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# Internationalising a course: the MA Museum and Heritage Studies experience

Key advice from the course team to colleagues wishing to make similar changes: *“Utilise as much support as possible—from the Library, the language support team, CADQ and others.”*

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## Area of Focus

The MA Museum and Heritage Studies course team introduced course-wide changes to support all students, with particular focus on integration and academic success of international students.

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## Context

The cohort comprises approximately half international students (largely but not exclusively Chinese) and half home students. Language, academic writing, and cultural reference points were all areas of challenge, as was integration among students. The course team wanted to address these challenges as a whole-course issue, and to work as a team to address them.

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## Approach

The course team took a collaborative, ideas-sharing approach drawing on institutional sources of support including a Language Centre tutor, relevant members of Library staff, and an educational developer.

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## Interventions

Interventions were made in three key areas: strategies for integration between home and international students; the inclusion of course materials suitable for an international cohort; and the integration of learning and assessment support for all students on the course.

### *Strategies for cohort integration*

- Before the start of the course the students and staff visit a heritage site, where the students work together to solve questions related to the site.
- During the course students are assigned to mixed-nationality groups, where they use prompts provided by tutors to discuss and familiarise themselves with the set readings before the texts are discussed in plenary.
- Social events with international food supplement the formal learning: for example, a Christmas event with German, Greek, Chinese and UK treats; a Chinese New Year celebration.

### *Internationalising course materials*

- Initial set texts are chosen for ease of understanding—with more challenging ones later—and question prompts are provided to support reading.
- An international project has been introduced which links the canal in Beeston and the Grand Canal in China—a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- A case study of Chinese-British co-operation has been added to course materials.
- Video-linked activities are planned between the course at NTU and CUC, the Chinese partner university.

### *Support with learning and assessment*

- PowerPoint slides, readings, and associated questions are provided on NOW before the sessions to give all students more time to engage with them.
- More assessment support has been integrated into the learning. This includes assessment workshops; essay writing sessions; and an activity where students grade exemplar assessments of varying quality in order to familiarise them with the marking criteria and process.
- More scaffolding has been integrated to help prepare students for assessments. This includes submission of essay plans, and work-in-progress presentations before a key assessment point. Students receive feedback following both of these.
- A co-tutored English support session with Language Centre colleagues has been discussed for the future (timetabling permitting).

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## Initial Outcomes

The group has stayed engaged and attendance has been good. The course rep has spoken about how well home and international students have integrated and work well together. Although some students have initially expressed a preference for choosing their own groups, the tutor-assigned mixed-nationality groups have required students to work together, which seems to have resulted in better cohesion among the cohort. Students have also expressed appreciation for the earlier availability of materials and readings online.

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## Challenges and next steps

There was an element of challenge initially in persuading the academic team that cohesion and learning support were key issues to be addressed. Colleagues in CADQ helped by providing some literature to support the case for integration, and by working with key course team members to discuss the issues in a supportive way with colleagues.

Another challenge has been sharing information with the partner university in China. A medium-term goal is to build relationships with the tutors at the Chinese university and to discover more about the learning on the partner course as well as the links to local museums on the Chinese campus. The course leader is currently exploring the possibility of a funded placement for a UK student in China.

Language is still an issue for the Chinese students. Although some Chinese students are confident in speaking, others feel self-conscious, and are anxious that they are slowing the progress of the group. Possible next steps may include creating more activities in which home students learn from their international peers, in order to shift group dynamics and build the confidence of the more anxious learners.

Further plans to evaluate the success of the changes include an analysis of student grades; and focus groups to ensure student voices are included in further enhancements.

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