

Motion Name: Easier Access to Support Services for International Students

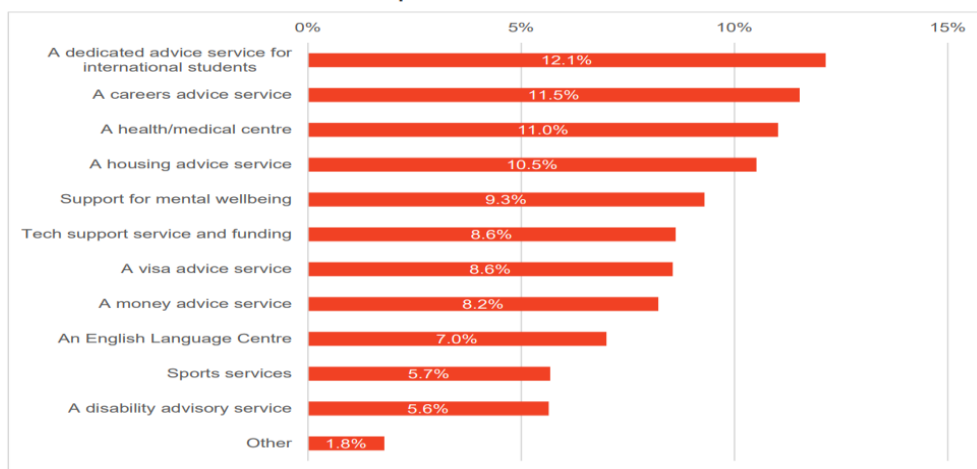
Proposer: Bakhtawar Javed

Seconder: Linlu Ye/Joshua

Background:

1. In the 2023/24 academic year, international students accounted for approximately 30% of the total student population at UoB. Compared to local students, international students often face unique challenges when transitioning to a new academic environment. Academically, they experience additional pressure due to language barriers and different standards in academic integrity; culturally, since they have moved to a new geographical location and are distanced from their family and other social networks, they not only need to make extra efforts to adapt to cultural differences, but also have to overcome sources of pressure, particularly barriers in communication, social disconnection, and loneliness. (1)
2. Compared to local students, international students may struggle to find resources that meet their specific needs, especially freshers who may not be aware of the ways to find available support services. Additionally, it appears that the University may not fully recognise the unique needs of international students, resulting in a lack of targeted promotion, as well as limited communication and engagement with them to ensure they could receive necessary support if needed. (2) That explained why anecdotal feedback from international students indicates that many find it difficult to access and navigate support services such as mental health and wellbeing, academic advising, and healthcare.
3. Consequently, these difficulties impact international students' overall experience at the University. A nationwide study conducted in January 2022 found that 47% of international student respondents self-reported a current mental health issue. Compared to local students, they were less likely to access counseling or wellbeing services. Among those who reported a current or previous mental health issue, only 23% of international students had disclosed this to their university. (2) This lack of awareness of available support, combined with the University's challenges in reaching those in need, inevitably causes them additional stress.
4. The Office for Students commissioned LSE Consulting a piece of research on International Student Experience across the country in February 2021. The report was published in January 2023 after a rigorous research and focus groups. The research focused on accessibility and effectiveness of wellbeing and support services for international students in the UK and discovered that a dedicated advice service was a top priority for the international students. (3) The figure below has been taken from the same research:

Figure 2. Prioritised support services by international students. Surveyed students and alumni were asked to choose the three most important services. This graph presents the proportion of students who selected the service as one of their priorities.



- Similarly, in the International Students Experience Survey 2023 conducted by Bristol SU, it was highlighted that some services are underutilized as international students were not aware they existed (4). This has also been seen in the International Students Barometer 2023, where in support section, Bristol University is performing slightly below the benchmark, but there is discrepancy within the data based on which country the students are coming from. For instance, Student Finances has 26% Support Usage. The Russell Group Benchmark is 3.15 and Bristol's performance is 2.99. This could be because the support service is underutilized (this can further be explored).

Purpose:

Improving access to support services for international students and ensuring that these services address the unique challenges they face are essential for their success and well-being at the university.

- By having a one stop shop and first point of contact for students, the University can create a more inclusive and supportive environment that makes it easier for international students to access existing support services available at university.
- This will in turn encourage more international students to seek help from support services, ultimately reducing their challenges in adapting to a new environment, improving their well-being, lowering stress levels, and supporting better academic performance.

Actions:

1. Assessment of Current Services:

- The Bristol SU Research and Insight Team to conduct a Focus Groups to identify specific barriers international students face when accessing support services.
- Analyse feedback to determine which services are underutilized and why."

- Using insights from the report, the SU International Students' Officer to lobby the school to review current support services and allocate resources to ensure these services are more accessible to international students.

2. Awareness Campaign:

- SU International Students' Officer to launch an awareness campaign highlighting available support services tailored for international students.
- SU to collaborate with various societies and student networks and University services to promote support services throughout the academic year, especially during orientation week. Multiple platforms (social media, campus events, flyers) should be utilized to disseminate this information effectively.

3. Dedicated Support Staff:

- SU International Students' Officer to advocate for the hiring of dedicated staff members who specialize in supporting international students, including multilingual advisors in Wellbeing Services.
- SU International Students' Officer to lobby the University to conduct upskilling workshops for existing staff members from professional and academic services, enabling them to provide tailored support to international students.

4. Orientation Programs:

- SU's International Students' Officer to work in partnership with university to enhance orientation programs to include specific sessions for international students, focusing on navigating support services, cultural adaptation, and academic expectations.

5. Peer Mentorship Program:

- SU's International Students' Officer to lobby the University to evaluate the existing peer mentorship program and make improvements where needed.

6. Feedback Mechanism:

- SU's International Students' Officer to lobby the University to create a feedback mechanism for international students to share their experiences and suggestions regarding support services.

Sources and References

(1) Cogan, N. A., et.al (2024). The taboo of mental health problems, stigma and fear of disclosure among Asian international students: implications for help-seeking, guidance and support. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 52(4), 697-715.

(2) The description of the problem, along with the statistics, is extracted from the report *Better Targeting of Mental Health Support is Needed for International Students* issued by Student Minds (<https://www.studentminds.org.uk/mh-inequalities-international-students.html>). This report serves as a valuable resource for investigating the major challenges that international students encounter at UK universities.

(3) Pagliarello, M. C., et.al (2023). *Working in Partnership to improve the international student integration and experience: Final Report to the Office for Students*, 16 January 2023. [Working in](#)

[partnership to improve international student integration and experience: Evaluation report - Office for Students](#)

(4) Jenna Hart, Bristol SU (May 2023), International Students Experience at the University of Bristol, [Bristol SU | Past Research](#)