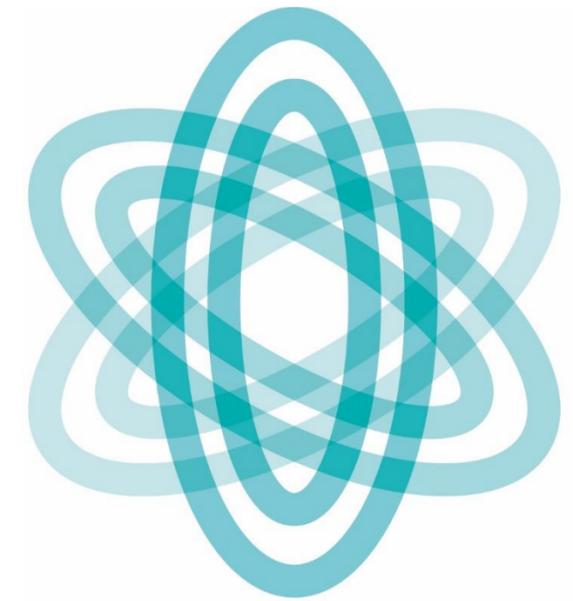


#WeAreInternational Grants Scheme

Innovative ideas to improve the
international student experience



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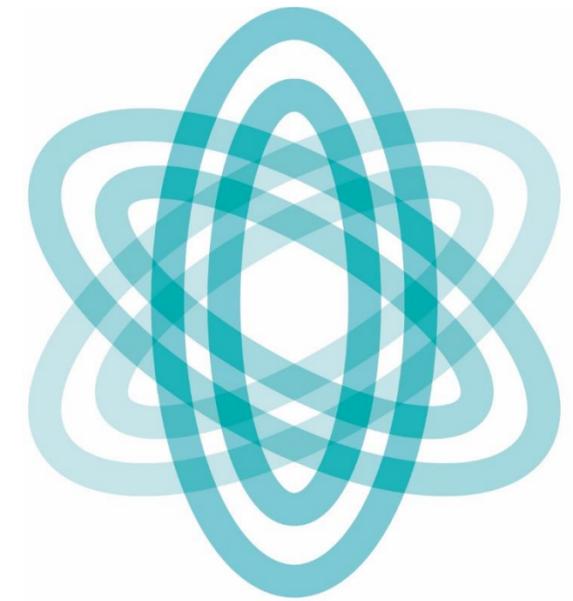


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Student Affairs

Building Belonging and Inclusion for International Students



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UKCISA UK Council
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THE team



DR ANEEZA PERVEZ



DIANA CATANA



DR SHARON BOLTON



Background & Aim



- ❖ Being International Students in the UK
- ❖ Social Isolation and Loneliness
- ❖ Importance of sense of belonging
- ❖ UKCISA #WeAreInternational student charter

The project aimed at examining the sociopsychological and academic barriers (including cultural integration and cultural-shock) that inhibit exacerbate experiences of social belonging and- isolation faced by international student during their studies in the UK.



Key Activities



- ❖ One-to-one semi-structured interviews with 26 international
- ❖ survey data were collected from 52 respondents.
- ❖ analysed using qualitative and quantitative methods
- ❖ presented at a stakeholder conference



Key Outcomes:



**1. INITIAL
CHALLENGES AND
ADAPTATION**

**2. SUPPORT
AND
DEVELOPMENT**

**3. ACADEMIC
INTEGRATION**



Next Steps:



- ❖ Writing up a systematic review on the challenges and barriers international students face in developing a sense of belonging
- ❖ Write-up of peer-reviewed article
- ❖ Development of a tool-kit to give students tips on adapting and settling to life in the UK



Recommendations



- ❖ Investigate on how varying 'home country' or 'home cultures' relate to social belonging and isolation.
- ❖ Focus on finding the best mechanism to get students the support and information they need without overwhelming them or dumping it at the start of the course.
- ❖ We encourage all university staff to deal with international students with patience and kindness, have real conversations with them to find out what platform they need to fully express themselves and succeed academically.



