified suitable opportunities, the next step was to inform the college's international students about the project and generate interest in volunteering. This was achieved by including a presentation on Volunteer for Success in the international student induction timetable. Delivered in conjunction with Volunteer Edinburgh, the College explained the concept of volunteering and the benefits participation could bring.

In contrast to the previous induction in August 2015 when the International Team had to deliver negative information about the new work prohibition, promoting Volunteer for Success in August 2016 (and again in the January 2017 induction) marked a positive new chapter for the international student experience at publicly FE education colleges. Members of the International Team also informed students about the project in any one-to-one interactions. This was especially important for those students with lower levels of English.

### Step 3. Connect international students with volunteering opportunities

The project aims were achieved by connecting international students with specific local and college-based volunteering opportunities. Students were informed primarily via email of volunteering opportunities exclusive to Edinburgh College students. The Volunteer for Success news email, sent approximately every two months, included details of when and where to meet and a brief description of volunteering duties to expect (eg, sorting donations at Barnardo's or planting seeds in the Community Garden).

Students were further incentivised by offering reimbursement for reasonable

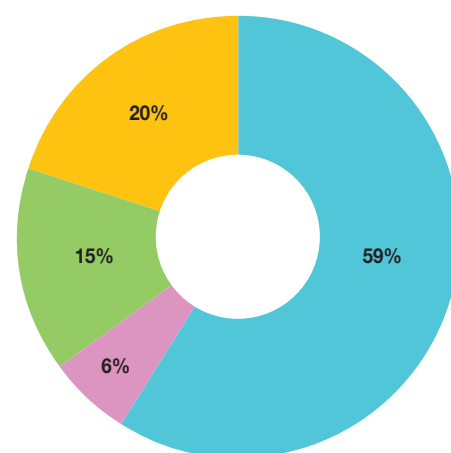
travel and subsistence expenses (allowed by UKVI Volunteering guidance), a Certificate of Participation and advice on their eligibility for the college's brand new 'International Volunteer of the Year' award. (See the note on the 2017 winner at the end of this report).

## Breakdown of participants by nationality and visa type

Approximately one third of the college's international students participated in at least one volunteering opportunity, with some students choosing to take part in several opportunities. Students representing over a dozen nationalities took part, including Colombia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, China and Belarus. The project was promoted to all our international students as well as to selected short-stay student groups.

Of the two-thirds of international students that chose not to participate, the majority were studying on visas that allowed them to work (eg, Points Based System visas or dependant visas) or were British/European passport holders without the requisite ordinary residence to qualify as home students as demonstrated below:

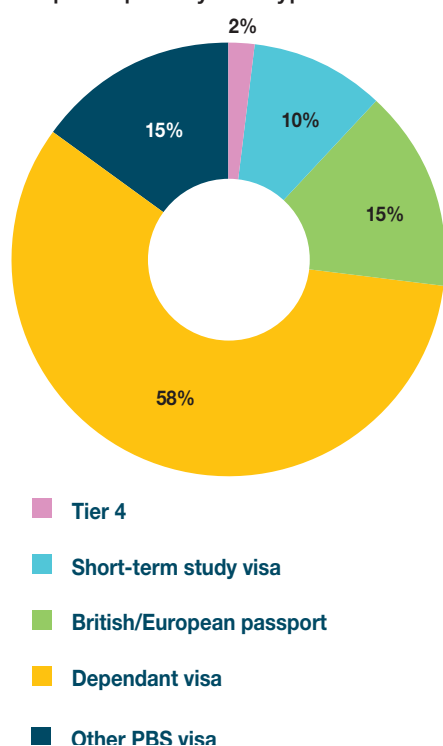
Participant by visa type



- Short-term study visa
- Tier 4
- British/European passport
- Dependant/other PBS visa



### Non-participant by visa type



### Project finances and staff resources

Expenses were lower than projected at only £400. This was incurred mainly on volunteer reimbursement, travel and purchasing trophies for the new International Volunteer award. Most students surveyed in the focus group in December confirmed they would have volunteered even if no reimbursement had been offered. This demonstrates that the project can be continued in future academic years without any capital investment.

Launching and co-ordinating the Volunteer for Success project did, however, require staff resources. The college estimated 15 hours for the total initial project set-up time, including facilitating initial contacts with charities and arranging one-day volunteering opportunities. About seven hours in total were spent by the International Team towards the end of the academic year to prepare individual certificates of participation and to select a winner of the new International Student Volunteer award. Approximately two and a half hours

per week were spent on co-ordinating the project (including emails to students, charities etc.). Other teams at the college also assisted with the Volunteer for Success Project; the Marketing Team designed the project logo and the Events Team coordinated the inclusion of the new International Student Award in the end of year Awards ceremony.

### Student feedback and key findings

The college facilitated a Volunteer for Success focus group in December to gain crucial feedback from international students. All students were positive about the benefits of volunteering:

**“Good opportunity to meet new people, improve your CV and helpful to improve English. By volunteering outside College you hear different accents and practice communication skills.”**  
(Talal, Yemen)

**“Particularly enjoyed the Community garden project as it was an opportunity to learn a new skill.”**  
(Pin, Taiwan)

**“Amazing experience! During the Re-Act project, I learnt new vocabulary, met new people and learned more about the political situation in Syria.”**  
(Juan, Colombia)

The College identified two key findings from the student survey:

1. It was important that Volunteer for Success was led by the International Team to be able to identify suitable volunteer opportunities.

By leading on and delivering the Volunteer for Success project, the International Team could ensure visa students did not risk breaching their visa conditions. It also broke down the

traditional barriers to international students integrating into local community projects (eg, language, lack of local knowledge, administrative hurdles).

2. The majority of students preferred to take part in ad hoc one-day volunteering opportunities rather than commit to a regular volunteering role which may interfere with their studies.

This preference for ad hoc volunteering with local charities meant the project could safely operate within the UKVI rules on permissible volunteering by Tier 4 and Short Term visa students.

### Benefits of Volunteer for Success to Edinburgh College and international students

The project has been a success both in terms of benefits to international students and to Edinburgh College.

International students benefited from the project through the enrichment of their student experience: it provides the opportunity to equip themselves with transferable skills and confidence to excel in future careers and even assist with their re-integration to their home countries. The project enhances their CV and employability, improves their English and gives students a greater sense of belonging at Edinburgh College and in wider local communities. These benefits apply to all students and not only to those visa students with a work prohibition.

In terms of benefits to Edinburgh College, Volunteer for Success provides an essential framework to nurture the desire of international students to enhance their employability and creates a college culture of inclusion that rewards and celebrates students who give back to their local community. The project favourably enhances the profile of

international students at the college and in the wider local community. It also represents an additional offering to students who join the college from commercial groups and this can be highlighted in proposals and tenders. For example, a group of Panamanian students who joined Edinburgh College on a short 4-month course were able to join the project this year.

### Future of Volunteer for Success

Having run a successful pilot of Volunteer for Success, the intention is to continue with the Volunteer for Success project at Edinburgh College, offering suitable volunteering opportunities to the college's international students and selected short-stay student groups. The project framework is now in place (including template emails and certificates, project logo (see below) and International Student Volunteer Award) and can therefore easily be rolled out in future academic years. In particular, key college and charitable contacts have been identified with the goal of adding one or two more charitable contacts each year to diversify volunteering opportunities on offer.

### Recommendations for other UK institutions

- Recognise that all international students can significantly benefit from volunteering during their UK studies (not just visa students with a work prohibition).
- A Volunteer for Success project is viable without any financial commitments.
- Identify and promote volunteering opportunities which do not breach work prohibition rules (ie focus on one day/ad hoc volunteering)
- Keep volunteering opportunities local and accessible by public transport.

The Volunteer for Success project framework can be duplicated in other FE and HE institutions, offering international students the opportunity to enrich their UK student experience in a unique and UKVI-compliant manner.

### Further information

**The project was led by Anna Le Gall**, International Advice and Compliance Officer, Edinburgh College who has since left the college.

**Contact** details are now:

**Sarah Gore**, International Business Manager  
sarah.gore@edinburghcollege.ac.uk  
Tel: 0131 535 4882

**Kris Lozanov**, International Advice and Compliance Officer  
kris.lozanov@edinburghcollege.ac.uk  
Tel: 0131 535 4738

### International Student Volunteer of the Year Award 2017

The Edinburgh College's new International Student Volunteer of the Year Award 2017 was won by Danny Guillermo Canas Rojas.

Danny was an English Language Scholarship student from Colombia, who studied Academic English from August 2016 – June 2017. He was a great supporter and ambassador for the International Team's Volunteer for Success Project. He regularly volunteered for the children's charity Barnardos, helping out at the charity's Leith Store. Danny also volunteered on several occasions during the year with Re-Act, a Scottish refugee charity which gathers donations from the public to provide to refugees in the worst affected areas in Calais, Greece, Syria, Lebanon as well as refugee families arriving into Edinburgh. Danny also volunteered at the College's own Christmas Fair raising funds for Cash for Kids. Danny's extensive



*Danny Guillermo Canas Rojas with his International Student Volunteer of the Year Award*

volunteering commitments showed his desire to help vulnerable people, both locally and internationally and he was a highly deserving winner of our first International Student Volunteer of the Year award.

Interview with Danny at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FF6btj\\_9g4&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FF6btj_9g4&feature=youtu.be)



**Edinburgh College  
Volunteer  
for Success**

# Grassroots internationalisation created by students for students

## Global Campus at York St John University

### Background

#### International context at York St John

York St John University (YSJ) is an institution of approximately 6,000 students of which roughly 500 are identified as international students studying on site. These are predominantly students of East Asian origin and exchange students who, in the main, are from North America.

#### Global Campus at York St John

Prior to the commencement of the current project, Global Campus existed with the main aims of:

- celebrating the diversity and experience of the student community
- fostering inclusion, friendship and cultural understanding

Global Café, day trips, a weekly bulletin and celebration events form the events and activities in the Global Campus project. The project is led by the Student Success and Engagement Team (SSET) within Student Services.

Engagement with Global Campus has traditionally been low with the number of students averaging 10 per Global Café and 25 per Saturday trip. Home students have not engaged and see Global Campus as “international”.

#### The aim of the project

The SSET believe strongly that for projects like Global Campus to develop and succeed the student voice needs to be represented and therefore needs to engage students as

co-creators. For this project, we aimed to employ students to design, develop, run and evaluate the series of weekly Global Cafés, since co-creating all Global Campus activity would be too large a task. By using students as co-creators the aims of the project were to:

- increase the number of students – both home and international – attending the café;
- improve the student experience and cultural connectedness between students;
- build the Global Campus brand
- provide opportunities for students to develop their employability skills; and
- improve links between the University and the Students' Union (SU), presenting the union as an inclusive space for all students and not just a bar.

#### Summary of outcomes

The cafés have been a success and have seen an increase in numbers. We averaged 30 students attending the weekly café across the year, with an especially high attendance in the second semester. Our most successful café was our Halloween-themed event which was attended by 80 students. Attendance by home students has increased but it is still a challenge to attract them, and they only account for 4 out of 30 students on average.

There have been challenges in the practicalities surrounding the café and the relationship between the university and SU. Some of these challenges



**PROGRAMME**

- Monday 6th February **Show Me International**
- Monday 13th February **Language Taster**
- Monday 20th February **Pub Quiz**
- Monday 27th February **Societies and Clubs Fair**
- Monday 6th March **International Pot Luck**
- Monday 13th March **Holi Festival**
- Monday 20th March **Earth Day**
- Monday 27th March **Easter**
- Monday 24th April **Cultural Show**
- Monday 8th May **Goodbye Cafe**

For more information contact Global Campus  
 E: [globalcampus@yorksj.ac.uk](mailto:globalcampus@yorksj.ac.uk)  
 Facebook.com/GlobalCampusYSJ

**Global Campus**  
 EVERY MONDAY  
 4:00PM - 6:00PM  
 STUDENTS' UNION  
 COFFEE LOUNGE

have been outside the control of either party but can be worked on for future years. These challenges, however, do not detract from the success and the café will run again in the academic year 2017-18.

### Delivering the Global Café

#### The Steering Group

A steering group was set up to help direct the project. The group had members from the SSET, SU, Equality and Diversity, and Chaplaincy. The aim of the group was not to initiate ideas for the café but to support the student co-ordinators and provide guidance where appropriate. The members of the group were also chosen to help prevent silo working, build relationships, and share resources, ie



space and advertising. The student co-ordinators were responsible for the café on a day-to-day basis.

### Timing of the project

The Global Cafés run every Monday during term time. We were notified of our successful application for a UKCISA grant in August therefore there was little time to do much planning, or to recruit student co-ordinators before the start of term in mid-September.

As a result, the first café which was run and delivered by the student co-ordinators was not until 3 October 2016, three weeks after the start of term. In total, 23 cafés were run by the co-ordinators.

For future years the student co-ordinators will plan and run the cafés from the start of term and their recruitment will be completed prior to the end of the previous academic year.

### Recruiting the student co-creators

The SSET already engaged students through the Student Services Representative programme to assist with various activities including the Global Guide (GG) activity. GG support international students throughout their lifecycle at YSJ. Students have already been through an application and interview process in order to be selected as a GG. In order to make the process as quick as possible student co-ordinators were chosen from the GG pool (20 students). Applications were open to all GGs however only three candidates applied from which two were chosen.

