

# International & EU Students Research Project



**BRISTOL SU**  
the best student life

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*This report was authored by Alice Phillips, Vasilki Sogia and Rizwan Javed (2019)*



## Executive Summary

Bristol SU's international & EU research project covered a broad range of topics relating to the international student experience, including arriving and settling in the UK, social experience, educational experience, financial experience, experiences of discrimination, careers and experiences of Bristol SU. A survey was conducted in June 2018, followed by focus groups in November 2018. The findings provide an important insight into the issues currently facing international students and the key priorities for these students whilst they are studying at Bristol.

### Key Findings

#### Arriving and Settling in the UK

- Students were most likely to be motivated to study in the UK by the quality of education (75%) and career prospects (66%).
- Cost of living was reported as the biggest issue faced by international students, with 62% reported this. International students were more likely to experience issues with cost of living (67%) compared to EU students (53%).

#### Social Experience

- International and EU students found it easier to make international friends, with 67% agreeing they had found this easy compared to 43% who found making UK friends easy.
- Students wanted the SU to organise more trips to UK towns and cities, as well as non-alcohol social events and global cultural events.

#### Educational Experience

- Many students felt the key difference between studying at home and in the UK was the independent nature of learning expected in the UK. This was largely seen as positive, but some students found this difficult.
- Support around essay writing (46%), time management (38%) and thinking critically (37%) were the most requested areas of academic support by students in the survey.
- Postgraduate students were more likely to want support on English language skills, with 41% indicating this, compared to 13% of undergraduates.

#### Equality and Freedom from Prejudice

- EU students were more likely to feel a sense of belonging, feel welcome and feel safe at the University of Bristol and Bristol as a city than international students.
- Religious students were less likely to feel a sense of belonging and to feel safe and welcome at the University and in the city than non-religious students.
- 10% of students reported feeling discriminated against because of their nationality, ethnicity of religion whilst studying at UoB by an academic staff member, with 10% reporting this from a non-academic staff member, 15% from a member of the public and 19% from a fellow student.
- EU students were less likely to report experiencing discrimination.

## Financial Experience

- Rent and bills were seen as the most difficult expense for students to meet, with 43% of respondents reporting they found meeting this cost difficult.
- 48% of respondents reported worrying about their finances 'sometimes' with 41% reporting they worried 'often' or 'very often'.
- International students worried more about their financial situation, with 46% reporting they worried often or very often, compared to 30% of EU students.
- 49% of respondents found living in Bristol more expensive than they had expected.

## Experiences with Bristol SU

- 25% of respondents had never heard of a Students' Union before arriving in the UK, with only 16% reporting that they felt they had a good knowledge of Students' Unions.

## Careers and Development

- Staying in the UK for work or further study were students' most common hopes for the future.
- EU students were less likely to want to return home for work, with just 6% of EU students indicating this compared to 25% of international students.
- The majority of students wanted to secure part-time work or work experience, with just 15% of respondents indicating that they did not want this.
- International students were more likely to want to secure part-time work or work experience during their degree, with just 9% indicating they did not compared to 25% of EU students.

## Introduction

The University of Bristol and Bristol SU is becoming more and more international, with a growing international student population and an International Students' Officer set to be elected in March 2019. This project aimed to provide some meaningful data on the experiences of international students, to help both the University and Students' Union improve their support and provision for this group of students.

The project followed a mixed methodology, with a quantitative and qualitative survey launched in June 2018 and two focus groups held in November 2018. The survey received 222 responses, with an 80% completion rate. There was huge interest in the focus groups, with 174 students signing up in total. Participants were picked at random, balancing for gender and international/EU status. 11 students attended the undergraduate focus group and 12 students attended the postgraduate focus group.

The survey's sample was a limitation of the research, with a 4% response rate overall and a 3% response rate for international students and a 7% response rate for EU students. These low response rates affect the reliability of the findings presented in this report, particularly when it comes to differences between demographic groups. However, the findings do help to identify some of the likely key issues for international students at the University of Bristol.

This report also draws on 2017-18 data from Bristol SU's Pulse survey and 2018-19 data from Bristol SU's registration questions. Bristol SU's Pulse Survey had an 8% response rate for UK students, 18% response rate for EU students and a 9% response rate for overseas students. Response rates were difficult to calculate for the registration questions, as students were asked whether or not they defined as international rather than their fee status. However, the questions did have a very high level of respondents.

## Survey Demographics

### Academic/University background

Level of study	Undergraduate	57%
	Postgraduate Taught	21%
	Postgraduate Research	22%
Year of study	1	45%
	2	24%
	3	19%
	4	10%
	5+	2%
Faculty	Arts	12%
	Biomedical Sciences	9%
	Engineering	23%
	Health Sciences	5%
	Science	21%
	Social Sciences and Law	34%

Prior to your current course had you studied or lived in the UK?	Yes	34%
	No	66%
Prior to your current course, did you do a pre-session course?	Yes	10%
	No	90%

## Characteristics

Fee status	EU	36%
	International	64%
Gender	Woman	60%
	Man	36%
	Non-binary or another gender identity	0.5%
	Prefer not to say	3%
Sexual orientation	Lesbian, gay, bisexual or other minority orientation	11%
Trans	Transgender	0.5%
Ethnicity	Black and Minority Ethnic	37%
Disability	Physical Disability	1%
	Non-physical Disability	9%
Mature student	Undergraduate	9%
	Postgraduate	19%
Caring responsibilities	Childcare responsibilities	4%
	Caring responsibilities	0.5%
Religion	Christian	23%
	Muslim	7%
	Buddhist	5%
	Other religion	8%
	Atheist/agnostic/humanist/no religion	48%

## Focus Group Demographics

Fee status	EU	17%
	International	83%
Level of study [PG focus group]	Postgraduate taught	83%
	Postgraduate research	17%
Gender	Woman	61%
	Man	39%

## Findings

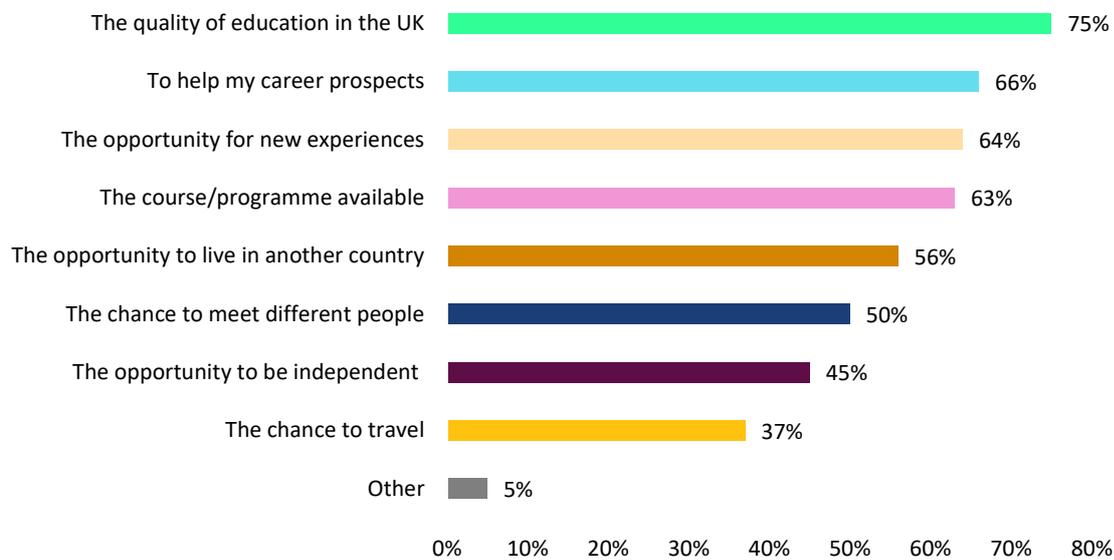
### Arriving and Settling in the UK

#### Motivations for study



## What motivated you to come and study in the UK rather than your home country?

Response rate: 208



The quality of education was the most common motivation expressed by students, followed by career prospects. Female students were slightly more likely to have been motivated by the chance to travel, with 41% reporting this compared to 30% of male students. Undergraduates were also more likely to have been motivated by travel, with 43% reporting this compared to 27% of postgraduates.

Undergraduates were more likely to have been motivated by the chance to meet new people, with 59% reporting this compared to 40% of postgraduates. Postgraduates were less motivated to live in another country, with 47% reporting this compared to 63% of undergraduates.

