

Opportunity

September • November 2019

friends
INTERNATIONAL



Welcoming the World

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Sharing Christ with international students in the UK



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Leading Thoughts

A new academic year is here, and with it come hundreds of thousands of new students from all over the world.



Churches up and down the country have a unique opportunity to welcome the world! In this edition of *Opportunity*, you will read about this great welcome happening, from churches enjoying an influx of students, to huge welcome meals run by Christian Unions.

We have new ways of helping connect students with activities through our app which has been a roaring success and should be even better used this year. Some things however remain helpful after many years, including meeting new arrivals at Heathrow airport, and offering a simple cup of tea as a conversation starter.

Our volunteers are key to each setting and activity, but a Reach Trainee can give a year or two of focused attention in the rich context of their own discipleship, with a dedicated Friends International staff member and a training team on hand. Who do you know who could benefit from this

key discipleship programme? Read more about it on pages 8-9.

Everything comes together in this edition of *Opportunity* – from first arrivals to eventual outcomes.

At the end of the day we serve because it's right and we leave the outcomes to God. Yet, we also look at what's going well and what can be left for another time as we seek to allocate resources strategically. So, please receive our Impact Report (pages 10-11) as a prayerful reflection on what has been possible by God's grace and pray with us for the year to come.

Read on to see what's new and what stays the same in ensuring that international students make a great start, and that we excel in welcoming the world to the UK.

Alan

Alan Tower, Friends International National Director

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“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” Hebrews 13:2

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Testimony



My Experience as a New International Student – Albert's Testimony

I'm Albert, a Hungarian student at the University of South Wales. I lived 19 years of my life in my home country and then decided to try something new. Now I live in Pontypridd and study International Wildlife Biology.

I arrived here not knowing a single person, which was a truly refreshing experience. I soon found out that the Welsh accent is difficult to understand and that it was going to take me some time to get used to. I also noticed that the towns here in the valleys are pleasantly nature-filled. The permanent rain doesn't bother me too much.

The first month was tough: I had never lived on my own so I had to get independent quickly. I started learning to cook, devising shopping routes and so on. I often felt very stressed, but at the same time it was a joy to be part of this entirely new culture, place and to speak the language.

The campuses here are filled with internationals, so it wasn't long until I started meeting all kinds of different people from all over the world. By the end of the first month I had already made many friends and learnt much about being independent, so the stress started to disappear.

I had never really been religious before, yet most of the friends I've made are Christians, since I felt strangely comfortable among them. I was eventually invited to Bethany Baptist Church, where I witnessed greater kindness than I had ever seen. These people became my family and assured me that my future here in Wales is in the right hands.

There have been a few challenges, but nonetheless living in Wales has been absolutely amazing. I know it was the right decision to take that huge step out into the world, and I hope I can stay much longer!

Albert Kovács

These people became my family and assured me that my future here in Wales is in the right hands.

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This month 460,000 international students are expected to begin or continue their studies at a UK university.

EVERYONE IS

WELCOME

Welcoming the World

We work in collaboration with local churches and Christian student groups to welcome the world as they come here to study.

It is an intense month of activity as hundreds of welcome events, free meals and church services help students settle into a new life.

Friends International staff are particularly busy, as Josh Bell, our Team Leader in Cambridge, explains: "September is an exciting month! Students from around the globe come to towns, such as Cambridge, to start their studies in a new country. They are thrilled to be welcomed by local Christians, shown around the city and invited to many events. It's definitely a hectic time of year, but also deeply rewarding, when often life-long friendships are formed."



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“At Centrepont Church we love seeing new students arrive!”

Newly arriving students can be hard work for churches. They can be seen as bringing in little and drawing out much, always away on holiday, and giant food hoovers! For us though they are the FUTURE.

Every September we love to welcome in new students, including many international students who come from all over the world. We give them serving opportunities, get them integrated into church life, put them on leadership training courses and help them to grow in their faith.

When I started university, after a few months I found a church that fed me every week, treated me like an adult, gave me opportunities to grow and had grace for me when I was away. It became a home away from home!

At Centrepont Church we love seeing new students arrive. We love to serve them throughout their student years and encourage them to go to both our student-only events as well as general church activities, so that every student can get to know their peers and the rest of the church well.

A great joy of ours is celebrating every final year student who leaves us strong in their faith, as they embark on their future serving God, and advancing the good news of the gospel wherever in the world they may go.

Some even stay, and that's great too!

Chris, Lead Pastor, Centrepont Church, Guildford





The Big Belfast Welcome



For two weeks each September, over 100 volunteers from local churches and the Queen's University Belfast Christian Union commit time, energy, care, and resources to welcome hundreds of international students who've just arrived to study in Greater Belfast.

The Belfast iWelcome programme provides both practical assistance and meaningful opportunities to form friendships, while demonstrating God's love in action.

