Motivating international students

A practical guide to aspects of learning and teaching

Dr Margarida Dolan, International Consultant and Dr Irene Macias, University of Bath

1 Motivating international students learning Economics in the UK: the context

Many international students come to the UK to study economics, attracted both by the history, and the excellent teaching and research reputation of many Economics departments in the UK. The following quotations suggest that international students enjoy the intellectual challenge of studying in institutions with a high reputation which will give them the opportunity to have good careers:

- 'The opportunity to study at a prestigious institution of international repute, and the promise of intellectual stimulation.'
- 'I wanted to be part of one of the most appreciated educational systems in the developed world.'
- 'Excellent teachers: have a deep knowledge of the subject and know how to transmit it to the students.'

When asked about the best aspects of their Economics course in the UK, students include its international environment*:

- 'Meet different people from all over the world, being independent.'
- 'Meeting international students and learning more about other cultures.'

However, international competition for quality and cost-effective Economics education is rapidly increasing, and the UK faces new challenges in its attempt to remain an attractive destination for international students (see for example, Sastry and Bekhradnia, 2007). In recent years, many UK HE institutions have attempted to raise their international profile by recruiting a larger share of international students. UK Economics lecturers have varied responses to the growing number of international students in the classes, with some considering this as beneficial to students' learning and others highlighting the challenges created+.

The importance of motivation in academic learning is recognised by many authors (for recent examples see Maclellan, 2005 and Lanzt, 2007). So, what is motivation and why should we consider it within the context of international students in Economics? As a working definition, motivation can be considered as 'that which gives purpose and direction to behaviour'; and motivating, as 'providing incentives'.

When we ask cohorts of international and UK lecturers and teachers 'what constitutes a good lecturer or teacher?', irrespective of cultural background, the responses show that the lecturer or teacher is considered fundamental to motivate students to learn. The characteristics of a motivational lecturer or teacher referred to include being passionate, enthusiastic and

* Economics Network Students Survey 2008
http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/projects/stud_survey2008_full.pdf

\+ Economics Network Lecturer Survey 2007
http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/projects/lec_survey2007.pdf

inspirational, combined with being knowledgeable, clear, structured, available and approachable. Even choice of a particular career direction can be influenced by a motivational lecturer or teacher. Equally, a number of postgraduate students choose to do research with the academic they find to be most motivating – including having an appealing website or writing in a manner perceived to be enthusiastic. In our experience, no subject in Economics is inherently impossible to make interesting: any subject can be made clear, interesting and motivating or, conversely, confusing, boring and de-motivating.

As lecturers and teachers we are potential role models to all students, and our behaviour 'can have a significant impact on students' Lantz (2007). We can therefore mediate openness to diverse ways of being, and contribute to developing and sustaining academic environments where international students feel valued, included and motivated. However, we may also inadvertently propagate unhelpful stereotypes regarding other cultures.

Previous to their arrival in the UK, international students will have been successful learners; their skills, knowledge and command of English are to the level required by UK admission criteria, and they will have received plenty of advice regarding living and studying in the UK. But the challenges they encounter when they arrive are often manifested in such unexpected ways that they may struggle to settle into their academic lives.

The opinions of individual international students are very important since those who are motivated by the learning and research environments they experience in the UK can become excellent ambassadors and in turn motivate others. This is implicit in the following quotations*:

- 'I have always loved the British culture, history and the English language. So for me it was the only place where I wanted to study.'
- '(…) I already had friends studying in the country.' *

Students can now share their thoughts in web-based discussion groups, blogs and websites aimed at ranking the quality of lectures and teachers, hence influencing the choices of other students.

UK universities have for many years, organised activities specific to welcoming international students, particularly the induction week. But there tends to be a separation of the social from the curricular, in that the presence of international students is visible and explicit in special social occasions, but invisible or not even implicit in learning and teaching contexts. Regarding this issue it is interesting to compare the findings from the Economics Network 2004 and 2008 Alumni Surveys (Economics Graduates): the perceptions of alumni regarding their own awareness of cross-cultural issues has increased markedly from 2004 to 2008, but their perception of the role played by the degree itself for awareness of cross-cultural issues has not changed much. These findings strongly suggest that much can be done within learning and teaching of Economics to further support cross-cultural awareness and fluency of Economics graduates.

International students have been successful in other learning contexts, so we can work from the constructive premise that the challenges they face result from conflicts between what is expected and what is experienced by all parties involved.

Motivating international students requires that we shift our thinking and practice to anticipate, differentiate and respond to their needs. International students can then benefit consistently from equivalent opportunities available to UK students, are more likely to feel valued and included, and are thus more likely to succeed.

If we attend to the particular requirements of international learning contexts, we can develop understandings and skills, to motivate all students studying or researching Economics in the UK, and to nurture collaborative relationships that are beneficial for all.

International students can be an invaluable asset if we facilitate and value their participation in the learning community. Staff and students alike can gain wider, richer and internationalised perspectives of Economics, and of personal, social and professional choices linked to culture.

2. Cultural diversity and learning and teaching

In this section we share examples of cultural diversity we have experienced that can directly impact on the academic performance, the behaviour in lectures and the social interactions of international students. These examples support or complement the wealth of published material on this matter (see for example Ramburuth, 2001, who investigated the perceptions and practice regarding cross-cultural learning behaviour with implications for teaching, learning and diversity management in Economics; and Carroll, 2005).

In some cultural traditions, scholars are treated with great respect as societal role models. Students from such cultural traditions may address us with ceremony emphasising or exaggerating our academic title, and combining it with our first name. No matter how many times we ask the students to call us by our first name alone, they may never feel comfortable to do so. Also, some students may seek our advice on personal issues of a serious nature, beyond the scope of normal pastoral care. In these situations it is best to refer students to specialised support services within the institution as further discussed in section 5.

TOP TIPS

The purpose of referencing escapes many international students. In addition, referencing is not that easy to learn. Exemplifying how to reference using our own work somehow personalises the experience. Introducing students to referencing software can be very helpful.

The fundamental value of learning and researching to become a better human being is in contrast with applied research and learning for a career and material gains*:

- 'My main objective was to learn economics rather than getting a degree, however, currently I just wish I could finish my degree as soon as possible because I am not learning what I wanted. I have become a degree seeker instead of knowledge seeker.'

Knowledge is for many, considered as having an intrinsic value for humanity, with no ownership or attribution to its creators. Referencing can be meaningless if we believe we should integrate learnt knowledge as our own. This is fundamental to understanding why so many students are considered to be colluding and plagiarising even after being explicitly told that they may be excluded.

There are also implications for answering exam questions and writing essays particularly when students first start their degrees. Some international students consider that basic questions that check factual knowledge cannot be just that. They take such questions as opportunities to show how much they know around the subject without ever stating the obvious because that is obvious and the lecturer or teacher already knows that. As a result, they tend to produce long answers that do not address what is asked, and are marked down. Similarly writing essays can be a problem*:

- 'Essay writing during the first year was a little difficult.'

TOP TIPS

Students who do not look at us directly when talking or listening, respond constructively when we explain sensitively how such behaviour can be interpreted. Students need to consider **negotiating with themselves** to change a behaviour that may be core to their culture.

Some students produce essays that are far too long; that do not address the immediate concerns of the essay but are instead speculative; where no distinction is made between facts and opinions; and that are poorly referenced, or not referenced at all.

In some countries, arriving late, chatting with peers or answering mobile phones in lectures or tutorials is acceptable. We have given lectures in countries where students and staff take notes whilst answering their phones, or leave the lecture halfway through and come back later without any form of justification.

When international students chat during lectures or tutorials, particularly in a language other than English, it can be distracting, irritating and interpreted as a lack of respect. However, students may be trying to support each other as expressed in the following quote from an Economics lecturer+:

- 'In the past I have occasionally had overseas students talking in class – but this was usually one of them translating for the others.'

Interrupting or talking at the same time as others can be considered normal and even desirable in some cultures, as it indicates being interested in what is being said. Yet, in the UK it may be interpreted as disruptive, aggressive or rude. We need to address these issues early on, and explain to such students how they might be interpreted.

TOP TIPS

One approach to deter students from giving us presents is to tell them that we cannot personally accept presents, and that gifts have to be formally recorded and will become university property. It's worth checking your university policy on gifts.

Respect in some cultures also manifests itself by not looking straight at others, so that there is little eye contact. We could consider that the student lacks confidence, is extremely shy, is not interested or is rude. This is relevant when students give presentations as they may receive lower marks.

Some students will want to give us presents, as an expression of respect. It could be food and drinks, but it could also be expensive goods (or money and vouchers) and even forbidden imports such as stuffed crocodiles. Simply telling such students that we cannot accept presents does not solve the problem, as in a number of cultures it is polite to accept a present only after refusing it a number of times. So students will insist that we accept, as it is part of a ritual for them to insist and for us to refuse! Such students can seem to be intrusive and as trying to ingratiate themselves with us in some way.

