

Opportunity

December 2023 • March 2024

friends
INTERNATIONAL



**Transforming Lives,
Shaping the Future**

Growing Friendship and Faith with International Students

Inside



Shaping the Future

Page 4



Tea and Biscuits

Page 6



Prayer Diary

Page 7-10



Staff Survey

Page 12

Leading Thoughts

It's a dilemma many leaders have grappled with – when to focus on getting the maximum impact in the current generation, and when to step back to train up the next generation and invest fully in the future.



At Friends International we see the need for investment despite the never-ending list of opportunities and urgencies around us. We see hundreds of thousands of international students arriving at British and Irish universities, often from countries where it would be rare to hear the name of Jesus, and where it might be difficult to be open about Christian faith, and thousands more in language schools, often from European countries where ancient Christian traditions have been abandoned by the majority. We make every effort to share friendship and faith with international students we encounter.

However, we know that the building up of teams of volunteers, and training new staff members, will produce greater fruit than relying solely on our own endeavours.

One of the simple ways we do this is by inviting graduate trainees onto our Reach programme where they become part of the Centre Team environment as trainee members of the team. This year we are

welcoming four new Apprentices who for two years will be supervised by existing team members and learning on the job in key locations. Stand with us as we seek to bring on the next generation of international student ministry workers. We are standing on the shoulders of previous generations who put down great foundations, and the current generation aren't giving up. Like the apostle Paul who wrote to his younger disciple Titus: 'Encourage people and give them hope' (Titus 2:15), we aim to invest in the new generation so that our vision of every international student being within reach of a Friends International local centre where they can find friendship and faith can become reality.

Alan

Alan Tower

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To contact us scan this code:



'For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people'

Titus 2:11



London Calling

London registers on a global scale. Two thousand years of history. A prominent financial district. Cultures that are both deeply rooted and fizzing with distinctives from around the world. Parliamentary and royal traditions. Pearly kings and queens. Radical plots and networks. Marathons and carnivals. More parkland than any other major city. Elegance and engineering. Poverty and pain. Cost of living and pressures on making ends meet.

London also registers globally as a destination for international students. The UK has been a globally significant destination for those undertaking higher education as well as those improving their English. Only the United States receives as many international students as the UK¹. Among UK destinations, London is pre-eminent with 160,000, over 25% of the UK total, arriving to study in the more than 50 university campuses across the city. Add to that language students and there are enormous challenges and opportunities to meet, for our outreach alongside churches and Christian student groups.

First steps

Into this setting we are pleased to celebrate the appointment of Samuel Sao as the new London Development Project Team Leader, joining the existing team in London led by Kirsten Wynn, and looking to see international student ministry further established and resourced in the capital. Samuel has both academic (London School of Theology) and church leadership (Christ City Church, Grays) credentials and his work with the Transformation Thurrock group of church leaders means he has significant experience of bringing different traditions together around a missional cause.

Initially, Samuel will focus on establishing Development Groups in different geographical sectors, allowing local churches and student groups to envision and plan together for local initiatives. Samuel is currently identifying ministry partners to stand alongside him in prayer and financial support. As ever, we trust that God has been preparing those who He would want to be involved in sharing the different loads for this work. We believe your prayers and financial support will open doors that would otherwise be closed to our ministry. We would love to hear from you so please follow the link or scan the QR code to find out more.

Samuel Sao

” Please visit www.friendsinternational.uk/volunteer-signup to find out more.

¹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Shaping the Future

The Apprenticeship Scheme is a two-year programme designed to prepare prospective staff members for international student ministry in a Friends International local centre.



Prospective staff members come to Friends International in different shapes and sizes, from varying backgrounds and with a wide variety of gifts and experience to bring to the table. Some have spent years abroad in mission gaining relevant experience where they learned to relate to people of different cultures and disciple them in their faith. Others have had a career in the secular world alongside Christian ministry in their spare time as part of a local church. Some come to us ready for a career change and wanting to dive deeper into the international friendships that have been a key element in their life. Others are new to ministry, excited about what working life might hold and wanting to get established in full-time ministry among international students.

