Aston University
Birmingham

Intercultural Skills and Employability: the Aston Approach

Prof. Dame Julia King

Going Global, Dubai, 5th March 2013

Employable Graduates, Exploitable Research

‘Culture at Work’ conclusions

- Value to business of staff from diverse backgrounds
  - *different cultural contexts and viewpoints*
  - *respecting others*
  - *speaking a foreign language*
- Employees with these skills can
  - *bring in new clients*
  - *work in diverse teams*
  - *enhance brand and reputation*
- Few employers screen for intercultural skills today
- But they do look for
  - *strong communications skills*
  - *foreign languages*
  - *cultural sensitivity*

Aston University

- UK’s smallest ‘mainstream’ university
- 10,500 students
- A green campus
- In the centre of the UK’s largest city - outside the capital – Birmingham
- Founded in 1895, Royal Charter in 1966
- Schools of Engineering, Life Sciences, Languages and Social Sciences, and Aston Business School

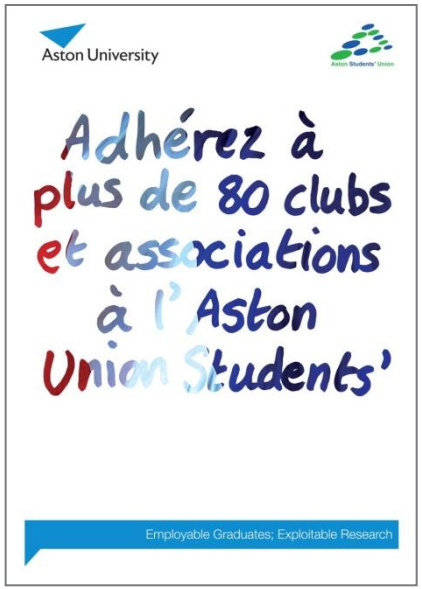
Aston’s student population: local and global

- Undergraduate: **8,000**
- Postgraduate: **2,500**

- Home/EU: **8,100**
- Overseas: **2,400**
- Outside UK: **over 25%**
- Birmingham: **2,000**

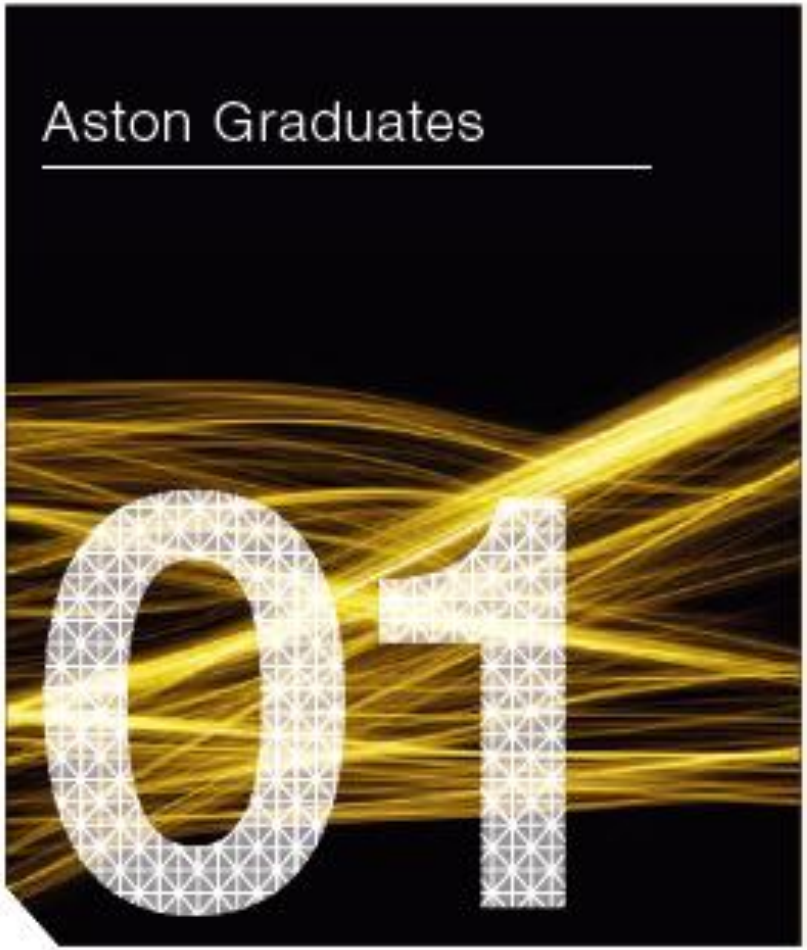
- Over 130 nationalities on campus
- Largest groups from UK, China, India, Europe, Hong Kong, Nigeria…
- 12 University Chaplains: Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, Anglican, Catholic, Hindu…
- 30% of our staff are from outside the UK

Aston Welcome for new students 2012



2020 Strategy: Access and Success

Access for a wide range of students to professional careers



01.01

Access

Widening participation – ensuring high potential students from all backgrounds can gain the benefits of university education and the social mobility that comes with professional careers.

