



# A classroom toolkit for teaching international students

## Supporting you to better support your international students

This toolkit is designed to help university lecturers create more inclusive, engaging, and culturally responsive learning experiences. It brings together a 10 point strategy with reflective questions and practical tips to support your classroom practice. Whether you are designing a new module or refreshing your teaching approach, these ideas aim to support all students, especially international students, to feel more welcome, more confident and more able to succeed.

### 1. Start with inclusive curriculum design

This is important because we want to give our students the best chance to connect early.

#### Ask yourself:

- Does the teaching content reflect a range of global perspectives?
- Are the learning outcomes accessible to students from different educational and cultural backgrounds?
- Do the assessments give students the opportunities to connect in with their lived experiences?
- Have I made the expectations of UK Higher Education clear at the outset?

**Top tip:** Include a short “welcome to the module” guide that explains key terms, assessment types and how to get help.

#### Practical tips:

- ✓ Use examples, case studies, and reading from a variety of countries and contexts.
- ✓ Avoid assuming students are familiar with UK-specific references, idioms, or academic conventions.
- ✓ Be explicit about what's expected in your teaching and assessments. Don't assume students “just know”.
- ✓ Think about the positioning of your activities – allow for late arrivals to catch up.

### 2. Build a sense of belonging from day one

#### Why it matters:

International students often face challenges settling in, from language and cultural differences to feeling homesick and unfamiliar with our academic norms.

**Top tip:** Make space for informal chat before or after class, which helps build rapport and makes students feel seen.

#### Practical tips:

- ✓ Learn and use students' names (and check pronunciations).
- ✓ Use icebreakers that allow students to share something about themselves or their country background.
- ✓ Mix up groups regularly to encourage cross-cultural interaction.
- ✓ Use digital tools like *Vevox*, *Mentimeter* or *Padlet* to allow anonymous contributions. This is great for students who are still building confidence to speak out.

### 3. Make language and communication clear

**Keep in mind:** Even fluent English speakers may struggle with fast-paced lectures, unfamiliar vocabulary, or academic jargon.

**Top tip:** Create a glossary of key terms for your module. Students can even help build it as teaching goes on.

#### Practical tips:

- ✓ Speak clearly and don't rush. You can pause to check students progress.
- ✓ Repeat the key points you want to make in a number of different ways; reclarify tasks.
- ✓ Provide written instructions alongside verbal ones – use the whiteboard/share in Canvas.
- ✓ Use visuals to support key points.
- ✓ Avoid idioms or explain them when used.

### 4. Design assessments that support learning

Assessments can be daunting, especially when students are unfamiliar with UK academic expectations.

**Top tip:** Talk students through the marking rubric in class. Better still, get them to mark a sample together and discuss it.



#### Practical tips:

- ✓ Break down assessments into stages (e.g. one page outline, initial draft and final submission).
- ✓ Use exemplars to show what good work looks like and what can be improved.
- ✓ Use examples of less good work to show how this will be marked/what is not acceptable.
- ✓ Create an opportunity in class for students to mark previous examples, so they become familiar with the marking rubric and how their own work will be marked.
- ✓ Incorporate regular formative assessment and feedback to help students build confidence and develop their academic skills over time.
- ✓ Provide clear, constructive feedback and explain how to feed this forward.

### 5. Encourage peer learning and collaboration

#### Why it matters:

Students often learn best from each other, especially when navigating a new academic culture.

**Top tip:** Consider asking your international students to share their ideas in class first, so they have an early platform to share.

#### Practical tips:

- ✓ Use peer feedback activities with clear guidance and sentence starters.
- ✓ Encourage students to share examples from their own countries or experiences – it enriches the learning for everyone.
- ✓ When it comes to a group task, assign specific roles to students, such as timekeeper, note-taker, presenter, to ensure everyone contributes.

## 6. Offer cultural orientation within the module

Small cultural misunderstandings can affect participation and assessment performance.

