

Coming to Britain

Coming to study in a different country is a major change to your life. Even though you probably felt very excited about coming here, adjusting to life in a new culture can be very stressful. For many of you there will also be the task of working and writing in a language which is not your mother tongue.

Feelings you may experience

- it is likely that you will experience some 'culture shock' when you arrive – many things will be different to what you have been used to, and this can feel bewildering and frustrating; for example food and climate may be different
- you have left behind friends, family and familiar situations for what is unfamiliar, and you will probably feel lonely, lost and homesick at times
- you may have had particular expectations of what being here would be like and may feel disappointed and let down if these are not met
- it may feel exhausting communicating and studying if English isn't your first language
- you may have been here a while and felt that you're starting to adjust; but then something – even quite small – goes wrong, and it all seems too much and you feel like giving up and going back home
- you may feel low in spirits and overwhelmed; it's not always easy to recognise these feelings – sometimes it may show as a feeling of being run-down and tired all the time
- people often find they are more liable to minor illnesses such as stomach aches, headaches and colds and flu when they have moved country; this is a reflection of the emotional strain of adjusting to life in a new country
- you may encounter other people's prejudices and assumptions about your culture, which can leave you upset or angry
- when you get to the end of your course you will probably be anticipating returning home; this can also be difficult and you can experience a kind of 'reverse culture shock', together with a sense of loss for the things you have enjoyed about life in London.

What might help

Understanding yourself in this new situation

- remember that this is a huge transition and all these feelings are normal and natural responses to adjusting to life in a different culture
- don't be too hard on yourself, adjusting to a move and making new relationships takes time
- think about your strengths and try to identify what has helped you to cope so far (and with difficult situations in the past)
- remember that others may be sharing similar feelings and it can help to talk to others and find you're not the only one; this will help you to feel more part of things; British students may also share some of your feelings if they are away from home for the first time

Adjusting to life in a different culture

- take opportunities to familiarise yourself with the culture here (reading papers, watching TV, talking to others)
- spending time with someone from the same culture can help you feel less isolated, you may find it easier to feel understood; you can talk about home, cook food you enjoy together, which may help you to feel less cut off; but try to get a balance – you'll feel more part of things if you also talk to people from British and other cultures, as well as have a more interesting time
- try not to be afraid to ask if you don't understand something or need help
- be open to the differences around you and enjoy the rich variety of social and cultural experiences that life in a London university can offer!
- keeping in contact with your friends and family back home can help you feel more settled (writing or arranging for them to phone you at an agreed time can help cut down on your phone bills!).

Making use of the help and support available at the University

The International Student Advice Team is based in the Sheppard Library near UniHelp and offer visa workshops, one to one appointments, as well as advice by email and telephone. Staff can be contacted at: intadvice@mdx.ac.uk or 020 8411 4507 or use <http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/your-support-services/make-an-appointment> and choose the link for International Student Advice.

For further information go to: <http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/your-support-services/visas-international>

LET (Learning Enhancement Team) can help with study skills and developing your written and spoken English. For more information please see: <http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/let>

The Student Welfare Advice Team provides information and help on a wide range of practical issues affecting all students, including regulations affecting overseas students. Please visit the UniHelp Desk or call 020 8411 3008 or email: welfare@mdx.ac.uk.

How to contact the Counselling and Mental Health Service

If feelings of depression, isolation or anxiety persist, take them seriously; talk to the counsellor or your GP. Please see website for up-to-date service details:

<http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/cmh>

The UniHelp Desk will be happy to tell you where to find the Counselling service or you can contact us at:

cmh@mdx.ac.uk

Further leaflets in this series

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Anxiety and panic
Bereavement and loss
Coping with trauma
Depression
Eating disorders
Exam anxiety
Helping someone you are concerned about
Managing stress
Mature students
Mental health
Presentation skills
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