

Supporting Cultural and Social Adjustment for Master's Students in Allied and Public Health

University of Salford, Directorate of Allied and Public Health, School of Health and Society. Dr Anna Mary Cooper-Ryan, Chloë Annette Wheatman, Julie Reay and Emily Murphy

Introduction and Objectives

Aim:

This project explored themes around the cultural and social transition to UK master's level study in relation to International students and those returning to education, enabling enhanced support.

What?

We explored:
Challenges and facilitators surrounding transition into master's education in the UK including opinion on different approaches to studying within our International and returning to education groups.

Why?

Within a 1-year master's programme, assessment requirements commence early in the first trimester. However, learners are more likely to be unsuccessful at first assessment. As such there is a need for learners to be aware of academic expectations and be supported with their pastoral, social and cultural transition from pre-arrival onwards to ensure equity and inclusivity (LU, 2022 & Graham & Walker, 2024).

Methodology

Through focus groups and surveys with students (n=19), semi-structured interviews with staff members (n=10) we collected the opinions, experiences and suggestions for improvement from our International master's learners and staff members (academics and professional services) on challenges and facilitators to transition and themes for the development of supportive resources. Data was thematically analysed by 2-reviewers and themes were identified.

Key themes identified which were used as a foundation for the ThingLink and Mentimeter development:

- Getting to know the UK
- Getting to know the campus and local area
- Cultural, academic/digital and wellbeing support

Reference List:

LU, A. Y. E. (2022) *Facilitating International Masters Students Transition to UK Higher Education*. Available at <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/facilitating-international-master-students-transition-uk-higher-education> (Accessed: 22 January 2025).
Garnham, W., and Walker, N. (eds.) (2024) *Supporting the Student Journey into Higher Education: How Pre-Arrival Platforms Can Enhance Widening Participation*. London: Routledge.

Project Results

University of Salford Students		University of Salford Staff	
Facilitators to transition	Challenges to transition	Facilitators to transition	Challenges to transition
Pre-arrival support	The speed and level of teaching in the first semester	Clear admissions process	Study visa constraints and expectations
Induction process including staff introductions and expectations	Previous assessment experiences tend not to transfer, and assessment methods are often new to students	Considering previous learning experiences and increasing staff awareness of international further and higher education systems.	Experience of different learning models, expectations and power dynamics
Understanding social, financial and wellbeing support/challenges	Loneliness, limited social life, time management, commuting	Getting to know the UK, culture, religion by spending time with people who are familiar with British culture	Knowledge and understanding of UK professional behaviours, accents and etiquette
Practical experience within UK health industry, chance for different interactions	Time management and academic study skills	Transparency towards assessment methods, being specific and direct with expectations	Language barriers, culture shock, financial responsibility
Making new friends	Awareness and access to social groups	Co-creation with current students and alumni	Conflicting commitments
Support with Salford systems and processes	Motivation and avoiding distractions	Resilience and self-awareness	Academic language and writing skills
Understanding UK culture, expectations and language. The need for interaction with students who are familiar with British culture	Understanding UK culture, expectations and language	Supporting culture, digital and study shock	Time management, lacking a support network and awareness of services
Peer learning and teaching activities to further consolidate knowledge and skills gained	Finding suitable accommodation	Social, financial and wellbeing support	Living location, loneliness, isolation and homesickness. Devaluation of student's home currency

Project Outputs

- Universal Mentimeter to aid staff in understanding learner needs to be introduced during the induction period.
- ThingLink digital platform which guides students to resources and support services.
- Top tips and tricks document for programme teams supporting the transition.

Impact

This project will continue into the 2024-25 academic year where the outputs will be implemented and then evaluated with the aim for further development, co-creation and dissemination across the University.



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Anna, Chloë & Julie