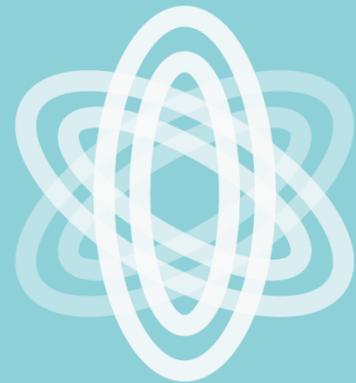
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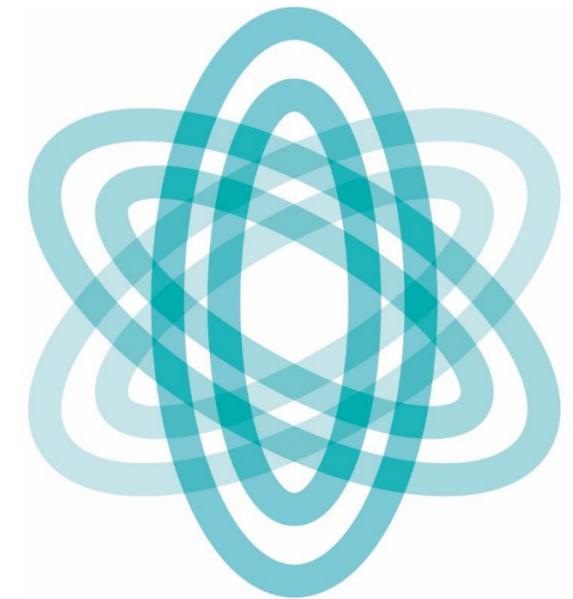
Swansea University

Resources for International
Students and Employers

Lucy Norman-Lewis and Simeon Smith



Swansea
University
Prifysgol
Abertawe



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Background

Like most universities we are working to attract students from across the globe, and international students make up around **20% of our student body**.

In general international students are more motivated and access our services more often than home students.

- **44%** of paid internship programme participants are international students
- **39%** of employability bursaries go to international students

We want to **empower our international students** and **support local employers** to hire international students.

Empowering International Students

We developed a pre-arrival **International Students' Career Development Course** to equip students with the necessary skills to navigate the UK job market before commencing their courses.

- **We hired an international student as an intern** to research, film content and develop marketing for the course.
- The course focusses on **LMI, CV writing, Interviews, and Job Hunting.**
- **270 students** completed the course in the pilot phase in January 2024
- **95% of students** felt 'more informed after completing the course'
- Now being rolled out to "Top-up Degree" courses.

Supporting Local Employers

We developed two guides, one for employers looking to hire international students and one for international students accessing the UK job market.

Both are available on our website and in print.

We also ran events to connect local employers to students and encourage more employment of international students.

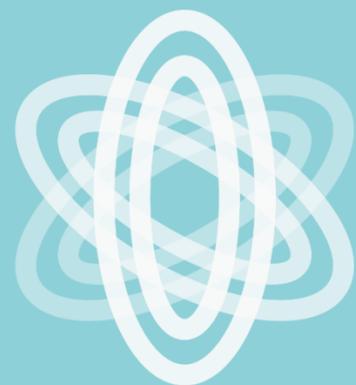


What we learned

- + Hiring an international student to engage other international students.
 - + Regular Group Meetings
 - + Shared documents on Microsoft Teams
 - + Project Planner to keep everyone on track
 - + Negotiation with suppliers
-
- Completing the project alongside normal workloads was challenging
 - Offering fewer, more specific resources could lead to more student action.

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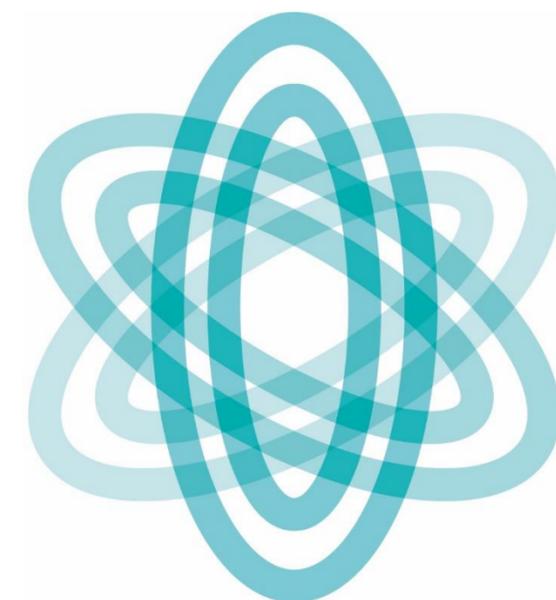
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Supporting international students fleeing humanitarian crises

Untangling the experiences of students from Ukraine and Syria.