This process worked well to select the students in a short space of time; however, having only a small pool of three students to choose from was disappointing. In developing the programme, future recruitment will be part of the general Global Guide recruitment in March and April.

### Location, location, location

A key aim of the project was to build links between the University and the SU. It was accepted early on that the SU was not a space that international students engaged with, one reason being the prevalence of alcohol and the SU being seen as a bar. To challenge these barriers the event was to run in the café area (separate from the bar) of the SU as this would be an alcohol-free space.

The SU space proved to be problematic throughout the project. While some of the issues were unavoidable, others have given incentives for improvement. The first issue was the building itself. The SU building was demolished over the preceding summer and was set to be replaced for Welcome Week. However, the work was not complete until late October resulting in the early cafés being held in the dining room.

An unforeseen complication was the relationship between the SU and the external contractor who runs the Starbucks café which prevented us from 'booking' the space. Although the SU were aware a group of students would be coming every week for the cafe, there was no formal agreement so we did not have exclusive use. If we could have guaranteed greater attendance (40+) exclusive use would have been an option. Exclusive use would have allowed us to have more control over the audio visual equipment and run the café in an alcohol-free space rather than an alcohol-free event within a space where alcohol could be purchased.

This caused tensions between all three parties which continued throughout the year.

### Planning and ideas generation

The essence of the development of the Global Café was for the students to be co-creators. Once recruitment was completed, an 'ideas generation' session was held to identify numerous ideas and themes for the cafés, which did not take into account practical considerations such as the budget. (It was felt that at such an early stage we did not want to stifle the creativity of the co-ordinators by constraining them with budget considerations). Budget and other practical considerations, such as space usage and health and safety, were taken into account when refining ideas from the session and finalising the semester plan.) A summary of this session can be found below:

Under the guidance of the SSET these were refined to a programme of events for Semester One which was then presented to the steering group for comment. The same process was followed for Semester Two. The themes for the resulting programme of events were as follows:

Semester One	Semester Two
Pub quiz	Welcome Week semester two
Origami	Speed meeting
Show Me International – this focused on students sharing and celebrating something about their home country. Activities included show and tell about objects from their country, language taster and sharing traditions.	Lunar New Year
Halloween	Show Me International
Dance taster – Stress reliever	Language taster
LGBTIQ+	Pub quiz
Thanksgiving	LGBTIQ+
Season's greetings – Goodbye	International Pot Luck
	Holy Festival
	Earth Day
	Easter
	Cultural show
	Farewell Café

With a large proportion of our cohort on short term courses/exchange some of the more successful cafés from Semester One were re-run in Semester Two.

With the programme finalised the student co-ordinators had to plan each weekly café. To assist, the SSET developed a pro-forma for the co-ordinators to work through covering:

- Target audience
- Objectives
- Activities – approximately five activities for each café
- Resource requirements
- Promotion

To plan the café the co-ordinators had set office hours within the SSET office each week. This worked well; however, it was a great deal of work for the co-ordinators to plan a different café each week.

### Budget

As an existing project Global Café already had a modest budget which covered staffing at the event and some basic catering. The UKCISA funding covered co-ordinators' salaries and an operating budget for putting on activities.

The initial plan was to have a set budget each week for the activities, but it became apparent that different cafés had different requirements. The student co-ordinators, therefore, managed their budget differently, running most of the cafés on a smaller scale and saving for bigger cafés, such as Halloween and Lunar New Year.

The co-ordinators were extremely effective at budgeting wisely but felt they could have achieved more. Existing partnerships between the University and contractors meant there was little scope for shopping around for best prices on items such as catering.

### Capturing feedback

Evaluation was within the remit of the student co-ordinators and formed part of each café via an anonymous feedback exercise where positive feedback was left on green cards and negative on red. The co-ordinators also completed feedback for each event, looking for successes, challenges and areas for improvement.

Gaining feedback at the café worked well, proving accurate feedback with time to implement changes for future events. A more detailed feedback form would, however, enhance this and not be a binary response such as good/bad. For example, we could ask more focussed questions: did the café help students feel part of a diverse university community; did the activities make them think differently about a subject; and what activities and themes would resonate with them as suggestions for future events.

### Outcomes and reflections on the project

#### Successes

Throughout the year the number of students has increased and our average attendance is up by 20 students per café to 30. Semester Two saw the biggest increase with

numbers averaging 37 per café. This fantastic result provides a great foundation for developing the café and justifies the use of students as co-creators.

The feedback from students who attended the café also shows that the café was successful in reaching its other aims. Below is a selection of quotes taken from the comment cards left by attendees.

**The café was really interesting and inclusive**

**The global guides are really friendly and make me feel included and I always have fun**

**I enjoyed the multi-cultural experience and learning about a different celebration that I did not know existed, it was fun to try it [calligraphy] out myself**

**I like meeting people from all over the world and learning about their culture and what they eat**

**I like the global café because I can communicate and talk with people around the world. And also I can learn a lot of culture – it is a great opportunity**

**I have made amazing friends from different cultural backgrounds which is brilliant for someone who loves culture**

The café has been a success for those students running the café. The skills they have developed will stand them in good stead beyond York St John and their university experience has been enriched greatly. The success of the café can be attributed to the students who were the driving force behind it and completed the tasks required with minimal guidance from the SSET.

### Challenges

As detailed above there were challenges with space availability and usage along with the need to keep within budget whilst being restricted to certain suppliers due to existing university contracts.

The student co-ordinators found it a challenge to manage their workload within the set office hours. Planning a café every week placed a heavy burden on the students who also had academic commitments. To mitigate this, the café will have double the number of co-ordinators for 2017 working in two teams of two.

The challenge to engage home students with the café and Global Campus in general continues. In the coming year more work will be done to try and break down this barrier. Such work has included embedding Global Café and Global Campus into a centralised induction talk giving all year one students an introduction to the activity. Additionally, having a presence at the Success Fair (similar to a Freshers' Fair but for central university services) allows the promotion of the value to UK students of having an international outlook and to show how they can get involved.

### The future of Global Café

The increase in numbers and the benefit gained for the students involved has only served to strengthen the position of Global Campus and reinforce the need for students to lead the café into the future.

The areas for improvement centre around our preparation time as we felt we were playing catch-up from the start of 2016. Steps have been taken to avoid this happening again:

- The co-ordinators for 2017 have been recruited and initial planning meetings for ideas generation have taken place
- We are working with the SU and external contractors to reach a resolution over the use of space in time for September.

### Tips for other HEIs

If you are looking to set up a similar scheme our advice is:

- Formalise your relationship with external stakeholders who could have an impact on your ability to run your events.
- Trust your students – give them the space to generate their own ideas.
- It is a rewarding experience for all involved and can be a success.

### Further information

**The project was run by Simon Ganderton**, Student Success and Engagement Team Manager  
**Contact:** [s.ganderton@yorksj.ac.uk](mailto:s.ganderton@yorksj.ac.uk)



# Manchester international student safety campaign

## Manchester Student Homes, Manchester University and Manchester Metropolitan University

### Background to the project

The Manchester International Student Safety (MISS) campaign is designed to educate, inform and support international students on the issues of personal safety, household security, health and wellbeing. The MISS Campaign was created in response to ongoing concern about the vulnerability of international students studying in Greater Manchester. This project, delivered by Manchester Student Homes (MSH), received funding of £2,000 from UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) which was match-funded by Manchester City Council's Community Safety Partnership. The campaign was delivered in conjunction with various stakeholders operating in the City and is student-led to ensure messages are meaningful and relevant.

### Project overview

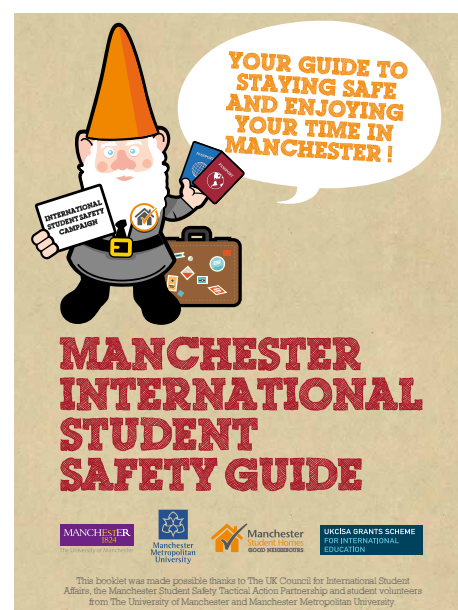
MSH is a jointly-funded department of both The University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University, with service level agreements with the Royal Northern College of Music, The Manchester College and the University of Salford. MSH has been supported in the delivery of this campaign by external agencies such as Greater Manchester Police, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service and The International Society. Further support has been secured through students' unions, international departments and Residential Life teams across The University of

Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University.

The campaign was initiated following receipt of several case studies and anecdotal reports provided by international students relating to their experiences of living and studying in Manchester. There are approximately 20,000 international students studying in Manchester, from over 160 countries and there was unified consensus across the partnerships that international student safety was an area requiring increasing focus. As a result, a series of focus groups were held with international students, facilitated by MSH Community Cohesion Interns to gauge how they felt a campaign could effectively support and educate them to enhance and support their student experience. 10 students were involved and, at the outset, researched leading best practice on student safety from both the UK and America in order to develop ideas for the campaign.

Feedback from students resulted in the creation of several mediums to ensure a multi-faceted approach:

1. An **International Student Safety Guide** containing specialised safety, security and wellbeing advice from Greater Manchester Police, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue, NHS and other partner organisations. Additionally, this includes information regarding health and wellbeing, budgeting advice and signposting to local community groups. The guide includes a removable postcard for students to



*International Student Safety Guide*

send to their families and friends in their home countries and a passport containing a safety checklist for the students to use upon their arrival. To supplement this, an International Student Safety flyer was created which provides a synopsis of key safety messages featured in the fuller International Student Safety Guide. (See 'Useful links' at the end of this report to view the guide and the flyer).

2. A **safety message tea towel**, which contains a map of Manchester's places of academic and social importance, such as the universities and the International Society building.



Milena Pretko, Project Lead (Manchester Student Homes) showing off the MISS tea towel



Still from animation created by students studying film at Manchester Metropolitan University

3 **An online student safety video** (see Useful Links at the end of this report) designed in the style of 'Studio Ghibli', popular with many international students. The animated video was created by students studying Film at Manchester Metropolitan University and follows the day in the life of an international student, highlighting a number of safety scenarios. The video was launched in 2016. In order to maximise views, there will be further targeted campaign from September 2017. Partnership agencies will be provided with a social media toolkit to effectively disseminate the campaign.

## Dissemination of the project

The MISS campaign is promoted on an ongoing basis at various events held both on and off campus, aligned to an academic partnership calendar of events and the student lifecycle.

These events have facilitated discussions and enabled advice and support provision to over 2,700 students in 2016-17. All aspects of the campaign are co-delivered with partnership agencies and via various social media channels including specialist platforms such as WeChat. The project was disseminated through the following channels:

- Facebook
- University communications departments
- Twitter
- International Society website and Facebook group
- At international students welcome week and induction
- Safety talks by Greater Manchester Police
- International Student Ambassadors
- Sabbatical officers at the students' unions
- Tutors, mentors, heads of departments
- Manchester Student Homes website
- Volunteering departments
- Resident Associations
- Manchester Student Homes accredited landlord communications
- Residential Life (a programme operated across both The University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University to provide support to students living in halls of residence)
- National Community Conference Steering Group
- International Town and Gown Association

## Linking to wider aims

The development of the campaign compliments the wider work of Manchester Student Homes to support international students from a housing perspective. The International Friendly Standard initiative ([https://www.manchesterstudenthomes.com/Pages/International\\_Friendly\\_Standard](https://www.manchesterstudenthomes.com/Pages/International_Friendly_Standard)) developed by MSH in 2014 requires accredited landlords, private halls of residence and agents to

provide fair and transparent housing services to international students. There are over 6,000 students each year that will have access to this enhanced service via their private halls of residence provider.

The MISS campaign further complements other MSH-led strategic initiatives relating to student safety such as Hate Crime Awareness and the MSH WOLF (Wary of Light Fingers) campaign.

## Evaluation

The campaign has been project managed by Community Cohesion Interns, with ongoing support from the Off Campus Student Affairs Officer based at MSH. Officers presented the initiative at the 2016 UKCISA Members' Forum. This has ensured the tone of the project is appropriate as well as providing on-going personal development opportunities for the lead officers. The continuing success and relevance of the campaign is supported by International Student Safety Ambassadors who act as a 'critical friend' on all aspects of the initiative through designated email and focus groups as well as supporting MISS events through volunteering opportunities. The project has been evaluated on a quarterly basis in terms of numbers of students engaged with via various strands of the campaigns.