Shaking hands energetically, patting each other on the back, gesticulating, talking loudly and standing very close to others may be the norm in some cultures but is usually considered as overtly aggressive in the UK. Unless students are told explicitly how their behaviour may be interpreted, they may not notice that they behave differently to others.

Reluctance to make decisions quickly, taking initiative or volunteering information can be interpreted as passive or non-assertive behaviour, and as having something to hide. But in some countries one needs to first develop a strong sense of belonging to a group before being more actively engaged. Some international students may feel that they are not given time to think, and that they have to accept the decisions of others. Making such cultural differences explicit may ease relationships between students particularly in group work.

TOP TIPS

Some students feel uncomfortable in one-to-one or small group meetings where they are the only person of their gender. Leaving the door of the meeting room open, and offering the student a seat by the door can make them feel safer.

Some students will be surprised that there may be fewer senior female academics in the UK than in their country of origin; others will consistently not acknowledge the presence and professional competence of female academics.

Some international students think that being English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh is the same; and many non-European international students may even assume that all European (including UK) students are the same. Likewise some UK students may believe that all Africans, for example, are the same. This form of stereotyping can be the source of irritation for many students and staff alike.

3. Being aware of language and cultural references

3.1 Language issues for students

A good command of English is highly valued for many professionals across the world, and achieving language fluency is a goal for international students. So the English language is an important factor when international students choose to study in the UK.

Although institutions set certain language standards as entry requirement, the monitoring of these standards tends to be the responsibility of language units within the institutions. Many newly arrived international students cannot understand well what others say and cannot make themselves understood, despite having the entry requirement language standards. This can be very demoralizing and result in some international students avoiding to speak with English native speakers which can lead to isolation.

Initially, being taught and tested in English can be unexpectedly difficult, and students may feel inhibited to ask for clarification which can affect their performance. A high proportion of international students of Economics in the UK report that their learning had been affected in some way due to language*:

- 'To some extent, yes. It doesn't affect my understanding, but when it comes to asking questions and writing essays, I do have some problems.'

The following quotations reflect some difficulties initially faced by some international students studying Economics in the UK*:

- 'At the beginning of the course it was difficult to grasp more technical and academic terms, but I would not see that as a long-term problem.'
- '(…) I had hardly any experience with essay writing, which resulted in several bad marks at the beginning of my course.'

Schmitt (2005) reports that the vocabulary considered sufficiently large for native English speakers is 40,000 words whilst for non-native English speakers entering university it is 10,000 words. Schmitt *et al.* (2001) found the average vocabulary of university-aged English language students in several countries to be just under 4600 words. With such a limited vocabulary, students understanding and progress are likely to be affected. A study by Shanahan and Meyer (2003) found that first-year students of Economics for whom English was a second language, had significantly worse examination results in end-of-semester than students for whom English was a first language.

International students who are native or near-native English speakers, and to some extent UK students whose first language is not English or who have strong regional accents, can also struggle. The practical suggestions on learning and teaching we share in this chapter may be useful for them as well.

Being aware of language and cultural references is very important, as commented by a UK Economics lecturer+:

- 'My most serious issue is providing material in language that is understandable by ESL [English as a Second Language] students. I am searching for ideas all the time – your site [Economics Network] helps me in this regard.'

Many international students initially rely on varied verbal and non-verbal cues to understand what is being said, including pace and emphasis, lip reading, facial expressions, hand movements, multisensory signals and contextual prompts. Strong regional accents, colloquialism, the use of unusual phrasal verbs, jargon, abbreviations, acronyms and references to culturally specific information can all make the message more difficult to understand.

3.2 Strong regional accents

It is inevitable to encounter strong accents that are difficult to understand in an international environment, whether individuals are native speakers or not. This should not necessarily be a barrier to communication, but in the context of a lecture or tutorial, a strong accent can make the content difficult to follow as expressed below*:

- 'The seminar tutor should speak better English, as a strong Chinese accent makes it sometimes very hard to follow, even for my native English speaking friends.'
- 'Use of more understandable English by the tutors would make seminars far more useful. They can be a little useless when the group cannot understand the tutor and the tutor cannot understand the students when questions are raised.'

It is therefore crucial that the delivery of content does not rely exclusively on talking as discussed in section 9.

When students with strong accents talk to us but we cannot understand them, it can be embarrassing and counterproductive to ask them to repeat again and again. Sometimes, it is tempting to pretend we have understood and to move on. On a practical note, from our experience, the more we engage with different accents the more we are likely to understand them.

TOP TIPS

If we cannot understand a student's accent we can ask the student to write down the question/comment so that we can read it, and then write it on the board for the benefit of all.

3.3 Particular uses of English

International students are normally curious about colloquialism, idiomatic and unusual expressions, phrasal verbs, jargon, abbreviations and acronyms that are new to them. These may take a long time to understand and learn and unless we are prepared to explain their meaning as and when we use them, the students will not understand us. For example, one of us recently heard a specialist say 'looking at the accounts with a beady eye' and thought it was an acronym 'BDI', and so asked what it stood for!

Most international students and staff will know common phrasal verbs including to sit down and to stand up. But less common phrasal verbs can be very difficult to understand. For example, what does *to stand down* mean? Is it the opposite of *to stand up*? If so, how can we physically do it? To learn and use less usual phrasal verbs can take a long time! So can we use alternatives, maybe closer to the Latin or Greek root? For example, instead of *to stand down* we might use *to resign*.

Linguistically related to phrasal verbs are also expressions that use the same particles as phrasal verbs but in a different order and which have very different meanings – these can be very confusing for international students and staff alike. Examples of this include *to set off* and *offset*; and *set up* and *upset*.

In the context of lectures and tutorials, we should write down all specialised jargon, abbreviations (for example, e.g. and i.e.) and acronyms, and what they mean in legible print so that we can refer to them when we use them. It is helpful if we can refer to a glossary that we have previously made available to students, as discussed in section 14. Also, if year after year, international students make a spelling mistake writing specialised jargon or expressions, we should refer to this, and maybe suggest a way of memorising the word/expression properly.

3.4 Culturally specific references

Examples are important to illustrate information and to help students engage with the lecture or tutorial. However, if the examples used are specific to a culture they are only meaningful to some students. An illustration of this is when we show a picture of 'Asterix and Obelix' and most European staff and students know these characters well, but very few non-Europeans do. Further examples include social, political, religious or historical references based on the UK, USA and Europe; and TV and radio programmes, films, magazines, newspapers, cartoons and books. Many international students frequently prefer to watch and listen to programmes and to read sources from their countries of origin. So if we want to use local examples, we need to explain their context and why we are using them and if applicable we can bring a copy to the lecture or tutorial.

TOP TIPS

The motivation of international students can increase if we ask them to contribute with information relevant to their country. For example, we can ask students to verify the specific impact that a global trend has on a particular economic aspect of their country.

In cases where our lectures focus on UK specific systems, say the UK tax system, some international students may feel that this is not relevant to them. We can explain that the underlying thinking and practicalities about systems in the UK can be transferable to other systems, and that it is of value to analyse different models of organisation and to learn how to access relevant information.

4. Being welcoming

Just before starting their studies, many international students are very motivated but once they start attending lecture after lecture and struggle to understand, they can become tired, confused and de-motivated. No one notices their presence anymore, as they are one of many, and our lecture is also one of many. It is therefore important that we welcome them to our lectures and tutorials.

TOP TIPS

Showing students a map of the world signalling the countries represented at the university (or on the course), manifests our support for the international community. The international services in institutions are normally happy to supply us with the information needed.

At the beginning of the course we can tell all students that we are privileged to be in an international learning environment. We can highlight the opportunities to learn about different cultures, values and uses, and to experience how individuals perform academic tasks differently. This can help international students feel valued and included, and all students appreciate each other more.

If we participate in events that celebrate the international community within the department or at the university we can meet international students informally, which is valuable for the rapport mentioned by Jackson (2003). In Petropoulou's (2001) words 'taking an interest in the students can evoke commitment and inspiration making the course satisfying for both teacher and students'. Having a good relationship with lecturers and teachers is one of the social aspects considered important by Economics students in the UK *:

- '…the good relationship between lecturers and students and the possibility to meet very diverse and interesting people…'

5. Being responsive

TOP TIPS

We may need to advise international students to consult the support services. It is important to know what services students are entitled to and which ones they may have to pay for; where the services are located; and if students are reluctant to use these services for cultural reasons.

After the initial period of transition, most international students prosper without any major difficulties, but inevitably some find it difficult to adapt. Occasionally an international student may need more support than the pastoral care that we are able or competent to offer. If an international student is putting in effort yet getting poor results, it may be that there is an underlying difficulty.