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Research context and approach

- 'International students' - problematic labelling and the myth of homogeneity
- 'Forced' vs 'voluntary' migration - a false dichotomy? Overreliance on quantitative approaches?
- Interviews and focus group, data pseudonymised
- Public exhibition to amplify participants' voices within the wider community
- Collaboration with partners to enhance understanding, systems and processes

We interviewed 17 students – 11 from Ukraine, 5 from Syria and 1 from Afghanistan.

Their study levels ranged from Foundation Year (level 5) to PhD (level 8).

Experiences varied according to level of study and nationality.

Communicating Opportunities

- “First and foremost, I would advise to do research and not make migrants search for opportunities themselves. If a university can provide some help to a migrant, it must give all the information about that”
- “I had been looking for PhD opportunities for 2 months in spring 2022. Only some universities had Scholarships for PGT courses, but the communication wasn't structured. You had to e-mail each university separately to learn about the details”
- “Creating a website for Ukrainians only with links to organisations that are focused on helping students, along with a list of all available funding opportunities. Somebody just posted this information on Facebook...you know, I was searching and I found it, but someone less determined will decide there isn't anything and won't go to study”



Academic Support

- "It's a teacher's care that gives you... when they are not just paid for what they do, but they communicate and help students."
- "A professor is always your friend, your advisor, you can come up and ask about anything and you don't have this feeling like you can't approach him because of his higher rank or status."
- "There were people in my university who were in a terrible mental state, and they couldn't complete the assignments on time but there was no option to take an extension. We understood that if they fail to meet the deadline and then they provide the explanation post-factum, there was a chance that the university wouldn't consider it and they might lose their place at the university"



Language Support

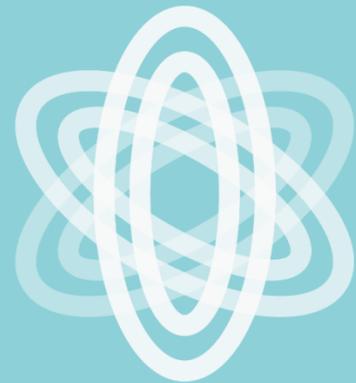
- "To be honest, I think that language support could be improved."
- "I noticed that my English has significantly improved... But there's still room for improvement"
- "Language barrier is a problem. We didn't have any lessons in English punctuation, for example, it's different. They always consider that when assessing our assignments, it influences the final mark."
- "We need help with other English, not just academic. The forms [official paperwork] are difficult to understand."



Conclusions

- The primary concerns regarded communication of opportunities both for study and funding
- Students appreciated staff sensitivity to their situation
- Respondents felt that there was a difference in sympathy depending on where the student was from
- Ongoing support is necessary, long after the initial "crisis"

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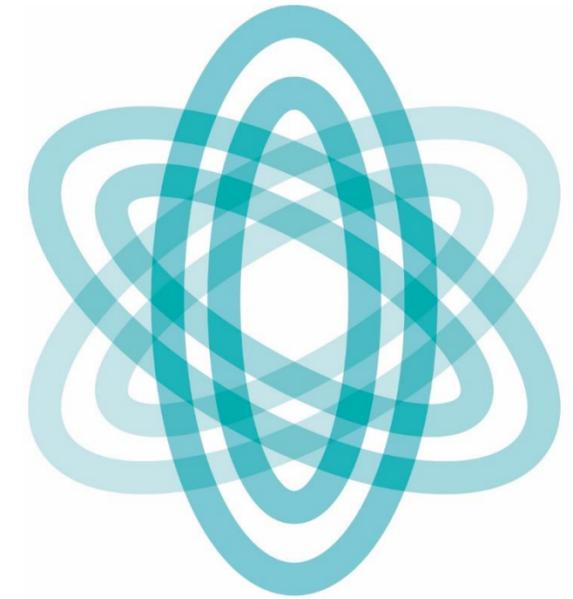
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International Talent Symposium: A regional approach to employer engagement