For students who responded other, the most common answer was that their partner lived in the UK. Other students responded that it felt like a natural decision, or that they had family in the UK. One student moved to the UK to work with a specific academic.

In Bristol SU's registration questions, students were asked what their main motivators were to apply for university, with 4732 self-defined international students responding and 14671 non-international students responding. Both international and non-international students were most likely to cite learning about their chosen subject (82% and 80%) and improving their employability and earning potential (71% and 69%). International students were noticeably more likely to apply to meet the expectations of their family or community, with 26% reporting this compared to 16% of non-international students.

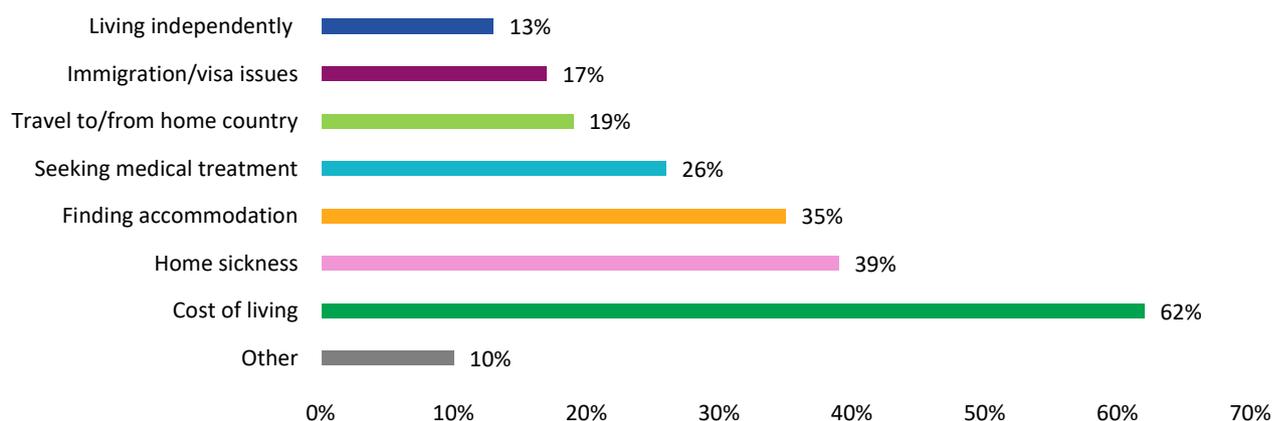
International students were also more likely to report that they applied to build the skills to change the world around them, with 66% reporting this compared to 52% of non-international students. International students were less likely to apply because of the social life of university and the opportunity to make friends; 55% of international students reported this compared to 66% of non-international students. However,

social experience was one area in Pulse where international students were less satisfied than home students. Just 52% of international students and 61% of EU students agreed that they were getting the social experience they wanted from University, compared to 70% of home students.

## Settling in

Did you experience any difficulty with the following issues that negatively impacted your experience settling in the UK?

Response rate: 172



Cost of living was by far the biggest issue experienced, followed by home sickness and finding accommodation. Unsurprisingly, immigration and visa issues were less of an issue for EU students, with only 2% of EU students experiencing difficulties around this compared to 24% of international students. Seeking medical treatment was also more of an issue for international students, with 31% of international students reporting this problem compared to 14% of EU students. Notably in the Pulse survey physical health was more of a concern for international students than home and EU students, with 48% reporting they were concerned about this compared to 32% of EU and 33% of home students.

International students were also more likely to experience difficulty with the cost of living, with 67% of international students reporting this compared to 53% of EU students. International students were more likely to experience problems seeking medical treatment, with 31% experiencing problems around this compared to 14% of EU students.

Other difficulties identified by students included language issues, a lack of job opportunities, loneliness, racist incidents and issues with paperwork and adapting to British culture. Many students claimed that they had not received adequate information from the university about accommodation options before arrival, with some unaware of the existence of university halls. One student noted 'I was underprepared for the competitiveness of the UK housing market'. Other students were unhappy about the quality of their halls and the pastoral support they received. In the focus groups several students argued that there should be more staff or students from Bristol supporting arrivals at Heathrow and other airports. It was

also suggested that information for international students was 'not just in one place' so students had to look quite hard to find everything out. One postgraduate student commented that the international lounge had been presented as somewhere to address any concerns, but that when she arrived it only seemed to offer support around bank accounts.

*'I moved out of university halls. I don't think the accommodation is good in terms of hygiene, drinking students, noise and distance to University'.*

*'I couldn't like just talk to one person and like chat it out I had to like go to different people and different places and it was still very confusing'*

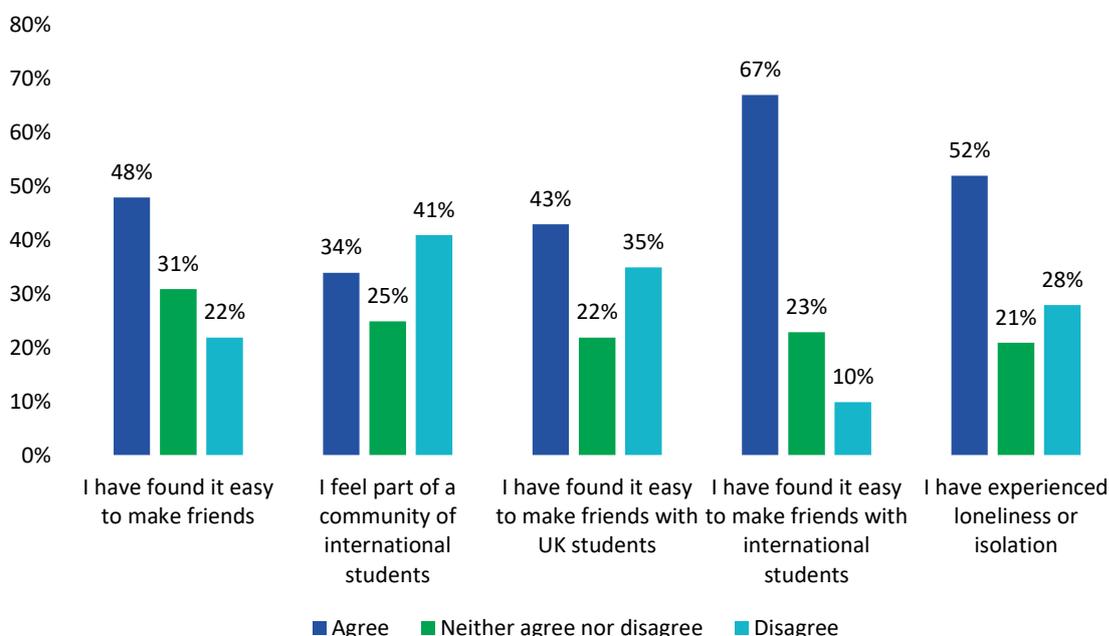
When asked if there was anything they would have liked to have known about living and studying in the UK before arriving, students cited accommodation costs and the cost of living. Students also requested more information about assessments, university culture and travel information such as student bus discounts and railcards. In the focus groups students spoke about the culture shock they experienced when arriving in the UK. Several commented on a 'politeness but at the same distance between people' and 'lots of pretences'.

## Social Experience

### Making friends and fitting in

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Response rate: 195



Almost half of respondents found it easy to make friends, with 67% agreeing that they found it easy to make friends with international students and 43% agreeing that they found it easy to make friends with UK students.



EU students appeared to find it easier to make friends, with 53% agreeing compared to 45% of international students. EU students also found it easier to make friends with UK students, with 54% agreeing compared to 37% of international students.

Male students found it easier to make friends, with 55% agreeing compared to 43% of female students. Male students also found it easier to make friends with UK students, with 49% agreeing compared to 38% of female students. Women were more likely to report that they had experienced loneliness or isolation, with 54% agreeing compared to 47% of male students.

In open text questions students were asked how the SU and University could make it easier to make international and British friends. When it came to international friends many respondents felt that hosting events specifically for international students would be beneficial. Some students criticized the inconsistency of international events, pointing out that most of them seemed to happen in the first few weeks of term. It was also suggested that a parenting scheme could be introduced between international students. With regards to student accommodation respondents noted that the proportion of international students across each hall was uneven and suggested a more even distribution could help students make friends. Mature students and students with families appeared to find it difficult to attend events because they were tailored to the needs and expectations of younger students. In terms of making it easier to make British friends, the most common suggestion was mixed events to encourage integration. One student argued that the SU and university needed to 'openly address the way international and UK students do not mix'. Another student felt that having events for international students was positive but 'the focus should be on encouraging international students to attend events frequented by British students'. A parenting scheme between international and British students was also suggested, to help foster understanding between the groups.