International students giving their feedback on MISS as part of the ongoing evaluation of the project

The campaign has received widespread support both inside and outside the higher education sector. In May 2017 MISS was shortlisted for a CUBO (College and University



Business Officers) Award 2017 under the category of Innovation Award for Excellence in Student Experience. The project has also been cited as best practice by the USA-based International Town and Gown Association (ITGA) (<https://www.itga.org/>) which brings together networks of colleagues working in off-campus management across North America. The project has also been shared more widely with the UK Town and Gown Association (UKTGA), a UK network of 200 colleagues considering best practice for off-campus student experience. Internally, MISS has been promoted in staff publications as well as through the International Society and Residential Life teams, and featured in arrival guides for Manchester Metropolitan University 2017-18. MSH has also developed a social media campaign with specific hashtags relating to International Student Safety:

#MSHMISS  
 #Man\_Student\_Hme  
 #Halls2Home  
 #GNT (Good Neighbours Team)  
 #WOLF (MSH's other safety campaign, stands for Wary of Light Fingers)  
 #International  
 #StudentSafety

<https://twitter.com/hashtag/MSHMISS?src=hash&lang=en-gb>

## Challenges in delivery

There were no discernible challenges with regards to timescales and budget. However, there were challenges in recruiting focus group participants. This may be due to the timing when students could have had too many academic commitments. Students were offered dinner as an incentive to attend. Volunteer advertisements were created and sent to the volunteering teams at both The University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University. The advertisement was also highlighted in the International

Society's Newsletter and students were provided with a mock draft of the safety guide to Issuu (a free-to-read publications website) which was sent out to students directly. MSH Interns also attended Accommodation Fairs and university events to recruit students which resulted in the recruitment of 10 volunteers. In order to ensure the ongoing and effective recruitment and retention of focus group participants and MISS Ambassadors, MISS staff will attend events as well as liaise closely with international departments and the International Society.

There were slight delays with the video production, although this was still delivered on time. The experience with making videos was useful for the officers involved in this aspect of the campaign – next time, they need to be realistic in what can be produced with video on a small budget. Manchester Student Homes will build on the established social media campaign and the bank of assets to ensure an increasing awareness of the campaign in 2017-18.

## Recommendations for other institutions

1. If you are going to run focus groups, plan how to recruit students and how long this will take.
2. Try to be realistic about how much can be achieved with video in the time allotted. The initial concept for this project was much more detailed than the funding would allow. For example, we had hoped for an interactive choice-based approach involving different scenarios. However, this led to time delays and we revised the approach to the videomaking.

## Next steps for 2017-18

In summary, the participants recognised that the project has been hugely successful. The project is sustainable, given the ongoing support

across the Student Safety Partnership for the campaign and the established social media presence. To ensure students continue to be at the heart of shaping this project, the continued recruitment of MISS Ambassadors is essential. This will also be useful for ongoing evaluation of the project. MSH have already begun liaising with university colleagues and partners with the International Society to ensure that the campaign is promoted effectively in 2017-18. A summary of the 2017-18 campaigns associated with MISS is detailed in the Appendix below. MSH recognises that ongoing support for wider colleagues to promote MISS effectively is fundamental to the ongoing success of the campaign. To this end, MSH will develop a stakeholder communications toolkit to ensure consistency of messages and more accurate tracking of social media analytics.

In order to make this project accessible, the project was a generic international student safety campaign. However, there is an appreciation that there is a particularly high percentage of international students from China studying in Manchester, with whom there are associated vulnerabilities in terms of personal safety. To this end in 2017-18 a funding bid will be submitted to the Student Safety Group to reprint the safety flyer but with key words highlighted in the relevant language. This is chaired by Manchester City Council and has representation from the Council, Greater Manchester Police, University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University and their associated students' unions. Each year the group has a pot of money for which partners can submit bids for safety-related activity.

Further funding has been secured via the Student Safety Group to purchase software to host a specific online quiz. The quiz was created by the MSH Intern, herself an international student. The quiz will be live from September 2018 and will be posted on the

Manchester Student Homes website. MSH has also applied to the Community Safety Partnership to secure additional funding for MISS to fund fortune cookies containing safety messages.

2017-18 will see greater work with the alumni of the universities as part of this campaign. For example, alumni writing articles to their younger self and possibly requesting support for funding.

### Useful links

- Manchester Student Homes [https://www.manchesterstudenthomes.com/Pages/Community\\_H2H\\_Safety\\_Intl](https://www.manchesterstudenthomes.com/Pages/Community_H2H_Safety_Intl) (this includes a link to the magazine format of the guide for students and the project video 'Mei's Day Out')
- Mei's Day Out video on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBnu-UCQrl8&feature=youtu.be>

### Further information

**The project was led by Poppy Humphrey**, Off Campus Student Affairs Officer, on behalf of The University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University Manchester Student Homes

**Contact:** [poppy.humphrey@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:poppy.humphrey@manchester.ac.uk), tel:0161 275 0750

## Appendix

### MISS 2017-18 campaign plan

Month	Key message	Activity
September	Orientation	Stalls held on campus Information provided to private halls Social media campaign Work with international departments & International Society for Welcome week
October	Hate crime awareness week (national)	Stalls on and off campus Social media campaign Information provided to private halls Fortune Cookie campaign
November	Dark nights - property security and personal safety	Social media campaign Partnership messages, eg, police Information provided to private Halls Fortune cookie campaign
December	Dark nights- property security and personal safety	Social media campaign Partnership messages, eg, police Information provided to private halls
January	Love your stuff! Orientation (Erasmus students)	Social media campaign Partnership messages, eg, police Stalls held on & off campus Information provided to private halls
February	Hate crime awareness week (Manchester) Chinese New Year	Stalls on and off campus Social media campaign Information provided to private halls Fortune cookie campaign
March-June	Links with WOLF	Stalls on and off campus Social media campaign Information provided to private halls Fortune cookie campaign Link in with partnership agencies

# 'Bounce Back': increasing access for international students to student wellbeing services

## The University of Sunderland

### Summary of the project

The Student Wellbeing Service ran a series of workshops designed to support international students with their transition into university life and culture in the UK, with a particular emphasis on mental health and looking after personal wellbeing.

12 students attended the workshops and the evaluations showed an increase in wellbeing and in help-seeking behaviour, as measured by the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS).

We also designed a leaflet to be issued to international students about managing wellbeing. This was published in the top two languages of international students at the University.

A section of the wellbeing service website was created dedicated to international students' wellbeing.

### Background information

The University of Sunderland has over 2,500 full-time international students (25.5% of all full-time students). However, our monitoring figure identified that engagement in Student Wellbeing Services did not reflect this figure with approximately only 9% of all referrals received coming from international students (2015-16).

International students who did engage with the Student Wellbeing Service reported a lack of awareness of our

*"Mental Health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stressors of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."*

World Health Organisation

presence on campus and an initial reluctance to engage due to pre-conceptions of the service as well as not considering themselves to have emotional or mental health difficulties. For example, a number of international students have cited cultural differences in perspectives of mental health, creating barriers to engagement and support. These findings are supported by the current body of research exploring international students' engagement in services (Bentley, Virgo and Hastings, 2016).

### Aims

- **Targeted promotion of wellbeing:** helping international students recognise what wellbeing is and the factors that might affect wellbeing
- **Self-management skills:** supporting international students to develop a unique set of skills to increase personal resilience and confidence in managing their own wellbeing
- **Increasing social networks:** the opportunity for contact with other

**BOUNCING BACK**

Are you an international student? Is this your first time away from home? Feeling a bit overwhelmed? Come to our workshops to meet new friends, eat pizza, and learn about bouncing back!

Find out more information online at [www.sunderland.ac.uk/bounceback](http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/bounceback)

**9<sup>th</sup> November**  
1pm - 3pm  
**GET TO KNOW**  
Workshop one is looking at the common struggles of being an international student and what it's like to be in a new country studying for the first time.

**23<sup>rd</sup> November**  
1pm - 3pm  
**GET TO LEARN**  
Workshop two will help you learn how to adjust to a new environment, new places, new faces, new challenges and your new life!

**7<sup>th</sup> December**  
2pm - 4pm  
**GET SUPPORT**  
Workshop three will focus on relaxation sessions and learning about what support is available at the University and how to get your bounce back!

lifechanging  University of Sunderland

Advertising of the workshop via poster. Issued in leaflet format and displayed on LCD screens around campus. This was emailed to all new international students.

international students, increasing social support and shared understanding

- Increasing referral to student wellbeing: raising awareness of support avenues in the University and encouraging help seeking behaviour when required

### Establishing the project

Working with a member of staff from the International Office we looked at an engagement strategy to encourage international students to access Student Wellbeing.



Three workshops were designed. The content was largely activity-based and included discussion and information on topics such as culture shock, homesickness, basic stress and anxiety awareness, how to seek support, building resilience, and a session on mindfulness.

The sessions were informal and included refreshments.

See the links at the end of this report and download presentations from the UKCISA website.

### Step 1

We identified key members of staff to be involved in the project. An International Students' Officer supported the project which was led by a mental health adviser in Student Wellbeing.

### Step 2

We planned and designed the workshops and advertised across the University. Posters were distributed to student accommodation and targeted emails were sent to all recently-arrived international students. Leaflets were issued at the international student welcome event to over 240 students.

### Step 3

Three workshops were delivered including a mindfulness session with the University chaplain. Evaluation and feedback was collated and used to inform the next series of workshops.

### Step 4

The Student Wellbeing website was developed specifically targeting international students, raising awareness of struggles or difficulties that they may face as international students. (See Useful Links at the end of this report for a link to the website).

A leaflet was designed which included information on managing homesickness, seeking support and ways to ensure wellbeing. This was also posted on the Student Wellbeing website and was cascaded to academic staff with high numbers of international students in their cohort.

A flyer with 'welcome' in different languages was placed across the university in food areas, study areas, accommodation, etc. to catch the eye of international students and direct them to our services.

The Student Wellbeing website was mirrored on the main international students' pages of the University of Sunderland website.

## Timescales

The workshops ran between November to December 2016. The leaflets and Student Wellbeing website were completed in May 2017.

## Project evaluation

### Challenges

1. The project was primarily the responsibility of a single member of staff with support from others. It was challenging to consistently fit the work in around the demands of staff roles.
2. The University of Sunderland underwent a significant restructure: departments were changed leading to difficulties in advertising and continuity of support. We advertised for a second set of workshops to take place after Christmas, when uptake was very low and we did not have the resources to investigate why. A likely explanation for the poor response may have been the impact of the restructure.
3. Delay in getting the leaflet designed and marketed, due to marketing commitments to other projects. We chose to design the leaflet after we had completed the workshops so we could create content based on themes or issues presented by students during the workshop. This meant it was behind in the queue for jobs with our marketing team which has a long lead-in time for publishing as it is a very small team.

### Sustainability of the project

The Student Wellbeing website and leaflet are designed for a long shelf life. A smaller leaflet was sent to every new international student arriving and other leaflets produced for the international office to distribute directing students to the website. This series of leaflets is planned to continue for the foreseeable future.

Further dates have been agreed to continue to roll out the workshops with a new member of staff (who was

previously an international student) from Student Wellbeing to continue to support the programme.

The Sports Development team have agreed to support a fourth session. Sports Development are employed by the university to focus on engaging students in exercise and sport. They have a broader remit than staff based at the gym and offered to do a session which would engage the students and hopefully encourage longer-term activity. One suggestion was to host an introduction to cricket or volleyball as these tend to be more popular among international students.

### Impact

Questionnaires were completed pre- and post-workshops. These showed an increase in personal wellbeing (measured using the WEMBS) and a slight positive shift in attitudes to help-seeking behaviour.

This shows the benefits of targeted engagement. Further research could look at retention rates to ascertain how many international students leave for wellbeing-related issues and investigate whether early intervention and targeted support could make a difference.

All of respondents reported finding the workshops helpful and said they would recommend the course to a friend.

In response to the question ‘Can you tell us one thing you will do differently as a result of this workshop?’, students commented:

**‘I will try to stop procrastinating and worrying about failing’**

**‘Helped me manage my life better’**

**‘I learnt new ways of coping with stress’**

Two of the students who participated in the workshops went on to self-refer to student wellbeing. Some of our

current students accessing wellbeing came along to some of the workshops. Students were invited back to attend a further workshop run by the Students’ Union entitled ‘Look after your mate,’ which encouraged students to look out for others who may develop or have mental health difficulties.

Access for international students in wellbeing increased to 18.1% (2016-17).

### Recommendations for other UK institutions

1. Engage students as soon as they arrive in the UK. This can be done through the International Office, social media, emails and students’ union groups.
2. Keep the focus in workshops on activities that allow students to talk to one another.
3. Adding refreshments helped to settle anxieties, provide a distraction and a common conversation point.
4. Check timings for internal marketing deadlines to avoid delays – or consider outsourcing.
5. Draw on resources in your institution. For example, mindfulness workshops with the chaplain in workshop 3 was rated highly.
6. Target the promotion and awareness-raising to this specific student cohort. It is important to focus on international students to consider what would work best, (for example we produced the leaflet with other languages). Another option is to work with students’ union groups such as the Malaysian society or the Chinese society to target students. This is more effective than producing or using generic promotional materials.

### Useful links

#### Wellbeing Service website

<http://sls.sunderland.ac.uk/wellbeing-international>

#### Presentations

Week 1:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ZKnLIEY1WgYKPIf7vFM58qxRQ4p46itDOGWU9Y1SVyl/edit?usp=sharing>

Week 2:

[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1VK8TikhTyHjB65DgJ58bMIAWclvqd70yXu5ZLMv-\\_ro/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1VK8TikhTyHjB65DgJ58bMIAWclvqd70yXu5ZLMv-_ro/edit?usp=sharing)

Week 3:

[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1Mhh8UjRp8m\\_TUUF9qf9CTQAR8AZKsLygl0lv-y4itg/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1Mhh8UjRp8m_TUUF9qf9CTQAR8AZKsLygl0lv-y4itg/edit?usp=sharing)

### References

Bentley, A., Virgo, M., and Hastings, D., 2016. Reaching out to enhance the wellbeing of International students. Are you University counselling and wellbeing services accessible and inclusive? *Research into the international student experience in the UK 2015-16*. London: UKCISA. Available at [https://institutions.ukcisa.org.uk/file\\_download.aspx?id=18311](https://institutions.ukcisa.org.uk/file_download.aspx?id=18311).