Those with the experience, and training, might be able to begin immediately as a fully-fledged staff worker. However, for others, Friends International's Apprenticeship Programme is a better pathway to make the transition, gain relevant experience and training, before emerging ready to hit the ground running as a staff worker. It's taken time to develop a solid programme, and sometimes the challenges of funding, supervision or ministry openings need careful navigating. In this light we celebrate the Apprenticeship programme and those who are being nurtured through it – let's be praying for fruitful outcomes.

Abbie Robinson, Lydia Bown and Pheobe Ridout have recently joined the Apprenticeship Programme. Here are their stories...

Can you describe your journey to get to this point and become an Apprenticeship Staff Worker?



Abbie Robinson [AR] - I attended Coventry University, where I studied accounting and finance, which I enjoyed but I wasn't sure if that was

what I wanted to do as a job afterwards. I decided to take a year out after graduating and I did a voluntary programme called Relay with UCCF which meant working with the Christian Union at Chichester University. Coming to the end of Relay I applied for a few jobs in both accounting and ministry, including being an Apprenticeship Staff Worker with Friends International.



Lydia Bown [LB] - I was born and grew up in Pakistan because my parents were missionaries there. I've always been aware of people from different

cultures and backgrounds – indeed, when

growing up, I was the one who was in the minority being white and Christian! I studied Biomedical Sciences at the University of Southampton. My CU Staff Worker recommended checking out Friends International's summer outreaches and that led to me joining Oxford International Outreach. There, I experienced for the first time the joy of getting to know international students and holding out the Gospel to them. Since then, I've had the blessing of being friends with a number of international students and being involved in mission to internationals.



Pheobe Ridout [PR] - My journey started through my father who helped run the Urban Saints and Amor mission trips to South Africa. I remember going to different

types of churches there and being amazed that we were worshipping the same God that I worshipped in the UK. I also had the opportunity to go to Ukraine with UCCF to teach English; this both encouraged and challenged me in international mission and developed in me a love for international students at the same time.

What are your first impressions of working with Friends International?

AR - I've loved getting to know the local volunteers from the city and learning from them. Seeing their servant-heartedness, the care that they have for the international students and desire to share Jesus with

I experienced for the first time the joy of getting to know international students

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Apprenticeship Programme

them has been really inspiring for me. It's been great to hear about the different missions that some of them have done and what has led them to want to volunteer with Friends International after moving back to Exeter.

LB - I've eaten meals with students, apologized for our food being too sweet - probably every single time I eat with an international! - gone on the train with internationals to the beach/forest/country park, decorated gingerbread houses, discussed many aspects of culture and living in the UK. I've shown students how to skim stones, paddled in the river together, shared my testimony and more! It's been a privilege to help them get to grips with life here and to share fun times together.

PR - Working with Friends International has provided me with many opportunities to meet students. We have been able to show them more of the UK, as well as run events where they can build community and also hear about the gospel. We have also seen some students attending a church service after attending the international café that the church holds weekly, which is so exciting!



For more information about working with Friends International, please visit www.friendsinternational.uk/jobs



Hosting - It's only Tea and Biscuits but we like it!



Through Friends International's 'Local Link' hosting scheme, Christians can invite international students into their home to share a meal and hospitality. As the winter nights draw in and Christmas approaches, this simple act of sharing speaks volumes and can make a lasting impression in the lives of both international students and the hosts themselves. Relationships are formed and lifelong friendships established. Is this something you could offer? Read on to find out more...

As a host, what do you do?

Ian and Lucy Castro [I&L] After initial contact, perhaps by meeting for coffee near the university, we invite them to come to our house for a meal. (It's always helpful to have two, rather than just one student.) If that goes well, we might subsequently suggest an outing; for example, a walk in the New Forest or tea and scones in a suitable café. Generally, we try to meet at least once a term, keeping in touch by email and maybe inviting them to church services, especially at Easter or Christmas.

