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Cultural inclusivity: a guide for Leeds Met staff

Written by Yasmin Valli, Sally Brown and Phil Race



Introduction

The student population at Leeds Metropolitan University is made up of many ethnicities, cultures, languages and religions, and it is constantly evolving. Through advancement in technology and increased migration, we are faced with the challenge of engaging effectively with issues of multiculturalism, diversity and difference. This places an imperative upon us to promote 'cultural inclusivity' in order to ensure that students, through both the formal and informal curricula, engage in activity that will prepare them to step out into the 21st-century global and multicultural world.

This ethos is well illustrated in the University's Vision and Character document:

"A university with worldwide horizons where an international, multi-cultural ethos is pervasive throughout our scholarship, curriculum, volunteering and community engagement at home and overseas."

[Leeds Metropolitan University: Vision and Character]

[*'Cultural inclusivity'* and *'cultural diversity'* are terms that are used interchangeably.]

Why is cultural inclusivity important?

“Everywhere cultural identities are emerging which are not fixed, but poised, in transition, between different positions which draw on different cultural traditions at the same time, and which are the product of those complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalised world.” (Hall, 1992)

This booklet offers some discussion of good practice in cultural inclusivity in the context of curriculum design, assessment, delivery and organisation. Inclusive practice is about providing equally good experiences of assessment, learning and teaching for all of our students, whether they originate from Britain or anywhere else in the world, and whatever their culture and heritage. This is not necessarily straightforward. Power differentials, minority status, gender divisions and class divisions all shape cultural experience.

As mentioned above, cultural inclusivity is central to Leeds Met’s mission, and this booklet aims to raise awareness of this evolving factor, which demands continuing change and adjustment.

The United Kingdom is probably more culturally diverse now than it has been at any other point in time. This has significant implications for providers, not least because they are required to have greater levels of knowledge and understanding about learners and their needs. It has implications for the recruitment and training of staff, for policy and procedure, and for how racism is challenged and cultural diversity promoted.

Our behaviour, attitudes, values and general view of the world come from a base often obscured to others that is built over the course of a lifetime through a range of influences including family, peer groups, the media and faith. The challenge for educators is to discover how the factors beneath the surface affect learning (DfES Curriculum for Diversity Guide, 2007).

As educators it would be helpful for us to know about:

- the barriers to learning for students from diverse backgrounds
- the ethnicity, culture, religion and family background of the groups of students we work with or seek to recruit
- the learners’ language preferences and mother tongues.

However, as ethnic groups are not homogenous, we must avoid the potential pitfalls of stereotyping learners according to the culture or community to which they belong. This factor only increases the sensitivity with which we should approach our learners’ needs.

The legislative context

There are a number of responsibilities and duties under legislation relating to equality and diversity. Recent legislation covers equality issues in relation to gender, age, race, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation and gender reassignment. The Equality Act 2006 has established a new overarching Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR), bringing together the separate bodies who have had responsibility for combating discrimination. The Act outlaws discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation in the provision of goods, facilities and services, education, the use and disposal of premises, and the exercise of public functions. Other equality legislation relevant to higher education includes:

Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (extended and amended 1986)

Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999

General Duty to Promote Gender Equality 2007

Race Relations Act 1976 (RRA)

Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)

Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001

Disability Discrimination Act 2005

Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003

Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003

Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006

Human Rights Act 1998

Equal opportunities

Much has been written about the term 'equal opportunities' and what this means in educational contexts. Talbot (1999) gives many examples of good practice in incorporating equal opportunities into the curriculum. Often 'equal opportunities' and 'inclusion' appear in official documentation and implicit in them are some clear legal requirements, but they are certainly not straightforward and unambiguous terms. Equality in education is a much debated topic (Barker et al, 2004), and equal opportunities remain a contestable concept. What is clear is that 'equality of opportunity' is not the same as 'equality of outcome' (Jencks, 1988; Richards, 1999).

Leicester (1996) identified four levels of equal opportunities as applied to higher education:

1. **Promoting equal opportunities as removing unfair/irrelevant barriers:** so that people can compete equally for higher education. This relates to a liberal model where discrimination is seen as being caused by barriers whose removal – by legislation or application of resources – produces a 'level playing field' that represents fairness.
2. **Promoting equal opportunities as increasing ability and motivation:** this goes beyond removing barriers. Resources are directed to groups who are under-represented in higher education to increase their aspirations and improve their chances of entering HE. Together with removing barriers, this constitutes 'positive action'.

3. **Promoting equal opportunities as the development of 'respect for all':** here the concern is not simply for access, but for the promotion of diversity and valuing of difference among staff and students. It is concerned with the curriculum, as well as access and teaching.
4. **Promoting equal opportunities as social engineering:** in this model the concern is not the educational access and experience of individuals but that of the group. It supports quota systems that recruit students because of their possession of certain characteristics; for example, membership of a gender or ethnic group.

At Leeds Met we aspire to reach at least level 3 of this model. As part of our commitment, for example, Leeds Met appointed an Equality and Diversity Manager in 2008.

The educational imperative

Teachers must be concerned to ensure students have equal opportunities, irrespective of disabilities, religion, sexual orientation, age, race or gender. Everything a teacher does should be informed by equal opportunities legislation, institutional policy, widening participation arrangements and an awareness of good practice.

The Higher Education Academy has developed professional standards for teaching and supporting learning in higher education (http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/resources/publications/professional_standards_framework). One of the professional values included in the standards is 'Commitment to encouraging participation in higher education, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity.'

As a result of upbringing and experience, everyone's life is conditioned by a wealth of cultural practices. A person's identity is a unique mix of allegiances, some of which they share with others. For some young people religion, class or lone parent status rather than ethnic background may be a defining factor. Although there may be significant cultural differences between different ethnic groups, culture is dynamic, and all people growing up in Britain share many important features in common regardless of ethnicity; for example, inter-ethnic friendships, shared tastes in music, dress, food, and ambitions and desires.

At Leeds Met we aim to make appropriate use of cultural diversity and build on it, rather than merely try to accommodate it. We would like our campuses to be places where students from different backgrounds can take part in conversations and share experiences that help them to develop an understanding of the perspectives of other people. We can approach this position by creating an open and inclusive approach to learning from others, and valuing the diversity of the perspectives offered in group learning contexts. Furthermore, our commitment to widening participation, which is firmly embedded in the University's Vision and Character statement, means that such practice can be openly promoted (Valli, 2005).