### Further information

#### The project was run by Ashley

**Cave**, Student Mental Health Advisor and supported by **Kayleigh Munday**, International Student Officer.

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# Teaching and learning

## Engagement with learning for international students Royal Northern College of Music

### Aim

The aim of the project was to support International music students as they explore new and unfamiliar academic territories in a UK conservatoire.

Research carried out at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) indicated that international students from diverse learning backgrounds find Western approaches to study and methods of assessment confusing. The RNCM recognises that international students are successful learners in their own country. However, learning how to operate within a UK conservatoire while navigating their way through a new language is extremely challenging for many international students. The RNCM also acknowledges that it is unrealistic to expect international students to absorb a Western approach to learning and teaching merely through the conventional teacher-led 'telling' culture of student handbooks, induction, and initial cohort lectures.

### Summary of outcomes

Our Engagement with Learning (EwL) for international students project is a targeted strategic intervention which helps international students make the transition from learning in their own country to studying in a Western context. EwL allows students to use

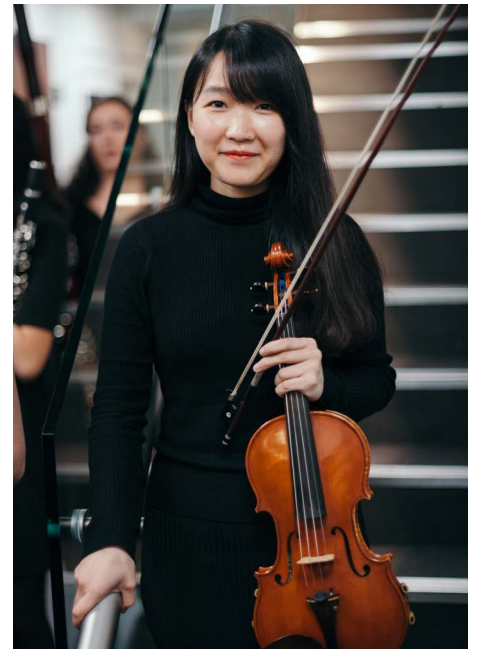
the security of familiar experiences to learn about an unfamiliar educational context. It also allows for the development and enhancement of English language skills in a more meaningful, contextualised way. Most importantly, EwL gives students the tools to cope with and explore their new learning contexts in a structured and imaginative way, helping them to gain the maximum benefit from their study.

### Background to the project

RNCM is a leading international conservatoire located near the centre of Manchester. It has 320 teaching staff, and 800 students from almost 60 countries. Our EwL course is specifically designed for Far Eastern students who have experienced a different learning background. The language level of these students is typically IELTS 5.5 /6.0 (B2 on the Common European Framework Level). The students who participated in the course are undergraduate and postgraduate students.

### Organisation and evaluation

The project was originally set up by Dr Jean Ammar who is the Language Support Tutor at the college. Jean works closely with international students in support of their academic



*Yan Li, one of the students involved in the Engagement with Learning project, makes her way to the stage.*

work and language development and has a thorough understanding of student needs. After carrying out small scale research at the college, Jean drafted the EwL project according to the needs of the students (outlined above). She then met with Dr Fabrice Fitch who is Head of the Graduate School to discuss how the project might be put into practice. EwL initially ran as a pilot project for postgraduate students in 2015. It was well-received by students and staff and was then rolled out for undergraduate and postgraduate international students in 2016

following the receipt of the grant from UKCISA.

## Timescale

The course was delivered on a weekly basis from September to December 2016 in ten sessions. The tutors were all from the RNCM. The September to December timing is essential as EwL is an introductory course for new undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The project is run as a three-strand model:

### Strand 1: studying in a UK conservatoire

Learning frameworks and assessments: do they differ in your country or are they the same?

- Session 1: Learning frameworks.
- Session 2: Communicating in the college.
- Session 3: Academic assignments.
- Session 4: Principal study assessment.

### Strand 2: strategies for effective study

Using the learning skills you developed in your own country in a new study context. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle; making the transition from studying in your home country to the RNCM.

- Session 5: Planning and organising your time. Dealing with change, keeping healthy.
- Session 6: Making use of resources across the college.
- Session 7: Attending seminars and lectures at the RNCM.

### Strand 3: talking and writing about music

Talking and writing about music in a different language. How you can express your understanding of a piece of music in English.

- Session 8: The vocabulary of music.
- Session 9: Compare recordings of a piece.



*"The Engagement with Learning project underpins the acquisition of an understanding of Western music, giving students confidence and a greater sense of wellbeing."*

Session 10: Compare editions of a piece.

**Strand One** looks at the structure and organisation of a UK conservatoire and the support mechanisms in the college which are specially designed for international students. Assessment is discussed in detail within this strand. We feel this is extremely important as Far Eastern students frequently become disheartened when failing to achieve the high scores they are accustomed to receiving in their own country. Explaining how marking and assessment criteria is carried out in the RNCM and discussing how it might differ from their previous study contexts helps students to manage self and institutional expectations in a more realistic manner.

**Strand Two** is concerned with student wellbeing and acquiring a positive

mind-set with regards to time management. Resources and how they can be accessed is also discussed in this strand.

**Strand Three** looks specifically at talking and writing about music in a different language other than their own. Comparing recordings and editions of a piece and dealing with unfamiliar terminology are the main focus of this strand. The students will have studied parts of the Western repertoire but have little understanding of the cultural context of that repertoire. Bridging this gap is an on-going process during their RNCM studies but EwL underpins the acquisition of an understanding of Western music in the first weeks of their course, giving them confidence and a greater sense of wellbeing.

The EwL project was followed by an evaluation session where the students meet with the language support tutor to discuss what they had learnt and what they felt had been useful to them. This evaluation session provided a rich source of information, enabling tutors to match the current EwL course content to the changing needs of students. The data from the evaluation session was fed into the on-going development of the project and the RNCM Internationalisation Strategy. Students reported that they felt more confident in the college and able to participate in lectures and seminars more fully. This is illustrated by such comments as

**“I feel at home in the college now”**

**“I feel more relaxed about studying here”**

**“I understand how the college is organised”**

**“This course helped me to understand how I can learn”**

Students also related that they had a better understanding of methods of assessment and how they differ from their previous educational contexts after attending the EwL course.

### Challenges to delivery

There was no challenge to delivering the project on time and within budget. Careful planning meant the project ran smoothly.

### Sustainability

EwL is now an established part of our Internationalisation Strategy at the college, a strategy which places emphasis on giving support to international students within the ethos of inclusivity and integration. EwL will run at the beginning of each academic year as described above. Some tutors have suggested that the EwL model



*The RNCM is a thriving conservatoire with over 800 students from 60 different countries. It hosts a live music venue offering unparalleled opportunities for students to perform regularly to public audiences and to work alongside professional musicians and visiting artists.*

could be used for our home students who come from diverse learning backgrounds. This would be relevant as the EwL framework allows students to discuss new methodologies and approaches, thereby directly involving them in the shape and structure of their future learning.

### Implementing learning points at the institution

Participating in the EwL project was optional in the first year that we ran it (2015) but we decided attendance had to be a compulsory part of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes if the students were to benefit from the full content of the three-strand approach. Attendance was much better in 2016 when the course was made compulsory. It was also decided that EwL had to take place in academic priority time when academic studies and course work takes precedence over music and performance commitments at the college.

### Recommendations for other UK institutions

We believe the three-strand model of the project can be beneficial to other contexts that extends beyond the conservatoire environment to encompass dance, drama, performance arts and performance areas generally. For instance, while Strand Three is directly applicable to our conservatoire, we feel that the sector as a whole could adapt the content of each strand to their own particular learning and teaching situations.

### Further information

**The project was run by Dr Jean Ammar** SFHEA, Language Support Tutor

**Contact:** Jean.ammar@rncm.ac.uk, tel: 0161 907 5403



# Supporting the academic and cultural challenges facing international students studying the biosciences

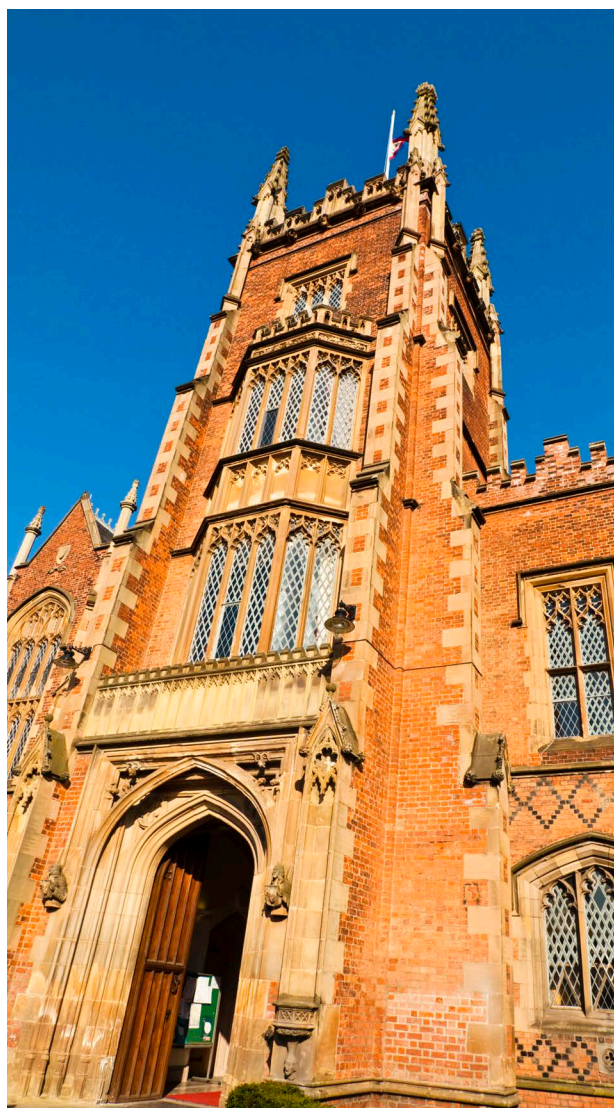
## Queens University Belfast

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## 1. Introduction: beginning of a journey

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When international students start their degrees in UK universities, they find themselves learning not only new ideas, but also new ways to discuss these ideas. They are asked to write assignments or give class presentations in English, which in most cases is their second (or third) language, and they need to learn how to complete these tasks in a short period of time. These are considerable challenges to overcome.

In the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Science (FMHLS), Queen's University Belfast (QUB), the impact of these challenges has become more and more apparent as numbers of international students increase. In recent years the number of undergraduate and postgraduate international students in biomedicine has grown significantly – at present over 70 postgraduate students come from overseas – and it is expected to do so in the future. Yet the increase of international students also puts new demands on the faculty in different areas, including academic development.

## 2. Project aims

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The aims of the present project were twofold: first, to support FMHLS international students with academic discourse; and second, to learn more about the challenges faced by this cohort of students in their academic learning. Importantly, the project was not a 'proof-reading service'. It went beyond grammar by approaching texts (both written and spoken) as culturally-based constructs which can only be learned by instruction and practice (Cook, 1989; Paltridge, 2006; Juez, 2009).

## 3. Motivation for project

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Academic staff at FMHLS had long ago detected the difficulties experienced by international students with academic discourse. Yet no research had been carried out at faculty level to understand these challenges, and very little was known about best practices in this area.

This lack of knowledge became apparent in a pilot project funded by the Queen's Annual Fund (awarded to a number of small-scale projects that benefit QUB students, campus and community) and implemented in the academic year 2015-16 at the Centre for Biomedical Science Education, QUB. The project, which consisted of a series of workshops with students and academic staff, showed that international students may arrive to FMHLS with high IELTS scores, or may receive extensive pre-sessional training (eg, INTO courses), but may still struggle with biomedical academic discourse. The findings of the pilot project made it clear that further investigation was required.

## 4. Key outcomes

---

The present project revealed insightful information about the difficulties of FMHLS international students with academic discourse. In brief, the project showed that:

- The main challenges for international students are related to a) comprehension of coursework guidelines, b) comprehension of scientific articles, c) academic writing, and d) critical approach to literature.
- Written coursework guidelines were not always clearly developed. This negatively impacts on the understanding and completion of academic tasks.
- Postgraduate (international) students would benefit from a faculty service specialised in academic learning.

- In terms of academic learning, engagement with international students can be a challenge.

## 5. Background information: beyond grammar

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Many international students come from academic traditions which differ significantly from the Western tradition of "constructing knowledge" (Canagarajah, 2014). As research in applied linguistics has demonstrated (Blue, 2011; Liyanage and Walker, 2014), differences between academic traditions may cause tensions in the way in which scholars and students from different backgrounds conceptualise texts and discuss academic matters.

International students are particularly vulnerable to these differences. Having spent most of their academic lives approaching texts in a particular manner, once enrolled on programmes in UK universities they need to master new ways of, for instance, reading a scientific article or writing about a technical subject (Braine, 2002; Bitchener and Basturkmen, 2006; Seviour, 2015; O'Boyle, 2015). Use of sources (eg, quotes, paraphrasing) and so-called 'critical thinking' are two well-known examples of how differences between traditions may cause confusion among international students in English-speaking universities (Skyrme, 2010; Hirvela and Du, 2013; Cumming et al. 2016).

