

Welcome to Aston University and
School of Languages and Social
Sciences



Welcome from Professor Alec Cameron, Vice-Chancellor & Chief Executive



Dear applicant

The HE sector is currently experiencing an unprecedented scale and pace of change, combined with a high degree of ambiguity and uncertainty. Those universities able to adapt swiftly to a changing and increasingly competitive market will thrive. As a mid-sized, focused university Aston has the advantages of agility, innovation and team working that some other institutions do not. Our integrated placement year, our applicable, exploitable research, and our commitment to widening participation all help to make Aston distinct.

The 2014 Research Excellence Framework results recognised the quality and impact of Aston research. This research directly influences medical breakthroughs, advancements in engineering, innovation, policy and practice in government, and the strategies and performance of local and international business. The Times Higher Education REF rankings placed Aston University 35th in the UK and 78% of our submissions were judged to be World Leading or Internationally Excellent.

Teaching quality and the student experience are an important focus at Aston. We are committed to doing all we can to address the needs of students and to assisting them to achieve their career ambitions on graduation.

We very much look forward to receiving your application and learning more about how you would contribute to Aston's continuing success.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alec Cameron." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Professor Alec Cameron

About Aston University

Founded in 1895 and a University since 1966, Aston is a long established research-led University known for its world-class teaching quality and strong links to business and the professions.

Outstanding graduate employability

Aston has been a leading university for graduate employment success. With placements integrated into our degree programmes, students develop essential work skills, build industry connections and a professional profile. The majority of Aston graduates go on to graduate level jobs or further study within six months. We have strong relationships with national and international graduate employers, as well as smaller and local employers. These relationships are extremely important and make a real contribution to graduate employability.

Career focused programmes

Aston's close and established links with business, the public sector and the professions ensure that our career focused degree programmes are inspiring, challenging and constantly updated to equip students with essential work-related skills and experiences.

Excellence in teaching and research

We are committed to high quality teaching and academic excellence, ensuring we provide the highest standard of education to our students. Awarded TEF Gold in June 2017, the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) found that students from all backgrounds achieve 'consistently outstanding outcomes'.



Aston has an excellent reputation for research which shapes and improves lives. We're proud of the quality of our research and the real world applications developed as a result – it makes a substantial and beneficial difference to people, organisations and society.

International

Aston University is a popular choice for international students. We recognise and welcome the important academic contribution and cultural diversity international students bring to our university environment. Students from over 120 countries study at Aston University each year.

Birmingham – one of Europe's liveliest cities

Birmingham has a rich history which makes the city a unique and inspiring place to visit. It is internationally recognised as a leader in leisure, entertainment, shopping and sport and is an international centre for business, commerce and industry, housing numerous UK and overseas banks and law firms. Birmingham is home to world-class companies, innovative entrepreneurs and has one of the youngest populations in Europe. It is a dynamic, thriving and business-focused region and one that is well connected and centrally located in the UK.

A green, sustainable campus

Located in the centre of Birmingham our green, 40 acre campus houses all the University's academic, social and accommodation facilities for our 15,783 students. All staff have the opportunity to contribute to our sustainability agenda and practices.

University values

All staff are expected to demonstrate/promote the University's values and expectations, which are an integral part of our strategy and underpin the culture of the University.

In addition, our leaders are expected to be accountable, help to execute strategic visions of the University and share and set clear expectations that inspire those around them.

Our mission is to be the UK's leading university for students aspiring to succeed in business and the professions, where original research, enterprise and inspiring teaching deliver local and global impact.

In 2022 Aston University will have an international reputation for delivery of outstanding graduate outcomes and equipping business and communities with the skills for future success.

Staff expectations

All staff are expected to:

- Be committed to delivering high performance
- Recognise and praise the high performance of others
- Remain open to new ideas and seek to act quickly for positive change
- Develop themselves, and support the development of others
- Be ambitious, for themselves, their teams and the university
- Engage with others, listen, observe and communicate
- Focus on excellent customer service, finding solutions and saying "yes"
- Make reasoned decisions without fear of blame
- Engender trust through their own actions
- Be fair in all matters

Our beneficiaries

The University's beneficiaries are identified as three groups:

Students

The first and primary beneficiary of Aston University are the individuals who form our student body and who progress to become our alumni. Aston places students at the heart of our academic and professional endeavour.