What difference does hosting make in the lives of international students and their families?

I&L – There is no doubt that the international students are pleased to be invited into a British home. They enjoy the fact that there are older people taking an interest in their lives, offering help where needed, answering questions and generally sharing life together from time-to-time. And they appreciate learning about our culture, customs and faith.

Mo Hunter and Carol Pert [M&C] – Once we were introduced to two students from Singapore, who didn't have a Friends International connection, but had come looking for us on recommendations from

continued on p11

Prayer Diary

December 2023 • March 2024



Seventeen weeks of prayer points



Thank you for your continued prayers and support for international students.

Christmas Celebrations



Week 1
4th Dec

Madeleine Bonicel, Nottingham

Pray for our Christmas Celebration, that many students would come and hear about the true reason to celebrate. Our hope is that international students will also want to attend local church services throughout December. Please pray many would choose to follow Jesus for themselves!

Week 2
11th Dec

Ivana Bajic, Stirling

As normal, this year we are organising a Christmas Global Café. This event is usually well attended and is a great chance to help international students understand the difference between a 'cultural Christmas' and 'Christian Christmas'. Please pray that as we share the Biblical Christmas story, the students will experience a hunger for getting to know Jesus more. Please pray that they are willing to attend Christmas services with local Christians.

Week 3
18th Dec

Tim Stanyon, Loughborough and Raquel Medina, Norwich

Please pray for our annual Christmas meal in Loughborough. We're excited to be welcoming large numbers of international students to eat together and hear the gospel through the Christmas story. Also, remember the Christmas lunch in Norwich which is one of the most popular activities we run all year. Pray God will prepare the hearts of international students attending both events to be open to the gospel.

Week 4
25th Dec

Jonnie Green, Oxford and Kirsten Wynn, London

Please pray for the students that attended our Explore Christmas party, that the good news about Emmanuel - God with us - resonates. In London, we're planning several events for students who are remaining here over the holidays. Pray we'll be able to support those who are feeling lonely at this time of year. In the new year we'll be welcoming new students starting Masters courses at Uni of Greenwich. Pray we can engage with them.

Week 5
1st Jan

James Adair, Sunderland

Please could you pray that, following our Christmas gospel talk at our Globe Café and carol services, many of our students would attend a follow-up Bible study starting in January. Pray that through this study, many of the students will discover the good news of Jesus Christ and by God's grace come to follow and trust in Him.



Recruitment and Growth

Week 6
8th Jan

Heledd Job, Cork

Please pray for an Intervarsity couple seconded to work in international student ministry in Cork as part of the Friends International and CUI partnership in Ireland. They are currently applying for a visa and hope to be in Cork by January. Please pray that the visa will come smoothly and for them as they settle in Cork and begin to contribute to the work of churches and the CU.

Week 7
15th Jan

Ruth Farquhar, Dundee

Many students have arrived in Dundee from Afghanistan. Some are also seeking asylum. The women have been warned that if they return home they might be arrested for studying abroad. Around 20 of these students joined us for a dinner and discussion at the start of the year. Pray for ongoing fruitful contact with these people and that they would experience Jesus' love.

Week 8
22nd Jan

Lilli Jones, Guildford

The University of Surrey has enrolled a lot more international students this year than previously. 200 students came to our welcome party so we are now looking into how to connect with them further and build friendships. Please pray for wisdom and for new volunteers to join the team.

Week 9
29th Jan

Madeleine Bonicel, Nottingham

Please pray that we would be able to build up and encourage students at the Nottingham Trent City CU. We thank God for His provision of finances for the current staff team, but we pray for the money to be able to train up another Apprentice Staff Worker in Nottingham in the coming years.

Week 10
5th Feb

Pete Edwards, Middlesbrough/Teesside

Please pray for the recruitment of a Friends International worker for Middlesbrough/Teesside as we follow up someone we interviewed previously. Pray too for churches in Middlesbrough as they reach out to international students studying at Teesside University. Our vision is for a new worker to get involved who can be a catalyst for growth.