*'... it wasn't my being an international student that made it difficult to integrate. It was probably more because I had my wife and child with me and there are no activities for a group of students like me'*

*'Make them aware that they should be more patient and not make fun of us because of our language problems'*

*'I would love it if international students were given British mentors through peer mentoring schemes to help them understand British culture better and acclimatize'*

In the focus groups students discussed the difficulties they had experienced when it came to making friends. Several noted that they felt that the existence of a language barrier had made making friends more difficult. One undergraduate noted that 'I am very talkative and participative but in French' and another commented that 'in Brazil I liked to go out and be friendly, but when I arrived here, I felt so alone'. Several students reported that they felt they just had acquaintances rather than proper friends. Participants also spoke about the effect that being an international student could have on their mental health, with several students in the undergraduate focus group arguing they would benefit from someone to speak to

who 'can relate basically'. Meanwhile one postgraduate student noted that they were 'not used to talking about my problems... this is not my culture'.

In the postgraduate focus group there was a notable discussion about the experiences of Chinese students at the university. One (non-Chinese) student (B) commented that the Chinese students in her class had 'a really difficult time expressing their emotions in English... maybe they'd much prefer to speak to a Chinese person'. The rest of the conversation is noted below.

*D: here we have a Chinese student maybe they can...*

*B: Most of my classmates are Chinese and I find it difficult to talk to them. They are not really like open-*

*Focus group facilitator: what were you going to say?*

*Chinese student 1: I was going to say because our English is not good enough to talk, so we prefer to talk with someone really, we can talk Chinese it's easy.*

*B: our English is not good either.*

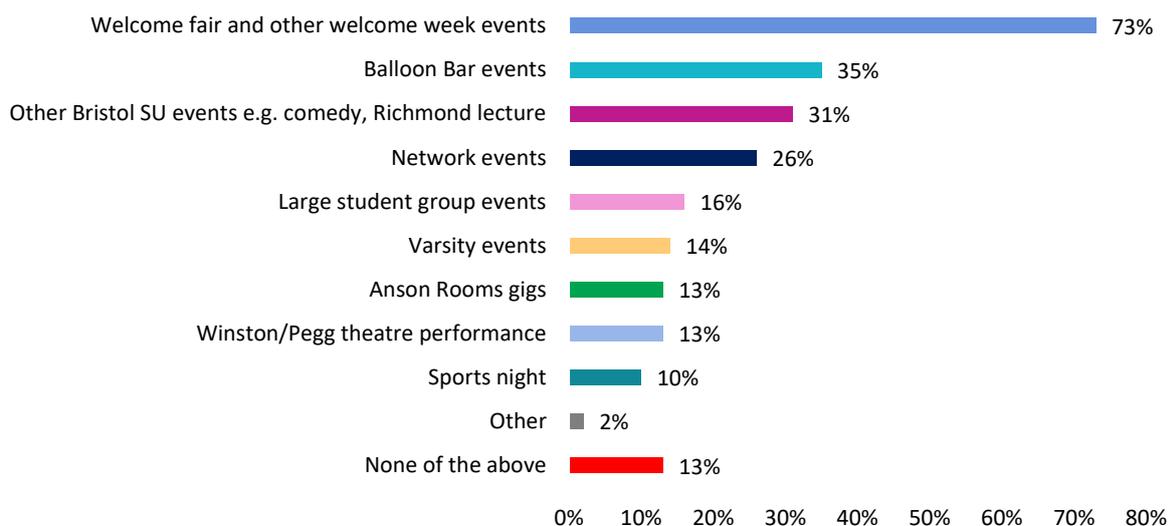
*Chinese student 2: A lot of Chinese students in English university are especially in the EFIM school... so we are open, we all want to communicate easily with international students from other countries, but maybe there are not many channels for me to say something, I think it's hard, it's hard.*

The conversation above suggests some possible animosity on the part of some international students towards Chinese students specifically, with the idea that this group of students are 'not open' and perhaps do not want to integrate. Yet the testimonies of the two Chinese students in the group suggests instead a concern around language skills and a desire to communicate. Such dialogues highlight the dangers of treating international students as a homogenous group, as students from certain countries may be experiencing greater difficulties around integration.

## Events

Have you attended any of the following SU or student events this year?

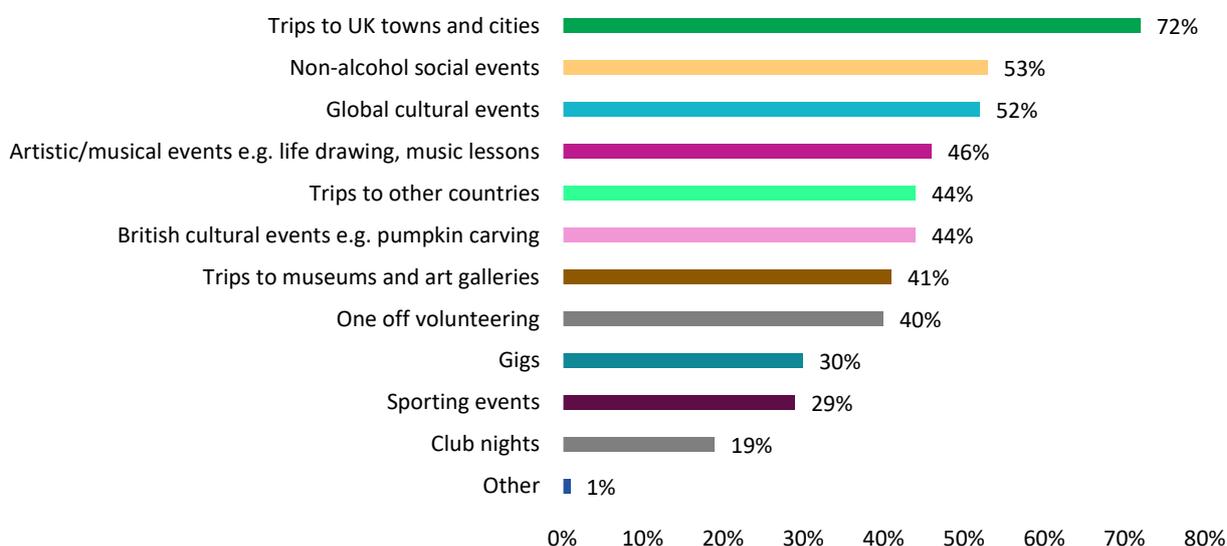
Response rate: 191



Welcome fair and other welcome week events were by far the most commonly attended events, with 73% of students reporting having attended one of these events. This was followed by Balloon Bar events and other SU events such as the Richmond Lectures, Comedy and the Volunteering fair.

What kinds of events would you like to see the Students' Union organising?

Response rate: 179



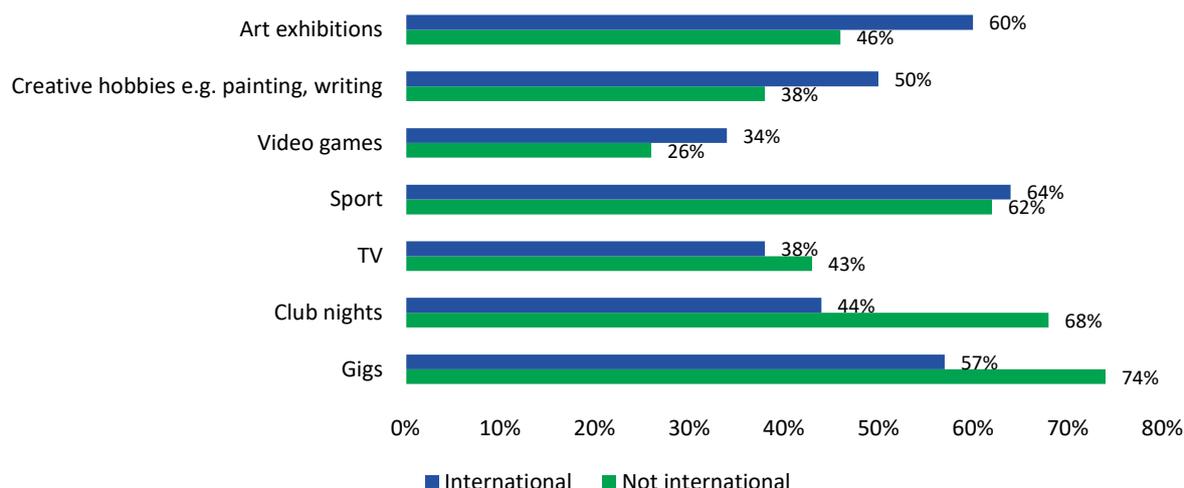
The most popular kind of event suggested was trips to UK towns and cities, followed by non-alcohol social events and global cultural events.

