

POLICY PROPOSAL

TITLE: WE NEED MORE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT!

PROPOSED BY: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ASSOCIATION (ISA)

SECONDED BY: ROMANIAN SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

Many international students struggle with their well-being. This is due to two main reasons: **first**, there is not a clear plan of how the SU goes about supporting the mental health of international students, and **second**, many international students are not familiar with the terminology used to describe well-being problems (including mental health). Stigmas add to the pressure caused by the two main reasons listed above. Consequently, many international students would not like to ascribe their well-being problems to mental health issues, even if there is strong evidence that they might have a mental health issue. It seems like both parties are speaking a different language when it comes to well-being, even though they are both using English. The ISA are still receiving reports of international students who feel there is not enough support for them and many still feel they are being discriminated against by both the SU and the University (Student Services and other members of staff), even though the ISA signpost them to the appropriate places.

REASON FOR CHANGE

Considering

1. Bathstudent.com has a section for mental health support, but it does not signpost to issues, such as acculturative stress, cultural assimilation, and tackling language barriers, that directly affect international students.
2. The ISA are still receiving reports of international students who feel there is not enough support for them and many still feel they are being discriminated against.
3. There is a national “annual rise in demand of about 10%” for university counselling services¹².
4. Research indicates that in the life of international students, living in another culture is a significant stressor to mental health that adds to the normal problems of university students; it also indicates that, while seeking mental health support, those students significantly face more barriers than other students^{3 4 5}.
5. The university had already planned, with the SU, to implement the ‘Time 2 Change’ pledge, but limited action has been seen.
6. The SU has the resources to carry out research and more reliably find out more about how to contribute to the well-being of international students.

Bath Students' Union recognises that ...

1. Bathstudent.com is undergoing a layout redesign, and the plans for this redesign are still not definite, so now is the perfect time to include international students more in those plans.
2. "Minority students" or "international students" often seem to act as labels to define a sector of the university population that is not expected to fulfil the same demands as other students; those labels allow too much emphasis on prejudice and lets part of the SU and University staff get away with poor efforts to really meet the needs of those students.
3. The counselling services and the Students' Union need to work more closely than ever to better meet the rising demand for counselling.
4. Many students opt for declining treatment despite not feeling well and sometimes even having a clinical diagnosis⁶⁷.
5. Currently, neither the University nor the SU is sufficiently reaching out to "international students" to find out the main reasons why they do not seek mental health support.

THE PROPOSAL

Bath Students' Union will:

1. Lobby the university to carry on with the 'Time 2 Change' pledge until it is fully implemented.
2. Include international students more clearly in the University Mental Health Action Plan so that it acknowledges the specific barriers international students face while seeking mental health support and presents solutions to each barrier.
3. Lobby the university and Student Services for counsellors who have had experience working with international students; this also includes ensuring the cultural awareness training to the counselling staff takes place.
4. Produce data through surveys to more definitely prove the extent of the issue to the University, and also help the counselling services to identify the areas they can improve.
5. Improve the promotion of mental health support, specifically information that could be relevant to the students represented by the Diversity & Support groups and the International Students' Association (ISA), thus actively encouraging students to engage more with the services offered.
6. Work with the International Students' Association (ISA) to create a permanent joint campaign to challenge stigmas that stop international students reaching out for help (e.g. significantly run more events and provide more information that tackle the prevention of mental health issues in international students).

¹ <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2015/student-mental-wellbeing-in-he.pdf>

² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-34354405>

² <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1054139X09003401>

⁴ <http://mcr.sagepub.com/content/66/5/522.short>

⁵ <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0951507031000114058>

⁶ <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1077558709335173>

⁷ <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/amp/59/7/614>