Emily Sandwell,
International Careers Consultant, University of Stirling



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International Talent Symposium Project Overview

The University of Stirling International Talent Symposium was created to:

1. Support international students in navigating the Scottish labour market
2. Address the lack of awareness amongst local businesses about the benefits of hiring international students and graduates

Key partners:

- Forth Valley business community: included STEP, Ceteris, and Codebase
- Alumni and employers contributed insights and experiences
- International event Intern
- Students' Union



Student Focus

Inform and educate international students on:

- The Forth Valley labour market to help them find suitable work, projects, and graduate jobs.
- Forth Valley as a place to live and work.
- Professionalism in the Scottish workplace.

Student programme included:

- Main symposium event and workshop series
- Pre event workshop series
- Online resources and recordings

Global minds, local impact

Gain experience and enhance your career
in Scotland's thriving labour market



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Employer Focus

Inform employers in the Forth Valley region

- Address skills gaps – an insight into the international talent pool at University of Stirling
- Ways to utilise and benefit from international talent e.g. student projects, Internships and graduate employment
- Visa options for recruitment

Employer programme included:

- Main symposium event
- Employer Roadshow
- Code Base Unfiltered project show case
- Online resources and recordings

Global minds, local impact

Connect and enhance your business
with international talent



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Outcomes & Feedback

- 29 student attended the pre-event workshops series.
- 86 students attended the main networking event.
- 17 guests from large companies and local businesses attended the main event.
- 3 local small businesses attended an employer roadshow workshop prior to this.
- 16 employers attended the Codebase showcase
- 15 University staff from different services and faculties attended the main event.
- Workshops were recorded and video content created for use after the pilot for both students and employers.

96% of attendees said the event had improved their knowledge and help foster connections

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Feedback

"Inspiring evening hearing about the leading University of Stirling programme linking global talent with local employers to drive real impact. With the University's expertise in subjects from data, business and economics to biology, environmental science and media attracting international students from over 140 countries worldwide, Stirling truly is alive with talent."

Stirling Council Economic Development Unit

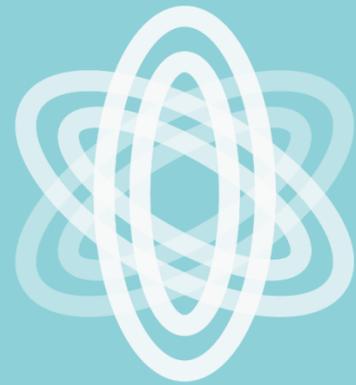
"As an alumnus, it was truly fulfilling to reflect on my journey as an international student and share how the University played a pivotal role in shaping my success in Scotland."

University of Stirling Alumni

[University of Stirling Appendix \(padlet.org\)](https://padlet.org)



Emily Sandwell,
University of Stirling



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#WeAreInternational Grants reports and resources

ukcisa.org.uk/grants

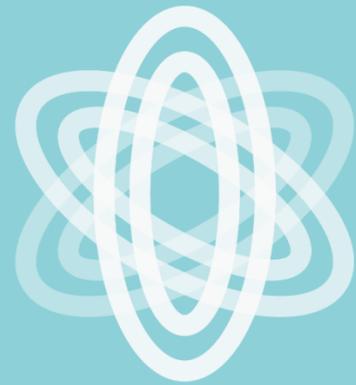


#WeAreInternational Student Charter

1. **Create a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable environment for international students in the UK**
2. Value international students' perspectives and voices in institutional policy and decision-making
3. **Integrate sustainability as a core value in institutional internationalisation strategies**
4. Monitor and evaluate existing available support and provision for international students on an ongoing basis
5. **Make available targeted support for international students in every area of the student experience.**



Any questions?