Business and Industry

Our new strategy also has an emphasis on the businesses and other external organisations who engage with the University. Aston University is a market leader in industry-engaged research, as well as graduate employability. Our industry partners benefit from Aston's work both through our leading research and knowledge exchange, and from the quality of graduates we produce. Each student at Aston is offered the opportunity for a year-long work placement; these placements not only cement our relationships with industry but ensure businesses have access to work-ready graduates.

Region and Society

We are committed to having a positive and transformative impact on Birmingham and the West Midlands. Birmingham is one of the youngest cities in Europe and Aston University plays an important civic role by educating the leaders of the future. By emphasising research that has a regional impact, engaging with local businesses to develop a strong economy and educating top graduates, we are helping to shape our society around us.

The School of Languages and Social Sciences

The School of Languages and Social Sciences at Aston University is one of only a handful of unified academic units in the UK to span both the Humanities and Social Sciences. In doing so, it draws on a rich and distinguished tradition of teaching, scholarship and research. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Department of Modern Languages (French, German, Linguistics), as it was then known, was one of the UK's pioneers of the study of language in contemporary society. In 1998, reflecting the growing interest in Europe, it became the School of Languages and European Studies. In 2004, we adopted our current title.

Since then, the School has grown rapidly in student numbers and in its academic coverage. New single honours undergraduate degrees were introduced in Politics and International Relations (2005), Sociology (2007), English Language (2008) and Spanish (2012) and more recently we have added half degrees in English Literature (2017) and History (2018) with various combinations. Today, the School comprises four Departments: English, Languages & Translation Studies, Politics & International Relations and Sociology & Policy. The academic Departments are supported by the School Office.

This combination of subjects and the way they relate to each other is almost unique in British Higher Education and leaves the School ideally-placed to investigate how language and society function, both in their own context and in relation to each other. A particular opportunity for the future will be the exploitation of interdisciplinary perspectives on this question.

Our departments enjoy a strong reputation, both among students and our peers:

- ▶ In 2017, Aston was awarded Gold in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)
- ▶ In the 2017 National Student Survey (NSS), the School had an overall satisfaction rate of 90 per cent; on this measure, Sociology and Policy scored 93 per cent, Politics and International Relations 93 per cent, English 92 per cent, French 92 per cent and German 99 per cent.
- ▶ In the 2019 Guardian League Tables, Aston is ranked 50th for English, 21st for Sociology, 18th for Social Policy, 22nd for Modern Languages and 41st for Politics.
- ▶ In 2017, the Department of Sociology and Policy won the University's Excellence Award for Teaching. This comes on top of winning the 'Excellence in Teaching Sociology' Award of the British Sociological Association and the Higher Education Academy in 2013. The Department of Politics and International Relations won the Political Studies Association's Innovative Teaching Prize in 2018 for a module teaching negotiation through simulation.
- ▶ In [REF2014](#), the School's submission to the Area Studies subpanel was rated 3rd out of 23 institutions in the UK in terms of percentage 3*/4* research. The submission to the Modern Languages and Linguistics subpanel did particularly well in the area of research impact and places Aston within the top 10 institutions for that measure.