In open text comments many students reiterated the need for more events that do not involve alcohol consumption. Others noted a need for a wider range of events, particularly for PGR or PGT students. One PhD student noted that starting in January was very difficult 'because there are no welcome events'.

*'I think there could be more social events that do not involve clubs or alcohol so people can actually talk to each other instead of just getting drunk, especially because there are plenty of people who are put off by drinking and clubbing'.*

## Hobbies and interests

In Bristol SU's registration questions, students were asked if they were interested in a number of different hobbies and events, with 4893 self-defined international students responding and 15191 non-international students responding. There were a number of areas where international and non-international students differed in their interests.



International students were more interested in art exhibitions, creative hobbies and video games. They were less interested in TV, club nights, and gigs.

## Educational Experience

### Differing educational experiences

In both the survey and focus groups students spoke about how the British educational system differed from their own. The most commonly identified difference between systems was the independent learning expected of students in the UK. Most students in the survey linked this to the high quality of education in the UK and perceived this as a positive opportunity to shape their own research and pursue their own interests. One responded compared the UK system to the Chinese educational system which they felt was based on 'forcing and pressuring' students to study. The student reported that they preferred the UK system where 'everyone is free to express opinions, regardless of rank or experience'.

However, other students found the independent nature of the UK educational system more of a struggle, with one student reporting that 'it is expected of you to figure out how everything works without much help'. Some students also critiqued the quality of teaching at the UK and felt that the education they received was not worth the fees that they paid. In the postgraduate focus group, PGT students spoke

about struggling with the independent nature of the British educational system. The seminar format appeared to be challenging for some students, with several expressing confusion around having to do reading before a seminar and tutors facilitating conversations rather than lecturing. There was a sense from several students that they felt they were teaching themselves. This was not so clearly expressed in the undergraduate focus group, but students in this group did report struggling in seminars as 'English people generally are the loudest... we don't really get a chance to stand out'. Survey respondents also reported finding it 'difficult to keep up with discussions', with accents and speed of speech also proving challenging.

*'In my country we don't have seminars and things like that, so I wish we had more guidance on how to navigate through the whole process, because they just expect us to show, participate and give opinions and stuff but I've never done that so I need more explanation of how, what is expected of me and I how I can achieve a good grade because I'm kind of lost'*

*'One thing I really miss is being able to study with other people. But it's like everyone is so protective of their work, so you can't actually get to study with other people'*

Many students also expressed concerns about their inability to understand what was expected of them academically. One survey respondent commented 'getting a 70% is so hard. In Greece that would be acceptable but still a bit low'. Some students claimed that marking schemes were never properly introduced to them, with others finding marking 'unfair' and 'too subjective'. Language barriers were another issue mentioned frequently by students. Cultural differences were also a factor, with one undergraduate focus group participant noting that 'French people really like to do long sentences with lots of words in it... in England it's very not detailed and just little sentences every time. It's the entire methodology I have to change'.

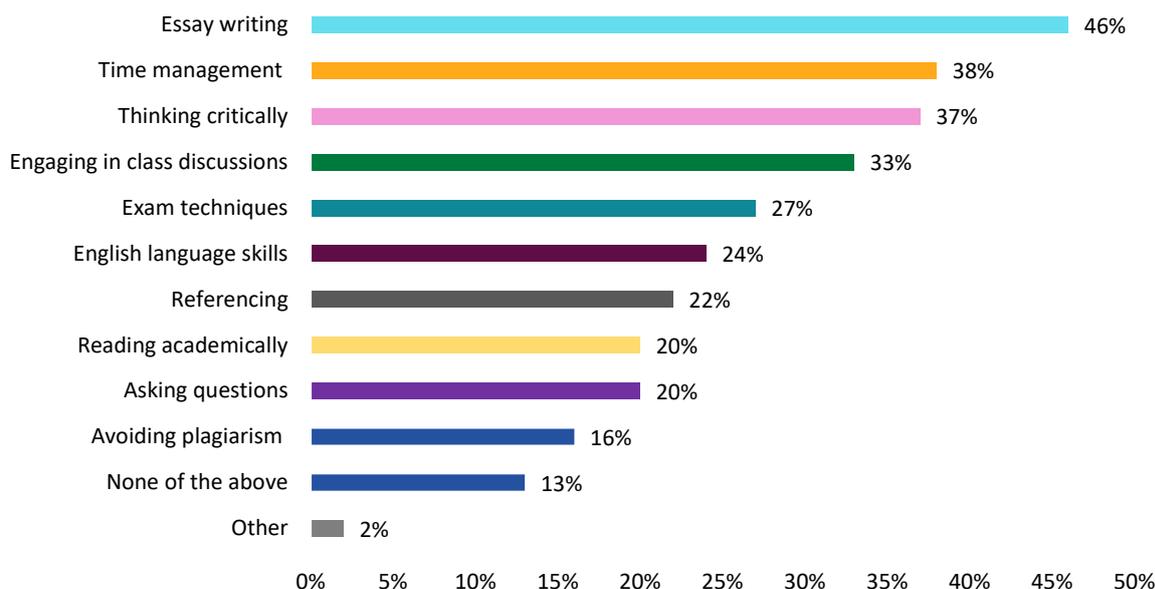
*'Understanding what is expected of you for some of the written assignments and exams has been difficult at times. And there are contradictions between what we are asked to do and the feedback we received'*

*'I am a very independent person, but here units are too independent. We just get introductory units and we don't receive useful information about our course'*

## **Academic support**

Would you like any further academic support in any of the following areas?

Response rate: 176



The most common areas of support felt to be needed were essay writing, time management and thinking critically. A third of students felt they needed more support engaging in class discussions.

Students were also asked whether the support they received at university matched up to their expectations before they arrived. 44% of students answered that it had, with 31% unsure and 25% feeling that it had not. International students were less likely to agree that the support they received matched their expectations, with 39% indicating they agreed compared to 55% of EU students.

In a number of different areas, international students were more likely to feel they needed support than EU students.

Area of Support	International students	EU students
Time management	42%	28%
Engaging in class discussions	36%	26%
Thinking critically	40%	31%
English language skills	28%	17%

Meanwhile, postgraduate students were significantly more likely to want more support on English language skills, with 41% indicating this, compared to 13% of undergraduate students.

In both the focus groups and survey students elaborated on the academic support they received and how this could be improved. In the undergraduate focus group students called for a peer mentoring scheme for international students and more explanation of 'the English structure' of education from academic support staff. In the postgraduate focus group one student noted that at the beginning of their course they had a session with their academic mentor, but this discussion was limited to unit choices. The student argued that the session could be used to identify skill levels and support available. In the survey postgraduate students called for more



support around publishing articles and greater funds to attend academic conferences.

