



**DECOLONISING
DMU**

The Education Academy

Decolonising DMU Toolkit

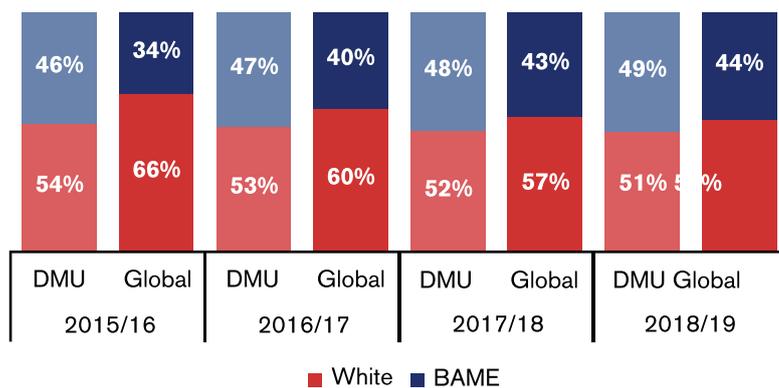
Supporting Students with Global Travel

What is the issue/ problem this resource will help to address? Context setting

For many students, global travel is an important aspect of their studies and of their university experience. They may be attending a short field trip; spending a year studying abroad on an exchange programme or taking part in an overseas work placement.

Black, Asian & ethnically minoritized students are under-represented in global exchange programmes, not only at DMU, but throughout the sector. At DMU there are clear differences in participation levels between shorter length forms of global travel and one-year exchanges. This figure compares student participation in DMU Global overseas opportunities compared to the percentage of BAME students at the institution:

Ethnicity



When we consider participation in longer exchange visits the differences are clear:

Studying on Exchange data

Academic year	Percentage of ethnic minority participants
2019-20	16%
2020-21	16%
2021-22	28%
2022-23	28%



Pre-mobility preparation of students traditionally focuses on practical and logistical content such as application processes, funding and accommodation. Amongst this, cultural preparation can get easily overlooked. Where it is delivered, it is typically designed to suit the representative majority amongst the outgoing cohort, presenting concepts (e.g. intercultural awareness) and addressing matters like respecting the local population and language barriers.

Whilst this knowledge is beneficial for students from underrepresented backgrounds, there needs to be an additional, deeper level of discussion and groundwork around issues that impact specifically these students. (In this resource students from underrepresented backgrounds are those from Black, Asian or other ethnically minoritized groups, but many of the issues discussed are also relevant to students travelling abroad who have other protected characteristics.) This could include:

- Dealing with serious incidents related to racism or harassment;
- Microaggressions;
- The availability of certain products they may require when overseas;
- The ability to practice their faith in the host destination.

To gain a better understanding of the issues these students may face, it is not sufficient to look at the surface-level information that is available to us, such as their ethnicity, household income etc. Instead, it is vital to consider the journeys that the students have undertaken to reach the decision of participating in student mobility.

Those from underrepresented backgrounds may be the first in their family to attend university, let alone study abroad (as is the case of a large percentage of students at De Montfort University). These students may also suffer a backlash from their family for 'abandoning' them in favour of spending a prolonged amount of time away (especially those students who are from a collectivist culture where the needs of the group/social circle are put ahead of the individual). The value of the benefits of placements or exchange visits may not surpass other priorities and can be considered a luxury. In contrast, students who regularly participate in exchange visits may have taken attending university as something for granted, and have a background where they are encouraged to leave home and try new things.

For example, the feeling of homesickness is commonly experienced by students taking part in exchange visits or placements. Students in both categories will miss being surrounded by familiar faces but those in the first category may experience the additional pressure of having left their family without support every time they make a phone call home. Consequently, these students are likely to carry a heavier emotional load whilst overseas compared to their peers.

Similarly, the impacts of harassment, micro-aggressions, issues around practising faith and obtaining culturally appropriate products, while seemingly small can manifest in different ways. Over time they can 'contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity and fattened confidence' (Pierce, 1995, p. 281) of the students and can 'come at great psychic, emotional, and physical cost to the targeted individuals.' (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011).

Black, Asian and ethnically minoritized students have much to gain from participating in global travel as part of their studies, but they also face additional barriers in doing so.