The fortnight of events begins with shopping trips to the local supermarket via organised mini-buses and accompanied by local volunteers. We have two free meals for 250 hungry students – a practical and hospitable way to officially welcome students. Our iWelcome café runs in the second week, and the programme concludes with a coach trip to one of Northern Ireland's top tourist spots, the Giant's Causeway.

International students appreciate the programme because it helps them make

friends with students from different countries, while also learning about local culture. One student from China said: *"The programme is very important because it enables internationals to feel at home and helps them make friends right at the beginning."*

The programme is an important catalyst in connecting with international students in the early days of their time in Belfast, in order to invite them along to weekly activities organised by the churches and CUs throughout the term. Volunteers are prepared to verbally share about these opportunities as well as direct them to more details on a flyer or on the Friends International app.

The iWelcome programme serves as a valuable link in the process 'to see international students transformed by the good news of Jesus' in Belfast.

Kim Becker, FI/CUI Ireland Project Staff Worker

Heathrow Airport Meet & Greet



I set up the Meet & Greet Scheme with Margaret Goodgame 18 years ago! We have been welcoming international students arriving into Terminal 3 at London Heathrow every September ever since.

Why do we do it? We want international students to experience authentic Christian love through practical help. Tiredness, a crush of people and lack of familiarity with the arrival complex, lead to some students feeling and looking disoriented. A helpful individual with a smile on their face is a welcome sight!

What do we do? We connect students up with what they need: currency; a new SIM card; finding the bus station; a toilet; linking with university welcome teams when their students get stuck in immigration and university coaches won't wait for stragglers. We also give students the LIFEUK booklet (a guide to life in the UK), facilitating further contact with us if they want it.

Who volunteers to help? Local church members from across London who can see that involvement in a project like this can be a first step in getting 'mission on your doorstep' onto a local church agenda.

What results do we see? The initial relief on a student's face – then usually the question, "Why do you do this?" or "How much does it cost?". We see students connecting with Friends International work in their university city. Also, it facilitates a gradually growing profile with university welcome teams, and hopefully a good name with university authorities.

Only conversations in the hereafter will reveal all the ways God uses such unglamorous service for Him. Work like this may seem ordinary, but it is potentially life changing under a God involved in the mundane and unspectacular of everyday life.

Bob Dawson, Friends International Senior Advisor

Reaching the World



The Reach Programme is a unique ministry opportunity for graduates, where cross-cultural discipleship and ministry training go hand-in-hand.

Through befriending and sharing the love of Jesus with international students, Reach Trainees engage in God's global mission – and open themselves to be changed and equipped by Him in the process.

We recognise that Christian formation involves the development of the whole person. Therefore, Reach is more than learning Bible handling skills and cross-cultural ministry, but also about developing conviction, values and character.

The four main elements of a Reach year are:

- **Group training:** four residential conferences plus regular local training.
- **Ministry experience:** hands-on involvement in a local work.
- **Personal study:** core material plus a personalised programme.
- **Mentored supervision:** regular mentoring with an experienced staff worker.



Why Reach?

Over the years, both international and British graduates have found the Reach Programme to be formational, setting them up for the next phase of life. The flexible programme means that it is suitable for the international student who has become a Christian whilst here and wants to grow as a disciple before returning home, or the British graduate who wants to learn about cross-cultural evangelism – whether they then go abroad or stay in the UK.

As Reach training builds deeper understanding of both the Bible and modern cultures, we believe it is a significant and strategic investment into the growth of God's kingdom.

Our prayer is that, through Reach, we will release to the global church servant-hearted followers of Jesus who are committed to life-long discipleship, passionate about God's mission and have foundational equipping for cross-cultural gospel ministry.

Jenny Brown,
Reach Coordinator

My Year as a Reach Trainee



On the outside, Reach would seem to be about colourful hoodies, cross-cultural training and endless free Chinese meals cooked by loving students.

It is all these things, but so much more. My year in Newcastle has seen me doing activities from basketball in the park to training courses near London, visiting our former international students as far as Cardiff and St Andrews, and building lasting friendship with so many students through the simple 2-word phrase: "English Practice".

As well as learning how to study the Bible with Iranian and Japanese students, we learnt how to rest and how to reflect. Our study books have taught us the value of self-forgetfulness and how to read the Bible as a whole. Things which, after three years of intense lectures and CU evangelism, have really brought a confidence and a depth to my faith.

This is perhaps the best thing about Reach. It's so flexible that, apart from Globe Cafés, matching hoodies and a love for international students, each Reach Trainee's year could look totally different. For me it's meant a greater focus on reading God's Word than I've ever had since becoming a Christian at uni. It's also meant a very helpful exposure to Mandarin ministry which has given focus to guide my future planning for now. Finally, it's given me a long list of books and activities which I can't wait to (attempt to) get through during my second Reach year!

