Supporting the international student experience

A downloadable checklist aligned to University of Sussex guidance on supporting international students

Supporting international students requires making expectations explicit, building strong learning communities, carefully structuring learning, and ensuring all students understand how to navigate the University. The guidance on this page is presented as a checklist for module convenors. While the focus on this page is on supporting international students, these actions will benefit all of our students, but particularly those who have joined us from academic institutions where expectations and learning environments are often very different.

Checklist for module convenors

Familiarise students with university systems and support

☐ Encourage students to meet with their Academic Personal Tutor, who has oversight of their course, helping them make the most of their studies and work with them across modules.

☐ Encourage students who are joining for their final year of study (in BSMS and MAH) to reach out to their Partnership Tutor for additional support.

☐ Demonstrate in class how to navigate Sussex Direct and Canvas, highlighting where module information, assessment information, submission links and feedback can be found.

☐ Apply your School Canvas Template and structure your module Canvas site to make it as accessible as possible.

☐ Signpost students with English as an additional language to English Language for Academic Study (ELAS), which provide workshops, tutorials, and drop-ins.

☐ Remind students that the Student Centre provides support and advice on a wide range of academic and personal matters including internal student advice, visas and working in the UK.

☐ Direct students to guidance on academic writing, critical thinking, assessment preparation, and academic integrity on Skills Hub.

☐ Make students aware of the support available through My Sussex.

For further guidance on helping students familiarise themselves with the University, see: the University of Sussex Student Transitions guidance and framework

Build a learning community

☐ At the start of a module, ask students to introduce themselves to you and one another, for example, using a Padlet where students create a short introductory slide about themselves, their interests, experiences, languages, or countries they have lived in.

☐ Learn and correctly pronounce students' names, using approaches set out in the say our names guide.

☐ Structure group work deliberately by using planned group allocation rather than relying solely on self-selected friendship groups.

Make academic expectations explicit

☐ Help students plan and manage their workloads by breaking down the module learning hours (e.g. 150 hours for a 15 credit module) across a semester so they understand how much time they should typically spend engaging with lectures, seminars, reading, assessment preparation, and independent study.

☐ Discuss assessment briefs explicitly in class.

☐ Clarify acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI and translation tools.

☐ Use low-stakes and formative assessment opportunities.

☐ Break larger assessments into smaller stages where possible.

☐ Emphasise why discrete learning tasks are important, making clear connections between these tasks and your module assessment, which is often a key motivator for students.

☐ Explain unfamiliar terminology such as critical analysis and reflection.

☐ Unpack (i.e. explore and explain) marking criteria and grade descriptors.

☐ Provide exemplars showing strong and weak work, and feedback that explains what the work does well, and how it could be improved.

Scaffold learning and manage workloads

☐ Use formative assessment opportunities, and informal in-class activities, to allow students to practise assessment tasks and receive feedback before major submissions.

☐ Make weekly study expectations clear, including preparation, reading, and independent learning activities.

☐ Ensure reading requirements are realistic, manageable, and clearly prioritised.

Create respectful learning communities

☐ Explicitly discuss expectations around respectful discussion and disagreement and co-create class expectations, ground rules, or a learning agreement with students.

☐ Acknowledge your own positionality with your students, by sharing how your identity (e.g., race, educational background, gender, class) has shaped your teaching methods, expectations of your students, and interactions with them, for example, as described in Creating safe but brave learning communities.

☐ Provide context and guidance when discussing sensitive or potentially challenging topics.

☐ Read about the intercultural learning principles, which are a way of naming what a genuinely reciprocal, critically honest intercultural encounter asks of everyone in the learning space.
For further guidance see: Creating safe but brave learning communities.