We also need to be aware that some international students may be on the receiving end of unfavourable attention within or outside the university, due to stereotyping or political conflicts.

Confidential support from counselling, money advisors and the international student office, plus specific support for learning, accommodation, religious and spiritual issues, and security are amongst the provisions available in many institutions. The student union usually facilitates a number of support groups and international societies. The security services are normally equipped to support students in difficulty and are generally contactable at all times day or night.

6. Being explicit

Many international students adapt to the academic culture in the UK without much specific support but others will not understand what is required (Carroll, 2005: 27). Quotations from Economics students in the UK reflect this*:

- 'I have studied in Poland and the system is quite similar, however it is different to study abroad and in the beginning it is difficult to find yourself in such a new situation.'
- 'Learning experiences have not prepared me for the teaching and assessment style used in the UK as it differs very much from the system I am used to.'

International students may have very different expectations regarding the *what*, the *why* and the *how* of learning and teaching in the UK and so we need to be explicit about the following:

- what the UK standards for academic work and practice are;
- why students have to engage with existing thought *and* acknowledge it;
- what we intend to share in the course/unit/session, and how we intend to achieve the objectives of the course/unit/session;
- how we intend to facilitate students' learning; why we suggest that students interact; and what students should demonstrate when they contribute to activities;

- why it is important to learn 'x' or 'y';
- what we expect students to learn by when, and why and how we assess students in different ways;

The above list is not meant to be exhaustive but a reminder that it is not sufficient to include such information in introductory brochures, lecture and course handouts, or virtual learning environments. Students are unlikely to engage and invest emotionally, socially and intellectually in different activities if they do not understand *what, why* and *how*, and if information is not presented in a personable manner.

If we are explicit, international students are more likely to engage with our suggestions. We should explain to the students that:

1. The course is composed of diverse modes of learning opportunities designed and integrated to reinforce each other, including lectures, seminars, tutorials and web-based discussions;
2. To learn and to develop values and skills essential for the students to succeed, we expect them to be committed and to prepare well.

7. Being structured

When we plan a learning session we should consider the following to motivate international students:

1. International students particularly gain from seeing an explicit summary of the session at the beginning and end of the session, and whenever we progress to a new stage. We can use three minutes at the start of each session to remind students of the context, and show the summary of the previous and of the current session. Alternatively, we can get students to work in groups of three to write down what they remember from the previous session. This gives students the chance to engage with the subject and interact with colleagues, from the beginning of the session.
2. We can share the rationale behind the structure of the session. We can start with simple or general principles and then build up complexity. We should introduce the wider context (general theories, general rules) first and then look at the detail (or exceptions to the theory, models, practicalities). We can also start with a very interesting detail that the students are likely to engage with, and then introduce the wider context.
3. We can enrich and add variety to the session using audiovisuals and media (see section 9), and we can plan opportunities for the students to interact under our guidance.
4. After showing the summary at the end of the session, we should aim to give a short introduction of the following lecture or tutorial.

8. Being realistic

If we want to motivate international students we need to be realistic. This starts by questioning the frequently quoted figure of 20 minutes for students' attention span, originally from a study in 1970 by MacManaway. In our experience the attention span of students is at best 7–10 minutes! Due to language issues, the attention span of some international students may even be shorter, and initially, paying attention and remaining motivated during a whole session can be a struggle for many. We can tell students that we empathise with them on this and that the process tends to improve with time.

We also need to be realistic in terms of the time we need to prepare a session and the time each element of a session takes to deliver/present. Many lecturers and tutors often anticipate that they can prepare faster, and that they can cover more than what is realistically possible. The result is that they rush the content, students cannot follow and all end up feeling frustrated.

Using a table to plan the linked elements of a session can be very useful, and we use such session plans very effectively. These linked elements are: **learning outcomes** (what we intend the students to start developing an understanding of), **content** (what we are going to present to address the learning outcomes), **methods** (how we are going to present to address the learning outcomes: are we going to talk? to ask a question? to present a problem? to propose an activity? to show a resource?), **multisensory resources** (how we are going to illustrate each aspect: are we going to use a newspaper/ a photo/ a film, etc?), **assessment** (what and how are we going to assess?) very importantly, **time!** (how long will each section of content take us to present?).

The session plan helps us decide when to introduce short activities that are not meant as distractions but as opportunities for all students to interact, focus and learn.

This is a format for a session plan that we use (rows can be added as needed):

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Aims:
Length</td><td colspan="2">
Date</td></tr>
<tr><td>Time</td><td>Learning outcomes</td><td>Content</td><td>Methods</td><td>Audiovisual/multisensory resources</td><td>Assessment</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Notes
Personal reflections</td></tr>
</table>

So, for example, the first rows of a session starting at 9:00 can look like this:

Time	Learning outcomes	Content	Methods	Audiovisual/multisensory resources	Assessment
9:00-9:05	Support recall of context	Context	Plenary	Summary in slide shows	NA
9:05-9:15	Topic Y	Content of topic y	Talk Demonstrate	Board	Students to share poster contents

Such a format also allows us space to write notes or reflections on how we feel the lecture was received with particular emphasis on the participation of international students. We discuss reflecting in our practice in section 17.

Being realistic about time in our session plan saves us from rushing to finish. In a 50-minute lecture, the time to organise the materials and equipment at the beginning, the time to run the activities, and the time at the end of the session to clarify any points, leaves us with 35 minutes to present content.

If we design a session that receives particularly affirmative feedback from international students, we could offer to share it with other lecturers and teachers via the Economics Network.

TOP TIPS

Printing the session plan on coloured paper makes finding it easier amongst other printed materials. We can write notes about students' interaction, and quickly assess how we are doing in terms of time. Also, if some of the resources are unavailable (for example, no projector) we can still give the session with reference to the plan.

9. Being resourceful

Multisensory communication using audiovisuals and media resources

Colander (2004) discusses the need to balance the content and form of a presentation, and highlights the importance of being an expert who cares for the subject to convey its importance to students. Showing enthusiasm for one's subject is very important to motivate students to learn, particularly in an international learning context. Using our pace, our voice and our body language to support our words can be very effective to motivate international students.

But whilst we should not exclude talking without using supporting resources, as suggested before, international students in particular may find it hard to pay attention to sessions if we rely exclusively on written and spoken words. Multisensory variety can support students to better focus and to follow the content of complex subjects (see for example Fullekrug *et al.*, 2007).

We can use a combination of traditional and non-traditional audiovisual and media including boards, flipchart, visualiser, OHP, slides, slideshows, photos, video clips (and increasingly video streaming), three-dimensional objects, web resources, interactive websites, and voice recordings from radio interviews. Being restricted to only one resource particularly in low lighting conditions can make it very hard to pay attention as illustrated with great sense of humour by Cham (1999). Equally, lengthy clips, radio or films may actually de-motivate rather than motivate international students.

We have to account for the time it takes to show and/or the time to set up the resources. It can take us a minute to set up (if the video is internet based in which case we need internet access) or two minutes if it is VHS or DVD. These times are approximate, but we refer to them to make the point that we have to be realistic and account for them in our session plan.

TOP TIPS

Enriching the main messages of lectures and tutorials with multisensory resources that stimulate various senses helps students pay attention, and recall the information when revising. Enriching the content does not have to be complex or reliant on sophisticated equipment.

For example, when explaining ranking bundles of goods from most to least desirable, in addition to the mathematical notation, say $U(A) > U(B)$, we can use cartoons to indicate the most preferred ☺ and the least preferred ☹ (we can insert these in slideshows; or we can draw them on the board). We should also use examples that all students are likely to understand, for example a bicycle and a car, rather than, a cricket ball and a rugby ball, which many students may never have heard of. We can enrich our words by showing cartoons or photographs (we can use our own or download free resources), or three-dimensional objects, for example, a model of a car or bicycle. The point is that only speaking the examples does not have the same impact of *showing* the examples.

TOP TIPS

Resources are normally influenced by the cultural traditions of their authors, and students might interpret them differently from what we anticipate. For example, some international students may have culture-related reservations regarding our choice or miss the point completely. We can let the students know that we welcome their views, and that we can consider alternative resources.

If there are current news relating to our lecture, we can bring newspapers and refer to them, or use a visualiser to show the newspaper in some detail.

When we are choosing resources, we need to check their quality as background noise, strong accents and image distortions can be barriers for international students to understand the message. Films that have the possibility of subtitles should be used when available.

If something fails, it is best not to show great disappointment or complain about technology! We can reiterate what the resource is about, why it is so interesting, and suggest that the students access it in their own time, and that they can share their thoughts by email, virtual learning environment or in the following session.

Mainstream UK news is likely to be influenced by UK perspectives. That is not a problem in itself, but it is important to be aware of it, as some students may have culture-related reservations.

