

Interview Guide

Introduction

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this interview.

As mentioned in our previous communication, you should have already received the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form via email. You have returned the signed Consent Form, which confirms that you understand the nature of this research and voluntarily agree to participate.

This interview is part of my MSc dissertation at the University of Edinburgh. The study explores how Chinese postgraduate students interpret academic grades and feedback in the UK, and how their educational and cultural backgrounds may influence these experiences.

The interview will last about 60 - 75 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers – I am simply interested in your honest views and personal experiences. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymised in the final report. You may also decline to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any time without giving a reason.

If everything is clear, we can now begin.

Section 1: Academic Background and Context

<i>Purpose</i>	To understand participant's prior education and expectations.
<i>Undergraduate CN</i> <i>Postgraduate UK</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me a bit about your academic background before starting this MSc programme? • Why did you choose to pursue your Master's degree in the UK? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Such as job hunting or parents' • What were your initial expectations regarding coursework and grading here? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Is it the same between undergraduate and postgraduate?
<i>Undergraduate UK</i> <i>Postgraduate UK</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me a bit about your academic background before coming to UK? • What made you decide to continue your postgraduate study in the UK after completing your undergraduate degree here?
<i>Undergraduate CN</i> <i>Postgraduate CN</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you briefly describe your academic path so far (undergraduate and postgraduate) in China? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Do you have any abroad study experience such as exchanging study? • Have you ever considered studying abroad, such as for a Master's degree? Why or why not?

Section 2: Understanding of Assessment and Grading

Purpose	Explore how students perceive and interpret grades in the UK context.
Undergraduate CN Postgraduate UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you usually interpret a grade like 60, 65 or 70? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When studying undergraduate in China and studying postgraduate in the UoE. Do you feel that grades (like 60 or 65) accurately reflect your academic effort or ability? And what about higher grades – for example, 80 or 90? Do you see them as goals to aim for, or as exceptional cases that are rarely awarded? How do you feel about the grading system here (in your university)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If not clear and understandable, why? Do you usually check the grading criteria? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does this compare to your undergraduate experience in China? In your opinion, what are the main differences between the grading system in the UoE and that in your previous education?
Undergraduate UK Postgraduate UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you usually interpret a grade like 60, 65 or 70? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you feel that UK grades (like 60 or 65) accurately reflect your academic effort or ability? Having studied in the UK for both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, how has your understanding of the grading system evolved over time? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> And is it similar between Edinburgh and your previous university? Do you think your views on grades have changed between undergraduate and postgraduate levels?
Undergraduate CN Postgraduate CN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you usually interpret a grade like 60, 65 or 70? What does a "good" grade mean to you in your current programme? Do you feel that grades fairly reflect your academic effort and ability? How are grades typically calculated in your university (e.g., exams, assignments, attendance)?

Section 3: Experiences with Feedback

<i>Purpose</i>	Explore how students interpret academic feedback and its emotional impact.
<i>Undergraduate CN</i> <i>Postgraduate UK</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you receive a grade with written feedback, which part do you look at first? Why? • How do you feel when you receive the feedback? Can you describe a situation that feedback had a big impact on you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ If unclear, discouraging, confusing, why? ◦ Do you think feedback in the UK is sometimes too vague or indirect? How does that make you feel? • Have you ever felt that the written comments didn't match the grade you received?
<i>Undergraduate UK</i> <i>Postgraduate UK</i>	<p>[The same as above]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the way you use or react to feedback now different from when you first arrived in the UK?
<i>Undergraduate CN</i> <i>Postgraduate CN</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do your teachers usually provide written or oral feedback in your coursework? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ How detailed or useful do you find this feedback? ◦ Do you pay more attention to grades or to comments? Why?

