

International Alumni Friendship Scheme

Guidelines for Alumni Volunteers

About

The *International Alumni Friendship Scheme* is a collaborative programme between the Alumni Relations and International teams. The scheme is designed for international students (non-Home/EU) to meet with an alumnus during their first term at Birkbeck to help them settle into life and academia in London.

This document outlines the format of the programme and provides guidelines on how to conduct your meetings.

Objectives

- To help international students feel more integrated within the Birkbeck community
- To ease the transition from international students' home countries into the UK, by helping students learn about British culture and practice conversational English
- To enable alumni to offer their expertise, experience and advice to international students having studied at Birkbeck

What is expected from me?

- Commitment to meeting the student(s) at least once during their first term
- Listening skills
- Warmth and friendliness
- Offering encouragement
- Sharing knowledge and experiences of Birkbeck and London
- Giving advice/information as appropriate
- Referring to other sources of help

Common concerns from international students include:

- Difficulty understanding and being understood in English
- Being required to adapt to a new style of learning very quickly (especially for Post-graduate students on one-year programmes)
- The need to adjust to UK culture and customs
- Being unfamiliar with many practicalities including eating out, finding a bank, travelling around London
- I don't not know what is expected of me e.g. essays/exams/seminar discussions

Programme format

1. Alumni and prospective students sign up to the programme
2. Matching takes place (we match primarily on the subject/courses studied)
3. Alumni and students meet at the Welcome Reception

4. Alumni make initial contact with their student(s) by email to arrange a place and time to meet
5. One-two meetings will take place in the first term.
6. Feedback given

Meeting Guidelines

Although there are no fixed rules about what you should discuss during your meeting, you can use these general guidelines:

If you have more than one student you can decide whether to meet individually with them or in a small group.

- Introductions
- Get to know one another
- Explain why you both signed up for the programme
- Ensure that you have answered their most urgent questions – don't do too much of the talking! Let the student lead on this
- Ensure that you pass on information about other Birkbeck support services (this is provided in the Sign-posting document)
- Ask whether the meeting has helped to understand what it is like to study at Birkbeck and to live in London

Frequency/Mode of Contact

- We recommend that alumni email their student mentee(s) in the first instance and then wait for a response. Once contact has been established it is the responsibility of both the alumnus and student(s) to attend the meeting
- You will need to agree how often you are happy to be contacted and over what time period.
- As a guide, it is anticipated that one-two meetings will take place over the first term. The meetings can take place outside of Birkbeck, but must be in London at a mutually convenient location
- If you decide to meet more than once, it might be an idea to visit a famous London landmark or a place that you love in the city.

Finally...

The Development and Alumni Office will be in touch once all of the meetings have taken place to ask for your feedback. This will be invaluable for future *International Alumni Friendship Scheme* initiatives. Should you have any queries or concerns at any point, do not hesitate to get in touch with us: alumni@bbk.ac.uk