Sources of topical media include news on the radio, TV, internet and newspapers articles. As suggested by Sloman and Mitchell (2002) if our institution has an ERA (Educational Recording Agency) Licence we can record and copy programmes and assemble extracts for free.

10. Being strategic

Preparing a course can be very time consuming, so we need to be strategic and check what materials are already available that we can use. The Economics Network online learning and teaching materials site is a great resource base that provides reference lists, links to sites of interest, lecture slides, worked examples, multiple choice questions and answers, examples and activities for seminars.

Whilst many materials are not produced having the needs of international students in mind, we can easily adapt them. Can we make a slideshow more clear in any way? Can we rewrite the learning outcomes in terms of direct questions that will be addressed during the lecture? Is there a clear summary? Can we choose slides from different presentations and can we make changes so that the slides become more visually interesting? Can we introduce current international issues? Can the language be simplified?

There is no need to be apologetic about adapting materials that others have produced, but it is good practice to acknowledge the original sources and recognise the privilege of having access to them.

11. Being clear

A number of subjects in Economics depend on interconnected levels of increasing complexity, and to miss one step can result in not understanding a whole theory or model. Using appropriate pace and emphasis is very important, particularly as explanations of proofs, diagrams, graphs, tables and charts may otherwise become incomprehensible.

11.1 Pace and emphasis

When we are familiar with a topic, we tend to speak faster. International students in particular may struggle to follow us. So it is important that we consider our pace and ensure that we do not go too fast. If we emphasise the most important points students are more likely to take notes and to focus. Emphasising can be done by slowing down or pausing; repeating or rephrasing what we said before; changing the tone of our voice; signalling 'what I am going to say next is very important/ relevant/ interesting'; writing on the board (for example, if we refer to authors and their work during a lecture or tutorial, we should write this information down so that international students can take note, otherwise they may simply miss the references altogether); and using circles or arrows.

International students also use non-verbal cues to try to better understand the information and they will frequently lip read and follow our facial and body expressions. We need to be aware that some non-verbal cues are highly cultural-dependent, and can be misinterpreted.

We should face the students when we are talking and we should avoid covering our mouths. Standing with our back to the light, low lighting; background noise, 'chalk and talk' (which refers to writing on the board and talking) or 'talk and walk' can impact on students' ability to see and hear us, and our voice projection can be compromised. We suggest that 'chalk and talk' should not be 'talk to the chalk'!

If we are lively, if we use a good pace, if we face the students and use emphasis it is more likely that international students feel motivated regarding our subject!

TOP TIPS

Pacing explanations and giving time for the students to take notes including a few moments of silence, when moving from one stage to another, can signal that something different is to come. It can also give a moment of rest to all.

11.2 Proofs

Most proofs are the result of elaborate processes that involve trial and error, and time to mature until an elegant, useful result is achieved. Yet, they are frequently presented as if they were self-evident. Students have to understand that proofs are not there simply to make their lives difficult. We should clarify this each time we are presenting a proof. Instead of saying '*this is easy; trivial; basic, as we know*', we believe it is far more constructive to recognise that the proof is complex and that it requires dedication from the students for them to become familiar with it. To expect that the students understand immediately the elaborations of proofs and are thus able to ask informed questions is not reasonable.

Proofs can be extremely hard to follow for international students. Reading and copying whilst trying to listen and understand what is being said can be exhausting, and result in international

TOP TIPS

Tell students that we do not simply memorise proofs. In reality we need to understand the basic premises of the proof, and revisit them frequently. This can help students be realistic about the effort and time required to learn proofs.

students being unable to follow. In addition, students may not be familiar or not recognise the pronunciation of expressions and jargon particularly when the rationale seems counter-intuitive; and it is enough to mishear or miss a few words for the rationale to be lost, or totally misinterpreted. The result is that students feel their efforts are ineffective and can become de-motivated.

If the students should have covered the basic principles of proofs elsewhere we should guide them to where they can revise this information *'these concepts were addressed in lecture/seminar X and you may want to revisit your notes'*, preferably in good time before the lecture or tutorial.

If we planned to talk for 10 minutes or more, we should tell the students and recognise that some might struggle to follow us. We can tell them that we will be pausing afterwards so that they can discuss their notes in groups, and that we'll be asking some groups to share in plenary if they have missed some information. This can motivate students to pay attention as they are given a challenge and the promise of interaction!

We can use slideshows very successfully to present proofs. There are many slideshows available on the web and provided by publishing houses, but some present various equations and text simultaneously which can make us go faster inadvertently, and result in information overload.

Another aspect to be aware of is that at times lecturers or teachers write diagrams and maths on the whiteboard, and talk about related fundamental intuitive arguments without ever writing them down. International students may benefit greatly if we leave space on the whiteboard to write down these arguments, even if only in note form (Long and Barnett, 2008).

Clear signposts can be invaluable as the students are not simply presented with a lengthy proof that seems to go on and on with no direction. So when we teach a proof we can:

1. Explain the context of the proof. Why it is important to learn it – what are the practical or value-based implications?
2. Show what the whole proof looks like *in one go* (on a single slide, on a page to be displayed on visualiser, etc.).
3. Explain how we are presenting the proof in small stages, to make it easier to understand. We can assign each stage with a number of steps characterised by a particular attribute, for example, an assumption.
4. Show the initial equation and the end equation. 'We are starting here and we will end up here' and why the final equation is particularly useful. Then present the constituent steps of the proof without going into the detail. 'From this we will get to this/ from there we will get to there/ and finally from whatever we will get to whatever.' Only then go on into the detailed explanations.
5. At different points, clarify where we are in relation to the whole.
6. Repeat/reiterate important points, and signal 'This is really important; interesting; useful.'

TOP TIPS

Using mixed visual inputs to signal different stages of a proof adds variety to the explanation and helps students to refocus. Slide shows, laminated A4 posters, flipcharts, and the boards can all be used.

In our experience, this approach is equally beneficial when explaining models, theories and sets of instructions.

For example, we can print in landscape the initial and final equations on coloured A4 paper in a clear large font and use it as a poster (which we can laminate to reuse), and keep it on show until the end of the proof, or use a visualiser.

11.3 Diagrams, graphs, tables and charts

Diagrams, graphs, tables and charts are indispensable in Economics. A common assumption is that because they are visual representations, they are easy to understand and useful to illustrate information in an attractive way. In our experience this is frequently not the case. Typically there is too much subsidiary information that can distract the students from what is essential. Students may become more, rather than less confused about the subject.

It is important to be very clear about what we want the students to learn and then ask ourselves how we can simplify the relevant information in diagrams, graphs, tables and charts. Are font size and type clear? Can we refer to the trends in a graph in terms of shape or can we use lines with shapes/dots, etc.?

The language used when describing trends, degree and rates of change, and movements on a graph is complex and varied. For example, a decrease can be referred to as a decline, drop, fall or slide and international students may be unfamiliar with some of these words, and be unable to follow the explanation.

TOP TIPS

Specifying what we are referring to in diagrams, graphs, tables and charts is essential. This can be done with directed gestures and visual tools such as different colours and shapes (like arrows and circles). Waving or pointing in the general direction of a diagram, graph, table or chart from a distance is too vague for many students to follow.

Even simple instructions of the type ‘if you look at the top left hand corner of the graph’ or ‘when x equals 10 and y equals 30’ can be difficult for international students to follow in real time during a session. They may still be trying to write down what we said before and may not be aware that we are expecting them to look. However, international students in particular may feel embarrassed to ask us to repeat.

To avoid this happening, can we stop for a few seconds to indicate we need the students attention? International students may also need more time and non-verbal reinforcement to reason instructions, for example, ‘top’ followed by ‘left hand’ or ‘x=10’ and ‘y=30’ and to look in that direction. Using the drawing toolbar in slideshows, we can circle the area of interest or use an arrow to point at it. Also, when explaining diagrams, graphs, tables and charts we must not forget to talk in the direction of the students, as discussed in section 3.

Modelling tools including Etc, FEELE, Me:tal and WinEcon can be used very effectively so links to these resources are provided in section 19.

We can plan time in our lecture for students to work in mixed groups on proofs, diagrams, graphs, tables and charts as explained in section 12.

TOP TIPS

International students have to learn to present and describe information using various words and expressions. However, initially, we can limit the range of words and expressions used, and we can provide a list for students to check such words during the session.

12. Being open to promoting interaction for integration

A key issue surrounding international students is integration with UK students. Even though many international and UK students would like to interact more, it is possible that they misinterpret each others intentions. For example, a study found that Australian students often think that international students prefer not to mix with them, and vice versa (Volet and Ang, 1998).