In addition, training for the new academic environment is not always adequate. In many cases the preparation of international students concentrates on English proficiency exams (eg, IELTS) and the scores required by universities. Although most exams claim that they are academic-oriented, research clearly indicates that preparation for English proficiency exams has little effect on long-term learning (Cheng, 2008; Hulstijn, 2011). Also, it is unclear to what extent

pre-sessional training courses are effective in preparing international students for their new learning experience as there is a scarcity of research evidence in this area (Terraschke and Wahid, 2001; Storch and Tapper, 2009).

## 6. Methods and analysis

To meet the project aims, the authors designed two types of activities: first, a student workshop to advise participants on biomedical academic discourse; and, second, a number of data collection activities (including surveys, focus group discussions, interviews, and workshops with academic staff) to complement the information gathered in the workshop.

Importantly, the approach was interdisciplinary as experts from three different areas of knowledge (including biomedicine, linguistics, and education) were involved in the project. First, academic staff from the FMHLS provided all the resources and advice necessary for the project implementation. Second, an expert on second language acquisition from the School of Arts, English and Languages, QUB, ran the workshop and collected supplementary data by means of a focus group and an interview with academic staff. And third, an expert on education from the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, QUB, delivered a workshop addressed to FMHLS academic staff.

### 6.1 Workshop

As the main activity of the project, the student workshop ran throughout the academic year 2016-17. In September and October 2016 invitations were sent out by email to international students to attend the workshop, which was also publicised by academic staff. Attendance was voluntary and no certificate was awarded at the end of the course. Hence the main incentive for participants was the opportunity to

have personalised support with their coursework. Refreshments were also provided in the first sessions.

The workshop was delivered in a series of sessions and its content was personalised to the needs of the participants. In each session participants were asked to identify areas which they found particularly problematic and the sessions that followed focused on these specific areas. For instance, two sessions were devoted to plagiarism and quotations as these were areas which some participants found especially challenging (see Appendix for a sample of the slides used in these sessions). Other sessions focused on topics such as the structure of assignments, understanding guidelines, and critically reviewing literature. The aim of this format was to design a workshop capable of being tailored to participants' needs.

In Semester One the workshop was delivered on a weekly basis, with one-hour-sessions on Wednesday afternoons, the most convenient day and time for students. Since attendance was at times irregular (see 6.3), the workshop format was amended in Semester Two. The workshop was re-organised as a 'drop-in clinic' (delivered in fortnightly two-hour sessions) in which students could bring their drafts and discuss them with the tutor. Online communication between participants and tutor was also encouraged by advising participants to send drafts to the tutor and receive feedback by email.

### 6.2 Data collection activities

Initially, the data collection activities included surveys, learner diaries, audio-recorded focus groups with students, and interviews with academic staff. However, the irregular participation of students made it difficult to carry out some of these activities (see 6.3). As a result, complementary data was sought from students and staff. This was gathered

by means of an informal focus group in a workshop session (Semester Two), an interview with a member of the academic staff, and a workshop with academic staff. Hence this data provided additional insight to complement the data obtained in the workshop.

### 6.3 Challenges

Engaging with international students was the main challenge in the delivery of the project. Despite the authors' efforts to encourage participation, attendance at the workshop was irregular. While the first sessions in Semester One and Semester Two had a good turnout (between five and fifteen students per session), in later sessions up to only three students attended the course. In some cases only one student, or none, attended. In addition, although a number of students contacted the tutor by email to discuss their coursework, only some sent drafts on a regular basis.

Different reasons may account for this irregular participation. First, attendance at the workshop was voluntary and no certificate was awarded. "We are all very busy", a participant told the tutor in an informal conversation about this issue. Second, some students had attended INTO pre-sessional courses and possibly felt that they did not need another 'language course'. Third, some students may have expected a course focused on technical content (ie, biomedicine) rather than on biomedical academic discourse, and dropped out after realising that was not the purpose of the workshop. And fourth, as reported by the interviewed member of academic staff, some students feared that attending the course would have a negative impact on their marks. In the words of a member of academic staff:

**"Apparently [some international students] were afraid of approaching teachers for help because they were afraid of how that would impact on their mark [...] And I was thinking: does that**

happen back at home? That if you ask a teacher for help, they immediately think of you as weak?"

As a result of these – to some extent unexpected – challenges, some of the original research procedures (particularly the collection of data with surveys, learner diaries, and audio-recorded focus groups) had to be re-examined. Efforts were therefore concentrated on collecting data by means of ‘drop-in sessions’, on-line tutoring and activities with academic staff (interview and workshop). Although collected data was not as abundant and diverse as the authors originally planned, it was sufficient to have an insight into the matter under study, as shown in section 6.4. and has highlighted an unforeseen finding in relation to international student engagement.

## 6.4 Data analysis

The data consisted of coursework samples produced by students (including coursework drafts and submitted assignments); coursework guidelines facilitated by students; an oral sample (a semi-structured interview with a member of academic staff), and information gathered during the workshop sessions. The following sections summarise the main findings after analysis of these materials.

### 6.4.1 Coursework guidelines

On a number of occasions student participants reported that the information provided in course handbooks is complete, but they also pointed out that they find it difficult to understand – and follow – some coursework guidelines. “I don’t understand what they are asking me to do”, a student emphasised. A discourse analysis of coursework guidelines facilitated by students shows that information is not always clearly provided, which may cause some misunderstandings. See an example in Sample 1.

01

The essays should have the following format:

1. Abstract, on a separate page. Summarises the subject, findings and conclusions within 300 words (not included in total word count).
2. Introduction and background to expand on the title and ‘set the general scene’.
3. Main body of the text, divide using appropriate sub headings. This should follow a logical sequence and student should argue pros and cons where appropriate.
4. Conclusions, which should include constructive appraisal and where appropriate include future work/perspectives
5. Reference list / Bibliography

Further guidance for preparation of the essay will be provided in week 1 of the module. All text should be word-processed using primarily Arial size 11, printed on single-sided A4 paper and 1 1/2 line spaced. Tables and figures should be incorporated throughout the essay; as with typical journal articles, titles for tables should appear before each table while figure legends are written below respective figures. All pages should be numbered and the total number of words should be stated at the end of the essay (Total 3,000 words, not including abstract, references, figures, tables or appendices).

Students should ensure that their report is factually correct. As these fields are developing rapidly, references should be relevant and up to date.

Students should note that regulations governing plagiarism are dealt with under “Student Conduct” and that it is an academic offence for students to plagiarise. Plagiarism is defined...

*Sample 1. Excerpt from coursework guidelines facilitated by participant students*

From a discourse perspective, Sample 1 does not completely achieve its communicative function (ie, instructional function) for a number of reasons. For instance, paragraphs are not clearly organised (cf. no space between them); sentences are not carefully proof-read (cf. that ‘Summarises’, l. 2, has no explicit subject); vocabulary choices may cause confusion (cf. ‘constructive appraisal’, l. 7); and instructions (cf. ‘to expand on the title’, l. 4) are not fully developed. Similar issues were detected in other samples.

### 6.4.2 Academic writing

In general, student participants were familiar with academic conventions, but the collected written samples revealed that in practice students had difficulties in producing appropriate academic texts. In terms of discourse structure, drafts typically needed improvement in coherence and cohesion, text organisation (eg, too

long sentences), and the development of ‘literature review’ and ‘discussion’. In terms of language accuracy, typical areas for improvement included referential devices (eg, pronoun ‘it’), complex syntactic structures (eg, relative pronouns), vocabulary (limited at times), and register adequacy (eg, use of colloquial expressions). A typical example is presented in Sample 2.

Sample 2 shows the abstract from a coursework draft produced by a postgraduate student. In the discussion with the tutor, the student pointed out that she or he was aware of the discourse structure and communicative function of abstracts but she or he found it difficult to apply these ideas to the actual text. In Sample 2 these difficulties become apparent for the repetitiveness of the text (ie, the potential of bioinformatics in biomedical research) and the only reference to the assignment (“essay”)

## 02

**Abstract**

With the advanced development of information technology, there is a huge impact on various industries for the arrival of big data. Biomedical Science is also included which has been greatly impacted by computational analysis of large biological datasets. Through the effective management and use of these biomedical scientific data sets, researchers can better carry out biological information data mining research work. The essential purpose of these works is to fundamentally understand the pathogenesis of human diseases, so as to effectively prevent and cure diseases, especially the high mortality of complex diseases. Since increasingly number of important scientific research projects involved in the support of bio-information technology and even become the leading technology project, Bioinformatics technology as computational analysis has become a biomedical research in the frontier area and the source of innovation. Its development will bring great influence and impact on molecular biology, drug research and development, biomedical resources sharing, and make use of biological information technology to standardize disorderly data and provide convenience for follow-up research. Research, and the standardization of data may bring about significant regularity of discovery.

This essay is to discuss the issues faced in biomedical computational analysis and how computational analysis of large biological datasets is transforming Biomedical Science.

*Sample 2. Abstract from a coursework draft facilitated by a student participant*

in a short, independent paragraph at the end of the abstract (l. 16-17). Sample 2 also exemplifies some of the issues in language accuracy mentioned above, eg, unclear use of pronouns (eg, 'which', l. 1; 'its', l. 11), unnecessarily long and complex sentences (eg, 'Since increasingly...', l. 7-11), and register-inappropriate vocabulary (eg, 'huge', l. 1). All collected samples contained similar issues.

**6.4.3 Critical analysis**

Student participants frequently asked for advice on the literature review and discussion of their assignments. They pointed out that they could not fully understand the differences between these two sections and their purpose. Sample 3 provides a clear example of these difficulties. The excerpt comes from a draft report (about anatomical variations of the sciatic nerve) produced by a student participant.

Two issues can be noted here. First, the discussion is situated just after the 'introduction' – as number 2 in the heading indicates. This order is quite

unusual as the reader would expect to find the discussion later in the text (eg, after the 'results'), not after the introduction. And second, there is no critical review of the literature on the subject. Instead, the text only describes the sciatic nerve. Only in the last paragraph in the section (here not reproduced) there are some bibliographic references about the most (un)common anatomical variations of the nerve. Similar difficulties were identified in the other collected samples.

**6.4.4 Interview data**

The interviewed member of academic staff confirmed the issues outlined above regarding academic writing (see 6.4.2, 6.4.3). For illustration, the participant explained that sometimes she or he needs to "sit down" with an international student and teach her/him how to critically summarise a research article:

**"I've myself sat down with [this international student] and gone: right, okay, this is how you write an essay, or this is how you start a literature review, giving examples... Comes to me and says: I don't know how to paraphrase, I don't know..."**

In addition, the participant put special emphasis on, first, the challenges of reading scientific literature, and second, the lack of resources at faculty level to support postgraduate (international) students. In relation to reading comprehension, the participant reported that some of his or her international students need a considerable amount of time to read scientific articles. For example, commenting on a particular student, the participant told us that '[this international student] loves reading papers, but will spend days on a single paper, trying to get every ounce out of it'. The staff member provided several reasons for these difficulties:

**"It's bad enough when English is your first language, and you've maybe done maths all your life and you start to learn about genes, proteins, diseases, and you're doing that in a second language! You've never read a**

## 03

**2. Discussion**

The sciatic nerve is the longest nerve trunks of the sacral plexus and it is formed on the anterior surface of the periformis muscle, in the pelvic cavity (13). Typically, it started as a common nerve trunk encompassing two components (ventral and dorsal), which bifurcating into its terminal branches at the upper border of the popliteal fosse, the tibial and common peroneal nerve, correspondingly. In the embryological life, two plexuses are formed in the lower limb at the limbs bud base: the lumbar plexus and the sacral plexus.

*Sample 3. Discussion from a coursework draft facilitated by a student participant*

### scientific paper before... That's a lot to expect of those kids"

These observations aligned with opinions expressed by some student participants in the workshop. Student participants pointed out that they find reading research articles particularly challenging (especially because of the abundant terminology and formal language), and that they generally need "several days" to read some articles.

With regard to support resources, the interviewed member of staff believed that international students' difficulties with academic discourse increase due to the absence of a faculty or university service to help postgraduate students (including home and international students) with their academic learning. The present Learning Development Service provided by the University is mainly addressed to undergraduate students (eg, one-to-one consultations are only available for undergraduate students) and it only supports postgraduate students by means of on-line resources. The staff participant insisted:

**"It was frustrating, because I noticed there were issues from the start. And I was concerned. But I spent a good month trying to figure out what the resources were in the university [...] Learning Development Service just do undergrad now [...] If you are postgrad taught, where do you go? [...] I think we have a responsibility to them"**

**"It's frustrating, because I expected resources to be there... and they are not, for them [international students], and I'm annoyed on their behalf"**

According to the participant, the absence of a specialised service also implies that academic staff do not know where to redirect (international)

postgraduate students who need support.

## 7. Key findings

Based on the analysed data, the following are the main project outcomes:

- **Academic discourse:** For some international students at FMHLS academic discourse can be a considerable challenge. The main difficulties identified in this project were: a) comprehension of coursework guidelines, b) comprehension of academic literature, c) academic writing (in terms of discourse conventions and language accuracy), and d) critical approach to scientific literature. These findings are consistent with research in the field (see 5).
- **Coursework guidelines:** Analysed coursework guidelines were not always clearly organised and developed, which can have a negative effect on how (international) students complete their coursework tasks. This finding suggests that further research on the instructional input received by FMHLS students may be necessary.
- **Specialised service at postgraduate level:** FMHLS postgraduate students, including international students, would benefit from a faculty or university service specialised in academic learning. As successfully shown by similar programmes in other universities (cf. the Centre for English Language Education, University of Nottingham), this type of service can a) provide support to international students more efficiently than pro-active, but isolated, initiatives of individual staff members; b) implement a greater variety of strategies to increase engagement with international students (eg, online booking of one-to-one consultations); and c) help academic staff deal with international students who need support with academic learning.