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Questions for Nottingham University and International Students House

What's the one thing you wish you knew before you came and that you'd want to tell someone from your home country? (for both of you)

For me it would be that there is an emotional shock to moving to the UK - so above food and the weather, being in a new place is intimidating and its key [for institutions] to be open [for students] to reach out to the available sources for help and support. - Aneeza Pervez

Personally, I wish someone told me how much independent learning was involved in the degree (I was expecting 9-5 classes every day like it was back home, Romania) as well as how proactive you need to be. I was expecting that if I did good in my studies, I will be picked for projects/ extra work for academics. I found that the opposite was true and that I needed to market myself a lot to get those opportunities and my grades were not enough. - Diana Catana



Questions for Swansea University

Was it January starters who did the [pre arrival work] course? Could you expand on the format and how long it was please?

Yes, pilot phase was for January 2024 starter pre arrival and these students completed the course in December 2023. The format for the course was a mixture of video, power point and a short quiz at the end to check learning.

How did you target employers?

We don't have a specific business engagement function in the team, so it can be difficult to target specific areas. For the launch of this project, we negotiated with a local business network to host one of their monthly business breakfasts on campus for free in exchange for letting us launch the project at the event. That way we could maximise attendance while not spending too much of our budget. This worked really well. We also invited our internship providers and careers fair attendees.

What was employer engagement like with the events you mentioned - were you happy with the numbers attending?

We were very happy with attendance! As I said in the above answer, we partnered with a local business network to extend our reach and also invited our own internship providers and careers fair attendees. Part-time work provision is particularly tricky for us in Swansea, but hosting two Part Time Jobs Fairs each year has definitely helped. It also helps certain students that might have more graduate-level work in mind for their time in the UK to understand the culture of student jobs here better. A lot of students tell us that they're expecting to find admin or project work in an office for their part time employment, and while some students might find this type of work, most of our students, international or not, have part time jobs in retail, catering, care or education, not "graduate" environments. Experiencing this reality in a controlled setting like the part time jobs fair allows us to support them into these roles while explaining the skills they can evidence and develop in these types of jobs.

Did you monitor if all students that completed your Pre arrival work [course] did actually join the university? What % was this?

We followed up with those who completed the pre arrival course with an evaluation, to gain feedback on both content and if they felt it was beneficial once at Swansea. But I do not have a % of those students who enrolled.



Questions and comments for Keele University

Can you explain what the process of choosing a UK University is like for students fleeing areas of conflict?

From the interviews conducted, it appears that these students tend to gravitate towards the institutions local to the area in which they were placed for the Home Office. - Dr Alison Long

Each case is very unique. However, what is very common - they indeed choose the universities close to the area they're allocated, or they often follow the advice of local people they know, sometimes who help with admissions. University ratings are somehow important but it's not the key factor; financial costs and the availability of scholarships is very important. - Dr Filippo Nereo

As opposed to a 'voluntary' migrant. How do students choose a university over another?

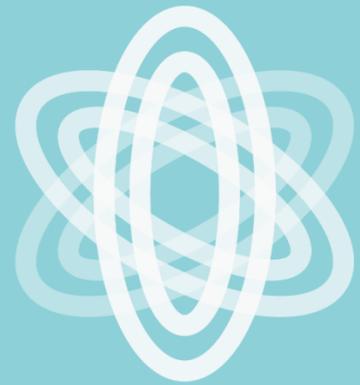
I think their choice is very much dictated by finances - scholarships/bursaries available and whether those fit with their particular area. But often, students approach their "local" university as they have been told where to live by the Home Office. We had a case of one student who had been in the area for a number of years, successfully applied for both a place on the Foundation Year and Article 26 funding, and was then moved to a different part of the country so was unable to take up the place or funding. - Dr Alison Long

Some UK universities have partnerships with the universities of their home countries, this means they can more easily switch to a UK program and often with a partially/fully covered costs. Most often students research the websites to see if the university offers grants or some schemes for students from their country. But as always-just finding the best financial conditions + suitable programme + willingness to help them with documentation which sometimes can be non-responding to general requirements. - Dr Filippo Nereo

<https://www.displacedstudent.org.uk/> is a great resource for all scholarships and opportunities at universities, it is hosted by Refugee Education, STAR and Universities of Sanctuary. - Eileen Laffan, Student Advisor, University of Sussex



Thank you



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