In Economics in particular, poor integration is a missed opportunity for very interesting discussions as international students represent a variety of economic regimes from all over the world. Students from diverse academic traditions also have complementary skills that can be used as a resource for learning. An example, is that some international students have higher levels of mathematical ability but struggle with economic intuition and interpretation of results compared with some UK students. Interaction that specifically acknowledges these complementary skills can be valuable as international students can check the mathematics of UK students and UK students can check the intuition and explanations of the international students (Long and Barnett, 2008).

Below we discuss how to achieve integration through interaction. We analyse the space provided by the lecture theatre to interact; we give step-by-step guidance on how to promote and monitor interaction in the lecture or tutorial; we discuss issues relevant to games and case studies; we discuss group work outside the lecture or tutorial; and we share views on e-interaction.

There may be students who do not like to engage in activities. As long as we provide alternatives for these students to learn (e.g. watching the behaviour of others; trying to look into emerging patterns on their own) we are not excluding them from learning.

12.1 The lecture space

In our experience, the lecture space is fundamental to initiate interaction between all students under our guidance. Sharda (1995) highlights the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity of staff in supporting the workings of culturally diverse groups, and that group work in class provides opportunities for staff to monitor groups' social dynamics.

The size and seating arrangements in lecture theatres often make them appear unwelcoming spaces, and students tend to sit next to their friends. So a common justification against using interaction in lectures is that it can only be done in small groups, and in rooms where students can walk around.

Also, some lecturers and teachers may be reluctant to encourage students to interact, as they are concerned that it does not result in real learning. Marburger (2005) investigated the impact of replacing the traditional lecture format with co-operative learning (where students work on exercises in small groups) in principles of microeconomics classes. He observed that students' application of theory and level of economic reasoning was higher in students who participated in co-operative learning as compared with students who attended traditional lectures. Whilst there is no mention of the cultural background of the students involved in this study, these findings support our observations of improved learning and integration of international and UK students through interacting in lectures, regardless of audience numbers and room type. Sloman (2002) also describes running workshops very successfully in lecture theatres.

12.2 Interaction in the lecture and tutorial, step-by step

Activities for interaction include those proposed by Sloman and Mitchell (2002) such as anticipating outcomes to scenarios presented; comparing notes; sharing doubts; filling in gaps in handouts; answering questions; sharing thoughts relating to a quotation; anticipating trends in curves; and predicting behaviours.

When we plan group activities for a session, we allocate one minute per student per group, plus one minute to write down keywords, plus one minute per group to share in plenary. In a variation of this format, we give one minute for students to reflect on the question on their own and to write down keywords, and then give another two minutes for students to share in small groups. Instead of asking groups to share in plenary, we can show them the answers on a slide, and give them another three minutes to compare these answers with what they had achieved.

We specifically ask students to form groups of three with others they have not worked with before. In our experience, groups of three give the chance for all to contribute fairly, in a short time. We say and write something along the lines of 'Please find two people sitting within your reach that you have not worked with before.'

In the following schematics we suggest ways to form groups of three. Students sitting in adjacent rows across a corridor can easily stand up and change places. This gives enough variety to group membership.

TOP TIPS

If students are reluctant to interact they may need some encouragement or clarification. Having instructions and aims of the task written down, and reaffirming the benefits of interacting, is usually sufficient for students to engage with each other. Students who prefer to work on their own should be given the possibility to do so.

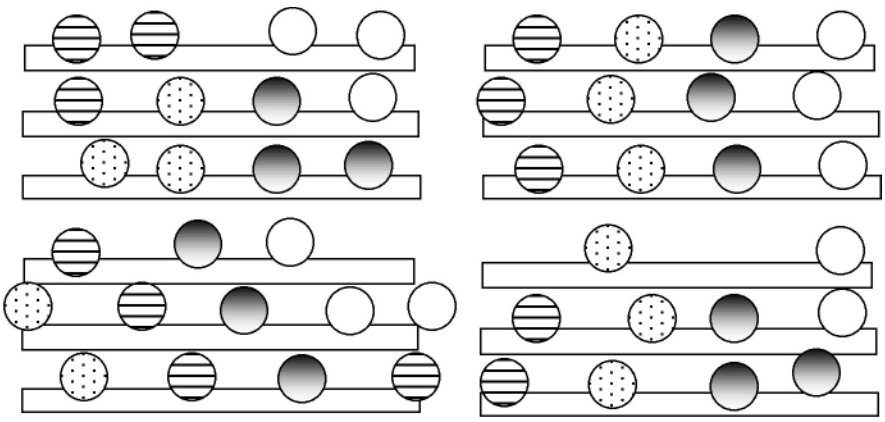

Figure 1 Schematic of sitting arrangements in a lecture theatre where the rectangles represent rows, and same type adjacent circles represent students working in the same group.

International and UK students generally enjoy working this way and are constructive about overcoming difficulties in communication to complete the activities successfully. Frequently, students start by introducing themselves and where they come from, which is a great step for integration. Our observations over the years lead us to conclude that there are a number of valuable outcomes of proposing such activities, for motivating integration of international students:

1. Students who might not otherwise interact, work together.

2. Engaging in activities on a regular basis prepares students to listen to different ways of expression, different accents, and different culturally informed views.

3.Students tend to leave the lectures in mixed, rather than in the initial same-cultural background, groups.

4.This can be a constructive foundation for more demanding group work outside the lecture.

Interaction in the lecture motivates international students and further energises all the class. We find that it no longer takes most of the semester or academic year for international students to develop enough trust in us and in the rest of the group to be willing to contribute.

TOP TIPS

As students come to expect working in mixed groups in lectures they no longer sit next to their friends, and groups of same-cultural background students (e.g. UK only; Greek only; Chinese only) tend to disperse. Apart from integration in the lecture, interaction may also nurture informal peer support networks.

12.3 Games and case studies

Using games and case studies can help make Economics lectures and tutorials more meaningful and help to motivate students (see for example Sloman and Mitchell, 2002; and Volpe, 2002). When asked about aspects of their Economics degree that could be improved students refer to more interactive elements, such as games, experiments and role-play*.

There are three important issues when considering using games and case studies in an international environment.

1. We need to be realistic in our planning of how long the activities take. If we rush the instructions and the conclusions international students may be unable to follow.
2. International students may need longer to understand why games and case studies are relevant to their learning.
3. Using expressions that international students cannot recognise can de-motivate them from participating. Even if we reassure the students that they will understand once they engage with the activity, it is still very frustrating to try to do something without understanding it.

TOP TIPS

Enriching the instructions of games and case studies with multisensory resources can help international students better understand and better recall information.

For example, a game with very simple instructions such as 'Setting up a pit market' (Holt, 1996), used to introduce the supply and demand model, can be initially very confusing for international students. So how can multisensory resources be of help? First of all, do international students know what a *pit market* is? Why not show a photograph? When the roles of buyers and sellers are allocated, can we enrich the verbal instructions with visual or auditory cues? Small changes can make it easier to memorise the roles so we could allocate the **b**uyers (and highlight the **b** for buyers) with the **b**lack cards (and highlight the **b** in black) to make it easier to remember. Also can we complement this with showing and keeping visible the colour of the cards? Can we use simple cartoons to explain the instructions?

12.4 Group work outside the lecture or tutorial

Group work can promote the acquisition and the development of values and skills, but it can also be very frustrating and result in discouraging students from interacting further. If this is the case when all group members come from a comparable educational system, having a mixed international and UK membership can bring far more complexity to group work.

Different and divergent unspoken culturally-influenced values, expectations and skills become more salient when trying to comply with deadlines. But our observations indicate that students who experience culturally mixed groups regard anticipated difficulties as manageable supporting the findings of Volet and Ang (1998) and those of De Vita (2005). We too find it important to share the affirmative outcomes of culturally diverse group work with all students to help remove preconceptions. Carroll (2005) also addresses some interesting issues related to group work.

Before suggesting that international students work in groups, it is important to consider the following issues carefully.

1. Proposing group work outside the lecture or tutorial at the beginning of a course is not wise as some international students may still be struggling with language, with learning how systems work, and with trying to access information (library, internet and intranet, and virtual learning environments). They may therefore be unable to fully and equally participate in group work.
2. International and UK students work better in groups if they have already had plenty of opportunities to interact during lectures and tutorials. However, we have to be aware that

unless we allocate the group members, UK and international students might not choose to work together.

3. Whilst in some countries, students have more exposure to assessed group work than in the UK, in other countries group work may be considered as not real learning. So whilst some international students will be very professional, proactive and constructive others will be uninterested and disengaged.
4. To assess the group work process we can ask students to submit reflective journals. Keeping records of emails exchanged, when meetings took place, what was discussed and decided, and who attended can be very useful for us to balance who did what and when. Our experience is that many international students do not understand the relevance of reflective journals, and providing them with previously assessed examples can be very useful.
5. We need to clarify what we expect to get from group work; what the roles are within the group; how we expect fair contributions from all; the typical challenges in group work and how they might be overcome; and what everyone can gain.