- **Engagement as a challenge:** The difficulties in the delivery of the project's original aims show that engagement with international students can be a challenge. Therefore any future actions regarding academic learning (including academic discourse) will need to pay special attention to strategies to encourage international students' participation.

## 8. Conclusions: from research to action

The present project has demonstrated that an interdisciplinary approach to academic learning can be particularly effective. The collaboration between experts from different disciplines (including biomedicine, linguistics, and education) has shown to be very productive in order to, first, understand the challenges faced by FMHLS international students in their academic environment, and, second, raise awareness of these difficulties in a wider academic context.

As a result of this collaboration, two actions have already taken place. The first one was the organisation of a workshop addressed to academic staff at the School Education Day, QUB (attended by 200 participants). The workshop, hosted by an expert in education, was aimed at raising awareness of academic literacies and learning about the concerns of academic staff in this area. The expert put special emphasis on the importance of using formal, but not unnecessarily complicated, English when communicating with students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (see also Linse and van Black 2010). The second action taken was aimed at raising the authors' concerns at faculty and university level to seek the implementation of more effective initiatives (including greater support at postgraduate level) targeted at international students' difficulties with biomedical academic discourse.

Yet the present project has also shown that further research on some specific areas is needed. For instance, what is the role of received input (eg, coursework instructions) in international students' performance? Is input adequate enough for an international audience? Also, how effective is pre-sessional training in the area of biomedicine? How can engagement with international students be improved? Research in these areas will help to better understand the challenges faced by international students with academic discourse and to implement strategies to confront them.

## 9. Professional practice: 'early diagnostic'

Another project outcome is the importance of raising awareness among students and academic staff. Some international students only become aware of their difficulties with academic discourse when they are assessed for the first time – sometimes with poor results. It is therefore essential that international students are familiar with the resources available and they use them effectively. At the same time academic staff need to be aware of the potential challenges for international students and know how to deal with these students. Academic staff have a key role at, first, promoting academic discourse among students, and, second, identifying students who require support and assisting them as early as possible. As shown by this project, organisation of workshops for academic staff has proved an effective strategy to raise awareness of these issues.

## 10. Final reflections

The increasing numbers of international students in UK universities, including QUB, is having a great impact on the entire higher education sector. Internationalisation is

providing universities with new and exciting opportunities, but at the same time it also requires that they respond to the needs of students from overseas. International students come from very different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and for many of them adjusting to a new learning environment can be challenging. The project outlined here demonstrates that resources need to be put in place to help international students succeed in their studies.

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## 13. Appendix

Sample of the PowerPoint slides used in the workshop to discuss one of the problematic topics raised by participants (here unintentional plagiarism)

### Edition: plagiarism

**Unintentional plagiarism:** inappropriate paraphrase

#### Original text

We do not yet understand all the ways in which brain chemicals are related to emotions and thoughts, but the salient point is that our state of mind has an immediate and direct effect on our state of body.

#### Plagiarised version

According to Siegel (1986), our mind affects our body quickly and directly, although we do not yet understand every aspect of how brain chemicals relate to emotions and thoughts.

### Edition: plagiarism

**Changed paragraph structure, source mentioned, but keywords are the same.**

#### Original text

We do not yet understand all the ways in which brain chemicals are related to emotions and thoughts, but the salient point is that our state of mind has an immediate and direct effect on our state of body.

#### Plagiarised version

According to Siegel (1986), our mind affects our body quickly and directly, although we do not yet understand every aspect of how brain chemicals relate to emotions and thoughts.

### Edition: plagiarism

#### Some tips

- Use your own words
- Use synonyms
- Change the structure of the sentence
- Change the structure of the paragraph
- Change from passive to active, or vice versa
- Use nouns instead of verbs, or vice versa
- Make sure you mention the source
- Use direct quotes in brackets ("blah blah blah") when you use three or more words from the original source.



# International students as Curriculum Advisers for academic writing courses: developing and implementing staff-student partnerships

## Durham University

### Aims and genesis of the project

This project aimed to develop a method of creating effective staff-student partnerships so that international students could actively contribute to improving academic writing course provision. Over the years, international students had contributed texts, self-study materials and cultural and/or disciplinary insights to the academic writing courses at the Durham University English Language Centre (ELC) on an ad hoc basis. However, these contributions were not being acknowledged in any systematic or formal way. How could the international students contribute more directly to curriculum planning, and how could their contributions be more formally recognised?

The concept of staff-student partnerships in curriculum planning seemed to offer a potential method of giving international students greater voice and agency. A small exploratory study was first conducted to see if international students would be interested in helping with curriculum and materials redesign for a year-long in-session writing course, the Academic Writing Workshop. The pilot project was then designed, aiming to set up a more formal process for establishing and implementing staff-student partnerships. The project was envisaged to benefit both staff and international students by breaking down and equalising, as far as possible, the power distance between

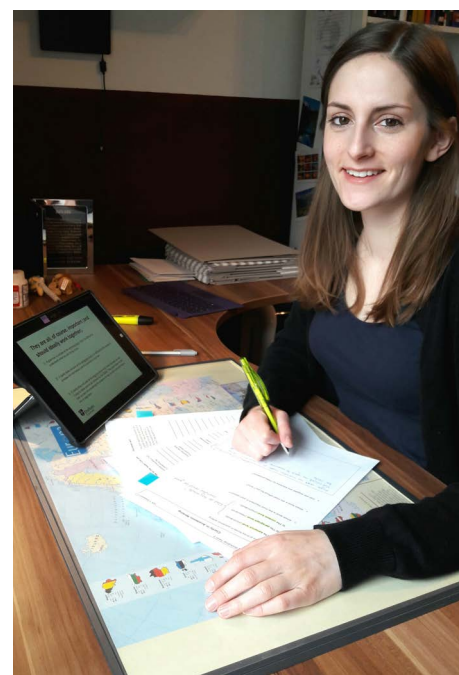
them. It was also hoped that the international students would feel increased engagement with the host university through their participation in the project.

### Summary of outcomes

- **Revised materials** were produced for the Academic Writing Workshop, to be piloted in 2017-18.
- **Qualitative interview data** was gathered from semi-structured interviews and a focus group, and the findings clearly demonstrate the benefits of involving international students directly in HE curriculum planning.
- **Conference presentations** were made by two staff members and four international students (at UK Lingua, Durham; BALEAP Bristol; STORIES, Oxford; Kaleidoscope\*, Cambridge; CERA, London; RAISE, Manchester; Learning and Teaching Conference, Durham).  
\*you can download the Kaleidoscope presentation from the UKCISA website
- **Three conference proceedings papers** are in progress: STORIES has been accepted and is in its final draft. Two more papers in which three students are co-authoring (BALEAP 2017 and Kaleidoscope) are currently under review.

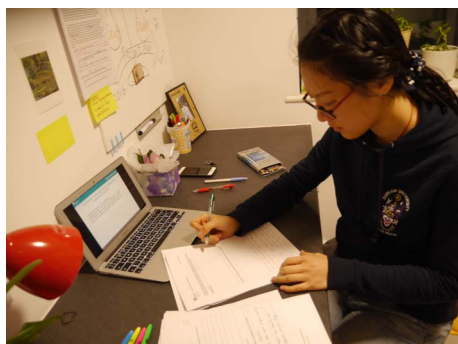
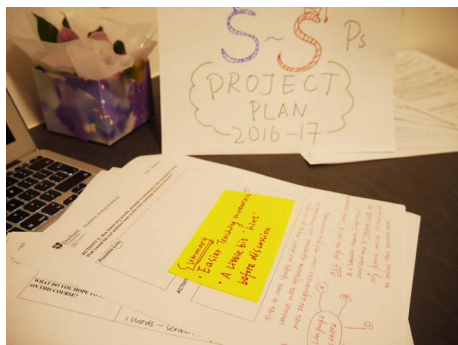
### Background to the project

The ELC at Durham University is a busy one, with a summer pre-



*Critiquing course materials: Natalie Schandri*

sessional programme of more than 600 international students, one-to-one consultations assisting approximately 1,000 students a year (both domestic and international), and an In-session programme with more than 50 courses. The ELC also runs discipline-specific courses, but on the in-session programme, most courses such as the Academic Writing Workshop are open to all, regardless of discipline or level. Although feedback for the workshop is always positive, the course supervisor felt that the materials are not always appropriate for everybody in such a multi-disciplinary, mixed-level, multicultural class. It was felt that if international students could act as Curriculum Advisers, working in



*Critiquing course materials: Ting Yang (above) and her notes (top)*

partnership with staff on a lesson-by-lesson, exercise-by-exercise basis, the course materials could be enhanced.

### How the project was set up

A staff project team was set up, consisting of the Project Supervisor, a Project Adviser to take care of ethical issues such as data protection and release of rights, and a Project Assistant to conduct internet research and data analysis. A total of six Curriculum Advisers were then recruited for the project through purposive sampling. Five of the six Curriculum Advisers had attended the Academic Writing Workshop; the sixth had attended an ELC Pre-session course. One of the Curriculum Advisers is a PhD student; the others are all taught Master's students. A key element of the project was the use of social media tools to promote teamwork and a sense of trust. Firstly, a Dropbox was set up containing project documents and selected journal articles about staff-student partnerships: everybody was given full access and editing rights. Secondly, a closed Facebook group for the project

group was set up by one of the Curriculum Advisers so that photos could be shared and meetings could be scheduled. In addition, all relevant e-mails were forwarded to the Curriculum Advisers to keep them fully informed of all developments in the project. The only documents not made available to the Curriculum Advisers were confidential student data such as personal details and interview transcripts.

### Timescale: project activities and findings

The project ran from October 2016 until August 2017 and was divided into four main phases:

#### Phase 1: Baseline study (October-December 2016)

In Phase 1, a baseline study was conducted by the Project Assistant to establish whether there were any other staff-student partnership projects in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in the Russell Group or at universities in the North of England. A series of keyword searches were run on the university websites and on Google. Although international students are increasingly being consulted in the design and delivery of discipline-specific academic writing courses (for example at Bristol University), no specific references to staff-student partnerships in EAP were found.

#### Phase 2: Data collection (January-April 2017)

The Curriculum Advisers evaluated materials from the first lesson of the Academic Writing Workshop. This allowed the staff to see how students of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds reacted to the same exercises and activities; also, on a voluntary In-session course the first lesson is crucial for ensuring ongoing student attendance. The staff-student discussions of the materials were audio-recorded and ethnographic field-notes were taken. After checking the field-notes for accuracy against

the audio-recordings, the field-notes were transcribed. All the Curriculum Advisers' comments were then collated on a session evaluation sheet. In a second round of materials evaluation, the Curriculum Advisers could choose any (and as many) of the 25 total sessions that they wished to critique. In both evaluation rounds, the Curriculum Advisers set their own deadlines and chose their preferred work locations.

#### Phase 3: Materials redesign and piloting (April-June 2017)

Redesigning the materials sometimes took place on the spot, with staff and students working side by side. In other cases, comments collected on the session evaluation sheets were used to adjust the materials at a later date. Broader-scope suggestions made by the Curriculum Advisers were noted, such as using a wider variety of text-type exemplars on the handouts, increasing the range of optional homework tasks, and improving the online support materials. These changes will be incorporated during the next roll-out of the Academic Writing Workshop in 2017-18.

#### Phase 4: Feedback, evaluation and dissemination (April-August 2017)

Semi-structured interviews and a focus group were conducted to ask participants to reflect on their participation and on the value of the project itself. How much of their time had been taken up with project work and was this appropriate for them? Had they truly felt that they were in partnership with the staff? Had their attitudes towards their writing, their studies and the host institution changed as a result of their participation in the pilot project?

The Curriculum Advisers' responses to the project were overwhelmingly positive. The project had not been too time-consuming, and the Curriculum Advisers felt that they were treated as equals within the partnership. Most

importantly, their attitudes towards their writing, their courses and to Durham University had become much more positive as a result of their participation. At the focus group the Curriculum Advisers were unanimous in their views of the value of the project to themselves as members of the university as well as to the ELC. They highlighted presenting at conferences as being seminal experiences for them. They also had several suggestions for taking the project forward, such as making videoed extracts of international students explaining academic English conventions in their own languages. A test video has been made in Korean, and we will add more videos in the coming year and assess international students' reactions to these recordings.

Dissemination of the project took place at a number of conferences at which Curriculum Advisers co-presented with the staff and with each other. Further dissemination and evaluation of the project will be made via the Conference Proceedings papers which the partners had been invited to publish.

### Challenges to project delivery and budget

The actual phasing of the project was somewhat less orderly than the above outline would suggest, resulting in a certain amount of "phase bleeding". For example:

- Heavy teaching loads for staff in Term 1 of 2016-17 meant that the baseline study scheduled for Phase 1 could not be fully completed until Phase 3.
- Data collection during Phase 2 could not be completed until Phase 3 as Curriculum Advisers on taught courses had extremely heavy workloads.
- Phase 3 (trailing the materials) could not be completed as originally planned, because the Academic



Writing Workshop is not scheduled to run again until 2017-18.