*'Doing law is quite difficult and we didn't receive a lot of advice on how to approach the subject which caused a lot of stress and anxiety'.*

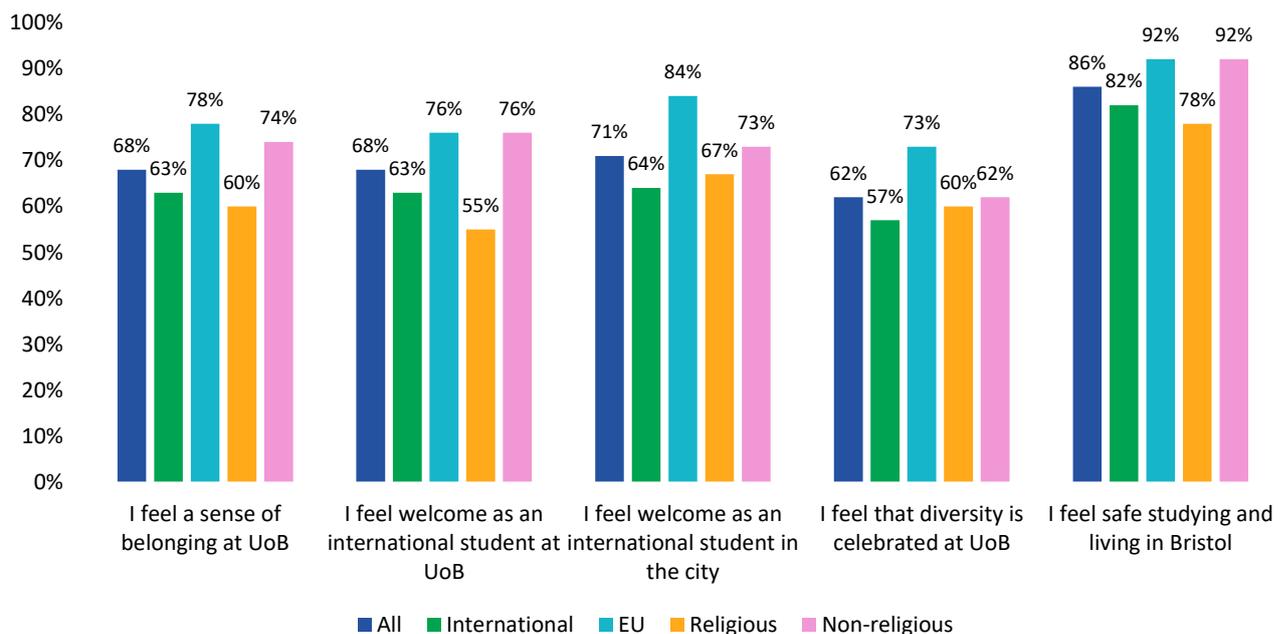
Students also called for more proactive support from personal tutors, which has been raised in previous research by the SU. One student argued that personal tutors should 'reach out more and check up on how we are doing. It would be nice to have someone ask me how I was doing and knew what people normally struggle with'. There were also calls for better administrative support, as 'the university is accepting a lot of postgraduate students and it is not able to keep up with that amount of students'.

## Equality & Freedom from Prejudice

### Safety and Belonging

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Response rate: 183



EU students were generally more likely to feel safe and welcomed at the university and Bristol as a city. Notably, the Pulse survey also revealed issues around safety for international students, with 31% of international students reporting they were concerned about personal safety compared to 13% of EU students and 8% of UK students. Religious students were also generally less likely to feel safe and welcomed.

Interestingly, male students were more likely to feel welcomed as an international student at the university, with 76% agreeing compared to 64% of female students. Male students were also more likely to agree that diversity was celebrated, with 70%

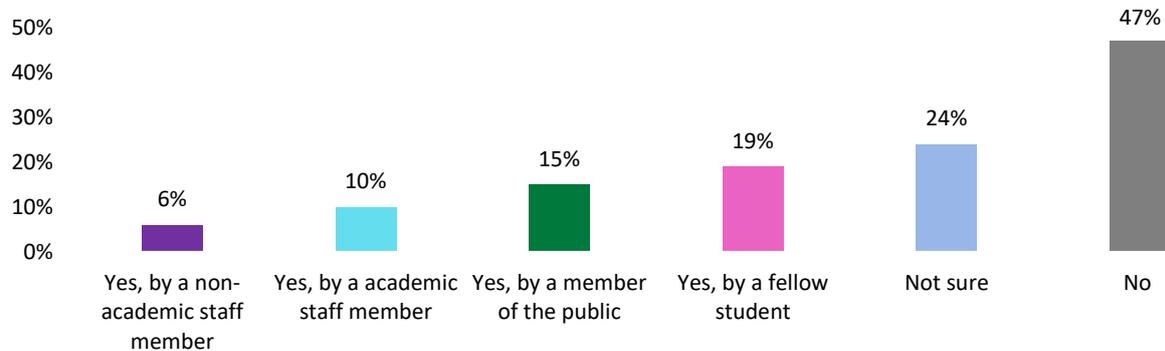


agreeing compared to 59% of female students. Such findings illustrate how intersectional identities can shape the experiences of international students.

### Experiences of Discrimination

Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your nationality, ethnicity or religion whilst studying at the University of Bristol?

Response rate: 181



10% of students had experienced discrimination from an academic staff member, 15% from a member of the public, and 19% from a fellow student.

International students were more likely to have experienced discrimination or be unsure about whether they had experienced discrimination than EU students, with 59% of EU students reporting they had not experienced discrimination compared to 41% of international students. Female students were also more likely to report they had either experienced discrimination or weren't sure if they had, with 45% reporting they hadn't compared to 53% of male students.

Some students chose to elaborate on their experience. One student noted that 'people assume based on appearance that I don't speak English/am Chinese, and their attitudes change accordingly'. Another student commented that a member of staff 'makes awkward comments about me and another student being Mexican'. Others spoke about 'subtle' discrimination and a struggle to fit in with other students. In the undergraduate focus group many participants reported being asked if they could speak English. Several participants also reported feeling somewhat excluded from home students with one student noting that conversations often descended into home students 'talking amongst themselves' and another student commenting that 'people assume you will only mingle with your own people'. None of the participants in the postgraduate focus group had experienced anything that made them feel uncomfortable, though many noted that they were in largely international classes. One participant reported that her friend in a majority English classroom had experienced British students 'making fun of the other students'. However, in contrast to these experiences, one survey participant argued that 'most of the blatant discrimination comes from other international students'.

*'It happened a few times that someone said "how is Hitler doing" after mentioning my German background. This happened in casual/party situations where alcohol was involved. Still, I was not quite sure how to react to that'*



*'One pharmacology lecturer specifically instructed students to give heavy penalties to international students who made any grammatical error. (Peer marking work)'*

Suggestions to improve the environment for international students at Bristol included improved systems of reporting discrimination and more guidance for students and staff on appropriate behaviour. Several students also expressed their concerns about safety in the city of Bristol.

## **Brexit**

Survey respondents were asked whether Brexit has shaped their experiences in the UK. By far the most prevalent narratives were those of uncertainty for the future and a feeling of being unwelcome. Many respondents reported that the confusion around Brexit made them worry about their career prospects in the UK and that this uncertainty caused them to consider moving to another country or even consider returning to their home country. One undergraduate student in our focus groups reported that she was 'hesitant' when applying as 'I did not know what would happen to me after graduation'.

Many students reported feeling unwelcome in the UK after Brexit, with one student commenting 'I felt I was an unwelcomed guest in the country'. Another student reported that it had a 'huge impact in emotional terms'. Many felt that Brexit had contributed to anti-immigrant feeling, and for some the normalisation of racist and nationalist behaviour. One undergraduate in our focus group felt that 'the whole nationalist resurgence everywhere has just enabled a lot of people who wouldn't necessarily express discriminatory thoughts'. Another undergraduate in the group reported experiencing hostility at the restaurant where they worked. Meanwhile, several survey respondents felt that they no longer belonged because 'we don't know if we can stay after our degrees'. However, generally students felt that Bristol as a university and city was 'against Brexit', with several students reporting that British students had apologised to them for the referendum. One student reported that part of the reason they had chosen Bristol was because it was a remain voting city.