Inclusive practice in British secondary education

Students entering higher education in the UK after having participated in secondary education here have experience of the inclusion provisions within the National Curriculum. In secondary education, schools have a responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils. The National Curriculum is the starting point for planning a school curriculum that meets the specific needs of individuals and groups of pupils. This statutory inclusion statement sets out three principles that are essential to developing a more inclusive curriculum:

- setting suitable learning challenges
- responding to pupils' diverse learning needs
- overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils.

More recently the Every Child Matters agenda (DfES, 2004) sets out a clear vision for schools and places a duty on schools to promote inclusive practice. In higher education we need to bear in mind that we may need to continue to make adjustments to our curriculum in parallel with the ways in which the National Curriculum has been modified.

Activity: who are we, who are you?

Consider the following factors:

- Social disadvantage, ethnic diversity, disability and gender – in what ways can a university foster tolerance, understanding and opposition to discrimination and prejudice among its students?
- Our attitudes to higher education are framed by who we are. Inclusive practice is, by definition, not about special treatment of people who are 'other' than 'us', instead it is a set of practices designed to mitigate disadvantage and discrimination. These practices need to be educationally sound for all students, not just the students who are perceived as being from 'different' backgrounds. Inclusive practice is good practice for all.
- To be inclusive in our practices, it is helpful to understand where we are coming from, since our own backgrounds shape our attitudes and behaviour.

Thinking about who you are, your pathway to university and the routes your students took:

- How would you describe your cultural background?
- How has this impacted on your life and learning choices?
- How does this impact on your own approaches to teaching and learning?
- How wide a range of cultural backgrounds is represented in the student groups you now teach?
- How much do you know about these diverse cultural backgrounds, and how much might you need to find out?

Setting cultural inclusivity in context

As teachers, we can provide more effective learning experiences for a culturally and linguistically diverse student group by embedding cultural competencies firmly in all policy and procedure relating to teaching and learning and striving to:

- provide a wide range of relevant services for students
- enhance all students' higher order thinking and problem-solving skills to improve their academic performance
- increase students' knowledge of the history, culture, and perspectives of key ethnic and racial groups in the University and the region
- recognise and value students' religious identity and practice
- enhance all students' self-esteem, self-awareness and identity
- promote the value of cultural differences so that they are viewed as diverse rather than as inferior or superior. In identifying differences, it is as important to identify the commonalities between different students and groups
- develop in ourselves and our students an understanding of the multicultural nation and interdependent world we all inhabit.

The rapidly changing demographics in UK HE make it imperative that all teachers are prepared to be effective instructors of a culturally and linguistically diverse student population. If the trends projected in our students' profile represent the country's future demographic reality, then our future graduates will need to meet the challenges of a society that is increasingly diverse in terms of race, culture and values.

A great deal of work has already been carried out at Leeds Met on cross-cultural capability, which can be accessed at: <http://alt-resource.teams.leedsmet.ac.uk/cross-cultural-capability>.

Illustrative examples

The examples below illustrate instances where cultural background may have a particular effect on students' approaches to learning. We must stress, however, that they are intended as background information only and not as examples of stereotypes.

Example 1: Approaches to learning: rote learning and the influence of religious instruction

Whereas in British education, rote learning has become frowned upon compared to socio-constructivist approaches to thinking about learning, it is useful to remember the role that rote learning has long played in other cultures; for example, many young people from diverse backgrounds who attend classes for religious instruction or for mother tongue teaching in supplementary schools are exposed to rote learning as the main method of instruction. Here, the youngsters are often encouraged to recite text from memory. The influence of such approaches for learning religious scripts can have a lasting impact upon pupils. In such settings rote learning is often regarded as the norm, and pupils engage in such learning with high motivation, often driven by parental pressure to succeed within the community. A test or exam is usually the only means of assessment, and is likely to include an oral component. Many learners achieve a high level of success and parents often comment on the attainment levels gained by pupils attending supplementary schools and compare these favourably with achievements at their mainstream schools. This practice is in contrast with socio-constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. We need to remain mindful about such practice as it provides a valuable insight into the background and earlier experiences of many students in approaches to learning and assessment.

Example 2: Assessment and the 'Chinese learner'

The perception of Chinese students as rote learners, lacking in initiative and tending to simply reproduce what they have read or heard in class rather than offering their own critical analysis and perspective, is perhaps one of the most widely held stereotypes of international students in Western countries. Much has been written about the 'Chinese learner' in Asian cultures, particularly in mainland China and Hong Kong. Here are some of the points worth noting from this literature, and from the experience of teaching and assessing Hong Kong students:

- Chinese school assessment is based on a highly competitive external examination system. Students entering university have experienced a limited range of traditional assessment formats, and assessment is seen as separate from teaching and learning. Students need to be introduced to new assessment formats.
- Students are adept at working out what is really required by assessment and studying accordingly. Students are highly motivated to achieve and attribute academic success to their effort (rather than to innate ability). If students can come to grips with what is required by assessment, they are likely to work hard at it.
- What appears to Westerners to be rote learning usually isn't. Chinese learning involves an intricate interplay between memorising and understanding. As a result, Chinese high school students consistently outperform Western (UK, US and Australian) students in comparative tests of understanding in maths and science. Chinese students will tend to adopt deep

approaches to learning when assessment requires it.

- Chinese students and teachers value the mastery of basic knowledge. If there is a typical pattern of Chinese learning, it may be (a) acquiring basic knowledge and understanding; (b) learning to apply this; and, only then, (c) analysing, critiquing and developing personal perspectives. Assessment that seeks critical analysis before mastery of basic content may be problematic. Students may be reluctant to participate in tutorial discussion if they have not mastered the material in advance.
- ‘Teaching from the text’ is a common practice in high schools, while the ‘teacher as text’ indicates the respect accorded to teachers as authoritative experts. Students may treat texts as authoritative statements of accepted knowledge. They may need to develop a critical approach to their reading, and learn to question their teachers. Some may need to develop appropriate citation practices.
- Chinese conceptions of teaching include a closer relationship outside class between teacher and student. Students may expect their teachers to take an interest in both their learning and their personal well-being.

- While university assessment in Hong Kong is dominated by examinations and essays, a wide range of alternative assessment methods have also been used successfully. With support, students are able to adapt to alternative assessment methods; there is no reason to believe that Chinese students are less capable than Western students in mastering new or unfamiliar assessment formats.

Assessment is a critically important aspect of cultural inclusivity, and a later section of this booklet focuses in more detail on what we can do to develop our assessment practices.

