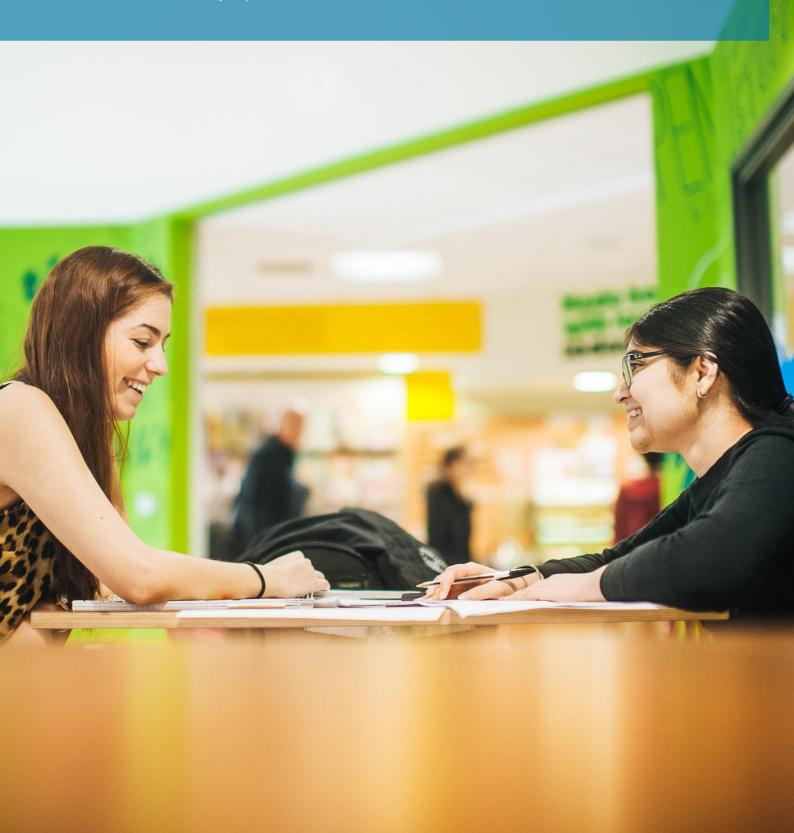# Intercultural competencies

The information on these pages has been developed as part of the Teaching International Students project

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1. Introduction

Intercultural competencies are those knowledge, skills and attitudes that comprise a person's ability to get along with, work and learn with people from diverse cultures.

Higher education can provide an excellent opportunity for students and staff to explore and practise the development of intercultural competencies. However, there is both anecdotal and research evidence to suggest that this does not always happen, nor does it happen by chance. Staff within higher education are well positioned to acquire and develop these skills and to encourage the development of these skills in students first by modelling these skills themselves and also by using specific strategies within their classes. Clearly these are competencies for all students, not just international ones.

2. The main issues: getting started

2.1 Developing your own intercultural competencies

- Find time to learn a little about the cultural backgrounds of your colleagues and students

- You can't learn about the cultures of all of your students but you can develop a 'meta-awareness' (Louie, 2005; Ryan & Louie, 2007) about the different kinds of experiences and expectations they may have

- Reflect on your own culture and its approaches to education.
  See your colleagues and students as a learning resource - they may be able to provide insights into how the whole system and your discipline is taught and practised elsewhere

- Consider your attitude: how do you feel about mixing and socialising with international colleagues and teaching international students? Do any prejudices and preconceptions arise when thinking about particular cultures (even within your own country), and if so, how can you transmute them into feelings of openness and appreciation or at least of professional respect?

2.2 Developing your students' intercultural competencies

You can do much to help your students, both home and international.

- Alongside your teaching provide a commentary on why you are teaching the topic as you are; e.g. 'examining opposing arguments here encourages critical thinking around...'. The commentary will help international students, but also home students who will begin to habitually see that the approaches commonly used here are just one way of teaching and that the curriculum is just one form within a range across the world.

- Once the academic year is well underway, encourage and sometimes insist that students work in unfamiliar and diverse groups in classroom exercises - see the Group work section of this resource bank for tips on how best to manage this.

