

Ideas to help international students

Supervisors may like to consider a number of approaches to the areas of difficulty faced by their international doctoral students.

Enabling academic and social integration

Consideration should be given to:

- ensuring students are aware of the availability of language learning facilities and encouraging them to make use of them (e.g. <http://www.lang.ox.ac.uk/courses/index.html>).
- the exercise of caution in the use of metaphors, always checking that the student has understood the message being conveyed through this medium.
- ensuring that arrangements are in place to help international students integrate into the life of the department/ research group. e.g.
 - formal welcoming event;
 - informal social or research-focused gatherings;
 - invitations to research seminars/ workshops;
 - inclusion on email listings.
- giving international students explicit 'permission' that independent thought and expression of opinions are acceptable and valued:
 - do this early on in their doctorate and reinforce over time if necessary;
 - clarify the convention in question and provide examples;
 - applaud students when they make the necessary adjustments;
 - solicit the help of students from a similar background who have made the transition.
- arranging mentors or guides to introduce or invite doctoral students into their new world.

Explication of expectations and aspirations

Supervisors should:

- ensure that international students are given opportunities to discuss and address their expectations and aspirations in light of their different cultural circumstances.
- seek to understand how teaching and learning practices differ across academic institutions and consider holding briefing sessions on cross-cultural communication, including turn taking, interpersonal space and gestures, and the concept of time.

and they might also consider:

- determining how each individual international student should best tackle their doctorate (the ethics, fieldwork, writing up) in light of their cultural background and experiences, their return home and their aspirations for their future.
- encouraging international students to draw on their own cultural and educational understandings, metaphors, capabilities, theories and tools relevant to their research, and use these to engage with and critically scrutinise Western knowledge in order to extend their capabilities for argumentation and reconceptualization.
- encouraging international students to keep a reflective learning journal to articulate their experiences and to expand on ways in which they perceive their previous academic learning processes to have differed from what is expected in their new environment.

Continues over

Confronting dissemination (including the thesis)

You may have to help your international student:

- decide whether to choose not to make their thesis available in the public domain.
- contemplate the writing up of two separate theses: one for the 'host' institution and one for back 'home'.
- by encouraging non-native speaking authors trying to publish in the English language to make the most of their unique position and point out how their doctoral work may have a bearing on one or more of the following:
 - awareness of the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural issues involved in their research;
 - bringing an outsider or insider perspective to the debate;
 - possibility of bringing an additional international perspective to the debate;
 - providing a testing mechanism for the dominant theories of the discipline or subject centre;
 - access to research sites and data in their native contexts where outsiders would be intrusive;
 - possibility of alerting discipline or subject centre scholars to research undertaken on the periphery.