- The project dissemination planned for Phase 4 actually went through all four phases, owing to conference schedules and abstract submission deadlines.
- The unpredictability of successful conference submissions made it difficult to estimate expenses in advance. One or two more conferences could have been attended and still kept the project within budget. Two conferences fell outside the budgetary period, so not all expenses have yet been claimed.
- A member of the project team became ill, which slowed down the collection and processing of interview and focus group data. Although this can be done at a future date, the hours allocated for this work could not be fully claimed within the budgetary period.

### Project findings and long-term sustainability

Participant responses to the project were very positive. At the focus group, Curriculum Advisers reported that they felt they had been treated as equals while working with staff, and that they found this empowering. All felt that it was rewarding to have more contact

time with university staff and with each other. One participant also mentioned that the altruistic nature of the project (helping future international students to improve their writing) was particularly valuable.

During the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, the Curriculum Advisers had many ideas for taking the project forward next year and beyond. One idea was to make a series of video recordings explaining English academic writing conventions in their first languages. The Curriculum Advisers agreed that this would allow them to give more nuanced explanations of cultural differences, which would be helpful to future students. The Curriculum Advisers also thought that putting such video content into the public domain would attract international students to the Academic Writing Workshop, to other ELC courses, to the University of Durham, as well as to the project itself. A video camera has been purchased for the project so that the current cohort of Curriculum Advisers can make high-quality recordings for next year's Academic Writing Workshop students to view on the university's Blackboard system. It was also suggested that a website could be set up during the next phase of the project to assist sustainability.

The Pilot Project has also demonstrated that this is a sustainable project from a research perspective, with the focus shifting from the process of setting up and implementing specific staff-student partnerships to the broader issues of international student empowerment within higher education institutions in the UK.

### Recommendations for other UK institutions

Staff-student partnerships can be set up and implemented within any discipline and can be used to develop a more inclusive culture of teaching and learning in higher education. Even if funding is not available, there are many incentives for international students to participate in a curriculum enhancement project. The title of Curriculum Adviser is a valuable addition to students' CVs, boosting employability. For some international students, it is sufficient incentive to take an active role in a research

project, particularly if there are opportunities to present and publish. The social aspect of the project was clearly valued by the Durham participants: as early as possible in the lifetime of a staff-student partnership project, it is a good idea for all participants to meet up. This will encourage team-work and help international students to build cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary friendships.

The workflow process developed in the Durham project can be greatly simplified if the purpose of the staff-student partnership is curriculum renewal rather than research. Simply noting and collating Curriculum Advisers' comments would be sufficient to allow changes to be made to curriculum and/or materials: audio-recording, transcription and coding would not be necessary.

### Further information

**Conference presentation slides:**  
[www.ukcisa.org.uk/durham-slides](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/durham-slides)

**The project was run by Terri Edwards,** Durham University English Language Centre  
**Contact:** [terri.edwards@durham.ac.uk](mailto:terri.edwards@durham.ac.uk)



*Terri Edwards (second from right), project leader with Curriculum Advisers Tamara Barakat, Lily Bossin, and Bohan Chen (left to right)*

## Global Voices in science

# Nottingham Trent University



This project was highly commended for the Paul Webley Award for Innovation in International Education 2017.

### Background

This project piloted a scheme to establish a Global Voices programme at Nottingham Trent University. The programme was designed to involve a select team of international students to deliver formal and informal curriculum activities on subject-specific issues relating to their home country and/or culture. The programme was piloted in five modules across the Schools of Science and Technology, and Animal, Rural and Environmental Sciences.

The project was designed to address a number of issues that impact on international students studying in UK higher education, while also recognising and engaging with the rich and diverse knowledge and experience international students bring to the sector. Evidence suggests that international students in UK higher education often feel disadvantaged in the classroom as they must come to terms with the same new ideas, approaches and concepts as other students while also grappling with new cultural references and UK-focused case studies and examples (Ramachandran, 2011). At the same time, UK students can perceive international students as needing extra support, particularly in activities such as group work, resulting in resistance



to co-working in case it detrimentally affects their assessment marks (De Vita, 2002). While academic staff are mindful of these issues, they often feel inadequately prepared or insufficiently experienced to modify their teaching and learning activities to effectively respond to the increasing diversity of student backgrounds and experiences (Leask and Beelan, 2010). The diversity that international students bring, therefore, to UK higher education is often seen as a challenge rather than a benefit.

This project sought to redress this perception by creating opportunities for international students to work in partnership with academic staff in delivering curriculum-based activities. There have been numerous calls for academic staff to consider international students as a learning resource, offering opportunities to mobilise student diversity for the educational and social benefit of all

students (see, for example, HEA, 2014). This is especially significant as it is increasingly recognised that all students need to develop the global competencies and intercultural awareness necessary for success in an increasingly globalised society. Turning a perceived 'problem' into an 'asset', the pilot was designed to:

- Improve the learning experience of international students by validating and valuing the specificity and diversity of knowledge and learning styles from outside the UK.
- Promote peer interaction and learning across cultural groups.
- Enhance the access of all students to first-hand experiences of issues and perspectives from other countries.
- Enable students to engage in critical and ethical consideration of the application of disciplinary knowledge in specific geographical contexts.
- Facilitate debate and the development of comparative

## UK student feedback

*“It’s interesting to see someone who lives there share their point of view. If we were to visit, we wouldn’t get this point of view”*

*“It’s good hearing the positive side of things. Normally, what you hear about that part of world is always negative.”*

*“It shows how our countries are similar but sometimes there are kind of cultural twists.”*

perspectives that can raise student awareness to issues of social justice and social responsibility.

- Support academic staff to internationalise their curricula by providing country-specific insights and reflections on course material and activities.

The pilot project focused on STEM subjects, where international students are widely represented but curriculum internationalisation strategies are often less well developed.

## Summary of outcomes

The Global Voices pilot demonstrated that providing recognised spaces for international students to contribute to the formal curriculum had positive impacts on the learning experiences of both international and home students. Global Voice students reported feeling

valued for their contribution and, as a result, more confident in their English language communication skills. All students felt they gained from hearing diverse viewpoints and both staff and students reported evidence of better integration of home and international students, both within the classroom and beyond. All students and faculty said they would like the opportunity to participate in the Global Voices programme again in the future.

## Project design and evaluation

The pilot project ran from December 2016 to June 2017. A call for an indication of interest in the pilot study was sent out to the faculty members in the two academic schools in December 2016. Interested faculty members were asked to complete a short form providing details of the module content, the specific activity

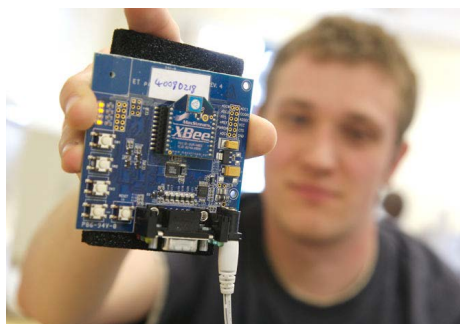
they would like a Global Voice to participate in, and any specific country or subject knowledge they required. The information provided was then used to invite international students from the specified countries/regions who had the relevant lay or subject knowledge to volunteer as Global Voices.

A total of five modules were included in the pilot from four subject areas: Sports Science, Pharmacology, Geography and Wildlife Conservation. Four were undergraduate modules while the fifth was a postgraduate taught module. Four international students (two undergraduates and two postgraduate taught students) participated as Global Voices in the four undergraduate modules. These students were invited to share views from their own countries on specific topics: for example, in Sports Physiology the Global Voice contributed insights into living at high altitudes, while in Wildlife Conservation they presented details of local conflicts between wildlife conservation and human habitation. In the postgraduate taught module the member of staff opted not to use a single ‘Global Voice’ but rather to make use of the multiple voices already present in the class. In this module a total of 15 home and international students engaged in a debate on global ethical practices within their discipline, reflecting views from 10 different countries.

In January 2017 a preparatory workshop was held for all staff and students scheduled to participate in an in-class activity. This involved sharing the aims and objectives of the Global Voices programme, exploring different approaches that might be adopted, and detailing plans for evaluating the project.

During the workshops, participating students were able to indicate the types of examples they might bring to the discussion, allowing staff an opportunity to confirm how these





could be embedded most effectively, giving students more confidence in the value of their contribution. It also created space for staff and students to reach agreement on the most appropriate method of delivery, such as debates, role plays, panel discussions, or simply presentations on their countries/culture.

Evaluation of the project was enabled through a set of interviews, surveys and focus groups. Pre- and post-class activity, interviews were conducted with all the Global Voices and faculty members. Pre-activity questions focused on exploring why individuals volunteered to participate and what their expectations were for the project, while those delivered post-activity solicited reflections on what was learnt and what could be improved for the future. Short surveys were administered in three of the undergraduate modules, prior to the activity, to understand the level of intercultural understanding among class members. Two focus group discussions were held after the activities to understand if and how having a Global Voice in class had made a difference.

The project ran according to schedule, but there were some challenges in maintaining the planned timescale and ensuring maximum participation. For example, for specific topics, such as Living at High Altitudes and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project, it was difficult to find suitable times in the teaching schedule when the appropriately experienced Global Voice was available.

## Global Voice student feedback

*“My contributions were valued. After my presentation, the students were eagerly asking me questions. There was enthusiasm to know about my town and that gave me more happiness because they understood my presentation. The lecturer asked me some questions and I answered them. I gained lots of confidence first of all, more communication skills.”*

*“Before the debates in class there were segregation of people, UK people sit together and I am sitting with 2 or 3 of my friends from the same country. Before the debate we don’t interact that much, we don’t talk much. In class we say hi and that’s it. After the debate, if it’s in the bus, in the Pavilion, in the canteen if we see each other we try to talk to each other...we are friends on Facebook, so if our countries are playing any sport together we prank each other now!”*

*“I feel more valued by participating because I got enough space to talk. They never laughed at my English, they never tried to laugh at my idea, they never tried to laugh at my knowledge. So in all aspects I think they valued me – every class member as well as the lecturer, even with my broken English.”*

## Project sustainability

Responses from the evaluation indicate that there is appetite from both staff and students to continue with the programme. In the postgraduate course, the tutor recognised the value of the unique perspectives and knowledge that international students brought to the classroom and, as a consequence, set aside two further sessions, leading to discussion on areas of disciplinary relevance and interest that were not initially part of the curriculum.

The School of Science and Technology has already put in place a plan to extend the programme in 2017-18 as part of the school’s commitment to the effective integration of home and international students, and to ensuring that all courses encourage students to develop international perspectives.

All departments have been asked to identify suitable sessions for Global Voice students to participate in, with the aim that all students will have the opportunity to attend at least one session during the 2017-18 academic year in which a Global Voice student is present. A training programme will be delivered, for staff and students, during term 1, followed by a suite of activities in term 2.

## Reflections on project implementation

While the pilot was effectively implemented at NTU, there are a number of areas that were challenging and that require further consideration as the programme is extended:

- Timetable and deadline clashes can stop recruited Global Voices from participating in the class activities for which they are best matched. Flexibility on the part of all

## Teaching staff feedback

*“International students show some of the things we talk about in science are a lot more complex, it [Global Voice programme] will help my students break out of their Eurocentric, British centric way of looking at things.”*

*“The value of this is that we can bring somebody who has the experience first-hand. Though we can bring colleagues who work in other places but it would still be second hand, they are not living 100% in the same conditions as people who live there like the citizens of that country.”*

participants proved important in managing such scheduling issues in the pilot.

- To maintain high academic standards, academic staff need to provide clear guidance to the Global Voices as they prepare for their activities, such as the need to balance personal experience and reflections with public perceptions, government policy and research evidence. This was particularly important for undergraduate Global Voices.
- Only the Global Voices were asked to prepare for the sessions in the pilot, however, their contributions seemed to have greater impact in classes where they were building on work students had already undertaken. This suggests there is benefit in all students undertaking appropriate reading and preparation.
- The dedicated and informed support provided by Dr Oluwaseun was instrumental to the success of the pilot. Recruiting, training, co-ordinating and supporting the Global Voice students is important

to the smooth running of the programme but also to building student confidence and a sense of being valued. Staff with a dedicated responsibility for overseeing the programme will be important as it expands.

## Recommendations for other UK institutions

The Global Voices project targets ambitions and initiatives that are shared across the sector, including: the positive integration of international students into university life; addressing common difficulties experienced in diverse classrooms; raising student confidence in intercultural and international interaction; and developing all students' international perspectives. The inherent flexibility built into the programme means it can be implemented across a variety of subject areas and institutional contexts; however, a conscious effort is required to mainstream the approach and to provide administrative support to ensure the smooth operation of the programme. In particular:

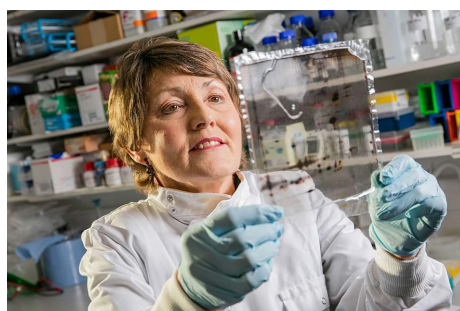
- Advanced planning and an early start are vital to ensure available Global Voices are matched with relevant modules, schedules are mapped, and any preparatory work built into the module study programme.