Example 3: The use of eye contact

Typically, in British society, someone who makes insufficient use of eye contact when interacting with others is deemed to have poor social skills. They may be regarded as lacking in confidence, a poor listener or uninterested. However, the 'right' amount of eye contact varies from situation to situation. In addition, the amount of eye contact considered appropriate in particular social situations may differ between different cultures. Sue and Sue (1990) report that on average, white Americans make eye contact for about 80% of the time when they are listening and for about 50% of the time when speaking. By comparison, African Americans make more eye contact when speaking but less when listening, whereas Asian Americans and Hispanics will tend to avoid eye contact altogether when speaking and listening to high status people. In some cultures downcast eyes are a sign of respect, and making eye contact when being 'told off' would be regarded a sign of defiance. A related example to this is that of a handshake. Although there may be some variations here between cultures, we are likely to come across people who prefer not to shake hands during greetings. This should not be considered rude or negative as it appears to be a matter of preference and is usually replaced by a smile or a nod.

Research shows that in some countries children are encouraged to be dependent, cautious, behaviourally inhibited and self-restrained, so these behaviours are positively valued in some cultures (Chen et al, 1992). However, such behaviour would be viewed negatively in the West and be seen as reflecting social immaturity and fearfulness.

This example obviously presupposes face-to-face delivery, now increasingly being replaced by online learning.

Language and cultural inclusivity

“The status of English as an international language is long established and, for the foreseeable future, unlikely to be greatly challenged. However, I believe that to make it genuinely international, then one step in that direction could be to consider the influence of non-native speakers in a different light ...

Generally, their non-occurrent uses are labelled errors and they are encouraged to change to conform to the Standard English model, even though many native speakers don't.” (Flynn, 2002)

English is a ‘world’ language – meaning that it is the most commonly spoken, learned and utilised language for international communication. It dominates the internet; professional, technical, medical, academic and scientific journals; and news media, films and popular music. It is claimed that there are more conversations going on in English between ‘non-native’ speakers at any one time than there are conversations involving ‘native’ speakers. It has a complex status – in many countries it is the ‘national’ language, but in many others it is the ‘first’ language, the ‘official’ language, the ‘second’ language, a ‘second’ language or a ‘foreign’ language (see <http://www.nationmaster.com/index.php>). India has an estimated 350 million speakers of English as an additional language; Nigeria has a million speakers of English as a first language; China has somewhere between 200 and 300 million speakers of English as a foreign language. Its ‘native’ speakers are a small minority of its users; its ‘native’ speakers themselves encompass a great number of ‘varieties’; most of its ‘native’ speakers assume incorrectly that their particular variety is the

norm, and many go on to label other established varieties as ‘wrong’. In summary, many of our students are very good at a variety of English, but might struggle with your variety.

Like all British universities we demand a level of competence in English before we admit students (international or home). This is fair to them and to us. What is not fair is if, having jumped that hurdle, students then find the actual requirement to function here is higher than the hurdle we have set. A few things we might think of to keep ourselves at the hurdle height:

- **Minimise the use of jargon:** of course some jargon might be technical, and necessary for the subject, so explain it appropriately. For example:
 - Jargon: “a major high street retail outlet”
 - Explanation: “something like M&S”
 - Problem: M&S may not be a known brand (and even where it is, it may be unfamiliar territory to your students).
- **Minimise colloquialism and use of idiom:** these are also kinds of jargon because they are language uses that are peculiar to a minority. For example:
 - “You’ll find yourself up the creek without a paddle”
 - “It’s a financial merry-go-round
 - “The tip of the iceberg”: one colleague, finding that the students he was teaching were unfamiliar with this metaphor, asked them to think of an alternative. They came up with “the nose of the hippopotamus swimming in the river”.

- **Use 'lexical verbs', not 'phrasal verbs':** in most varieties of British English we tend to use phrasal verbs (a verb such as 'get' with a preposition such as 'over'), which are confusing to many speakers of other varieties of English, who will use the alternative 'lexical' verb (get over = recover, get by = survive, get away from = escape).
- **Simplify sentence structure:** this is good communication, not dumbing down. Avoid the passive: "The operating system was devised by and implemented by Apple ..." when the active is shorter: "Apple devised and implemented the operating system..." Avoid 'embedding': "This is an example of the way that structure that I referred to last week that you saw in New York achieves stability."
- **Don't ask a question by using a statement:** we use intonation a lot to signal that we are asking a question when grammatically we are making a statement. And we do it in a very complex way – by showing what question we are asking simply by which word we stress. This is a statement, not a question: "She lives in London" – but say it with the right intonation, and you can turn it into a question. You can also shift the emphasis to each word in that statement and produce a different question (Who lives in London? Lives or works in London? In or outside London? In London or another city?).
- **Speak clearly:** perhaps try a less marked regional accent (there are political sensitivities here – but we are talking about meeting the needs of students, not labelling some accents as better or more socially acceptable). Remember, too, that some students may have impaired hearing, so speak towards them, not facing towards the side or towards the screen behind you.
- **Write clearly:** somebody reading your writing who is not a native speaker will have trouble guessing indistinct words; somebody with dyslexia may abandon trying to interpret your writing; somebody who is partially sighted may misread your words altogether.
- **Avoid irony:** it relies on familiarity and intonation – you wouldn't want to find yourself misunderstood on, say, "Oh, yes, Tony Blair is probably the greatest statesman of all time."
- **Don't check understanding by asking "Do you understand?":** students may (a) say "Yes" because they genuinely but mistakenly think they do understand; or (b) say "Yes" because it would be embarrassing to say anything else.
- **Check** that you are not **inappropriately** penalising students' language use in an assessment where it is not a criterion.
- **Listen:** give students space to express their thoughts, and if you don't understand what they are saying, try to focus on the specific bits of what they are saying that are causing you difficulties, then question those rather than simply asking them to say it again.

In many countries lecturing and support staff deliver classes and services to students in English, a foreign language to them all, and appear to do so with fewer difficulties than we have here. Home students may have difficulties in communicating across language boundaries – yet international students communicate across those same barriers with relative ease (until they have to speak to a ‘native speaker’). There is a strong argument for native English speakers working to become as effective communicators in English in international and intercultural contexts as are the millions of those for whom English is a second, third or sixth language. Ability to do so should be a form of basic literacy in the 21st century.

Students for whom English is an additional language do not make up a homogenous group. For them in particular, the acquisition of an appropriate level of academic language can take considerably longer than a working mastery of social language. However, an advanced level of proficiency in academic language can be crucial to their success. ‘Academic’ English can be quite different from the ‘social’ English that many students have already mastered. Extra planning and support may be required to take their specific learning needs into account.