TOP TIPS

When allocating groups we need to be sensitive as international conflicts can make some students reluctant to work with others. We must make it clear to all students that we can reconsider the group allocation if there is a strong reason, and that they can contact us in confidence to discuss this.

Some international students feel that they are not given the opportunities to express themselves, are being misunderstood intentionally, and are being rushed to make decisions. Some UK students may feel that the progress is insufficient and they are effectively wasting time, not learning as much, and that they will be marked down. Some other international students with more experience of group work may feel that UK students do not make enough effort.

Shanahan and Meyer (2003) observed that awarding bonus points for completion of a non-traditional curricular task related to learning issues resulted in increased student responses, and supported students' perceptions of the legitimacy of the task as integral, rather than external, to the course. An equivalent approach can be incorporated regarding knowledge and understanding of different cultures as an item that contributes to the final assessment of group work. We first need to ensure how specific we expect students to be in return about what they have learnt from each culture present in the group.

TOP TIPS

Make explicit to all students the values and skills they can gain from group work and the added value of an international membership. Also be clear about the difficulties that groups with a culturally-diverse membership can pose and how the difficulties may be manifested in practice.

12.5 International students giving presentations

Some international students may not have given presentations before, and some may be uncomfortable to do so, as articulated by an Economics student *:

- '(…) in terms of presentations it was quite problematic for me to speak in front of people.'

Asking international students to give presentations can result in unnecessary tension. Adjustments may help the students feel more comfortable. For example, would a student prefer giving the presentation in a smaller room, to a smaller audience? Or, initially, maybe read from a script whilst sitting down?

An issue to consider is whether allowances should be made for oral fluency of international students when giving presentations. International students may feel it unfair to be penalised due to their use of language. It may be argued (for example, McMahon, 2007) that since students will be assumed to have a very good command of English on finishing their degree in the UK, they

TOP TIPS

Asking international students to read aloud in lectures or tutorials can cause embarrassment to those who are unsure about pronunciation and sentence construction, particularly at the beginning of their course.

should be judged in the same way as UK students. We would suggest that if such a criterion is to be adopted, international students should be given plenty of support on their presentation skills, and staff assessing the presentations should give specific feedback on what and how exactly the use of language might be improved, so that international students can work towards specific goals.

All students preparing to give presentations have to be aware of the diversity of audience needs including those of (other) international students. We can specify what we do in our practice to support the learning of international students, including making available materials beforehand; writing down questions; making references available; and responding to questions and comments in an affirmative manner. We can formalise criteria relating to clarity of the presentation to international audiences in the evaluation sheet.

12.6 E-interactions

Outside the academic context, and irrespective of language and cultural differences, many students are increasingly using social networking to share interests. Virtual learning environments (VLEs) and Web 2.0 social networking platforms can allow us to communicate with students in a way that is an effective use of our time; can be used to promote learning of academic content; and improve the interaction of international and UK students in and outside the class.

A colleague (Abdullah, 2008) observed that attention, interest and participation levels among all students increased visibly as an immediate result of the introduction of such platforms in class. Students were also more enthusiastic and interactive when tasks relying on Web 2.0 tools were suggested at the end of the learning sessions. Communicating academic content using e-spaces that students use to socialise appeared to make the students perceive the subject and the teacher as accessible and resulted in increased levels of student motivation towards the subject.

However, we would like to caution that some lecturers and teachers feel that they effectively spend more time using these platforms as they get involved in moderating students' contributions. We recommend training on the advantages and disadvantages, and time management skills required when using Web platforms before starting to use them.

13. Being sensitive with questions, answers and comments

13.1 Offering questions and inviting comments

A frequent comment about international students is that they do not contribute in lectures or tutorials. The classic 'Are there any questions?' followed by an uncomfortable silence, is often used to justify that we move on quickly. But, do we find it easy to ask a question or to comment when the Dean or Vice Chancellor are present, without feeling that our contribution may seem obvious, irrelevant or pedantic? International students and staff may feel the added tension of internally debating how to articulate the question or comment in 'good English'. Whilst questions should be used as opportunities to learn, they are sometimes felt as threats.

TOP TIPS

If we want international students to contribute to a discussion we have to anticipate that initially they may struggle to find the right words or expressions, and may need more time than UK students. Also, international students are more likely to contribute when they feel safe that they will not be ridiculed for their English.

An approach we have adopted in our practice that motivates international students to answer questions is as follows:

1. We write the question down with clear, legible handwriting (or have it already written in slideshows, flipchart, etc.) and keep it visible so that students can refer back to it without having to ask us to repeat. This has two practical advantages:
   a) international students may not realise at first that we are asking a question (particularly if we do not use emphasis), and may worry that we might think they were not paying attention.
   b) we do not need to repeat the question, and so we avoid rephrasing it which can generate variations from the original question that can be confusing to international students;
   c) we avoid asking questions directly to individual students, whether international or UK.
2. We do not ask international students to comment/respond to questions about texts that they did not have access to beforehand. If we present international students with new material during the lecture, we must give them enough time to read it. A good approach is for us to read the material twice in silence and this usually corresponds to the time many students take to read the material once.
3. We give students three minutes to discuss in groups of three what the answer(s) might be.
4. We reassure the students that:
   a) doubts are learning resources as we can all learn from them.
   b) all interpretations are initially valid, and initially we are more interested in diversity rather than to focus on the quality of the contributions.
   c) we are interested in giving students opportunities for them to test their own understanding rather than in assessing their individual knowledge at that point in time. This way we get to know and can then clarify, for example, plausible or intuitive but wrong views shared by several students.
   d) the more difficulties and misconceptions raised and elucidated before the exams, the better for all.
   e) abstract, complex concepts need time to mature and to become clear.
   f) inevitably, during the lectures or tutorials some students will be focusing more at some times than others, and the combined recollections of groups may correspond to most of the information.
5. We suggest that one of the students writes down the answers produced by the group on a separate A4 piece of paper, clarifying that we are interested in the combined contribution and not on who contributed with what, providing a level of anonymity.
6. Once the groups have been talking for three minutes we remind them that they should start writing notes on what they want to share, and we give them an extra minute to do so. In our experience this refocuses the students on the task and supports them in being succinct.
7. To get the attention of very animated groups we may have to clap three or four times.
8. Because of time possibilities, we randomly select two or three groups to read out their

findings with one of the group members reading the group notes and we ask all groups to share their contributions on the virtual learning environment or by email.

9. We remind students that whilst the posting will be done by one of the group members, it is important that the comments are anonymous, i.e. that they do not identify which group member contributed with what.

10. We must not forget to be realistic discussed in section 8: even if only two groups share their contributions in the lecture, we need to allocate four minutes for group work and three minutes for sharing, so we need to account for this in our session plan.

TOP TIPS

International students are more likely to contribute and to take risks if there is a shared responsibility for the contributions and they are not the sole focus of attention. Even students with strong accents do not generally have problems in contributing when they are talking with their colleagues in small groups.

In our experience, if students interpreted the question differently from what we had originally expected, they apologise for interpreting the question the 'wrong way'. We reassure all that their contribution is still welcome. This is a good opportunity to clarify how to interpret types of question and is valuable preparation for exams and essays. We should take note in the session plan of the different interpretations of a question as this can inform us on how to make the questions clearer, particularly for exams. If several groups interpret our question in ways we had not expected, it is a strong indication that the question needs to be rephrased.

This approach has enabled us to learn misconceptions students have regarding the topics taught; to reflect on the areas of our lecturing that we need to clarify further; and to help international students feel that they can contribute to everyone's learning regardless of their perceived communication difficulties.

In seminars and tutorials, more time can be allocated for each question and student cohorts are smaller so we can invite all groups to share the answers obtained. To make the process more active, we ask all groups to pay attention to each others contributions, and to either tick the items present in their poster that are being referred by another group, or to write down items that other groups refer to that are not in their poster. Advantages of this approach include that:

1. We save time, as we avoid groups repeating or rephrasing the same items again and again;
2. We avoid the potential distractions that result from having to listen to all the contents of all posters;
3. To tick or add an item to a poster implies that at least one member of each group is paying enough attention;
4. All groups feel they have contributed, even if to inform us that all items in their poster have been covered by previous groups.

Alternatively, groups can show their responses by using a visualiser or by putting their contributions on the wall so that all students can go round the room and read them. We need to allocate ten minutes for this, but we can be sure that most students will feel focused and energised.

13.2 Responding to questions/comments

When it comes to responding to questions or comments from international students we have adopted the following approach.

If we understood the question being asked or comment made, we start by repeating it (or by rephrasing it, particularly if it needs to be simplified) to check that our understanding represents the student's meanings. We write down the question/comment or its keywords on the board to give the opportunity for all students to read the contribution, and to be prepared to engage with the answer.