Achieved through: an outstanding Schools and Colleges Liaison team, working with partner schools locally and supporting schools and colleges more widely; Masterclasses; student mentoring and volunteering in schools; the Aimhigher collaboration; school visit programmes; competitions; collaborations with organisations and initiatives with similar goals such as Pure Potential, the Aston University Engineering Academy and the UTC programme; scholarships and bursaries; support for care leavers; use of contextual information and interviewing in admissions.

2020 Strategy: developing global citizens

01.02

Success

Success – for all our students and alumni.

Achieved through: innovative learning and teaching; high levels of support in key areas such as learner development, maths, computing, writing and english; academic tutor system; peer and alumni mentoring; placements: work-based and international learning opportunities; developing employability skills and international competences; entrepreneurship programmes; a sector leading careers service.

01.03

Global citizenship

An innovative, international outlook – a differentiator for employers in a competitive graduate marketplace.

Achieved through: a diverse student environment and an international faculty: mixing with colleagues from many different countries and backgrounds; developing the ability to work in and lead diverse teams, recognising that diversity drives innovation; language provision for all students; intercultural awareness programmes; international exchanges; overseas placements in companies; year abroad placements; global citizenship education; international activities led by the Students' Guild.

Languages for All:
free language tuition for all first year students

Shortlisted for the Guardian University Awards: Student Experience category 2013

theguardian UNIVERSITY AWARDS

- Taken up by over **25%** of (non-languages) students
- **Arabic, Mandarin, Portuguese, French, German, Spanish**
- Overall **1210** students studying a language in 2012/3

Intercultural awareness

- Intercultural awareness programmes for staff and students
- Training in and experience working in diverse teams
- Language training
- Overseas exchanges and business placement opportunities
- Intercultural activities organised by the Students' Union
  - International week
  - International societies: religious, sports, dance, music…
  - Celebration of national festivals

2020 Strategy: employable and entrepreneurial

01.04

Employability and entrepreneurship

Sought-after graduates – world leading employability combined with confidence and business drive.

Achieved through: professionally accredited degrees; business engagement in teaching and the curriculum; international skills; employability skills; placements; high levels of achievement (1st and 2.1); work experience, Graduate Advantage for graduate internships, Job Shop opportunities; leadership development through clubs, societies and other Students' Guild activities; entrepreneurship development: SPEED*, BSEEN**, Aston Entrepreneurs; business competitions; alumni mentoring; a sector-leading careers service.

*Student Placements for Entrepreneurs in Education (SPEED)
**The Birmingham Skills for Enterprise and Employability Network (BSEEN)

01.05

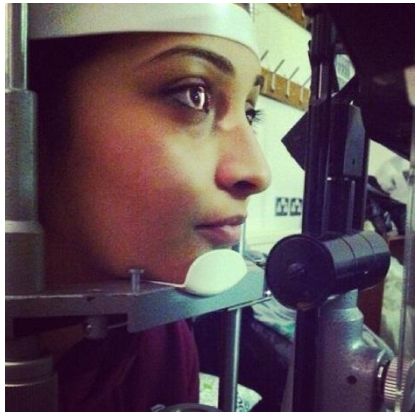
Quality learning

Developing independent critical thinkers – through research-informed, professionally-focussed courses at undergraduate, Masters and research degree levels.

Achieved through: inspiring teaching; excellent supervision; innovative project and problem-based learning approaches such as 'Active Engineering'; a student and course-appropriate range of modes and channels; professionally qualified teaching staff and active researchers; professional accreditation; research-based project work; a strong Graduate School; teaching and support for dissertations.

The Importance of Placements

- Over 70% of our students take a placement year
- 29% of those on placement are studying or working overseas
- Plenty of choice: over 5,000 placement opportunities for 2012/13
- Aston research shows students who take placements get better exam grades and better jobs



The Aston Graduate

- A global citizen
- Speaks at least two languages
- Has an international group of friends
- Sensitive to cultural differences, an effective member and leader of diverse teams
- Has business and overseas experience
- Impressive at interview
- Entering a well paid professional career
- Or setting out as an entrepreneur…

Does it work?

- *Sunday Times* acclaims Aston as better than Oxford for graduate employability
- In the top 10 UK universities for producing millionaires (2nd on headcount)
- Ranked in the top 20 universities in the UK by graduate employers
- Our own research shows the value of placements in employability
- We are now studying the impact of overseas placements, intercultural training and language study on the employability of our graduates