- A single point of contact for the programme is important for managing communication about multiple events.
- Training for the Global Voices is necessary to ensure they feel confident on entering the classroom and assured they have delivered something of relevance.

It is particularly important to guide Global Voice students on the academic standard expected, especially when students are participating in groups at levels different from their own. This might include guidance on the use of data, reference to literature and suggestions for enhancing impact and engagement (eg, use of visual aids or interactive break-out sessions).

- Teaching staff should manage expectations and actively oversee any discussions. Global Voices should not be positioned as ‘experts’ or as representing particular policy positions associated with their home countries. In classes where multiple country perspectives are presented, sensitivity is needed to ensure that no culture or country's perspective is marginalised.

Attention should also be given to off-setting feelings of ‘guilt and shame’ some Global Voice students may experience when an issue under discussion portrays their country/culture as somehow ‘backward’, ‘corrupt’, or otherwise inferior/lacking.





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De Vita, G., 2002. Does Assessed Multicultural Group Work really pull UK Students' Average down? *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 27(2), p.153-161.

HEA, 2014. *Internationalising higher education framework*. York: Higher Education Academy.

Leask, B. & Beelen, J., 2010. *Enhancing the engagement of academic staff in international education in Europe and Australia: Background Paper 2*. Paper prepared for the IEAA-EAIE Symposium: Advancing Australia-Europe Engagement. Hawthorn: International Education Association of Australia (IEAA).

Ramachandran, N. T., 2011. Enhancing international students' experiences: An imperative agenda for universities in the UK. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 10(2), p. 201–220.

## Further information

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**Dr Clare Newstead**, College International Manager, Nottingham Trent University  
**Contact:** [clare.newstead@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:clare.newstead@ntu.ac.uk)

**Dr Sandra Kirk**, Deputy Dean of Science and Technology, Nottingham Trent University

**Dr Stella Oluwaseun**, Research Assistant, Nottingham Trent University

# International academic writing boot-camp

## Liverpool Hope University

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### Project aims

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The four-day boot-camp aimed to help new international postgraduate students to understand the academic expectations and conventions of UK universities. In particular, it aimed to facilitate the development of relationships between students newly arrived in the UK and the academic tutors who are the international coordinators in their academic department, as well as with peer-writing mentors in the university.

### Summary of outcomes

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An academic boot-camp for new international students took place as part of a wider orientation programme. This enabled students to get to know their peers, departmental international co-ordinators (academic tutors) and writing support colleagues. Student evaluations and feedback suggest that this gave an opportunity for early personal interaction with key people and that this provided a foundation on which strong relationships have been built. Feedback also confirmed that the project enabled students to have a better understanding of academic expectations in the UK. Assessment results for those students who took part were higher than for those who did not.

The key learning point from the project is that it is the structure of such a programme which is key to its success. The gaps between sessions

– the time for informal interaction – is as important as the content of the sessions.

### Background context

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Liverpool Hope University is in the north-west of England and has a student body of approximately 7,500 students. Given its size, it has a strong emphasis on community and the development of professional relationships among staff and students. It has a long tradition of recruiting international students – however, there is a current shift in international numbers from postgraduate to undergraduate and study abroad.

The University does not have an English language centre on campus; social, cultural and wellbeing support is provided by the International Hub with academic departments providing academic support based on a tutorial system. The Library and Learning Resources include trained peer-writing mentors who can support students in improving their academic writing; this is a general service open to all students and is not international specific.

Like many UK universities, Liverpool Hope continues to be challenged by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) processes and timelines which leads to the delayed arrival of a number of postgraduate students at the start of the academic year.

### The boot-camp

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The academic boot-camp was organised by the International Hub with support from academic colleagues who provided sessions in their areas of expertise (see the programme in the appendix below). The project spanned two academic years as the final assessments for postgraduate students, who began their studies in October 2016, will not be completed until November 2017. Accordingly, final conclusions or impact cannot be concluded at this stage.

The boot-camp ran as planned; however, it was not as well attended as had been hoped due to the delayed arrival of some international postgraduate students on visa grounds. Therefore, the activities were also opened up to new international undergraduate students. This raises the question of the timing of such a programme. 25 undergraduate and postgraduate international students participated in the organised activities.

### Evaluation point 1

Feedback from students immediately after the session found that the boot-camp was useful and that the way it was structured allowed for good personal relationships to be formed – a key aim of the project. All participants appreciated the timing of the event in orientation week, before beginning their academic studies, because they felt more confident in understanding tutor expectations when they embarked on their classes.



80% of the students suggested a further mini boot-camp would be useful for them later in the year when assessment deadlines approach. Out of the 12 sessions that ran the most popular session was the 'Academic context at Liverpool Hope', followed by 'How to structure academic writing'.

### Evaluation point 2

Further evaluation took place at the end of the first semester. Students expressed the importance of having a good personal relationship with their tutors, particularly for feedback on their academic performance, and reported that they were much more likely to seek help and ask questions if they have a good relationship with their tutors. 78% of students said they approached their tutors for help during the semester and the programme had enabled them to initiate and then develop these relationships with staff. This finding is significant as there was not a specific session on how to build good relationships with staff, but, rather, the structure of the programme facilitated interaction during break times and eating lunch together. This suggests that it is not only the content of such a programme that is of importance, but also its structure (which is often given less significance in the planning stages). That is, the

space between the sessions is as important as the sessions themselves.

### Evaluation point 3

The third evaluation took place at the end of teaching in semester two and before formal examinations. Students continued to identify the importance of their relationships with their tutors as key to their success and confidence. The approachability of academic staff and the relationships established was a positive element in 67% of the evaluations.

**The academics made sure that we understood what was going on in class and offered help whenever we needed it. The course work is set up quite differently than home. There is much more emphasis on large assessment rather than work throughout the semester. This made the adjustment challenging because the essays have much more weight and a focus on critical thinking. All in all, the academic transition, although one of the more difficult things, was at once made easier by the people involved, some of whom we had got to know when we arrived.**

(Student from America)

At this point in the year students also looked back and reflected on their relationships with peers and the importance of peer support with 63% participants identifying this as significant to their experience:

**Studying different subjects, the grouping opportunity (the boot-camp) I believe brought us together much more than just living in the same accommodation would have.**

(Student from Mexico)

Tutors reported that the cohort of international students was fully involved, although no conclusions have been drawn at this point as to the impact of the boot-camp on engagement.

Assessment results have been gathered and analysed for the January and April assessment points. The original intention was to compare the results with last year when the boot-camp had not been available. However, because we had a cohort of students who arrived late on visa grounds, after boot-camp had taken place but before formal teaching started, these students became our comparison group because they had undertaken exactly the same assessments, reducing the variables involved.

The assessment results were looked at as a full set for each student, this included written assessments, such as essays or reports, and oral presentations, both an individual presentation and a group presentation. An average mark was also calculated across their written assessments only. Those students who took part in the boot-camp received an average of 64% for their assessment marks and an average of 64% for their written assessment marks. In comparison, the students who did not attend the boot-camp, received an average of 59% for their assessment marks and an average of 63% for their written assessment marks. While the difference is minimal, those who attended the boot-camp have achieved higher results than those who did not. What is interesting is that the greatest difference was in the overall assessment marks which included the individual and group presentation. One possible reason for this may be that those who attended the boot-camp, with its emphasis on building relationships and getting to know academic staff and peers, felt more confident in making the presentations and working with peers. Of course, other factors could have influenced the results, too.

#### Evaluation point 4

This has not been reached yet and final assessment/degree results are not yet known.

#### Project challenges

The delivery of the project had to be slightly modified due to the lower number of international postgraduate students recruited and the involvement of international undergraduate students in the boot-camp. This changed the content of some sessions, which became broader, but not the nature or theme of the sessions. The project ran to budget.

#### Project sustainability

We aim to repeat the boot-camp this year, but to run it over the first four weeks of teaching, one day a week, so that the start date may be delayed slightly to allow for late arrivals to participate, a key learning point from this year.

A second key learning point, referred to in the summary of outcomes, is the importance of the relationship with peers and key academic staff as recognised by the students. Providing opportunities which facilitate relationship-building is key to both the cultural, social and academic confidence of international students. We will continue to seek further opportunities which support this provision.

#### Further information

**Dr Wendy Bignold**, Associate Dean (International), Liverpool Hope University

**Eleanor Ehlen**, Boot-camp Administrator, Liverpool Hope University

#### Appendix

##### Academic writing boot-camp for international students programme 2016



Month	Session 1	Session 2	Lunch
Tues 4 October Morning	The academic context at Liverpool Hope	How to structure academic writing	Lunch with international co-ordinators and academics
Afternoon	Lessons learnt from an international student	English for academic purposes	
Wed 5 October Morning	What to expect of a UK postgraduate course	Debating sources	
Afternoon	Plagiarism	English for academic purposes	
Thurs 6 October Morning	Introduction to peer writing mentors	A guide to referencing	Lunch with peer writing mentors
Afternoon	Library visit	Library visit	
Fri 7 October Morning	Peer support	English for academic purposes	
Afternoon	IT services (Moodle/Turnitin)	IT services (Moodle/Turnitin)	

# Supporting staff

## Getting it right first time: an entry clearance toolkit for overseas staff Northumbria University

### Rationale for the project

In 2015 Northumbria University witnessed a spike in the number of entry clearance refusals. A study of these identified two main reasons: minor errors in financial evidence and failure at the credibility interview.

Overseas colleagues expressed concern with regard to the increasing complexity of visa regulations and the importance of giving correct and up-to-date advice and guidance to applicants at all times. It was identified that agents and overseas colleagues would benefit from a regularly updated training to ensure their knowledge remains current and comprehensive.

Due to the nature of the intended audience – in several countries working in different capacities – an online training package was preferred.

### Project aims

To create an online toolkit for overseas staff and agents which is focussed on Tier 4 financial requirements to instil confidence when advising students about this complex area of student immigration.



*Online toolkit, aimed at overseas staff and agents, on immigration requirements for international students*

### Motivations for project

To reduce the number of refusals by enabling overseas colleagues to learn more about the importance of checking students' documents prior to a visa application and allowing them to regularly test their knowledge.

### Summary of project outcomes

After exploring the many packages available we decided to use two: Articulate Storyline for the logistics and Shutterstock for images. We

chose the anonymous locations of the Shutterstock images, avoiding Northumbria related photographs, so that other universities could use the toolkit.

The toolkit introduces four international students (specific nationalities and countries of origin are withheld) whose background and study plans are outlined across three slides. Each of the four students has a complex immigration situation. Users of the toolkit can choose which of the four students they wish to meet first by clicking on the image of the

student. This unlocks that student and guides the user through their story. At the end of the slides there are three questions, each using different answer formats: true/false, multiple choice, free text and so on. The questions will be taken from a bank of six, which, if answered wrongly, will be reset at random. The pass mark for this part of the toolkit is 100%.

Once all four students' questions have been answered correctly, the user progresses to the final stage. This comprises eight general immigration questions with a pass mark of 75%. The question formats vary and are taken from a bank of 20 questions to minimise repeats when reset. Users will be able to take each stage of the toolkit as many times as they wish until they reach the required pass rate. Uptake and results can be monitored, should the host university wish to do this.

All slides feature photographic imagery only, which is generic in terms of both UK study location and student nationality/background. This style of image is chosen for two reasons: colleagues overseas will not just feel that the student from 'their' country is relevant to them and other universities will be able to use the toolkit without having to change images to 'neutralise' the style.

As the Immigration Rules change, the questions will be revised, with a maximum number of three amendments per year. In the unusual case of there being no change, then we will refresh the questions every six months.

## Conclusions and ideas for further enhancement of the project

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The toolkit is useful for those who have a certain knowledge of immigration, in particular Tier 4 applications. It is not suitable for those completely new to the subject.

However, a toolkit aimed at absolute beginners would be relatively simple to produce with a few word changes and different introductions.

Those who work in larger UK universities are not able to easily influence entry clearance applications due to the volume of CAS issued and the relatively low number of UK staff to check documents. Ensuring colleagues overseas, or possibly students themselves, have access to training and up-to-date information, is a small step in the right direction.

The module is being trialled by Northumbria's UK-based and overseas staff. Early indications are that the information and exercises in the module are easy to navigate, and are already proving to be very helpful.

## Learning points for other UK institutions

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The many changes to the immigration rules, especially those seemingly small changes that could have huge consequences if ignored, means this toolkit must be kept up to date. It will need a keen eye to monitor the toolkit following any rule changes so that it remains relevant and useful.

## Further information

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## Useful link

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Links to the videos: [www.ukcisa.org.uk/grants-schemes](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/grants-schemes)

## Research completed in 2016-17

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Institution	Research title
<b>Manchester Metropolitan University</b>	Between expectations and lived experiences: recruitment strategies and their impact on international students' academic and social experiences in UK HE
<b>Sheffield Hallam University</b>	Mobilising family support: implications for the academic resilience of international students
<b>Lincoln University Students' Union</b>	Are students' union's activities, events and opportunities accessible and used by international students?
<b>The University of Glasgow</b>	Addressing the needs of international summer school students: implications for universities of the 'quiet revolution' in short-term international experiences

Research reports are published separately.

For a list of all funded projects and to download individual reports go to [www.ukcisa.org.uk/grants-schemes](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/grants-schemes)

The UK Council for International Student Affairs is the UK's national advisory body serving the interests of international students and those who work with them.

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