Week 11
12th Feb

Madeleine Bonicel, Nottingham

A number of students are involved in our Globe cafés and getting a taste for cross-cultural friendships and evangelism. Our two Reach trainees this year were previously in the CU and we pray that God will provide one or two more to do Reach in 2024-2025.



Events Weeks

Week 12
19th Feb

David Hubbard, Reading

Please pray for Reading CU Events week which has an International track with talks and social events throughout the day. Pray for the speakers and for the CU to have courage to invite international student friends to hear gospel messages throughout the week.

Week 13
26th Feb

Kim Becker, Belfast

Please pray for the Belfast Citywide CU Events week and the International Meal and Message events happening in the evenings. Pray students from across the three university campuses will attend and engage in the talks led by Friends International. Pray for The Philip Project Belfast team hosting a weekend away in February. This is the first year we are running the course in Belfast. Pray the time away will be encouraging and enriching.

Week 14
4th Mar

Helen Morrissey, Exeter

Exeter CU will be running an International track alongside its normal events week, at which Antoine Thenin will be sharing. This is the first time for a long time that Exeter has run a week of international-specific events. Pray for many internationals to come along and that they will be impacted by what is shared.

Week 15
11th Mar

Baiba Strause-Kalmere, Canterbury

We are organising a Canterbury Christian Unions events week with an international track. Please, pray for preparations for the week.

Events

Week 16
18th Mar

Friends International, National

In this busy time of new staff induction, trustee meetings and Leadership Forum alongside Easter preparations, please pray for the continued energy and strength of all our staff, volunteers, and Friends International family across all our centres. Please pray for our Support Centre which plays a central point in empowering these and other opportunities.

Week 17
25th Mar

Easter/Word Alive, National/North Wales

Please pray for Easter events being run by our staff and local churches. Pray that international students would feel welcomed, that the Easter message is well received and for lives to be changed. Please pray for the upcoming Word Alive event, that we can support and resource CUs, students and others seeking to work with international students.



continued from p6

a former international student. On another occasion when my great niece was on holiday in Singapore, she met up with an international student we had hosted and they were able to share a meal together.

Can you remember a highlight or funny story?

I&L – One particular highlight was a trip to Highclere Castle, the stately home featured in the TV series, *Downton Abbey*, where we donned theatrical masks of various cast members.

M&C – We have run a few master classes in making apple crumble, jam and quiche. It's great fun and on a couple of occasions we have both had the opportunity to share our faith. On other occasions we have hosted Christmas dinner, had a crowd in for Kate and William's wedding and celebrated the King's coronation.

Why do you do it?

I&L – Fundamentally, we are very conscious of the many biblical injunctions to welcome the foreigners and care for the aliens. This is most easily done by giving hospitality and developing genuine friendship, but it can also be great fun and immensely rewarding! Too many international students, who come to the UK and Ireland to study, return home never having been in a British home and, sadly, often not really having felt very welcome here.

M&C – We love meeting new people. It's good to share life experience with each other and our geography has improved no end. We are both widows well over 70 and this gives us the opportunities to meet new people and have fun together.

What's the best bit of feedback you've had as a host?

I&L – A measure of the appreciation we have received has sometimes been simply the desire the students have to stay in touch after returning home. We have even been asked to provide English names for babies subsequently



born to them in their home country – giving us an opportunity to explain the meaning of, for example, Jonathan or Grace! And we once acted as surrogate parents at a graduation ceremony. It's also been good to hear sometimes that the Bibles or New Testaments given to them are being read back in their own countries.

What would you say to people considering getting involved?

I&L – Go for it! Do it! It's easier than you think, it's very rewarding, it is a simple way of showing Jesus' love, and it can have eternal consequences.

M&C – To be absolutely honest I think we get as much, or possibly more, than the students get out of it. You shouldn't be daunted by the thought of it. It doesn't have to be fancy cooking, tea and biscuits will do! It's good to share skills and enjoy outings although not always necessary. This is our 13th year of hosting and we are still in contact with most of our international students and three of them have been back to visit us.

