



PTAS Project Report (for SMALL PROJECT GRANTS)

Project Title: Enhancing International Postgraduate Student Experience at History, Classics & Archaeology

Principal Investigator : Dr Wendy Ugolini
School / Department : History, Classics & Archaeology

Team members : Alexandra Huang, Research Assistant

For further information, please contact: Wendy Ugolini

Grant recipients are expected to submit a brief report at the conclusion of their project which outlines briefly the following : nature of work completed; outcomes; benefits to student learning/student experience; dissemination activity (where relevant – actual and planned) and how the activity could inform future work or be transferred to other subject areas in the University. The brief report will be published on the IAD web pages.

Brief Report (maximum 500 words)

As part of her role as PG Director at HCA, the PI, Dr Wendy Ugolini, was keen to assess the Graduate School's approach to the academic and pastoral care of its overseas students. Student feedback from PTES and PRES surveys in 2019 suggested that international students would like to see a more 'inclusive' social and academic environment within the Graduate School. Preliminary discussions with colleagues at Edinburgh Global, the School of Education, English Language Education and Student Well-being Services also suggested that students from international and culturally diverse backgrounds face a particular set of challenges whilst studying at Edinburgh. This can include transitioning from a different culture of learning which inhibits students from seeking available academic help, different modes of learning which create anxieties over assessments and feedback and a reluctance to access mental health and other support services. These issues can be particularly pertinent for East Asian students and other students for whom English is not their first language.

The project was initially delayed due to the impact of the covid-19 pandemic. However, Alexandra Huang was employed as the Project's Research Assistant from September 2021 to January 2022 and undertook qualitative and quantitative research with student volunteers. This took the form of in-person focus groups, paper questionnaires and an online survey. As the project was relatively short, we focused on five key aspects of international postgraduate student experience, with an additional section on PGR students: Welcome Week, Postgraduate Teaching at HCA, Engagement with assignment feedback, Student Communities, Pastoral support and Supervision (PGR only).

We produced a final project report which was approved by HCA's Senior Management Committee in April 2022. As part of Welcome Week events, students expressed an interest in inter-programme mixing with other postgraduate students within the University. In terms of creating a



sense of student community, a key finding was the need to provide more small-scale social events for MSc students which include international students (e.g., trips to cinema or football matches) at the start of the academic year. In relation to feedback, it was felt that there was a need for clarity on the HCA Common Marking Scheme and Grade Descriptors for international students. Course organisers should also be encouraged to introduce mid-semester assessments to provide an earlier feedback opportunity for students. The final project recommendations will be taken forward by the Graduate School and the intention is to set up a Working Group on International Students at HCA to continue to identify appropriate academic and pastoral support structures which will enhance the learning and teaching environment for our overseas students. A key part of this would be to work with staff and students on intercultural communication skills. The full set of final project recommendations were also sent to the PG Dean and the Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity and can be found here:

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/enhancing-international-student-experience/2022/04/29/final-report-recommendations/>

A copy of the full report is available on request from Dr Ugolini.

Financial statement (please delete as appropriate):

Either

This project has utilised the funding awarded to it by the PTAS adjudication committee and the Principal Investigator or School Administrator appropriate can provide financial statements showing the funding usage as and when required by the UoE Development Trusts who may require it for auditing purposes.

Please send an electronic PDF copy of this report to:

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