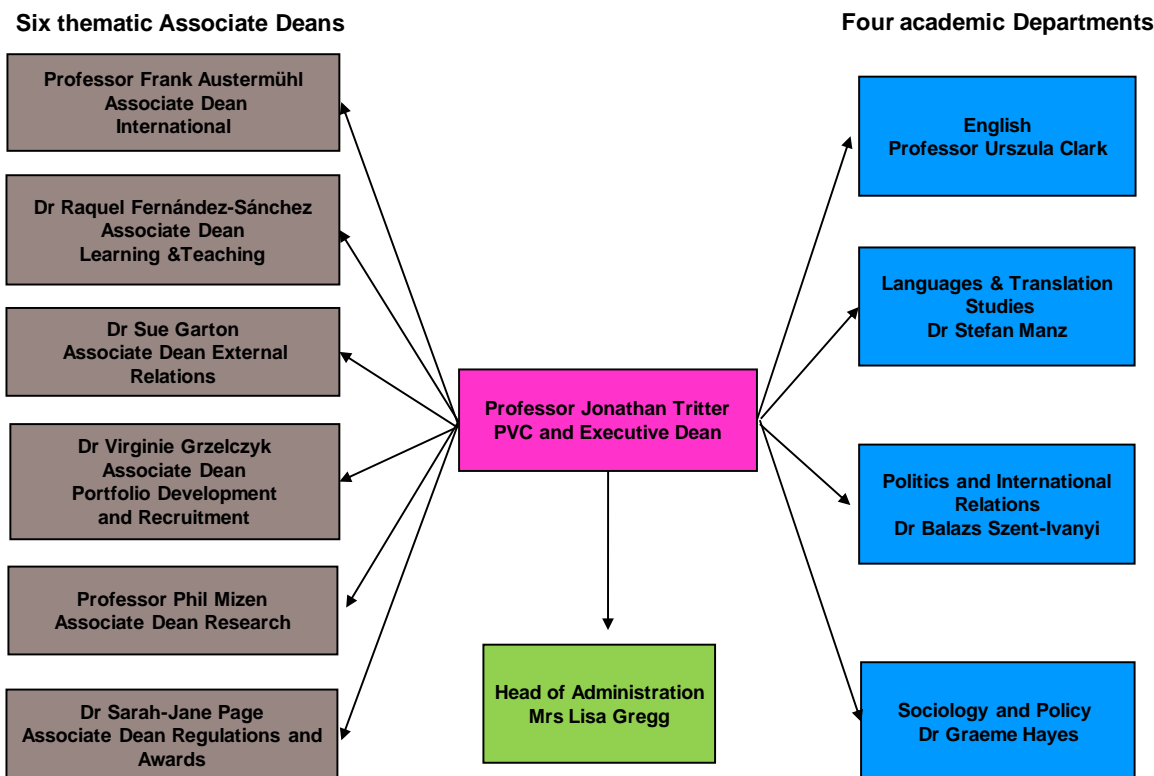
When combined with financially sound foundations, the School is therefore in a strong position. It has an ambitious strategy for the next five years, which recognises and seeks to exploit the symbiotic relationship between excellent teaching and research into real-world problems. In particular, we are focussed on three key categories of beneficiaries: our students, our region and society and employers in the public private and voluntary sectors. A key element of this strategy is the promotion of research excellence that is collaborative, multi-disciplinary and impactful.

The School is a collegiate and supportive environment, where teaching and research are both valued. We are proud of our diversity: around two-thirds of our staff are female and there are some 18 nationalities represented in our School. We have a well-developed structure for personal development and review and are bidding for Athena SWAN accreditation during 2018.

Organisationally, the School is led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean, Professor Jonathan Tritter, along with a team of Associate Deans and the Heads of Department. Together, they and the Head of Administration constitute the School's Management Committee. The Departments are supported by an administrative team as well by a range of central services, who together manage different aspects of the School's work, including research, admissions,

marketing, open days, student support, exams and timetabling. The School is further supported in its work by an Advisory Panel, whose membership is drawn from stakeholders and alumni in the city of Birmingham and beyond.