For more information about becoming a host, please visit www.friendsinternational.uk/hosting



It's All In The Numbers - Results

From Our 2022 / 23 Staff Survey

Like sharing a cup of tea and friendship with an international student, not everything can be measured in figures but at times numbers can work for us and measuring the impact of what is going on can surprise and encourage us. With this in mind, each year we ask our staff to complete a survey of Friends International activities to show how God has been at work in the lives of international students.

This year the results are both interesting and encouraging. The headline news is that, after a dip in numbers brought about by the Covid 19 pandemic, Friends International's student ministry is growing again and our impact is on the increase. There is a fruitful pattern of international students coming to faith - 53 in the last year, and 924 international students attended Bible studies. Overall, international students contacted is now at 10% above pre-Covid numbers. An average week resulted in 1,126 international students attending events across the country. This is a rise of 346 from last year.

Our local centres are supported by an average of 37 volunteers, without whom our ministry would grind to a halt. We need good teams; we want to see more people catch the vision for international student ministry and get involved. More churches than ever are involved – we have over 300 involved in hosting, volunteering, financially donating and some other form of support...on average that's more than eight per centre but there is still room for more.

The breakdown between university students and language school students shows that 90% of our contacts are studying at universities. However, this presents a challenge for us to explore how we reach more language students, recent graduates and family members. At the heart of our ministry is a

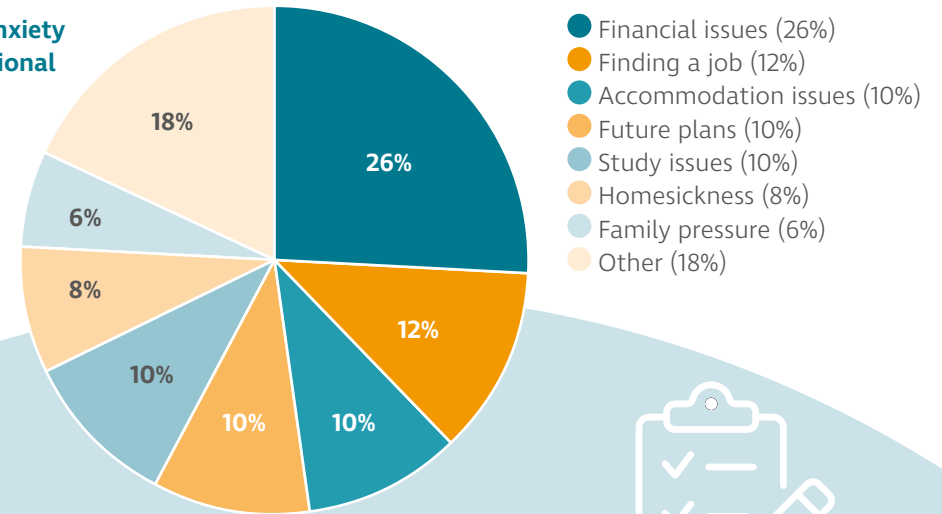
long-term relational approach. We want to continue supporting international students even after they have finished their courses, and our Centres are reaching out to returnees - this year seven centres (21%) were supporting 30 or more returnees.

International student ministry involves many excellent creative activities, from welcome events, book clubs and wellbeing sessions, to café games nights, and runs for the more sports inclined students. The survey also showed an increase in day trips and culture events put on by local Centres.

The human touch continues to be an essential aspect of international student ministry. More students responded to word of mouth and personal invites to events than social media and the friendship and relationship building aspects of our ministry remain key. Many international students continue to struggle with personal issues such as anxiety, stress and loneliness, all situations where a good friend can prove - and is proving - invaluable.

Your support is the 'life-blood' that our ministry is built on, and as a result thousands of lives are being impacted and changed as international students experience the love, joy and truth that Jesus brings.