How should the resource be used and by whom?

This resource is aimed at university staff who are engaged in supporting student mobility. It considers:

- Pre-departure preparation
- Micro-aggression training
- Resources for students

The resources:

- 1. Supporting students to prepare themselves <https://dmuglobal.com/minority-students/>** – This is a collection of resources for students who are planning global travel. It considers the experiences of other Black, Asian or ethnically minoritized students and travellers; sources of support for students whilst overseas; country specific resources and advice for travellers.
- 2. Running pre-departure microaggressions training & other pre-departure preparation** – Microaggressions are ‘brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults.’

An example

Angel’s boyfriend, who is White, visited her for a few weeks during her trip to Spain. In Madrid, they encountered non-verbal hostility as people seemed unprepared or uncomfortable ...to see a Black woman with a White man. “I got horrible looks and stares and just the body language, nonverbal mind you. They never said anything derogatory to me. It was all nonverbal body posture, [body] language, the rolling of the eyes, the turn up of the face, the turn away of the head.”

Willis, T., 2015. “And Still We Rise...”: Microaggressions and Intersectionality in the Study Abroad Experiences of Black Women. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 26(1), pp.209-230.

Microaggressions are frequently experienced by people of colour, irrespective of where they are. While not all students may experience a hugely significant negative encounter when they travel, it is likely that they will come across microaggressions in some capacity. These may well feel more significant due to cultural barriers when students are travelling overseas.

Providing training in how to deal with microaggressions as part of pre-departure preparation ensures that students are conscious of this possibility and provides a space for them to share experiences and discuss strategies to deal with microaggressions. We have also found that microaggressions training is a useful starting point in addressing other aspects of pre-departure planning for under-represented groups, including students of colour.



Based on our experience of preparing students at DMU, we recommend that the following areas are addressed within the training:

1 Developing self-awareness

Provide opportunities to discuss students' journeys so far – understanding their identities, what is important to them and how they currently respond to their local surroundings (and how their surroundings respond to them).

Consider intersectionality – how are students' experiences affected by gender, race, socioeconomic class, sexuality, disability etc? Each of these factors makes students more or less susceptible to certain challenges.

2 Discuss the reception from locals and the host culture

How will students' identities, faith, culture etc be perceived in the host culture?

Students may experience negatives: host's lack of knowledge, resulting in curiosity and the asking of questions that can be uncomfortable; the violation of personal space, unwanted attention and non-verbal actions (such as expressions or signs); and finally considering the student as the only representative of their identity/race.

They may also experience positives: Being met with greater friendliness than expected; extra help; respectful curiosity; receiving solidarity and a sense of community from like-minded people or those who share identity.

How can this aid pre-mobility student preparation?

- **RESEARCH:** Look at information regarding how their identity is perceived at the host destination, whether there is any history of prejudice or discrimination against their identity and the notion of colour-blindness.
- **REFLECT:** Think about how they would feel if they are the only minority student in the group, whether they have met this before and how they dealt with it.
- **KNOWLEDGE:** Consulting resources such as travel guides and vlogs on social media here people have shared their lived experiences, knowing how to report incidents, what support networks are available and how to reach them.

I propose that this can be addressed by addressing these crucial topics which otherwise go unnoticed ahead of their mobility. Before going into the detail about the topics, the following factors in relation to the delivery of the support must also be considered:

- **Ensuring clarity and not making assumptions:** Drawing conclusions from limited information can do more damage than good. Therefore, delivering this as a discussion rather than a presentation is favoured, allowing space for dialogue and to seek clarification where required. This is mutually beneficial for both the student and the staff to learn from each other as the content is sensitive and specific.
 - **Providing a safe space:** Making it clear that it is a safe space is likely to encourage students to speak up as they may otherwise feel vulnerable opening up and sharing their opinions.
 - **Delivery format:** Depending on the number of students and the resources of the study abroad office, pre-departure sessions may be delivered in a large group, smaller groups or on a 1:1 basis. Where possible, providing public and private opportunities for students to speak ensures that they feel most comfortable.
- 

- **Not homogenizing all underrepresented groups:** People from different backgrounds will have unique needs and face different challenges. While not everything can be accounted for, it is important to be mindful of this and encourage diversity in the discussion and resources used.
- **Involving the full cohort:** A recurring dilemma is whether delivery of this content should only be to underrepresented students or whether it's possible to have the whole cohort present. The former reduces the possibility of students feeling inferior or shy to speak up and can provide a greater sense of solidarity amongst like-minded students. However, having all students present means they can learn from each other and be considerate of the realities of others, both on exchange and at home (e.g. a white student when dealing with an ethnic-minority individual abroad can consider discussions from this session in their approach). This would mean that underrepresented students don't feel singled out due to their background and avoids students having to identify as one way or another to participate.