To achieve cultural inclusivity in the context of language development we may need to consider:

- students’ prior experience of learning English – how long they have been learning English, what kind of English they have already mastered and the extent to which they have already encountered academic use of the English language

- the composition of peer groups and the readiness (or otherwise) of students with English as an additional language to learn from peers whose first language is English, and vice versa
- students’ prior experiences of learning, in particular their history of learning languages other than their first language
- support mechanisms available in the institution. The School of Languages, located within the Leslie Silver International Faculty, currently offers part-time language courses in 23 languages. Both students and staff can gain discounted access to these courses through the School’s Language Pass (http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/international/lang/index_D96D81FEBA784955A3DD5C1F390F8307.htm).

‘Fluent’ users of English will be confident, competent and may well speak several other languages. They may well include high achievers, and some will be able to demonstrate how more than one language is structured. These students in particular will benefit from some level of challenge when helping them to further develop their academic English, and may feel that their experience is undervalued if language tuition focuses on more basic matters.

Designing an inclusive curriculum

An inclusive curriculum offers all students access to a range of cultural heritages. We need to provide opportunities for all students to reflect on and express their own sources of cultural influence, as well as to value the knowledge and experience they bring with them to the educational environment.

If we wish to design an inclusive curriculum we could do worse than begin by interrogating our present practices, for example:

- Is the language used in the classroom making inferences about the dominant group that excludes some students from outside this group (e.g. “You’ve all grown up using computers every day...” when computer-literacy may be very mixed)?
- To what extent are the examples and case studies used drawn from contexts in the UK (or culturally similar countries), and how far do they reflect the cultural diversity that the students actually represent?
- Are any of the required activities that form part of the curriculum (e.g. field trips, social activities, perhaps even induction programmes) likely to be problematic for students in cultural terms? For example, are there any informal meetings in pubs or site visits to places of religious worship?
- Are assumptions being made about student mores and behaviours that some students would find culturally offensive (e.g. references to students as “all-night party animals”)?
- Are activities requiring stamina and application required of students late in the day during periods of fasting, such as Ramadan?
- Are there activities that might be problematic for students with

dietary restrictions (for example, business lunches on placements, where halal or kosher options might not be available)?

- Is inappropriate behaviour by fellow students recognised, noticed, challenged and halted?
- Is some students’ practice or that of their families problematised more than others; do we sufficiently problematise white middle-class culture?

Guidance on some of these issues is available from the Higher Education Academy’s Subject Centre for Philosophical & Religious Studies, which has produced a series of Faith Guides for Higher Education. Currently covering Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism, the guides aim to give information to staff in the higher education sector on how best to support students with a variety of religious beliefs. They are available from: http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith_guides.html.

In designing taught programmes we need to consider:

- drawing on international experience
- developing international perspectives within the classroom
- making the curriculum accessible for all our students
- broadening perspectives for our home students.

In practice this means that when we design, for example, practical assignments, we need to draw on curriculum content, examples and case studies that go beyond our own national boundaries in order to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds feel equally included. Cross-cultural sensitivity needs to be integrated

into our curriculum design, to ensure that none of our students feel wrong-footed or discriminated against by the demands of an assignment. In the context of assessing students' artistic outputs, for example, we need to be on our guard against privileging particular national perspectives on what constitute aesthetically pleasing results.

Demonstrating inclusive curriculum design could be an integral part of all course validation procedures. Inclusivity should start at the first stage of curriculum design, with checks at each subsequent stage and at revalidation. Curriculum review needs to be ongoing to ensure that there are opportunities for students from all backgrounds to succeed and that subject content, language, materials and resources are aligned with the student profile on the course. We need to consider how to:

- recognise and respect the cultural experiences of all students
- acknowledge the contribution to knowledge of a wide diversity of groups
- develop a shared understanding of cultural, religious and linguistic diversity
- avoid reinforcing misconceptions about others by omission, ill-informed assumptions or generalisations.

Arguably the most common locus of discrimination can be fellow students; we need to find ways of modelling good practice from student induction onwards, so that this kind of discrimination is addressed at an early stage.

Inclusive curriculum design applies both to undergraduate and postgraduate provision, and it is important not to make assumptions that postgraduate students will already have mastered typical problems experienced by undergraduates, not least because of the number of postgraduates who may come straight into UK higher education after graduating in their own countries.

In addition to working directly with curriculum development, course teams may also give thought to how students can be encouraged or enabled to undertake experiential learning within or in addition to their programme of study. This might include, for example, language learning, participating in an international student exchange, participating in volunteering or acting as a 'buddy' to an international student. It is also worth considering how the diversity in our home student body may enrich the international/intercultural aspects of the curriculum.

Working with international students

Carroll and Ryan (2005) have published one of the most comprehensive resources on teaching international students. They use a striking metaphor for the way working with international students often alerts us to the problems other students may be experiencing:

“One analogy we, the authors of this chapter, both use often when thinking and talking about international students is to see them as ‘canaries in the mine’, harkening back to the time when coalminers took canaries into mines to monitor air quality. If the canaries died, they knew that the atmosphere threatened the miners’ well-being, too. We are also at a ‘coalface’. The international student ‘canaries’ thankfully show us their difficulties in less dramatic ways but nevertheless point out aspects of our teaching that all students will probably experience as challenges. By paying attention, we can change conditions to make sure that everyone can thrive in the higher education environment. If we improve conditions for international students, we improve them for all learners.” [Carroll and Ryan, 2005: 9-10]

In a later chapter, Carroll continues with a useful discussion of some specific cultural issues:

“Leask (2004) likens students’ arrival at university to learning how to play a new game where success depends on figuring out the new rules, applying them, and ‘winning’ rewards such as good grades, positive feedback and a sense of confidence and competence as a learner. All students find learning the new university ‘game’ challenging but international students may be doing so in English as a second, third or fourth language. British

or Australian culture and communication styles may also be unfamiliar and in many cases very different from the home culture (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997). Some international students may not realise the ‘rules’ have changed and most will start out using behaviours and assumptions that have served them well as learners up to this point. This may mean encountering unpleasant surprises. For example:

- *An American student who has always received very high marks does her best at a British university and her first coursework is returned with a mark of 50/100. How could she have earned only half the available marks?*
- *A Chinese student who has always viewed classrooms as places where you sat, listened and tried to make sense of what was being said by the teacher is asked in an Australian lecture to discuss a point with his neighbour. What is the point of talking to someone who does not know the answer either?*
- *A Greek student who has previously been rewarded for reading a textbook many times then reproducing its insights in an exam is stunned by a Canadian reading list containing 25 books. How can he cope with that task and three other courses suggesting the same number of books to read?*
- *A British student with good A-levels goes back home after a term’s work at a British university and asks, “Why do my teachers keep asking about referencing my work and giving me bad marks. I got Bs at school!”*

Often when Western teachers are presented with examples like this, they accept that learning is culturally conditioned, but awareness of difference can turn to dismay. How can they as teachers familiarise themselves with students' backgrounds when their students come from dozens of different countries?