Causes of anxiety for international students





Legacy reminder

Making the right choices on how to invest our time, money and skills are key decisions that are important to take time over. We all want to make good investments which will mature over time so that both ourselves and others can enjoy the benefits. The same principles apply for our spiritual investments. We want to 'pay it forward' so that the Kingdom of God can flourish and lives are changed.

Have you considered leaving a legacy, that will enable Friends International to reach and disciple future generations of international students? If you want to see more international students embark on a life with Jesus, in this generation and the next, then please visit www.friendsinternational.uk/donate/legacy-giving or call **01920 460006** for more information on how to include Friends International in your Will. Alternatively, just scan this QR code:



Answered Prayers and Servant Heartedness in Sunderland



James Adair is in his fourth year as the Centre Team leader in Sunderland. Soon after launching the Centre in 2019, university buildings were closed due to the Covid 19 pandemic but although the ministry has been beset by challenges, the work has grown and James is seeing God at work. He explains...

The main thrust of our ministry is a weekly Globe Café. I am grateful for a faithful group of volunteers from likeminded churches in the City who help me to run the café. These people are already busy serving in their own churches and to see their servant heartedness in action at the Café is encouraging.

of Hindu students from India showed up unexpectedly and listened intently to the gospel message even spontaneously giving a round of applause when he had finished.

At the start of this new academic year, I spent time distributing flyers around the City in the hope of meeting new students. I don't find this enjoyable or easy, yet our prayers were answered and many students who received flyers have become regular attendees at the Globe Café and friendships established. We are seeing new students every week and we have now began a new weekly English practise group with students from China, Egypt and Malaysia which has added a new dimension to our ministry.

One of the greatest difficulties we have experienced is being prevented from having a foot in the door at the University which has made it harder to make contact with students and invite them to the Global Café. Throughout the last year we struggled to attract students and it seemed like we were in an ever-uphill battle to sustain the ministry with little resources. Yet still God answered our prayers and brought students our way, from India, Kazakhstan, Brunei, China, Italy, Nigeria, Indonesia and elsewhere.

As I reflect on the ups and downs, I find the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 121 very fitting. 'I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.'

I particularly remember one student from Vietnam who took part in a Hope Explored course and then followed by reading John's Gospel. This person had never heard of Jesus, yet now continues to explore His Word. At Christmas we had a visiting speaker sharing the true meaning of Christmas at the Global Café. Just before he was due to speak a crowd



From Rio to Beijing and Mumbai, We Welcome You!

Christmas comes but once a year

Christmas gives our local teams around the UK and Ireland a great opportunity to share the Gospel with international students they've met during the term. Whether it be a carol service, Christmas lunch, fun and games or an open home, the Christmas holiday is a time when universities are closed and students can be on their own and separated from family at friends. Our teams are committed to being innovative and creative as they reach out to international students at this special time of year.

In Glasgow our team invites partner churches to host internationally-flavoured Christmas events and has previously run activities such as a wreath making workshop, a Christmas breakfast with food, biscuit decorating and a short nativity. In Norwich the local Centre hosts a traditional Christmas lunch, where each international student receives a goodie bag and a personal Christmas card signed by volunteers. On Christmas Eve students are invited to spend time together in a local home and then attend a nativity service.

Ruth Farquhar, Centre Team Leader in Dundee, explained that their key aims are: "To have fun and allow students to ask questions and explore the Christmas story for themselves." She added: "We also want Christian international students to contribute from their own Christian culture and learn how to share their faith".





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Join with us to Shape the Future of Tomorrow

At Friends International we believe that by sharing friendship and faith with international students today, we shape the future of tomorrow. From the Apprentice and Reach Training Programmes to Local Link and the Life Leadership course, we are investing in young lives and pray that by introducing international students to God, nations, governments and communities can be influenced for good.

Pray - Will you join us in praying that these international students will invite Jesus to be the Lord of their lives?

Give - Can you support us financially and enable us to develop our programmes so that more international students are able to experience God's love and the peace that only He can bring?

Please use the response slip enclosed, or give online at www.friendsinternational.uk/donate or scan this QR code.



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