We thank the student for their contribution. We may say 'thank you', 'that is a relevant point' or 'that's an interesting question'. What we are signalling to all the students is that we welcome their willingness to contribute, and that the whole group can benefit. Even if it is a request to repeat what we have just said, we should thank the student as we can anticipate that several international students may also have missed that particular point.

When we finish responding, we can check that we have addressed the question and open the possibility for the students to contact us if issues remain. For example, we may say 'Does this answer your question?', 'I hope this answers your question', 'Any issues remaining please come and see me afterwards', 'We can discuss this further at the tutorial/seminar'. We can invite the students to post queries on the virtual learning environment or by email by suggesting, for example, 'Please email me to remind me of this conversation'.

TOP TIPS

Aim to keep answers short and simple, and avoid going into lengthy answers or too much detail as international students may be unable to follow. Writing keywords and drawing visual elements such as a diagram or flow chart on the board can be of help.

What if we perceive a question or a comment as provocative? This is where we need to be very aware of the cultural differences that we have mentioned in section 2. Cultural differences influence the responses we expect from international students, and our interpretations of unexpected responses. Students may sound inappropriately aggressive, apologetic or disengaged/uninterested and be genuinely unaware of being perceived that way.

When there are misunderstandings or misperceptions that are uncomfortable or potentially threatening for those involved, it is best to try to safeguard everyone's values and worth. For example, if we feel that an international student is undermining what we are saying, we can anticipate that there might be a misunderstanding and we can ask the student to specify what the misunderstanding is. If the student is not co-operative, we can diffuse the situation by suggesting that the discussion is continued at a later date, for example, in the virtual learning environment.

Unless there is a way of communicating sensitively to the student how that behaviour may be interpreted, the student will not know, and may never develop the appropriate behaviour. In our experience, we have never had to take severe actions such as asking a student to leave the room or having to call the security, and hope never to be faced with such uncomfortable situations!

13.3 Supporting international students in sharing doubts and comments

International students may be particularly concerned that the way they talk is not clear, and that they may forget what they want to say. Giving opportunities for students to work in small groups in lectures and tutorials, in our experience, results in more international students sharing their doubts and asking questions.

The focus is always on enabling communication and not making the students feel inadequate for the way they express themselves.

TOP TIPS

Students can write down and then read contributions they want to make, as they tend to be more focused and clear than when trying to remember what they want to say, particularly international students. If we cannot understand the student's accent, we can ask to read their notes and summarise, and write it on the board for the benefit of all.

14. Making written information accessible

Unless international students can prepare for lectures and tutorials in good time, they may struggle, and be unable to contribute. In this section we explain particular issues faced by international students, the types of materials we can make available, and access to such materials.

For international students reading and processing information can initially take a long time. Becoming acquainted with the language and ways of representing data, checking unclear cultural references, and translating words and expressions may all be part of the process. We should therefore make the resources available to the students in good time, so they can prepare at their own pace and with access to dictionaries or online resources.

If we make any changes to any information international students have received or have already available, including criteria of assessment, submission deadlines, meetings, teaching times and venues, we need to inform the students orally and in writing so that they are more likely to access the information. Waiting until the end of a lecture or tutorial to make these announcements is not a good approach. Many students will already be getting ready to go, which increases the background noise, and international students in particular are more likely to misunderstand or not hear.

Materials we can make available include lecture and tutorial notes and handouts; slideshows; glossaries and vocabulary lists; list of abbreviations, acronyms, jargon and new words; reading lists; previous exam papers; copies of marked essays; and reflective journals. Such materials can be made available on the intranet and library, as e-booklets or paper copies, and should be available well in advance of being needed (at the beginning of the academic year or start of each term or semester). We can also ask students to research and/or read new material, revise previously covered material, or answer questions that we may post in advance of lectures or tutorials.

Petropoulou (2001) considers the issues faced by international exchange students that join courses at third year level, and who do not share the background knowledge needed to solve some problems. She has supported such students by meeting them outside class and by assigning extra reading in advance to prepare them for material to come.

When designing written materials we should reflect on the following:

1. Is there too much information on the slides and handouts making them difficult and unattractive to read?

2. Is there space for students to write notes?

3. Do materials include visually interesting elements?

4. Are the font type and size used legible?

5. Are equations, graphs and tables legible when printed?

To save paper, we may be tempted to fit two pages in an A4 copy but the material becomes very hard and unattractive to read. If we provide photocopies in the library, we should choose copies that are not twisted, blurred, illegible or dirty, as all these aspects greatly affect legibility and appeal.

Some international students will have excellent IT skills, but others may be unable to access written materials that are exclusively reliant on IT literacy, particularly at the beginning of their course. For example, not all students understand the library systems, or know how to access virtual libraries, data catalogues and virtual learning environments. Some may not have used email before. So can we guide the international students to courses that might be available to support their learning? Otherwise, can we make a number of paper copies available at the library? Can we suggest those students who may have the skills needed to teach those who have not?

TOP TIPS

Whilst access to written materials may be difficult for some new international students, they should not be excluded from learning that depends on having read materials beforehand. We can give them the chance to learn from other students in the lecture or tutorial.

During the lecture or tutorial we can give students the chance to learn from others information they could not access before, as follows:

1. We need to plan five minutes in our session plan;
2. It is most important that we do not make students feel guilty for not having prepared;
3. We ask students to form groups where at least one member has engaged with the reading to share what they remember;
4. We ask them to write keywords on an A4 sheet of paper;
5. We ask two or three groups to share in plenary what they remember.

This allows all students to have some general knowledge of the material. Engaging students in the learning of others creates good opportunities for international and UK students to interact constructively, and to engage with each other's interpretations.

Rather than doing progressively less preparation for the lectures or tutorials, and relying on someone else to have done it, our observations are that more students come prepared to the lecture or tutorial as they enjoy both the social interaction and sharing what they prepared.

15. Reading lists and selective reading

Petropoulou (2001) observes that 'When faced with a long reading list comprising of several chapters from books and a number of articles, students have difficulty prioritizing their reading and knowing which areas are beyond the scope of the course.' This is particularly the case for international students who may think that they have to read everything in case they miss relevant information. The result can be overwhelming, time consuming and de-motivating. So it is helpful that we consider the following.

1. Are there shorter, less wordy books on the same subject? We can ask the Economics Network Team for such practical advice.
2. Can we give a short, written, personal introduction about the benefits of consulting each of the books we are suggesting?

3. Do the students know how to read selectively? If not, can we suggest courses provided or on-line resources? Can we exemplify in the lecture or tutorial how to read selectively (using index, contents page, skim reading, etc.)?
4. Can we guide international students on why they should be reading the books and reports, or consulting a website, and what they should be looking for, perhaps even give them a list of questions?

If we promote the acquisition of students' reading skills, they will have more time to develop other skills including computer literacy skills. They can also develop critical skills regarding the reliability of sources, and better appreciate the relevance of the subject.

16. Assessment and feedback

Aspects of assessment of international students have been explored in a number of recent publications (e.g. Ryan, 2005; and Brown and Joughin 2007). In this text we focus on multiple choice questions as they can present particular barriers to international students. This is because when we are preparing these exams we should insure that the right option is unambiguously right and all the other options are plausible but wrong.

The issue for international students becomes interpreting options that may appear linguistically similar, so the level of certainty can be lower and the level of ambiguity can be higher than for native English speakers. Relating the theory with the options available can then be very difficult. International students particularly can gain from opportunities to learn and practise the language in this particular context. Can we provide lists of typical questions? Can past exam papers be provided at the beginning of the year and be worked on in tutorials?

Regarding feedback, its aim is to support learning in relation to stated outcomes. In other words, feedback should provide a link between the student's present performance and future targets as implicit in the following comment by an Economics student *:

> 'Personally feedback is one of the most important elements to improving.'

Feedback (or lack of it) affects all students of Economics. In the case of international students, there are particular barriers as students may not be familiar with classifications, assessment rubrics or indeed the difference between writing conventions for essays, reports, or reflective journals. This is expressed by an Economics student *:

> 'Learning experiences have not prepared me for the teaching and assessment style used in the UK as it differs very much from the system I am used to.'

It is worth remembering the need to be explicit referred to in section 6: the *what* the *how* and the *why* of learning and teaching in the UK before students are asked to do work that will be assessed. Students have then the chance to understand how learning outcomes relate to assessment. No feedback or poor feedback results in depriving students of information they need to develop.

Some Economics students feel they are left ignorant of their progress and that there is too much dependence on the final exam. Comments include *:

> 'We rarely get any feedback on our submitted work.'

> 'Very little feedback received through all courses.'