The School of Languages and Social Sciences, 2018-19



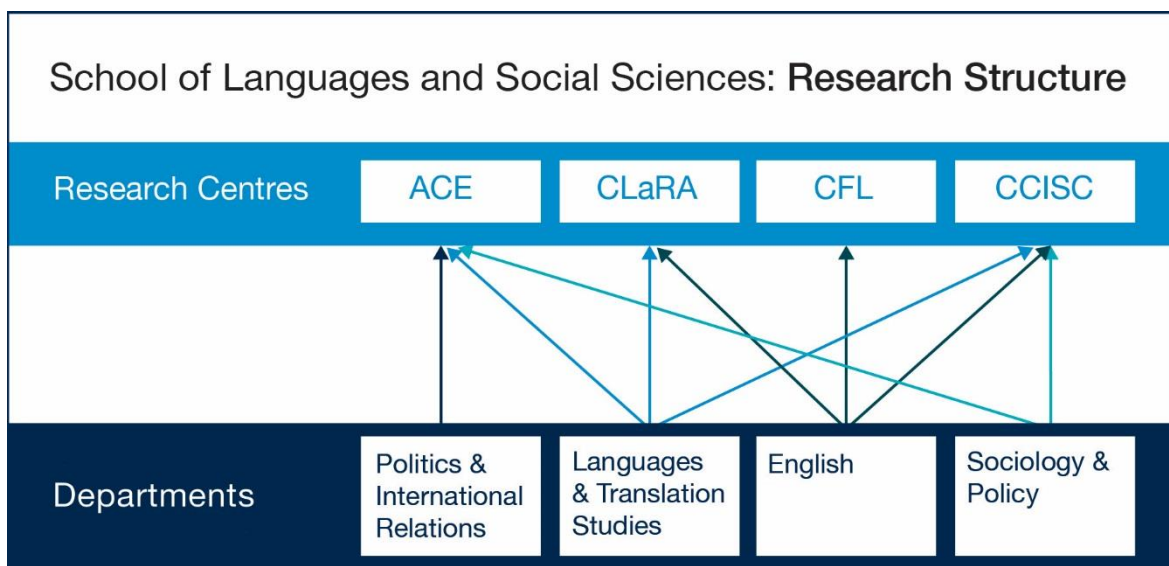
RESEARCH

Researchers in LSS are a multi-lingual, multi- and interdisciplinary community, working across the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, and bringing together a unique blend of internationally well-connected scholars. Research in the School ranges across the four core subject areas, with an increasing focus on engagement in interdisciplinary projects which is reflected in the remit of the four LSS research centres:

- Founded in 2009, the [Aston Centre for Europe \(ACE\)](#) brings together the University's and School's strengths in European Studies (broadly defined). Based primarily within the School's Politics and International Relations (PIR) subject group, ACE's purpose is to raise the University's profile on Europe at local, national and international level. To this end, it hosts high-profile visiting speakers, offers practitioner training, as well as running innovative MA programmes, and facilitates new research across the University. Its co-directors are Dr Ed Turner, Dr Carolyn Rowe and Dr Andrew Glencross.
- The [Centre for Critical Inquiry into Society and Culture \(CCISC\)](#) is an inter-disciplinary research centre that brings together academics and practitioners working within English language and linguistics, modern languages, translation studies, sociology, social and public policy, politics and psychology. It aims to create a bridge between research, policy, and professional practice and facilitate inventive inter-disciplinary research which contributes to public understanding of major social issues. It scrutinizes the evidence base for policy and practice, and expands the policy options under debate. It emphasises partnership and engagement with local communities, policymakers and businesses as both co-producers and users of knowledge, working with practitioners offering practical solutions for national and local government, service-providers and employers. CCISC researchers are engaged in work that will shape future thinking and pioneer practices that will have a

significant impact on society and organisations in ways that promote equality, inclusivity, and social justice. CCISC is led by Dr Gary Fooks and Dr Marcello Giovanelli.

- The [Centre for Forensic Linguistics \(CFL\)](#) at Aston is the first of its type in the world. It combines leading-edge research and investigative forensic practice with postgraduate teaching and professional courses. Research within the Centre involves all aspects of forensic linguistics, from how the police and the courts can best work with interpreters to the development and refinement of methods for identifying writers of disputed forensic texts. Members of the Centre have published widely and lectured on their research in some 30 countries. Their high-quality research ensures that both postgraduate and professional courses and their investigative work have a solid academic foundation. CFL is led by Professor Tim Grant.
- The [Centre for Language Research at Aston \(CLaRA\)](#) was launched in 2011 and is an inter-disciplinary research centre that brings together academics and practitioners working within English Language and Linguistics, Modern languages and Translation Studies. It aims to build on Aston's longstanding expertise in research into language education, modern foreign languages, applied and sociolinguistics by promoting interdisciplinary collaboration and establishing national and international networks and partnerships. Research within CLaRA focuses on translation studies, multilingualism and language contact, language policy, corpus linguistics, first and second language learning and teaching, language teacher education, and language education for professional and intercultural communication, language and culture. CLaRA provides an annual programme of seminars, workshops and conferences and delivers a language related programme of events to the university's continuous personal development programmes. CLaRA is led by Dr Sue Garton and Dr Emmanuelle Labeau.