Another significant consideration is the staff member who will be delivering the content. If there is a strong staff-student relationship, it will make it easier for the student to approach the study abroad office if they are experiencing a problem and seek a resolution rather than feeling like they are left alone to face it. Study abroad professionals tend to have had an exchange experience themselves, so can relate to the student. If they are from an underrepresented background and the student is aware of this, then even better. However, if they are not, as long as the staff doing the delivery can competently present and address these issues, it is likely to inspire some confidence amongst students. As often, issues such as racism or discrimination are simply not mentioned, due to their difficult nature. Depending on staff knowledge, expertise and resources, if it's not possible for this to be delivered internally, it is worth considering bringing in a specialist to do this as the students are likely to appreciate that this has been facilitated specifically for them. It could also serve as a shared learning experience between both staff and student.

We recommend covering this content:

1. **Introduction:** why this preparation is important; providing a clear rationale and explaining the impact of negative experiences will allow them to value what is being discussed and act as additional motivation to pay close attention.
2. **The student's experience so far:** Whilst this may be perceived as a time consuming task, this is an important content not only because it will provide them with a baseline to refer back to when comparing this to their time in the host destination, but it will also allow them to understand their current reality, what makes up their identity now and what is important to them, and the treatment they face from their current local surroundings. This can be done as a pre-session task to allow students to spend more time to reflect on it and it will also save time in the session. However, having this discussion in front of peers will lead to greater connection and understanding.
3. **Intersectionality:** Without considering how things can be further complicated by gender, race, socioeconomic class etc, the advice and support provided to students may not be wholly useful for them as each factor makes students more or less susceptible to certain challenges.
4. **Issues students may face from the host culture:** From the locals, one can potentially expect a lack of knowledge about the student's race or ethnicity, resulting in curiosity and the asking of questions that can be uncomfortable, the violation of personal space, unwanted attention and non-verbal actions (such as expressions or signs) and finally considering you as the only representative of your identity/race. Other things which may impact the treatment of locals can be the demographics of the particular location, i.e. if you are in a multicultural urban



city, perhaps there is more tolerance for diversity whether in smaller towns attitudes maybe less positive. Opposingly, this may result in positive interactions such as being met with greater friendliness than expected, extra help, respectful curiosity, receiving solidarity and a sense of community from like-minded people or those who share your identity.

5. Issues that students have control over: From the point of view of the student, they can control their knowledge and behaviour when encountering this. For example, researching information regarding how their identity is perceived at the host destination, any history of prejudice or discrimination against their identity and colour-blindness. Students may also reflect on how they would feel if they are the only minority student in the group, whether they have met this before and how they dealt with it, etc. They can take actions such as joining student societies as well as interest groups outside of the institution, consulting resources such as travel guides and vlogs on social media where people have shared their lived experiences, knowing how to report incidents, what support networks are available and how to reach them. Finally, dealing with incidents is a key point, the importance of validating one's reaction to a challenge, not shrugging it off as insignificant, taking a breath to decide whether you want to educate someone regarding a stereotype they may have used against you or to ignore them etc.

Ideally this support and advice will result in the student feeling more confident and comfortable with participating on a mobility overseas. They will be equipped with knowledge on how to react if something were to happen and manage this more effectively, ensuring that it doesn't have a lasting impact on their overall experience. Furthermore, this information is transferrable and educational in a life-long way, which is worth sharing with students to contribute to their future success and development, regardless of participating on mobility initiatives.

Produced by Aamena Meidell (she/her),
Student Exchange Officer,
Global Mobility Office

aamena.meidell@dmu.ac.uk

+44 (0)116 207 8407

For further information, contact
The Education Academy
dmu-ea@dmu.ac.uk