Section 4: Emotional and Psychological Responses

<i>Purpose</i>	Identify emotional responses (e.g. anxiety, motivation, confusion) linked to grades/feedback.
<i>Undergraduate CN</i> <i>Postgraduate UK</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important are grades to you personally? What do they represent to you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Do your family members have expectations about your academic performance? How do these affect you? • How do you usually respond emotionally when your mark is lower than expected? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Have you ever felt disappointed, frustrated or anxious after receiving a grade or feedback? Why? ◦ Have you ever felt that a lower grade in the UK affected your self-confidence, sense of achievement, or future plans (e.g. career, further study)? • Did you talk to someone about it (e.g. a teacher, peer, family)? Why or why not?
<i>Undergraduate UK</i> <i>Postgraduate UK</i>	<p>[The same as above]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compared to when you were an undergraduate student, do you still feel anxious or disappointed when receiving certain grades or comments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Do you think your emotional reactions have changed over time? Why?
<i>Undergraduate CN</i> <i>Postgraduate CN</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important are grades to you personally, or to your family? • How do you usually respond emotionally when your mark is lower than expected? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Have you ever felt disappointed, frustrated or anxious after receiving a grade or feedback? Why? • How do you usually cope with academic pressure? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Such as talking with teachers or parents...?

Section 5: Comparison and Adaptation

<i>Purpose</i>	Understand how different backgrounds affect adaptation to UK grading and feedback.
<i>Undergraduate CN</i> <i>Postgraduate UK</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Did you have to change how you define “success” in academic work after coming to the UK? ● Were you surprised by how UK teachers give feedback? What was most unfamiliar to you? ● Have you ever talked with friends or peers who are studying in China about academic experiences or grading? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What kinds of differences did you notice from these conversations? ○ Did those exchanges change the way you think about your own study experience in the UK? ○ Did you feel reassured, surprised, or perhaps frustrated when making such comparisons?
<i>Undergraduate UK</i> <i>Postgraduate UK</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do you notice any differences in how other Chinese students (e.g. those who studied undergraduate in China) interpret grades and feedback? (such as your classmates) ● What strategies have helped you better understand UK assessment practices over the years? ● Have you ever talked with friends or peers who are studying in China, for example through WeChat, Rednote, or other social media platforms, about academic experiences or grading? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What kinds of differences did you notice from these conversations? ○ Did those exchanges change the way you think about your own study experience in the UK? ○ Did you feel reassured, surprised, or perhaps frustrated when making such comparisons?
<i>Undergraduate CN</i> <i>Postgraduate CN</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have you ever talked with friends who are studying abroad (e.g. in the UK) about grades and feedback? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Based on those conversations or online posts, how do you perceive the differences between the two systems? ● Would you consider studying abroad in the future? Why or why not?

Section 6: Suggestions for Improvement

<i>Purpose</i>	Gather student-led suggestions for more culturally inclusive feedback practices.
<i>Undergraduate CN</i> <i>Postgraduate UK</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of feedback would feel more understandable or supportive to you? • Do you think staff should receive training in intercultural communication, especially in how they give academic feedback to international students? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What kind of training do you think would actually help? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ For example, would it be useful if: ■ Teachers were shown real examples of written feedback and asked to reflect on how these might be misunderstood by students from different cultures? ■ Lecturers were trained to avoid vague phrases like “a reasonable attempt” and instead use clearer language that shows what exactly was good or needs improvement? ■ Staff could hear from international students directly about how they emotionally interpret different kinds of feedback? ■ New students were offered a short session at the start of term where feedback styles and grading expectations in the UK are explained, with examples? ○ Which of these do you think would be helpful? Do you have any other suggestions? • If you could improve one thing about the grading or feedback system, what would it be?
<i>Undergraduate UK</i> <i>Postgraduate UK</i>	<p>[The same as above]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were advising a Chinese student who just arrived for a UK Master’s programme from China, what would you tell them about handling grades and feedback?
<i>Undergraduate CN</i> <i>Postgraduate CN</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any suggestion for the grading system in China? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For example, provide some feedback on the text portion in addition to the scores?