For the Research Excellence Framework (REF2014), LSS submitted to two panels – ‘Area Studies’ and ‘Modern Languages and Linguistics’. As a whole, [Aston University ranked 35th in the Times Higher Education rankings](#), with an impressive 78 per cent of research judged to be ‘internationally excellent’ or ‘world leading’ (3*/4*). In terms of 3*/4* in impact, and excluding specialist institutions, Aston ranks 15th nationally.

Within LSS, our submissions achieved some outstanding successes:

Area Studies:

- 81% of the LSS submission has been judged as “world leading or internationally excellent”. This is the 3rd highest percentage in the UK for this unit of assessment.
- In terms of Grade Point Average, Area Studies at Aston is ranked 5th out of 23 institutions in the UK in the Times Higher Education REF 2014 rankings.

Modern Languages and Linguistics:

- 60% of the LSS submission was awarded the highest marks (4*) for **research impact**. This is the highest 4* percentage in the West Midlands, and places Aston within the top 10 for this unit of assessment regarding impact.

- 100% of the LSS submission to this panel has been awarded 4* or 3* for **research environment**, ranking Aston joint 1st in the UK for this measure

Compared to RAE 2008, the results for both submissions show a dramatic increase of 3* and 4* rated research as well as excellent results for research environment and impact. The highly positive assessment of LSS' research environment in the REF 2014 results reflects a thriving research culture, with regular high profile research seminars, workshops and conferences organized by the four LSS research centres, a lively community of PhD students and a steep increase in research grants won by the School. The latter is facilitated by an annual grant-writing workshop for new researchers and by the University's Research Support Office (RSO) which includes the services of a dedicated Research Development Manager who provides one-to-one support to colleagues, advising on research funding opportunities and grant applications.

Recently, funding has been awarded to staff in LSS for example from the EU Horizon 2020 programme for an international project on Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future (CHIEF); from the ESRC for the Quantitative Methods Initiative, to integrate QMs into undergraduate programmes in Linguistics (CFL and CLaRA); for a project investigating assuming online identities (CFL); from EC Tempus to modernise language teaching through the development of blended masters programmes (CLaRA); from JISC for a project to understand the relationship between human migration and dialect variation (CFL); and from the Volkswagen Foundation for an international project on spoken academic discourse (GeWiss: CLaRA). Within ACE, funding has been obtained from the ESRC, the Leverhulme Trust and the German Academic Exchange Service, for example on projects analysing Poland's influence in the EU, on the study of religious lobbies in the EU, and on comparing migration policy in the UK and Germany.

Researchers in the School are internationally-recognised leaders in their respective fields; they regularly appear in national and international media, thereby underlining the strong impact of our research which was also recognised in our REF submission. This activity is supported by university structures such as Aston's Press and Marketing Team which assists LSS staff in disseminating their research as widely as possible.

Our doctoral community has also continued to grow, and we now have over 30 FTE registered PhD students across the four subject areas. From 2017-18, we are part of the [Midlands Graduate School ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership](#), together with the Universities of Birmingham, Leicester, Loughborough, Nottingham and Warwick; within this, Aston is leading the Area Studies pathway. Our graduate students play a central role in the research culture of the School, organising an annual Postgraduate Conference which provides an opportunity for doctoral students to present their work to fellow researchers. LSS offers a number of bursaries each year for new research students and supports all of its doctoral students through an annual sum from the School for conference travel.

Additionally, the School has a strategic priority to develop deeper research links with prestigious overseas institutions. To this end, we have in 2017 established a partnership with the Faculty of Arts at the University of Auckland, and longer academic exchanges have already been taking place. The School supports such exchanges financially.

Planning is well underway for REF 2021, and to which we additionally expect to be making a submission in Sociology. This will form a key priority for the School over the coming years. The high status accorded to research in the School is illustrated by the range of structures in place to support this. Building on our successes in the area of research impact, our Impact Champion supports and advises researchers in the process of creating and documenting this activity. In addition, each subject group has a dedicated Research Director who provides strategic advice, especially to new entrants to the profession, as well as reading drafts of publications and research applications and acting as the respective REF lead. The School has an active programme of research leave and offers staff access to an annual research allowance of £1,000 in 2018-19, as well as a commitment to a timetabled research day per week and additional support for colleagues developing bids for large grants. Furthermore, the University makes a £5,000 research start-up fund available to staff taking up their first academic appointment. It also funds a Distinguished Visitors scheme to enable research collaborators from abroad to come and visit the University.