Teachers can help students best by becoming more knowledgeable about their own academic culture. Once teachers can see their own academic culture as 'systems of belief, expectations and practices about how to perform academically' (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997: 77), they can start to offer explicit help to students who have chosen to learn in that academic culture. Many students will adapt to the Western academic culture without explicit help, of course, by picking up clues and using feedback, observation and implicit messages from teachers to check out their own assumptions. But many others will not. The less insightful and sensitive may not have the time or, in some cases, the confidence and support they need to gradually pick up the rules of the game. Success comes too late or at a very high price in terms of stress, work and worry. Such students will find explicit help vital, though everyone will probably welcome any help that means they can expend less time and energy trying to figure out 'the game' and more time on the content and skills of the programme itself." (Carroll, in Carroll and Ryan, 2005: 26-27)

Carroll continues with a discussion of some of the surprises and unexpected behaviours that international students give lecturers – think through the implications of some of those listed below on assessment:

- Giving presents
- Answering all my questions with “yes”
- Calling me Dr X even when I have said “Call me John”
- Complaining about wasting time on seminars rather than me teaching
- Handing in 4,000 words for an essay with a 2,500 word limit
- Writing very personal coursework with the main point on page 3 and lots of unnecessary background
- Repeating verbatim my lecture notes in the coursework
- Coming into my office after I have given the marks to argue loudly that I should give them higher marks – several times
- Remaining silent in seminars even when I ask a direct question
- Coming up after the lecture for a 1:1 discussion and seeming to expect me to stay for as long as it takes even though I said “Any questions?” in the lecture
- Deferring to my opinion even when a preference would be appropriate (e.g. Me: “Which essay will you do as coursework?” Student: “Please, you say.”)
- Talking loudly in lectures. (Carroll, in Carroll and Ryan, 2005: 29)

Technology Enhanced Learning and cultural inclusivity

e-Learning is more than a delivery method. It is an approach to learning. What distinguishes e-learning is its adaptability to learners' lives, needs and experience. It can be a preferred learning approach for many students from different cultural backgrounds, not least because well-designed e-learning allows students to make mistakes in private. It is normal for online help to be available to students; as such help is perceived to be non-threatening by students who may feel embarrassed when they need to seek help from a tutor directly. Content may be customised for users and thought applied to the style and design in order to engage the student more on an individual basis. A thoughtfully blended combination of online and offline approaches can be beneficial to those who struggle with linguistic expression, giving them the opportunity to practise privately online until they feel confident to communicate in public.

e-Learning has highlighted the shift away from 'broadcast learning' where the teacher is the expert and the fountain of all knowledge to 'interactive learning' where the teacher plays more of a facilitator's role and learning is more student-centred. Increasingly, tutors are using online mechanisms to support students with their learning. For example, at Leeds Met, the growth in the use of X-stream (an online system used for learning and teaching and supporting students) is growing in popularity with students. It provides an interactive platform for students, allowing them to communicate with their tutor and with peers. X-stream is also a valuable resource for storing teaching support material that can be accessed by students after their teaching

sessions. Such an approach promotes interactivity and greater student engagement with learning. Much thought is needed in the design and application of content on X-stream as students will depend upon it not just to see lecture notes, but also to see how these can be developed to enhance their understanding and further their learning. In order to make such material more accessible, we need to ask ourselves:

- How well do we know our students (their backgrounds, culture, language, competence in English, competence with ICT, disability etc)?
- Have you considered the possibility of misconceptions?
- Is the information well organised?
- How will the student's engagement with X-stream enhance their learning?
- Does the design promote interactive learning?

In a period of increasing student diversity, e-learning and e-assessment offer many advantages, including:

- flexibility of access in time, place and the selection of assessment options
- equitability, taking into consideration diverse student backgrounds (including international students), reducing time constraints and allowing more opportunity for students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding
- student-centred learning – open access can encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning.

e-Learning courses can be structured and aligned with the requirements of today's workforce (Volery, 2000). There is further scope with e-learning to connect with different cultures online through discussion forums. Students can bring 'real' first-hand examples to illustrate their understanding of learning concepts. However, given the ideals and values embedded in the use of the internet for online learning, students' cultural and language differences are not often enough incorporated into the planning and design of learning technologies.

When considering e-learning, we must ask ourselves:

- How do learners match their cultural and language backgrounds to the implicit cultural and language structures of online technologies?
- How do learners from different language backgrounds respond to the organisational imperatives, interests and assumptions that are built into online technologies? Unfortunately e-learning can be just as much a language barrier as other forms of delivery, and it cannot be assumed that students are comfortable with engaging with discussion boards, for example.

e-Learning is high on the agenda at Leeds Met and to make best use of it students need to be aware of the online help available through Skills for Learning (<http://skillsforlearning.leedsmet.ac.uk/>).

Culturally inclusive assessment

“Assessment defines what students regard as important, how they spend their time and how they come to see themselves as students and then as graduates. Students take their cues from what is assessed rather than from what lecturers assert is important.”
(Brown, Bull and Pendlebury, 1997)

Since for most students assessment is a very significant driver of their learning, our efforts towards cultural inclusivity are particularly important in the various contexts of assessment – written, oral, group, and self and peer assessment.

Assessment is commonly thought to be universal across higher education internationally, but even in neighbouring nations conflicting assessment cultures exist side by side. Assessment strategies in different nations reflect the value systems of those countries, and problems can arise when students find themselves in contexts where they find out only too late that they did not know the rules of the game.

One of the most significant findings from feedback from students studying away from their home learning environments is the problematic nature of their experience of assessment. Students from some Pacific Rim countries may find that their approaches to presenting written arguments do not find favour in the UK. Equally, UK students studying in Scandinavia or Northern Europe at undergraduate level may find it stressful if they find they are expected to defend their work in viva voce exams. Students may also need help in understanding what the marks they are given actually mean. The mark of C+ in some cultures is seen as an

acceptable mid-point mark, whereas for a student from the US this would be regarded as a low grade. Pass marks vary significantly from context to context, and nation to nation. In the UK a pass mark of 40% is not uncommon, whereas in some countries a pass mark of 70% is commonplace. Students may be elated or disappointed inappropriately if they don't understand the system under which they are being assessed.

