

Guidance on Identifying and Approaching Potential OIV Hosts

An Overseas Institutional Visit (OIV) is an exciting opportunity to advance your research and build connections with leading academics worldwide. While reaching out to a potential host may seem daunting, with the right approach it can become a rewarding step in your academic journey. Here are some tips for identifying and confidently approaching potential OIV hosts:

1. Start with Your Research Interests

The foundation of a successful OIV is alignment between your research interests and the expertise of your potential host. Ask yourself:

- What specific area of your research would benefit from this visit?
- Are there methods, training, or collaborations you can only access abroad?

Having a clear focus will help you target the right institutions and academics.

2. Research Potential Hosts Thoroughly

Begin by identifying institutions and academics renowned in your field.

- University Department Websites:** Browse department webpages at institutions known for their strength in your research area. Look for academics whose expertise closely aligns with your goals.
- Academic Publications:** Use platforms like Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Scopus to find recent publications by potential hosts. Reading their work will give you insight into their research focus and whether they are the right fit for your OIV.
- Conference Networks:** Reflect on conferences, webinars, or academic events where you encountered inspiring speakers or panellists—these could be excellent candidates.
- Supervisors:** In many cases, your supervisors will have ideas about which institutions and scholars would be most beneficial for you. They may even have personal contacts and can make initial introductions on your behalf.

3. Make a Shortlist of Potential Hosts

Once you have identified potential hosts, consider:

- Their alignment with your research goals and methodologies.

- ✚ Whether they offer unique opportunities, such as training programs, specialised facilities, or relevant seminars.
- ✚ Their engagement in collaborative work, which may indicate openness to hosting visiting researchers.

4. Reach Out with Confidence

Cold-emailing a potential host can feel intimidating, but remember that academics are used to such inquiries and are often happy to connect with early-career researchers.

Here's how to make a strong impression:

- ✚ **Be Respectful and Direct:** Introduce yourself clearly, explain your research interests, and outline why you believe they are the ideal host for your OIV.
- ✚ **Show Genuine Interest:** Mention specific aspects of their research that resonate with you. Demonstrating that you have done your homework will set you apart.
- ✚ **Highlight Mutual Benefits:** Explain how your visit could contribute to their work while advancing your own research goals.
- ✚ **Investigate How to Address Them:** Titles and forms of address can vary widely across academic cultures (e.g., Prof, Dr, Frau Prof. Dr.), and starting with their full title is a good way to make a positive first impression. Let their response guide you if a more informal approach is appropriate. This attention to detail shows respect and professionalism.
- ✚ **Don't Say 'OIV':** By definition, OIV hosts are not located in the UK, and they probably don't know the term 'OIV'. Even 'Overseas Institutional Visit' isn't very explanatory. Rather state that your PhD funding provides resources for you to undertake a **secondment** at an institution outside the UK, or that it provides you with an opportunity to be a **visiting researcher** at a non-UK institution.
- ✚ **Clarify That You're Not Looking for Funding:** You don't need to elaborate on this in any detail, but at some point in your opening email you should make it clear that your visit would be supported through your PhD funding and that you're not looking for financial support from your host.
- ✚ **Request a Conversation:** Politely ask if they would be open to discussing hosting opportunities further.
- ✚ **Let Them Direct the Specifics:** At some point later on, when you fill out your OIV application, you'll need to have plans regarding what you'll actually *do* when on the OIV (e.g. attending and presenting at their seminar series, co-authoring an article with your host, etc.). When making your initial contact, though, you probably won't know enough about what their current research project is, or how

their institution works. So, give them the opportunity, in their follow-up email, to make specific suggestions.

5. Sample Email Structure

Use a professional but approachable tone in your email:

- ✉ **Subject Line:** Keep it clear and relevant, e.g., “Prospective Visiting Researcher Inquiry: Exploring Collaboration Opportunities.”
- ✉ **Introduction:** Briefly introduce yourself and your research background.
- ✉ **Reason for Reaching Out:** State why you admire their work and how their expertise aligns with your goals.
- ✉ **OIV Objectives:** Outline what you hope to gain from the visit, such as specialist training, collaboration, or dissemination of findings.
- ✉ **Closing:** Thank them for their time, offer to provide more information (e.g., CV, proposal), and invite them to discuss further.

6. Follow Up and Stay Positive

If you don't receive a response within a reasonable timeframe, it's perfectly acceptable to send a polite follow-up email. Academics are often busy, and your email may have simply slipped through the cracks.

Even if your initial inquiries don't yield results, don't be discouraged. Every interaction is an opportunity to refine your approach and broaden your network.

7. Remember: You Belong Here

Reaching out to respected academics may feel intimidating, but you are a valued member of the research community. Your passion, curiosity, and determination are exactly what draw academics to host and mentor early-career researchers.

Taking the initiative to explore an OIV demonstrates your commitment to your research and professional growth.