**Top tip:** Normalise questions about cultural differences – let students know it's okay not to know and that curiosity is encouraged.

### Practical tips:

- ✓ Early in the module, dedicate 10–15 minutes to explain UK classroom norms (e.g. interaction expectations, office hours, group work etiquette).
- ✓ Share examples of “what good looks like” in UK academic work.
- ✓ Acknowledge cultural differences in communication styles and invite students to reflect on their own experiences.
- ✓ Celebrate cultural diversity through activities where students bring examples or perspectives from their home countries.
- ✓ Use images on your teaching materials that students will recognise and connect in with.

## 7. Use technology to support inclusion

Digital tools can help international students engage at their own pace, contribute more confidently and reduce language barriers. They also provide multiple ways to access and process information, which supports diverse learning preferences.

**Top tip:** Choose one or two digital tools and use them consistently, so students can become familiar and confident with them.



### Practical tips:

- ✓ Pre-record key explanations (short clips) so students can revisit them in their own time.
- ✓ Use lecture capture and/or provide transcripts to make content accessible for students who may need more time to process language or concepts.
- ✓ Encourage questions through interactive platforms such as *Padlet*, *Vevox* or *Microsoft Forms*. These allow for anonymous contributions, which can support students who may be hesitant to speak up in class. Be aware that some students may not be familiar with these platforms and so may need some help in groups first to get used to them.
- ✓ Provide structured templates or outlines for tasks to give students a clear starting point and reduce uncertainty.
- ✓ Offer optional online discussion forums to create peer support spaces outside of class time.

## 8. Scaffold academic skills throughout the module

Many international students are adjusting to different academic expectations (e.g. critical analysis, referencing, debate), so embedding support throughout the module rather than as one-off sessions can make a big difference.

**Top tip:** Build skills into the assessment journey (e.g. having students submit a draft or outline for structured formative feedback) rather than treating this as separate from the curriculum.

### Practical tips:

- ✓ Integrate short “skills moments” into lectures and seminars (e.g. 5-minute referencing recap, mini activity on critical thinking).
- ✓ Collaborate with academic skills teams, including the Library Skills for Learning support and Student Success Coaches, to run or support short, tailored workshops within your module.
- ✓ Provide optional drop-in sessions or online Q&A slots before key assessments.
- ✓ Signpost to language support or study skills services early, not just when problems arise.

## 9. Embed wellbeing and pastoral support signposting

International students may not always know where to find help or may feel unsure about asking for support.

**Top tip:** If it is not the right time to approach a student with an offer of support in class time, ensure you contact them later to check they are doing ok and remind of the support available.

### Practical tips:

- ✓ Build signposting slides into Week 1 (and remind periodically).
- ✓ Clearly explain the difference between academic, pastoral, and visa-related support services.
- ✓ Encourage peer support groups or student to student mentoring between cohorts.
- ✓ Make time in class, before starting the lesson, in the break or after the lesson to "check in" periodically.

## 10. Reflect and adapt your style

Teaching is never static. What works for one group might not work for the next, and that's okay. To enhance your teaching practice, it's helpful to reflect and gather evidence of what works continuously.

**Top tip:** Set one small new teaching goal for yourself each week (e.g. "I'll try a new group activity" or "I'll slow down when explaining tasks").

### Practical tips:

- ✓ After each teaching session, jot down what went well and what could be improved.
- ✓ Ask students for quick feedback e.g. "What helped you learn today?".
- ✓ Observe a colleague's session or invite them to observe you. Fresh eyes can be helpful.
- ✓ Use short surveys mid-semester to check experiences.
- ✓ Reflect on feedback from External Examiners or NSS regarding inclusivity.
- ✓ Share good practice within your school, faculty and wider university.



### Link to podcast:

<https://wlv.cloud.panopto.eu/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=50d3cc3c-693a-4a5d-879d-b37c00a92ce4>

### Additional ideas/questions:

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