It is easy to see these as problems that the students themselves need to solve. However, we believe the problem lies with mismatched expectations about assessment conventions:

- on the part of assessors, who may not even be aware of different assessment cultures in other parts of the world
- on the part of students, who may be working to a different set of ground rules than those in use in the new context in which they are studying.

Assessment is such a central area of higher education provision that good inclusive practice requires us to provide extensive guidance both for students and staff, so that they can recognise and interpret different approaches to assessment, and share expectations in areas such as coursework, orals and vivas, plagiarism and assessment regulations. Students used to co-operating very closely on practical assignments might find it difficult to recognise the boundaries between our encouraging them to work together, and the taboo we place on collaboration in assessed coursework contexts. This issue applies to all students in general, but can be more problematic when students come with a

range of expectations of how they should approach different parts of their assessment. Students coming from countries with highly structured teaching régimes may have become accustomed to believe that there is only one right way to perform a skill or undertake an aesthetic practice, and may find the value that we place on originality of interpretation challenging.

Carroll (Carroll and Ryan, 2005) discusses various ‘implications for assessment’ for international students. Reminding ourselves that in our drive towards cultural inclusivity, we are not just thinking about international students, but home students from different cultural backgrounds, it remains useful to look at Carroll’s discussion, reproduced below, and to think about which of her points may alert us to make adjustments to the assessment processes and practices we currently use with our students.

“Often, it is not until the end of the first term when students submit an assignment and do badly that they realise their ideas about assessment may not match your own. Again, to know what to be explicit about, you need to look for what your international students struggle with, then offer information. Spell out dates, times and deadlines; it generally takes international students much longer to accomplish tasks compared to domestic students. Students being assessed usually welcome explicit instructions on:

- the length of submissions (and the fact that longer is not better)
- the format (with explanations of what a report, poster, essay or précis might be and possibly a chance to try out new formats such as oral presentations and viva voces)

- what the assessment criteria mean and how they are applied
- what is being assessed (especially the percentage of the mark allocated to English language proficiency)
- which aspects of the assessment brief are compulsory and which are guidance or suggestions.

Because assessment is so central to academic culture, it helps to ensure [that] information is conveyed in writing as well as through discussion, explanation or example.

Being explicit about assessment also includes thinking about feedback. Explicit, sensitive feedback acknowledges students’ efforts and guides them to a more acceptable performance. Feedback that concentrates on what students have not done (‘confusing argument’, ‘no links’) or that implies rather than states what is required (‘Is this in your own words?’, ‘What about the Hastings report?’) is not helpful. It assumes the student knows the preferred behaviour, can decode the question, and could do what you suggest if they wished. This kind of feedback is rather like telling someone who is unskilled at Indian cookery how not to make a curry by writing ‘coconut?’ Explicit feedback describes positive behaviour (‘Put the main idea first then provide examples of how the idea would work in practice’ or ‘Tell the reader when you move from describing the method to discussing whether it is a good method or not’ or ‘If you are using someone else’s words, you must enclose their words in quotation marks to show they are not your own words’ or ‘You should have referred to the Hastings report because it ...’).

As a significant number of students often make similar mistakes based on similar assumptions, it is possible to assemble statement banks to streamline the task. Confine your comments to key points or essential information, especially in the early days, so as not to overwhelm students.” (Carroll, in Carroll and Ryan, 2005: 32-33)

Assessment ‘surprises’: staff perceptions

One of the best ways to illustrate cultural dimensions of assessment are the ‘surprises’ that staff – and students – can experience as a result of cross-cultural differences of perspective. The following discussion is adapted from the work of Pickford and Brown (2006).

The following are the kinds of remarks that staff make about what surprises them about assessing students from other countries. These are derived from comments made or reported to the authors in extensive international discussions on assessment matters.

“I couldn’t believe that the pass mark for the exam is so low in your country. How can you have doctors qualifying with a pass mark of 50% (or even less)? Does that mean your doctors can practise knowing less than half the curriculum material?”

The issue here is about different expectations of what comprises successful student achievement. For example, medical schools in Scandinavia have pass marks of 70% or even 80%, which their UK counterparts would find surprising. This becomes problematic when marks from one country are aggregated with those from another without mutual understanding of what standards of achievement are being reflected in each.

“This work is absolutely full of errors: the verb tenses are all over the place and the definite and indefinite article seem to be used more or less at random (when they are not omitted altogether)!”

The issue here is whether the work was full of errors, or a couple

of errors repeated many times. Some languages do not have articles (definite or indefinite) at all, and verb conjugations work in lots of different ways. For example, Chinese has no articles and no single/plural distinction for nouns. Chinese students and lecturers have great trouble with single/plural issues in English.

“Several of the students share a flat together and when their work came in, it was all very much of a muchness. I took the matter up with them and they were very defensive, saying that was how they worked, all helping each other, especially with getting the language right. It was really hard to mark them fairly and I worried a lot about whether I had let them get away with plagiarism.”

Here the issue is about lack of clarity concerning the boundaries between collaboration, collusion, co-operation and cheating. It is really difficult to make judgments on whether joint production of assignments is intentionally trying to break the rules, or whether it is a sensible coping strategy demonstrating the kinds of behaviour we would often commend in work-based contexts.

“After the Christmas vacation, one of my overseas students brought me back an expensive gift from home. It was just before the semester 1 exams. What was I supposed to make of that?”

What is at stake here is mismatched cultural expectations. The student would probably be horrified to think that the tutor might misconstrue the gift as a bribe to engender high marks. However, students might need alerting to that fact that gift-giving is unacceptable in some cultures, though welcome in others.

Assessment ‘surprises’ from the student perspective

However, the surprises are not all for assessors. The discussion below of ‘student surprises’ is also adapted from the work of Pickford and Brown (2006).

The following fictionalised quotes, all drawn from our own experiences or those reported by colleagues, give a flavour of the kinds of things that students find surprising when encountering assessment régimes very different from those back home.

“He gave me a B- for my essay. Back home I never got less than an A or maybe an A- so I went to see what the problem was, and he more or less brushed me off, saying it was fine. But it’s not fine! It’ll play hell with my Grade Point Average when I go back home.”