Realistically, giving feedback to students' work is very time consuming and possibly one of the most unrewarding tasks we have to engage with. It frequently relies on us having to work long hours, in our own time. Giving feedback to the work of international students can be more complex, and more time-consuming as we need to be sensitive with the way language is used. Frequently, the cumulative spelling difficulties, unusual use of words, and uncommon sentence structure can make it very hard for us to feel constructive; to interpret appreciatively the meanings behind what is stated; and to mark the work fairly.

For us to return work in a timely manner can be difficult. But unless we do so, the feedback is unlikely to be of much use as it can require a lot of effort for students to refocus on the work many weeks after they submitted it. Hence the large numbers of marked essays and work that students do not collect as they have already moved onto something else! To empathise with this, think of the effort it may require for us to try to engage constructively with reviewers' comments regarding a paper we have submitted for publication three months earlier! It really can be hard work as we too have moved on! The same happens to students*:

> '[Feedback is] normally received too late to be of any help';

> 'Highly poor at my university, you have to chase lecturers for feedback.'

As we expressed above, to give one-to-one feedback to all international students is unrealistic as usually there is not enough time. If we consider that instead of detailed feedback from reviewers on a paper we submitted for publication, we are given a list of general areas of improvement, we may be in a better position to empathise with the frustrations expressed below *:

> 'If the lecture give feedback one-to-one, it is very useful; just give classification is useless.'

> 'I would have loved a lot more feedback and criticism specifically about my own assignments rather than discussing them in groups.'

Hyatt (2005) discusses types of feedback, and the importance of giving encouragement and appreciation to students with the purpose of establishing and maintaining good academic and social relationships.

One way of personalising formative comments is by adopting the following structure:

1. We start with a brief sentence of appreciation for the effort/time the student has invested.
2. We describe what has been done well.
3. We highlight three points that need further development.
4. We finish by hoping that the student's future work may gain from our feedback.

In our experience, following such a structure makes the task of marking large numbers of essays and exams more personable and focused, coherent and fair for everyone involved. We work more efficiently and students receive a personalised constructive feedback that is fair for all in terms of the effort we put in.

The following suggestions are designed to make students gain an appreciation of the time taken to assess and to articulate feedback.

1. Give students as much preparation as you can prior to the actual evaluation. Explain how they will be tested and what is expected of them. Providing students with examples of model answers to past papers, for example, gives them a clear idea of the standards they should be aiming for. The Economics Network has excellent resources on this.

2. Before students have to submit an assessed piece of work, post a piece of work with errors and suggest that they:

    a) comment and mark it following specific criteria;

    b) write suggestions for improving the work;

    c) bring their conclusions to the lecture or tutorial to share with colleagues;

    d) in the lecture or tutorial, give five minutes for international and UK students to share their conclusions in mixed groups.

After the students hand in their work for assessment, a way of addressing the multiple tensions referred to above is as follows:

1. We post a numbered list of formative comments on particular difficulties, frequent misinterpretations and errors on the virtual learning environment or by email;
2. We suggest that the students reflect on the completed task, and conduct self-assessment in their own time with reference to the numbered list we provided;
3. We ask the students to bring a copy of their self-assessed work to the following lecture or tutorial;
4. We address the points on the numbered list in plenary.

This gives international students a chance to understand better the type of feedback they are likely to receive, and to know what to expect.

TOP TIPS

We can provide students with a list of common difficulties that they can use for self-assessment, and use the same list when we assess their work, to provide consistency of terms of reference. If new patterns of difficulties emerge, we can add them to complement the previous list.

Fullekrug et al. (2007) engaged in an assessment protocol that included students sharing their lecture notes online with other students and with the lecturers. This became an interesting approach to share understandings of the topic and to complement, clarify and/or correct the notes. The co-created lecture notes were compiled as a comprehensive booklet which led to a sense of group ownership. This type of assessment with feedback increased focus and purpose. The staff involved learnt the common difficulties presented by the subject and the time spent assessing the work was effectively reduced.

A word about language. Even though some international students will come to the UK to ‘improve the language to perfection’, once they stop attending English language courses their level of written English can deteriorate rapidly. Therefore, whilst as lecturers or teachers we do not have the time or training to provide detailed feedback on language use, it is advisable to make occasional comments about this (for example, relating to word structure, making plurals and using articles).

17. Being a reflective practitioner

Reflecting on our contribution to motivating international students

In this section we highlight the need to engage in reflective processes regarding our contribution to motivate international students. This can be aided by answering questions along the following lines:

- Did we manage to follow our session plan easily or did we feel we struggled? If we did not follow the session plan, how did we diverge from it? In particular, did some part of the lecture take longer to present? Should we change the session plan to accommodate for this?
- Were most students happy to work in groups? Did the students engage well in activities proposed? If not, what can we do to improve this?
- Did the students write down in groups as we had asked them to? If not, do we have to show previous examples, and reaffirm why it is important to write such notes?
- Did a majority of students prepare for the lecture or tutorial? If not, what can we do to improve this?
- Did international students ask questions? If not, what can we do to improve this?
- Did international students contribute to the discussions? If not, what can we do to improve this?
- Were international students happy to share their experiences in plenary? If not, what can we do to improve this?
- Did we feel comfortable in answering questions? If not, what can we do to improve this?
- Did international students share any problems we need to investigate?

As McMahon (2007) puts it 'No one wants to be a poor teacher; unfortunately, many do not start well.' In our experience, it is very difficult, if not impossible to have a clear perception of our own lecturing and teaching. We need the input of others, including students and colleagues, to balance our perceptions. For example, being observed by a mentor or a more experienced colleague is useful to monitor our practice.

Reflection to develop our performance in motivating international students is very important. We strongly recommend being filmed lecturing. The audiovisual services in many institutions are normally happy to provide the equipment and expertise. Receiving constructive feedback from an experienced colleague as we watch ourselves lecture and engage with our students, can be very powerful in transforming our practice to motivate further international students.

TOP TIPS

We can support our reflective processes by looking for indicators that international students perceive us as approachable, for example, that we are inspiring them to do work in their own time and that they feel able to contribute to group learning.

18. Where next? Further reading and web resources

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Caruana, V.and Spurling, N. (2007) The Internationalisation of UK Higher Education: a review of selected material. Project Report http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/tla/internationalisation/lit_review_internationalisation_of_uk_he_v2.pdf

Outcomes from institutional audit. Arrangements for international students. Second series
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/outcomes/series2/InternationalStudents.pdf

Library services for international students, SCONUL,
http://www.sconul.ac.uk/groups/access/papers/international_students.pdf

Jones, E. and Brown, S. (eds) (2007) Internationalising Higher Education: Enhancing Learning, Teaching and Curriculum and a review by Lee, C. (2008)
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Fielden, J., Middlehurst, R. and Woodfield, S. (2007) *Global Horizons for UK Students. A guide for universities*, London: Council for Industry & Higher Education.

Appleton, J., Hirst, S., Leggott, D. Mwanje, Z. Stapleford, J. (2008)
Hands-on Internationalisation, edited by David Killick, Leeds Metropolitan University
http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/alt/docs/Hands_on_Internationalisation.pdf

Assessing group work
http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/03/group.html

Advice for students unfamiliar with assessment practices in Australian higher education
http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/03/intstuds.html

A 14-minute video useful for reflecting about learning and teaching in large classes in general. It is not aimed at learning and teaching international diverse student cohorts so we believe activities need to be introduced more frequently considering a 7–10 minute attention span rather than the 20 minute proposed as we discuss in section 8.
Teaching Large Classes. A video featuring Graham Gibbs
http://learningandteaching.dal.ca/vhtest/largeclasses.html

A useful reference for students is the OU's online resource on mathematics and statistics, Chapter 3 'The language of proof'. This can be accessed by guests at
http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/file.php/3776/M208_5_Section3.pdf

A good source of information for graphics can be found at
http://personal.ashland.edu/jgarcia/Macroeconomics%20233/MacroEconPowerpt2004/Chap002a%20Graphing.ppt

The University of Leeds Language Centre has an easy-to-use, self-paced interactive resource that can be an excellent tool to support international students:
http://www.leeds.ac.uk/languages/resource/english/graphs/tren6b.htm.

National Student Forum. Annual Report 2008. Available at:
http://s52158.gridserver.com/NSF_annual_report_2008.pdf

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http://www.asterix.com

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Economics Network
http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/

Economics Network Alumni Survey (Economics Graduates) (2004)
http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/projects/alumni_survey2004.pdf

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http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/projects/alumni_survey2008.pdf

Economics Network Online Learning and Teaching Materials
http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/links/othertl.htm

Economics Network Lecturer Survey 2007
http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/projects/lec_survey2007.pdf

Economics Network National Economics Students Survey 2008 report
http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/projects/stud_survey2008_full.pdf

ERA Licensing Scheme
http://www.era.org.uk/about_era.html

Etc
http://www.staffs.ac.uk/schools/business/iepr/etc/index.htm

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All links were last checked on 21 February 2009.

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