**Supervising an international trainee: key considerations**

Two of the DClinPsy courses in the North Thames region (UCL and RHUL) take on international trainees, and we have put together this guidance for supervisors of international trainees which has been informed by a survey examining the experiences of international trainees (Hayat, 2021a).

International trainees may come to train in the UK for a variety of reasons and they bring with them a wealth of different experiences and perspectives that clients and teams across the region can benefit from. However, travelling abroad to train can also bring with it various challenges; it can be a confusing and isolating experience at times, and trainees may be unfamiliar with some of the services, systems, approaches and terminology that are commonly used in UK healthcare settings.

**Key points:**

* International trainees may have different support needs on placement. Get to know your trainee’s personal circumstances and individual learning needs.
* International trainees bring with them diverse clinical and cultural experiences and knowledge; facilitating conversations around this is a valuable mutual learning opportunity for the trainee, supervisor and wider team.
* Set up supervision and expectations clearly. Explore the trainee’s prior supervision experiences.
* Take a multicultural approach to supervision; discuss difference and diversity openly and from a perspective of cultural humility.

**Background to this guidance**

Recent research indicates that these additional complexities and challenges are rarely discussed or addressed openly within the supervisory relationship (Teo & Yong, 2020). Of greater concern is that some international trainees report negative experiences on placement, such as racism (including microaggressions), discrimination, a lack of understanding or respect for their cultural background or perspectives and broader feelings of being different and alienated due to their status as an international trainee (Hayat, 2021a; Teo & Yong, 2020).

Nagrani and Smith (2021) conducted a study of 34 international trainees studying at UK DClinPsy courses. Reassuringly the majority (72%) of international trainees surveyed reported feeling “reported feeling supported by their placement supervisor (39% felt very supported and 33% felt moderately supported). However, the remainder of participants (29%) reported less satisfactory levels of support received on placement. One specific concern raised was the lack of consideration given to diversity issues on placement, with one participant saying: “I do not feel well feel supported because supervisors relied on trainees to educate them about cultural sensitivity, the impact of racism, etc.”

Some international trainees have also reported needing to take a lead role in educating their supervisor and other team members about what it means to be an international trainee, or in having to put a lot of additional effort in themselves to get their needs met, rather than the supervisor anticipating these needs or proactively offering support.

Based on a recent survey of experience of international trainees (Hayat, 2021a), we set out below some information and guidance for supervising an international trainee, emphasising the importance of facilitating open conversations with your trainee about your supervisory relationship and what the trainee might need as they settle into the placement (particularly if this is their first training placement).

**Induction**

International trainees are now issued with an honorary contract with Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust for the duration of their training. Therefore, there is no need for them to be issued with an additional honorary contract on each placement. On occasion, there may be confusion about their contract or visa status with local HR departments because trainees’ clinical work forms part of their studies rather than being ‘work’. Trainees may need your support in advocating for them with these administrative issues. Under visa rules, you may be asked to periodically report to the course to confirm the trainee’s attendance at placement. This will be prompted by the trainee/course, but is an essential requirement for the trainee to maintain their visa, so please do respond in a timely way to these requests.

Please be mindful that international trainees may incur fees of nearly £30,000 per academic year. The majority of trainees are personally financially responsible for funding their studies, whilst some may have a scholarship or grant that provides them a small stipend for living expenses. Therefore, the financial situation for international trainees is very different than for our home fee trainees, who are paid and funded by the NHS during their training. Some international trainees may be obliged to take on additional paid work to supplement their income (where their studies permit) and financial pressures may be particularly salient for some. The circumstances for each individual trainee should be explored directly with them, and the impact of any financial pressures responded to sensitively.

International trainees may be separated from their family and loved ones during their period of study, and may be without a close support network, especially when they first arrive in the UK. Trainees report that it is helpful when supervisors explicitly check in about issues such as homesickness and adjustment to life in the UK, and offer compassion and support if they are encountering any challenges. Understandably, international trainees may wish to travel home to see family during periods of annual leave, so we would ask that you be as flexible as you can within your service constraints in allowing trainees to take blocks of annual leave (as opposed to ad hoc days).

International trainees may not have prior experience in working within NHS settings, and healthcare services may be structured or provided in a different way in their home country.

Although the DClinPsy training programmes do provide international trainees with additional induction sessions and information relating to working in NHS contexts, it can also be helpful to open up a conversation about their knowledge and experiences at the start of their placement (ideally during the pre-placement planning meeting). Some things may still be unfamiliar or may be unique to your service context, so taking the time to explore differences between the NHS and the context(s) of their previous clinical experiences may help to identify and anticipate any learning or induction needs. Please offer the trainee appropriate reading or other resources to meet these needs wherever possible. Please be mindful that the induction to your service for international trainees might take a little longer than for home fee trainees, particularly if it is their first training placement. However, please also make adequate space for the trainee’s experiences and perspectives of different approaches to healthcare delivery to be heard and valued.

Ensure that your colleagues are aware that your trainee is an international student and discuss with them how they can support the trainee’s induction and integration into the service, based on your conversations with the trainee about their learning needs.

**Setting up supervision**

One of the key themes arising from research is that the international trainees have a much more positive experience on placement if their cultural and previous professional experiences are explicitly asked about and valued within supervision, as well as the whole team valuing multiple perspectives and voices.

In Hayat (2021a) a key overarching theme was the importance of a multicultural approach to supervision. Other research also indicates the potential negative impact for supervisees when supervisors neglect cultural issues in supervision (Ancis & Ladany, 2010).

Trainees report that it is most helpful when the supervisor approaches the trainee’s experiences and difference (of any type) in the supervisory relationship with curiosity, cultural humility and acknowledgement of the power dynamics at play. Moreover, trainees benefit from opportunities to think about how they might be able to foreground or integrate culture (including their own) into their clinical practice. It is also important that supervision is a space where trainees feel safe to raise issues around any racism or discrimination they may have experienced during their time on the placement, so setting this up at the outset is essential.

It may also be helpful to explore what the trainee’s previous experience has been of supervisory relationships and what format of supervision they are used to, reflecting on any differences between this and what is typically offered in your service, or more broadly in the NHS. Clear contracting and setting up of the style and format of supervision can facilitate the trainee’s confidence and help them to benefit optimally from supervision right from the outset of the placement.

**Mutual learning opportunity**

Supervisors report (Hayat, 2021b) that international trainees bring a wealth of experience and new perspectives to their clinical work, which often broadens a team’s understanding of mental health, service delivery and the role and importance of culture in clinical practice. They can help to challenge some of the ‘received wisdom’ about the NHS and encourage critique of areas that home-fee trainees might ‘take for granted’ about how services are delivered. International trainees are typically experienced by supervisors as diligent, hard-working and eager to learn about a new way of working. Our international trainees are a huge asset to our clinical courses.

We hope that this guidance helps you as a supervisor and gives you some more information about the experiences and needs of our international trainees. In particular, we hope that it helps you to feel more prepared in welcoming them into placements within your service. We would also welcome any feedback you have about how we can further develop this guidance.

**References**

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