*'It is making me feel unwelcome. It is harsh to see comments by people in power on the news talking about immigrants in such a way that you cannot avoid feeling harm or unwanted here despite the contributions that you make to this country'*

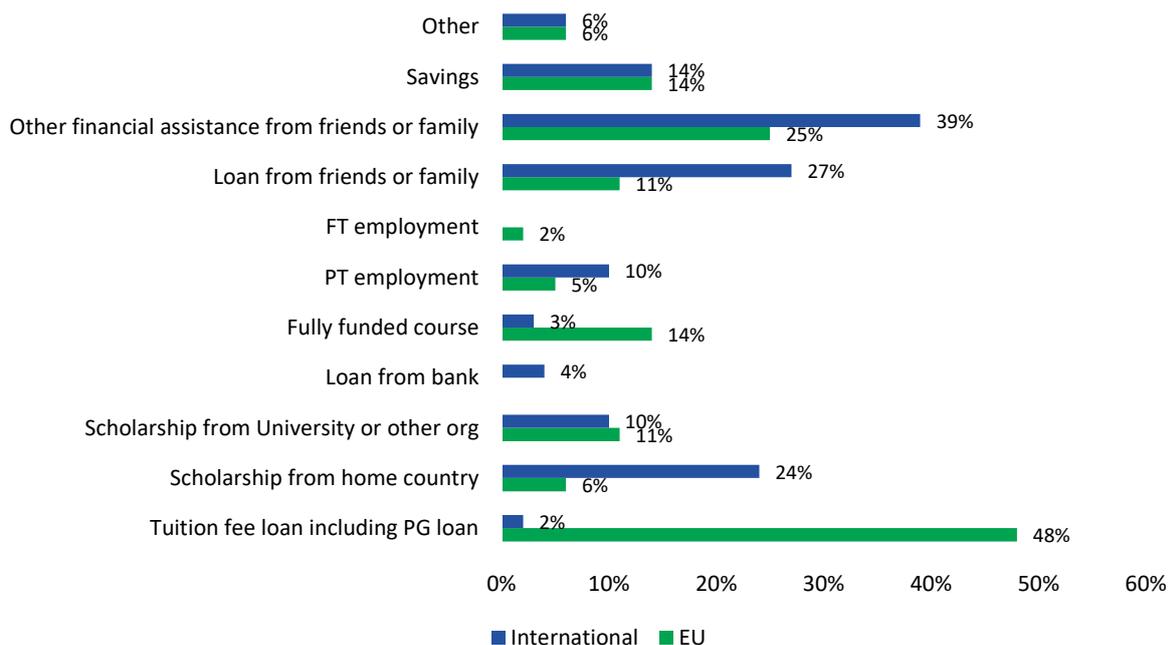
The unfairness of Brexit was also touched upon, with several respondents arguing that they had contributed to the country by working, paying taxes and paying fees so should not potentially be facing having to leave the UK at a later date. One student commented 'I feel like we have been unfairly dealt and that the public image on immigration has been manipulated to a despicable degree'.

## **Financial Experience**

### **Tuition fee funding**

How are your tuition fees funded?

Response rate: 180



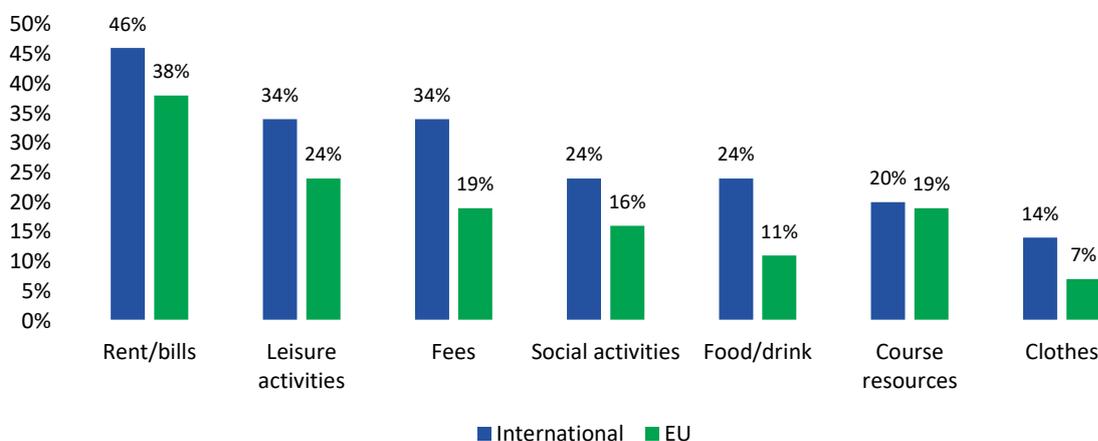
EU students were much more likely to fund their tuition fees through a tuition fee loan from Student Finance England, with international students more likely to have received a scholarship from their home country. EU students were also more likely to be on a fully funded course, for example a studentship or ERSC funding.

International students were more likely to be funding their tuition fees through working part time, through a loan from friends or family or from other financial assistance from friends or family.

## Cost of Living

How easy have you found meeting the following expenses as an international or EU student at UoB? (% difficult)

Response rate: 180



Rent and bills were seen as the most difficult expense to fund by both EU and international students, but international students found it more difficult to meet the cost of fees. Overall, international students found it more difficult than EU students to meet the majority of expenses.

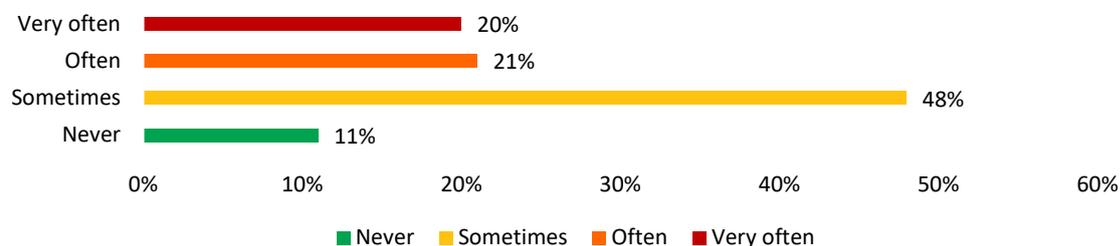
Students discussed their financial experiences in greater detail in our focus groups. Several students commented upon the price of healthy food in the UK, with one student noting that 'I come from Kenya, where you can buy a bunch of bananas for 10p... I came here and it was £1.50'. For other students, accommodation costs were the biggest issue, with one student from Poland reporting that they had to work during their first year to meet these costs and sometimes had to 'sacrifice studying to go to work in order to just have money'. Another student commented that 'my one year rent in my home country cannot get me a cheap accommodation in this place, cheap, for a month'. Several students in the group had also struggled to meet the cost of fees, and called for more financial support from the university.

*'I almost couldn't come back for my final year because I couldn't afford it. And I got a loan two weeks before term started. It was very much a rushed thing. I had already emailed the uni and told them that I can't afford to come back. It is a bit much'*

## Financial Worry

How often do you worry about your financial situation?

Response rate: 180



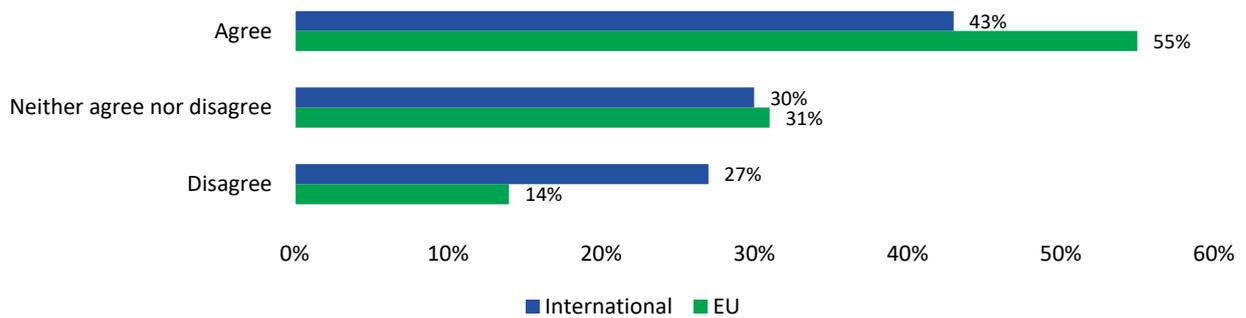
Only 11% of respondents never worried about their financial situation. International students appeared to worry about their financial situation more often than EU students, with 46% of international students reported worrying about their financial situation often or very often, compared to 30% of EU students.

Students were also asked how they found the cost of living in Bristol, compared to their expectations. 49% found it slightly more expensive than they had expected, 24% found it significantly more expensive than expected, and 24% felt it was about the same as they had expected. Just 2% felt that Bristol was less expensive than they had expected.

## Value for Money

To what extent do you agree or disagree that your course is good value for money?

Response rate: 186



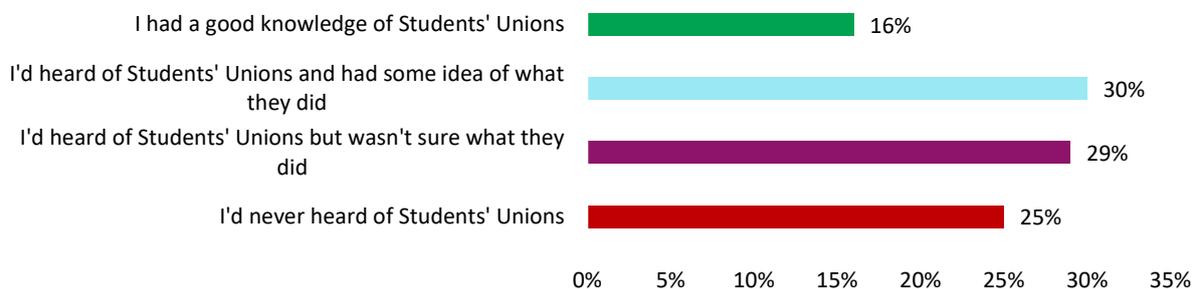
International students were less likely to agree that their course was good value for money, and were more likely to disagree, compared to EU students. This is perhaps unsurprising given that EU students pay the same fees as home students, and also receive a tuition fee loan.

