

Faculty of Engineering

ASPIRE Summer Research Program 2026-2027

Project Title: Language Proficiency and Expectation-Reality Gaps in Academic Transition of International Engineering Students

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Objective

Investigate whether English proficiency and mismatches between students' expectations and actual academic/language demands predict transition difficulties and support-seeking behaviours across 2+2 and Master's pathways. Potentially compare existing Master's data with new 2+2 student data to inform recommendations for language support and expectation-setting.

Project Details

Consider a student transferring into third year of an engineering degree in a country they've never lived in, taught in a language they've studied but never used in daily life where what they expected university to be like and what they actually experience turned out to be quite different. This gap is likely to shape how well students cope, yet it has not been systematically examined within the Faculty.

This project investigates what actually drives academic difficulty for international engineering students during their transition into a new system, whether it is primarily a language issue, or more a mismatch between students' expectations and their lived academic experience. You will extend an existing Master's student survey to a cohort of current 2+2 students, asking them to reflect on what they expected before arriving compared to what they have actually experienced in lectures, assignments, and help-seeking and test whether this gap, more than proficiency alone, predicts who struggles and who adapts well.

You will gain hands-on experience designing a survey instrument, working with real student data, and producing recommendations that could directly inform how the Faculty supports a growing international student population over the coming years, with potential to extend into a longer-term research collaboration beyond the ASPIRE program. This project also runs alongside a parallel study on student belonging, offering the opportunity to see how two connected research questions can be addressed collaboratively.

If you're interested in how students experience academic transition, and want your research to directly inform decisions rather than just sit in a report, this project is a good fit, findings will be presented at the end of the program, giving you a real opportunity to see your work put to use.

Weekly Project Timeline

1. Literature review: language/academic English in engineering education; expectation-reality gap frameworks in international education, and ethics amendment.
2. Literature review and review existing Master's dataset; identify instrument structure, variables, and gaps to build on
3. Ethics approval submission; finalise recruitment plan and materials; coordinate with other existing data
4. Writing of background literature, methodology, survey questions, and ethics amendment.
5. Survey data collection (2+2 cohort)
6. Optional short follow-up interviews (probe specific expectation-reality gaps in a few cases)
7. Data cleaning and thematic analysis
8. Analysis: language proficiency and expectation gap as predictors of difficulty/support-seeking, compared across pathway and region
9. Synthesize findings, future work recommendations (language support design + expectation-setting)
10. Final poster presentation

The timeline is subject to change dependent on various factors.

Student Placement Agreement

A student placement agreement must be signed by the project supervisor and the student prior to commencement of the ASPIRE program.

[LV0554-72741 ASPIRE Program Co-Curricular-Student-Placement-Agreement-Short-term.docx](#)

Applicants that are interested need to contact the supervisors to arrange for an interview.