Matthew Brindley,
Reach Trainee, Newcastle

Find out more

If you're interested in joining the Reach Programme in 2020, or you want to invest prayer and finance to support a Reach Trainee, contact Jenny: jenny.brown@friendsinternational.uk



Impact Report



Looking Back, Looking Forward

As we start a new academic year, it can benefit us greatly to look back at what happened in the year just gone. We can rejoice in what worked well and analyse what can be improved.

These next couple of pages look back, both in terms of our financial year and our ministry year. One statistic that stands out to me is that in the last academic year we saw 70 international students make a faith commitment. Praise God!

Fruit like this is possible because of our faithful financial supporters, volunteers and prayer partners.

Looking forward, we intend to continue to grow our activities, particularly with a concerted effort to appoint staff and develop partnerships in a further twenty cities between 2020 and 2025. The aim is that the 50 locations with the most international university students are helped towards thriving international student ministry. This aim is significantly helped by having a stable financial footing, which you can see in our financial review opposite.

We are thankful for the year we have had, and excited for what is to come.

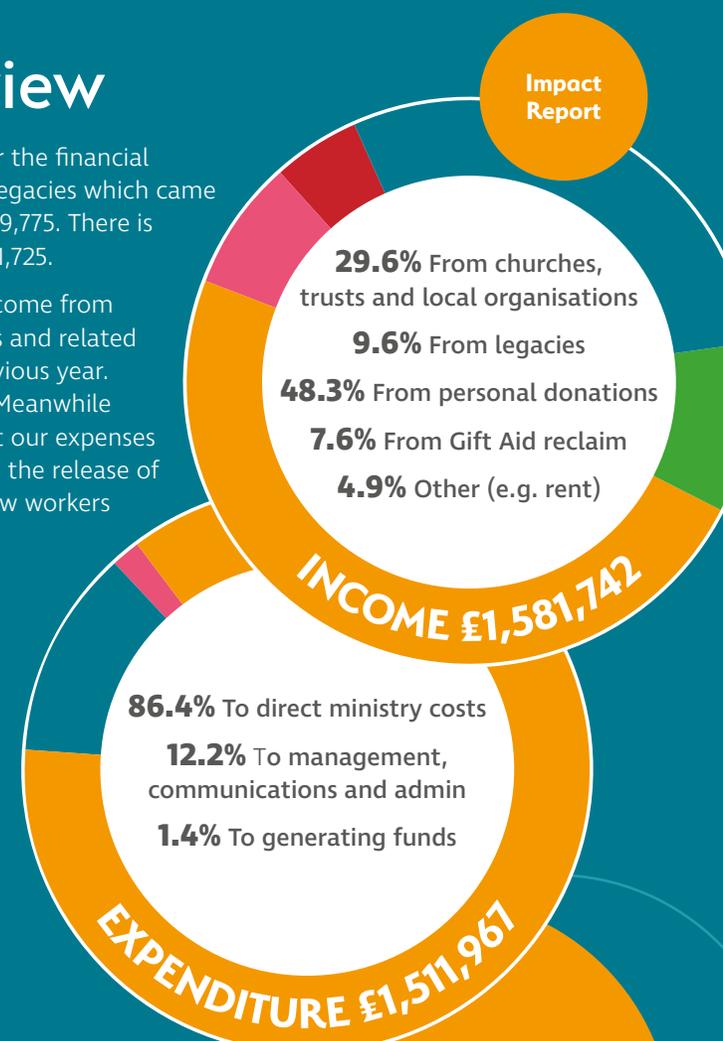
Alan Tower, National Director

Financial Review

We give thanks and praise to God for the financial outcome for 2018. With the help of legacies which came to £151,500 there was a surplus of £69,775. There is therefore an underlying deficit of £81,725.

In 2017 we reported that core gift income from churches, trusts, personal supporters and related Gift Aid was 11% higher than the previous year. In 2018 this has slipped back by 8%. Meanwhile careful cost control has ensured that our expenses have risen by only 1.7%. This includes the release of funds designated to allow several new workers to be paid for additional days' work beyond what their level of financial support would otherwise allow.

We are very thankful for the many hundreds of financial supporters who faithfully contribute towards funding our strategic ministry amongst international students.



Ministry Stats Academic year 2018-19

74

Friends International Staff and Admin workers

56

Affiliates on our Affiliate Scheme

1,500

Number of volunteers active in the ministry

11

Reach Trainees

240

Number of churches we work with in ministry

40

UK and Irish cities and towns with ministry to international students

Ministry Impact

Academic year 2018-19

11,000

International students contacted

1,000

International students who attended a Bible study

70

International students who have made a faith commitment

620

International students who attended our English language classes/groups



50

International students who attended the Philip Project course

470

International students who have been hosted