## Experiences with Bristol SU

### Knowledge of Students' Unions

Before I came to the UK...

Response rate: 176



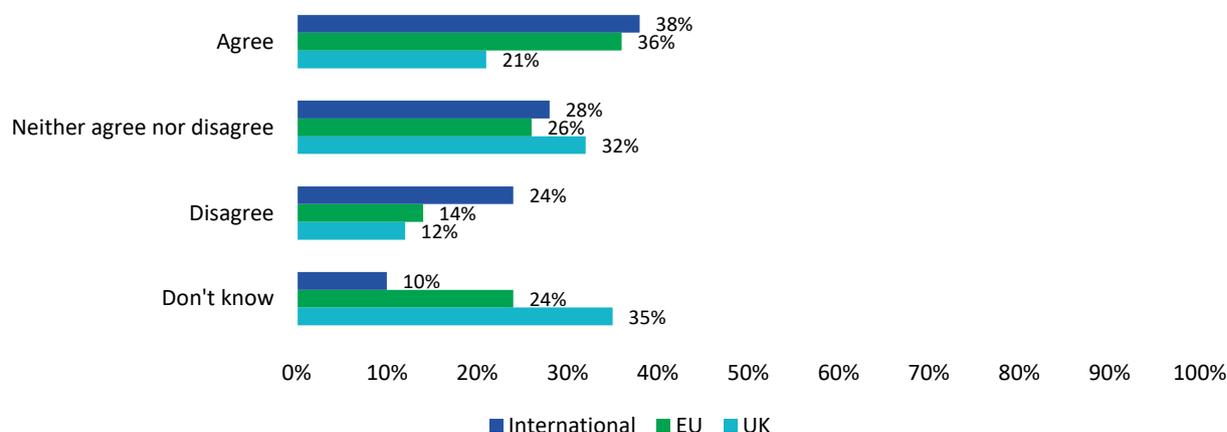
The majority of students had heard of Students' Unions before coming to the UK but only 16% of respondents felt they had a good knowledge of them. In open text comments students discussed their expectations of a Students' Union before arrival in the UK. These included the idea that the SU would organise events and support student groups, as well as being a place 'where students can relax, talk with friends and play games'. Others saw the Students' Union as a representative body which could be the 'voice of students'.

In the focus groups students discussed their experiences of societies and networks. In the undergraduate focus group there was praise for the international students' network which was felt to be 'more active' than previous years. However, one student felt that societies could be 'very clique-y' and if you didn't fit in immediately you could 'feel a bit ostracised'. Meanwhile in the postgraduate focus group several students felt that their age could be a barrier when it came to getting involved in societies.

## Representation

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the SU represents students' interests on international student issues? (Pulse 2017-18)

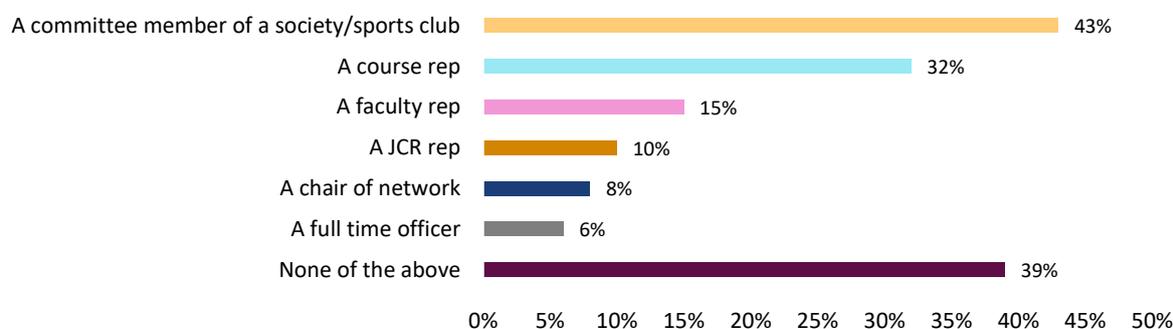
Response rate: 2265 (1594 UK, 424 international, 217 EU)



While students were asked in the international students' survey about Bristol SU's representation of their interests, the response rate was much higher for a similar question in Pulse. 38% of international students and 36% of EU students agreed, with 24% of international students and 14% of EU students disagreeing.

Have you ever considered becoming...

Response rate: 173



Respondents were most likely to have considered being a committee member of a society or club, followed by a course rep.

Postgraduates were less likely to have considered running for a position. Just 23% had considered running for a committee position, compared to 58% of undergraduates. 24% had considered running to be a course rep, compared to 38% of undergraduates. 48% of postgraduates had not considered running for any role, compared to 32% of undergraduates.

In open text comments students reported that they felt they would be more likely to run for an elected role if they had more confidence in public speaking, as well as more time. Workload was also cited as a reason that students refrained from running

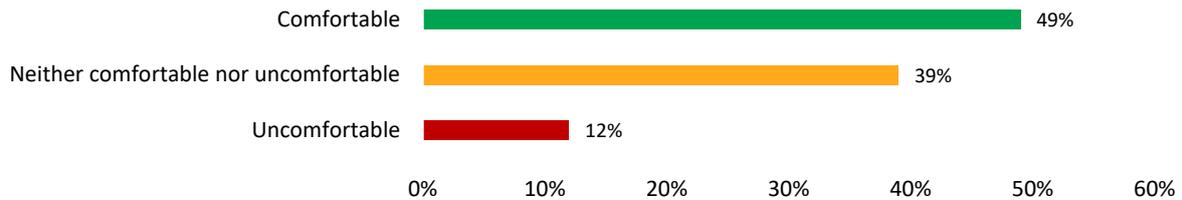
for leadership roles. Other students were unsure whether such roles would make them more employable or have a positive impact on their career.

### Democratic Meetings

Response rate: 173

How comfortable would you feel attending a democratic meeting such as Student Council or the Annual Members Meeting?

Response rate: 173



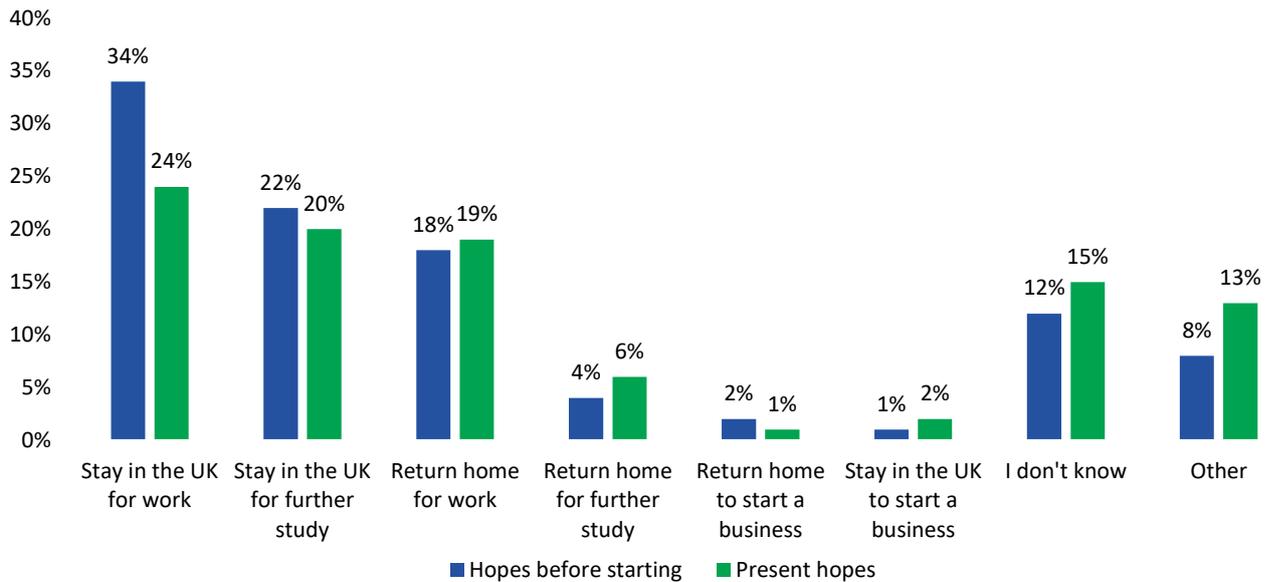
Almost half of international students felt they would be comfortable attending a democratic meeting, with 39% neither comfortable nor uncomfortable and 12% reporting they'd be uncomfortable. In open text comments students discussed what would make them more likely to attend a democratic meeting. Many respondents felt that they would be more likely to attend if there were topics that were relevant to them. Students also felt they would be more likely to attend if the decisions being made would have a real impact on their university experience. Several students commented that other international students attending would incentivise them to go along to a meeting.