- Build in opportunities for students to reflect on their learning experiences - can they discuss their personal challenges as well as their positive experiences with their peers?

- Ask students to generate their own ideas for creating an inclusive learning environment.

- Encourage students to participate in the wider opportunities that universities and local communities offer, such as activities in line with global citizenship ideals like volunteering.

3. Top tip

Use an Empathy Game with students - there is nothing like 'walking in another's shoes' to better appreciate the experiences of being an international student.

4. Top resources

Cross-cultural capability at Leeds Met ALT resources

UKCISA (2008). Bridging our worlds: A DVD for training staff working with international students. Trainers DVD and Manual.

5. Further Reading

Barker, S., & Crichton, J. (2008). Assessing and evaluating intercultural teaching and learning: an information management case study. Journal of International Education in Business, 1(1), 29-42

Campbell, N. (2012). Promoting intercultural contact on campus: A project to connect and engage international and host students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 16(3), 205-227. Discusses a peer mentoring scheme at the University of Waikato in New Zealand where home students and international students are placed in buddy pairs to promote mixing of home and international students.

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Crichton, J. & Scarino, A. (2007). How are we to understand the 'intercultural dimension'?: An examination of the intercultural dimension of internationalisation in the context of higher education in Australia. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 30(1), 0.41-04.21.

Crose, B. (2011). Internationalization of the higher education classroom: Strategies to facilitate intercultural earning and academic success. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 23(3), 388-395.

Crossman, J. & Bordia, S. (2011). Friendship and relationships in virtual and intercultural learning: Internationalising the Business curriculum. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 51(2), 329-354.

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Gopal, A. (2011). Internationalization of higher education: Preparing faculty to teach cross-culturally. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 23(3), 373-381.

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Ryan (Ed.), *Cross-cultural teaching and learning for home and international students: Internationalisation of Pedagogy and Curriculum in Higher Education*. London: Routledge. pp. 196-210.

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Jones, E. & Leask, B. (2010) *Measurement of Intercultural Competence.* Presentation to AIEA Annual Conference, Washington DC, 14-17 Feb 2010

Killick, D. (n.d.) *Cross cultural capability and global perspectives: Guidelines for curriculum review.*

Krajewski, S. (2011). Developing intercultural competence in multilingual and multicultural student groups. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 10(2), 137-153.

Louie, K. (2005). Gathering cultural knowledge: useful or handle with care? In J. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds), Teaching international students: Improving learning for all (17-25). London: Routledge.

Reid, S. & Spencer-Oatey, H. (2013) Towards the global citizen: Utilising a competency framework to promote intercultural knowledge and skills in higher education students. In J. Ryan (Ed.), *Cross-cultural teaching and learning for home and international students*

Ryan, J. & Louie, K. (2007). False dichotomy?: 'Western' and 'Eastern' concepts of scholarship and learning. Educational Philosophy and Theory (39)4, 404-417.

Sanderson, G. (2008). A foundation for the internationalization of the academic Self in higher education. Journal of Studies in International Education, 12 (3), 276-307.

Sovic, S. & Blythman, M. (2013) *International students negotiating higher education: Critical perspectives*. London: Routledge

Teekens, H. (2000). A description of nine clusters of qualifications for lecturers. In H. Teekens (Ed.), Teaching and learning in the international classroom (pp 22-39). The Hague: Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education (Nuffic).

Waldron, R. (2013) Learning agency: The interactional negotiation of difference and identity in group work. In The International Academic Forum's *European Conference on Education Conference Proceedings, 2013,* pp.1-12.

6. Related resources

Birmingham City University "Cultural Awareness" resources website

Briguglio, C. (2006). Empowering students by developing their intercultural communication competence: A two-way process. Paper presented at the 17th ISANA International Conference, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

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Graduate qualities: transferable skills and intercultural competence. - David Clarke et al University of Nottingham

Freeman, M. (2009). Embedding the Development of Intercultural Competence in Business Higher Education. Download the report from the linked page.

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