

Five tips for cultural inclusion in your research team

Recruiting researchers and hosting visiting academics from different countries and collaborating on a global scale is key to developing your international impact. As such, cultural inclusion is fundamental. Including people from different backgrounds is important for diversity, but ensuring they feel valued, welcomed and respected will help them reach their maximum potential.

Clear and empathetic communication will help you develop your relationships as most people are happy to talk about their culture and background when you ask in an open, respectful and genuinely interested way. It can be helpful to [review our Listening video](#) and consider how Level 3 listening can help you.

Below are some areas that you might want to consider when helping researchers from overseas feel welcome in your group, department or collaboration.

1. First language

- Knowing what someone's first language is, together with knowing what their experience of working in English has been, will help you establish a basis for communication.
- Many European languages use the same script as English and have cognates, words that are similar, e.g. University in English and Universidad in Spanish. These two aspects combined mean that it is generally less challenging for someone coming from a country such as Germany compared to someone coming from China where the script is different and there are fewer cognates.
- Be mindful of your use of metaphorical language, such as idioms, as these rarely translate easily into another language. Describing something as 'a dog's dinner' or saying you 'can't see the wood for the trees' can be confusing to someone who is new to the UK.
- Similarly, be careful of how many phrasal or prepositional verbs you use – these are very common in English and consist of a verb + a preposition to create a unique meaning. Using the phrasal verb "To look up to someone" is often more complicated than the simpler "to respect" for someone whose first language isn't English.

2. Holidays and festivals

These naturally differ around the world, but it is important to understand if there are certain ones that an overseas team member feels particularly strongly about. They may wish to take time off to observe the holiday / festival according to particular customs or they may feel the need to travel home to enjoy them with their family. Ask them when they wish to take time to celebrate holidays.

3. Working culture

Academics may come from countries where the working culture is very different to the one in the UK and specifically at Imperial College London. You may find it useful to talk to your team member about:

- The importance of hierarchy – how does their home country view titles and superiority? How comfortable do they feel about approaching senior members of staff? They may come from a very structured system where it would be considered disrespectful to question or confront someone senior about their work or opinions.
- Social connection with work colleagues – how do they feel about socialising? Is it something that's encouraged in their home country or are there strict norms about mixing?

- Approach to feedback – are they used to receiving positive and constructive feedback? Are they used to being asked for feedback?

4. Cultural norms

The UK has a culture of encouraging free speech and debate as well as challenging the status quo. This might be quite different to the researcher's home country and may need some explaining or time for them to adjust. Areas that they might find different include the enthusiasm to comment on Politics and the focus on diversity, inclusion and belonging e.g. LGBTQ+ issues. For more advice and support on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion topics, take a look at our resources sections ([link to diversity materials](#))

5. New to the UK

If someone has arrived for the first time in the UK they may need time and help to deal with:

- Opening a bank account
- Finding accommodation
- Registering with a doctor / dentist
- Finding a school for children

It can be helpful to find them a buddy who can help them with non-work-related issues or put them in touch with College groups that support staff from overseas.