## Careers and Development

### Hopes for the Future

Students were asked about their hopes for the future before their course started and presently.

Response rate: 179

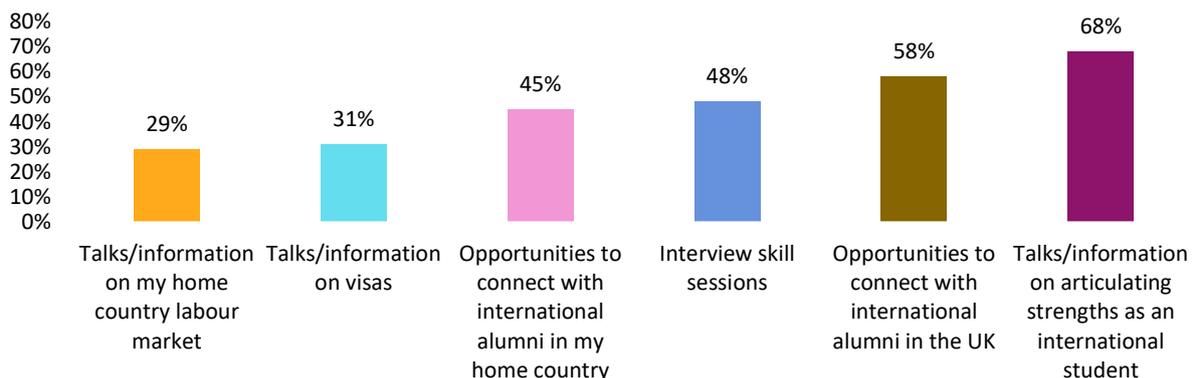


Respondents' hopes were fairly consistent between before they started and the present day, though less students wanted to stay in the UK for work now than before they started their course. International students were presently more likely to want to return home for work (25%) than EU students (6%). Postgraduates were also presently more likely to want to return home for work (31%) than undergraduates (10%).

The most common 'other' option was working or studying in another country to their home country or the UK.

### Career Support

Which of the following types of career support would be most helpful to you?  
Response rate: 172



Talks and information on articulating their strengths as an international student were seen to be most beneficial by students. In open text comments students discussed what more could be done by the SU or University to support their career and employability. The majority of students wanted more information around possible careers and career events. One student commented that the career service 'focuses on UK businesses, it would be helpful if other nations would be represented too'. Several students also felt there should be more internships and work experience

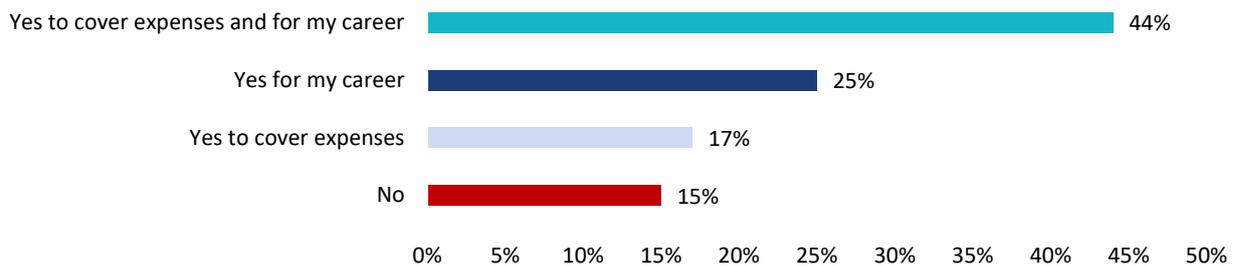


available for international students. It was suggested that the SU and university could do more to advertise job opportunities. One student felt that provision for international students at careers fairs needed to be improved, noting 'the international careers fair was only for volunteering opportunities and other careers fairs included employers which did not seek to employ international students'.

### Part-time Work

As a student do you want or have you wanted to secure part time work or work experience during your degree and if so why?

Response rate: 179



86% of respondents wanted to secure part time work or work experience, with just 15% reporting that they did not. International students were more likely to want to secure part-time work or work experience during their degree, with just 9% indicating that they did not, compared to 25% of EU students.

### Key Improvements

At the end of the survey students were asked what they would most like to see Bristol SU and the University of Bristol work on or improve over the next year to improve the experiences of international students.

The most common suggestion was the introduction of a programme of integration events and activities to bring international and British students together. It was felt by one student that the SU needed to 'introduce British culture like a new culture, not like what you should know by default'. Another argued that 'the idea that international friends and British friends should be approached differently hinders international student assimilation into the student body'.

Another key theme for the Students' Union was better representation of the views of international students. One student felt that the interests of some international students were prioritised over the interests of others, with 'Latinos, Southeast Asians, East Asians' underrepresented. The need for better mental health support was also commented upon by several students, with one respondent linking this to home sickness.

The most common suggested area of improvement for the University was academic support. One student mentioned this in relation to Langford, arguing that students there were 'very isolated' and transport was difficult, particularly for international

students who could not afford a car. Career support was again mentioned, with one student saying that securing internships and jobs as an international student was 'very overwhelming'. The cost of fees and living was also discussed with calls for more scholarships and affordable housing, as 'not all international students are coming from rich families'.

*'Arriving here I felt really lonely and still feel like an outsider to this day. I would like the University to help those students who may not have fellow students from the same country in their course or department to help them feel welcome and at home'*

## Recommendations

### Arriving and Settling in the UK

- Work with the University to provide clear advice on finding accommodation, transport and seeking medical treatment upon arrival in the UK – including a guide from Bristol SU Lettings on renting in Bristol.
- Make Bristol SU Lettings more accessible for international students, for example by offering Skype/video viewings for students.

### Social Experience

- Create a programme of events throughout the year for international students, including trips to UK towns, non-alcoholic events and global cultural events. Work with BISC and the international office to ensure a coherent programme.
- Develop initiatives to build closer integration between international and home students, including mixing events and a buddy scheme.

### Educational Experience

- Lobby the University to provide additional study skills sessions for international students to prepare them for the UK educational system, including essay writing, time management and thinking critically.
- Lobby the University to ensure there is good diversity in postgraduate courses and halls, to help international students integrate with home students.

### Equality & Freedom from Prejudice

- Work with the University and the council to ensure that international students feel welcome at the University and in the city.
- Work with the University to combat discrimination against international students by staff and the student body.

### Financial Experience

- Lobby the University for more funding for international students to combat the high cost of living in Bristol and help students deal with any unexpected costs, including scholarships, bursaries and hardship funds.

### Experiences with Bristol SU

- Consider ways to engage and celebrate international students through Bristol SU's structures e.g. international student of the year at the Bristol SU Awards.
- Ensure that marketing on SU elections targets international students by articulating the career benefits of an elected position.
- Deliver public speaking and confidence workshops before election periods to ensure international students have the confidence to run for a position.

### **Careers and Development**

- Work with the Careers Service to improve the international careers fair and international employability week so that they showcase paid as well as voluntary work.
- Work with the Careers Service to create a guide to part time work and graduate prospects for arriving international students.

### **Bristol SU strategy**

- Ensure that the recommendations from this report feed into Bristol SU's yearly team planning and into the next strategy which will run from 2020-2025.

### **Further Research**

- Consider further research exploring Chinese students' experiences. This project has highlighted the heterogeneous nature of international students' experiences, and as our largest subgroup, Chinese students' experiences would benefit from further exploration. One on one interviews could be a beneficial method for such research, ideally with a mandarin speaking interviewer.