“In the lecture she gave us information about three different approaches to the subject, but she never told us which one was the right one. When I asked her about it, she said it was up to me to decide. How am I supposed to do that? She is the expert! So now I just don’t know what to write in my essay.”

“I’ve never been asked to write an essay as long as this before. Back home I was getting on really well with my written English, but what they asked for was usually only around 1,000 words long. This just takes so much time to get it right.”

“I went to my tutor and asked him to proof-read my dissertation but he refused to help me. I am paying so much money as an overseas student here and I expected them to be more helpful to me.”

“Home students are at such a great advantage over us. They seem to laugh and chat with the teachers in a very familiar way. And it is these same teachers who are assessing our work. We feel like outsiders.”

“I couldn’t believe it when they told me there was no written exam. At first I thought it was wonderful but now I’m really worried because I don’t know what I am supposed to be doing.”

“It was a shock for me to find that I wasn’t going to be marked by the tutor but by other students. How can they possibly be able to do that? The tutors should be doing this because they have the knowledge that we don’t have.”

“They tell us to read around the topic and give us long book lists to help us prepare for writing essays, but how do you know where to start? I wanted to know which was the best book for me to concentrate on but no-one would help me find it. In my country the books we need to study properly are indicated and everyone knows what they are.”

“I’ve never given an oral presentation before. Back home all our exams were written ones, so it was very nerve-wracking for me to have to stand up in front of everyone, with them all looking at me. It made it really hard for me to concentrate on what I was saying, even though I had done lots of preparation.”

“In my country, you only really get to do a viva for a postgraduate qualification so it was a shock to me to find that I was expected to do them for my course on my year abroad.”

“He told us we could come to his office if there was something we didn’t understand, so I went, but after only half an hour, he said he had to go off to a meeting, so I didn’t feel he had really helped me much.”

“Back home exams only last a couple of hours, or three at the most. Here they are six-hour marathons, sometimes more. It’s really exhausting.”

The issues here include:

- different marking cultures from nation to nation
- different pedagogic paradigms and contrasting philosophies of what learning at higher education level comprises
- shocks for students encountering novel (for them) means by which they are to be assessed, often with little preparation about what equates to high quality outcomes
- mismatched expectations about what level of support for learning students can expect.

Anonymity in assessment

Generally it is accepted that to avoid bias in assessment, it is better to mark students' work anonymously. Discrimination by gender or ethnicity (mostly quite unconscious) is not uncommon when markers know the identity of those submitting written work.

However, it is usually nearly impossible to assess other products of students' work anonymously; for example, presentations or other evidence of live or practical skills. This means that the normal safeguards we have in place to ensure that our own inherent biases and predilections do not impact on our assessment practices cannot always work effectively. When assessing culturally diverse students without the safeguard of anonymity, we need therefore to be doubly vigilant to ensure that we are being fair and giving each student an equivalent (if not necessarily identical) assessment experience.

Peer assessment

When students are assessing one another's tasks, it is especially important that they understand the need to avoid bias. It can be difficult to prevent peer assessors making derogatory or inappropriately negative comments about students from other cultures and backgrounds in, for example, assessed presentations. In-class exercises as part of the briefings and rehearsals for peer assessment can be valuable in providing opportunities to clarify institutional expectations about anti-discriminatory behaviour.

The following comments in the context of peer assessing presentations could be used as part of an exercise to get students thinking about avoiding cultural (and other forms of) bias in practical assessment by focusing on the criteria. For example, you can ask students to say what each of the comments below says about the assessor, and about the person being assessed:

"I couldn't make out a word she was saying because her accent was so strong, so I rated her poorly."

"I gave him low marks in the presentation because he looked so scruffy. Where I come from, we make an effort to dress smartly for uni, and I think it shows little respect for us that he fails to wear tidy clothes when addressing us."

"I didn't really notice what he was saying, but he looked so fit, I gave him a good grade."

"I expect someone giving a good presentation to make eye contact with the audience, but her eyes never lifted from the floor."

“The content of his presentation was OK and he was pretty slick, but he was such an arrogant youngster, I downgraded his mark for being so smug.”

“We thought he was so brave doing his presentation despite his stutter, that we all gave him a good mark.”

Plagiarism and assessment

“Some studies identify the problem of plagiarism being greater among international students, but it is worth noting that the evidence is equivocal on this point. Where there is evidence of higher rates of plagiarism among international students, they are also more likely to be affected by a range of mitigating circumstances such as poverty, isolation and financial pressures requiring long paid working hours and/or embarrassment at not knowing how to do the task”. (Dunn et al, 2004)

Simply asking students from various parts of the world and different cultural backgrounds about their understanding of assessment reveals surprisingly different expectations of what is and is not allowed in assessed work. We need to be clear about when deliberate cheating may be occurring, and when what at first sight appears to be cheating actually results from students not understanding the conventions and expectations of assessed work.

“For an assessor it may be difficult to work out whether a student does not know the material or simply cannot express it as expected. When the cohort is particularly diverse, this may be quite a problem. One solution is to provide a range of assessment items – perhaps involving portfolios or presentations, so the student understanding can be gauged in a variety of ways.” (Dunn et al, 2004)

Some solutions and suggestions to minimise plagiarism:

- Make the rules of assessment explicit and don't expect everyone to get the hang of them all at once. Rehearsal opportunities benefit all students, and letting students see/hear/use examples

of what they are expected to produce will clarify your expectations regarding their assessed work.

- Be explicit about the extent to which the precision of written language is a criterion for assessment, and don't mark down work on the grounds of poor language if this is not explicitly part of the mark scheme.
- Find out more about assessment practices elsewhere, and use this knowledge to clarify what you expect of your students.
- Provide multiple and diverse opportunities for assessment, so no single element of assessment can prove to be a matter of 'sudden death' to particular students who encounter difficulties with it.
- Encourage or require students to submit early drafts of assignments for feedback.
- Use peer assessment (for feedback rather than marking) to help all students to develop their sense of what is required in formal assessments.
- Where appropriate, use cultural diversity positively by encouraging students to write about their own contexts in assignments.

Towards cross-culturally inclusive assessment

The following suggestions aim to help you to ensure that all of your students are assessed fairly:

- **Clarify what you expect in terms of originality.** This helps to ensure that practices acceptable in some cultures are not interpreted as plagiarism.
- **Recognise how assessment methods vary from country to country.** In some countries oral assessment is the norm, whereas elsewhere there is much more focus on time-constrained unseen exams. Students from some countries will be familiar with self and peer assessment, while this can seem alien to others.
- **Make sure that assessment relates directly to intended learning outcomes.** This is of course accepted best practice for all students, but taking particular care to achieve this in multicultural contexts allows students all the more opportunity to cross-reference your expectations of them in assessment contexts against the other cues that they derive from the intended outcomes.
- **Look for individuals' recurring problems.** Accurately identify persistent difficulties and problems of individual students, and build up a repertoire of techniques to assist them.