LEARNING AND TEACHING

The School offers a focused set of undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, which are structured around the four Departments. We see teaching and research as complementary and believe that excellence in one can best be achieved through excellence in the other. Our goal is to provide intellectually challenging and professionally relevant education, informing and innovating in our responses to social and cultural change. In the context of the new fees environment, our staff are committed to offering a dynamic, responsive and above all inspirational learning and teaching

environment, which will help to prepare our students as global citizens for their future careers, whatever form these might take.

Undergraduate programmes

Undergraduate provision, for which the University received Gold in the 2017 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), remains at the heart of the School's teaching provision and we have grown strongly in this area over recent years: our intake more than doubled between 2009-10 and 2014-15 and in 2016, we admitted over 440 students, with a typical offer of BBB-ABB. The School's recruitment foundations are therefore robust and this gives us confidence to act and plan in an otherwise volatile environment.

We offer a range of four-year BSc Honours degrees in each of the Departments; we also offer a variety of combinations both within the School and between LSS and other areas of the University, notably Aston Business School. We are also actively developing and expanding our portfolio of programmes. Each programme incorporates an integrated placement year/Year Abroad; this is one of Aston's most distinctive features and a key driver behind the University's high rates of employability.

Full details of the School's provision at undergraduate level are available at: <http://www1.aston.ac.uk/lss/undergraduate/>

University-wide Language Programme (UWLP) / Languages for All: Language modules are offered across the University to non-specialists, whether staff or students, as accredited electives or open learning opportunities. The language may be studied at ab initio or at Intermediate or Post 'A' level standard. Students may take these modules on a self-financing basis in cases where their specific degree programme does not include this opportunity. Languages on offer include: Arabic, French, German, Japanese, Mandarin, Portuguese and Spanish.

In addition, from 2012-13, the University has offered all first year students a free year of language learning as part of the University's goal of creating 'global citizens', under the auspices of the 'Languages for All' programme. This new initiative has been enthusiastically taken up by new students and is rapidly emerging as a key institutional kitemark which is resonating strongly with potential applicants. The Director of UWLP and Languages for All is Ms Aurélie Robert.

Postgraduate programmes:

MA/MSc Taught Programmes

Following a period of significant growth, the School admits around 100 postgraduate students annually to its 17 taught programmes, with delivery either on campus or, in some cases, by distance learning. The MA/ MSc programmes are growing in reach and reputation (see <http://www1.aston.ac.uk/lss/postgraduate/> for details):

- English Language runs a range of MA programmes in the area of Applied Linguistics, TESOL and Forensic Linguistics.
- The MA Translation in a European Context is officially recognised by the European Commission through its membership of the European Masters in Translation (EMT) network.
- Politics and International Relations has also expanded its portfolio of programmes, including a stand-alone MA on Governance and International Relations. The group also runs an innovative Double MA Europe and the World (run jointly with Sciences Po Lille), as well as partnerships with Institut d'Etudes Politiques Rennes and the University of Bamberg.
- Sociology and Policy is currently introducing new MA programmes on Social Research and Social Change.

FACILITIES

In addition to the main University Library, the School provides local study facilities for students. A learning support team is on hand to support and advise staff and students, to manage specialist equipment as well as our growing archive of learning materials, and provide training for teaching and research software (SPSS, NVIVO). Academic staff are encouraged to use Aston Replay, which allows students to access lectures outside the classroom. The University uses Blackboard as its VLE.

All LSS computer laboratories have been upgraded and refurbished over recent years to provide a technically advanced, supportive learning environment. For language tuition, we use the latest Sanako software to manage face to face learning in the labs, including Interpreting. Our specific translation software includes the translation memory system TRADOS. There is also a separate group viewing room for films and broadcasts. Colleagues benefit from the work of the Aston University Centre for Learning, Innovation and Professional Practice (CLIPP), making use of CLIPP expertise in the use of centrally-managed, technology-enhanced learning resources, curriculum design and pedagogical research. CLIPP also includes the Centre for English Language and Communication at Aston (CELCA), which provides English for Academic Purposes (EAP) training across the institution to overseas students.