- **Where possible, allow all students to put their best foot forward.** For example, portfolios can be a non-competitive way in which individual students can show their work at its best, and are therefore particularly useful for students from different cultural backgrounds, who can do so in different ways as appropriate.
- **Be careful about students' attitudes towards feedback and help.** Students from some cultural backgrounds may regard seeking feedback or guidance as an admission of failure, and may not seek support when they really need it. When giving feedback or advice to students, do so in such a way that it does not contribute to any feelings of inadequacy.
- **Provide clear guidelines on writing styles.** For example, help students to understand the different approaches expected of them when writing a literature review or a reflective assignment.
- **Be inclusive in terms of cultural references in case study material.** Don't always use examples from the home nation in business case studies, for example, and avoid references to cultural stereotypes, such as 'Asian family businesses'. Similarly avoid implying that all students are part of a particular age group when making cultural/social references that may marginalise older or younger students.
- **Be cautious about assuming your own norms are universal.** For example, some students might find being expected to receive formative feedback over a pint in the pub problematic if their religious or social beliefs forbid alcohol consumption.
- **Think about the language you use in giving feedback.** A term that is inoffensive to you might seem extremely rude to someone from a different culture, and the matey use of jargon or slang might be incomprehensible or confusing to someone who doesn't share your first language. Note that irony rarely translates well into other languages, so is best avoided in oral or written feedback.
- When assessing presentations, be aware that **making eye contact with assessors of the opposite gender might be problematic** for some students. Consider whether making eye contact really needs to be an essential criterion, and if it is, consider how much weighting is appropriate within the mark scheme.
- **Be sensitive about the possible need to make alternative arrangements for formal assessments because of religious festival dates.** For example, students who may be fasting for religious reasons can be disadvantaged if they are required to undertake lengthy assessment tasks at these times. This aspect of timetabling should be considered at the outset so that last-minute adjustments do not have to be made.
- **Don't make assumptions about the students you are assessing from the way that they look.** We would all hope to avoid stereotyping by age, gender, apparel or stance, but it is not always easy to leave our own baggage behind when making judgments. Hence we should always aim to focus on the output or performance rather than the person.

- **Provide your students with a 'jargon buster' for assessment.** Make a glossary of terms commonly used in the assessment process, including clear explanations of how students are expected to interpret words and phrases in tasks and exam questions, including 'discuss...', 'compare and contrast...', 'critically examine...', 'evaluate...', 'justify...' and so on. Consider getting all your students to work on making such a glossary, and building it up from one year to another as they encounter more assessment-related words and phrases.
- **Consider setting a choice of assessment tasks.** If there are two assessments for a module, it is common to make the first a presentation, the second an exam. However, the first assessment could be a presentation, or a portfolio, or a reflective essay. The learning outcomes assessed by an exam could also be demonstrated using other forms of assessment; for example, a demonstration or product creation.

Summary

Here are some examples of actions we can take in order to support all our students:

- **Give newcomers to our culture time to observe and adjust.**
Recognise that all newcomers need a 'silent period' of observation in order to adjust to routines – they are observing a lot of information and language.
- **Create an open and inclusive approach to learning from others.**
Help your students to value the diversity of perspectives they can gain from group learning contexts.
- **Find out more about students' cultural backgrounds.** Gain understanding of each student's culture to enhance their sense of belonging and enable you to offer tailored advice about the adjustments they may need to make in developing their academic English competences.
- **Vary class groups.** Some intervention may be necessary to achieve this to ensure that there is a cultural mix and students learn from each other, but, where possible, have at least two students in the same group who are from the same culture, particularly in the first year.
- **Make the most of informal interaction between students.** Maximise the opportunity for students to interact with others from diverse backgrounds on campus. An inclusive institution should celebrate the diversity of the racial and ethnic composition of the student body.
- **Bring diverse students together.** Provide stimulating courses spanning the historical, cultural and social basis of diversity and community, and create opportunities for students from different cultures and backgrounds to find settings that are familiar to them and replicate aspects of their home environment.
- **Help students to identify that they have a great deal in common** and therefore to keep the relatively insignificant differences between them in perspective.
- **Help students to acquire the necessary study skills;** for example, to develop strategies for making notes, looking up references and retrieving and recording information from the literature. Ensure that they are aware of the Skills for Learning resource at: <http://skillsforlearning.leedsmet.ac.uk/>.
- **Share and explain assessment criteria.** Develop a shared and clear understanding between the tutors and students about the assignment criteria.
- **Make academic conventions explicit.** Help students to understand the academic conventions that relate to assignments they write, and to understand your expectations of the required styles of writing in essays, reports, diaries, logs and so on, so that no students are disadvantaged by any lack in their development of academic English.

- **Make it clear what is regarded as plagiarism.** Help students to develop a shared understanding of what will be regarded as plagiarism in our assessment systems, and how best practice in citing and referring to others' work may be different in our academic culture from their own culture.
- **Help students to see how you mark their work.** Pay particular attention to their understanding of marking schemes, which may sometimes contain complex terminology.
- **Provide tailored language support.** Ensure that students are aware of existing support in the University and consider offering additional tutorials, tailored to the particular needs of students for whom English is an additional language, at various stages in their studies.
- **Remember that oral language skills may be assessed too.** Help students in their development of oral language skills, particularly when presentations are part of their assessment.
- **Help all students to develop cognitively.** Enhance higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills to increase the academic performance of all students.
- **Enhance students' confidence and self-esteem.** Help them to know who they are and where they are and to increase their awareness and knowledge of the history, culture and perspectives of all the ethnic and racial groups in the University and the region.
- **Provide ongoing, informal support.** It can be valuable to provide mentors or 'buddies' to allow students to develop their academic language skills as they continue their studies.
- **Value what students bring to the institution.** Provide opportunities for all students to reflect on and express their own sources of cultural influence, as well as the particular knowledge and experience they bring to the educational environment.
- **Prepare students for participation in a democratic society.** Include cultural diversity as an integral part of their overall learning, and help students to see that an understanding and acceptance of different cultures is necessary for the survival of the human species on this crowded planet.

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