

Opportunity

September • November 2020

friends
INTERNATIONAL

Why Not Just Say "Hello"?

Inside

Growing Friendship and Faith with International Students



Arriving Students

Page 3



Just Say Hello Day

Page 4



New Faith in Quarantine

Page 8



Impact Report

Page 9

Leading Thoughts

International students are returning to universities in the UK and Ireland this month. In any other year that would not be news, but 2020 has been far from a normal year!



There will clearly be significant changes in how universities operate, yet international students are still arriving in large numbers. The current situation may well increase student anxiety and isolation. Therefore, the friendship and faith Christians can offer these students is desperately needed.

Our events moved online in March, and during lockdown we connected with an additional 1,000 international students using Zoom. One of the joyful discoveries has been that graduates from previous years have re-established contact, giving us new opportunities to reach out and disciple them.

We are also thankful that in recent months it has been possible to connect with and train churches in new ways. We have been able to discuss, with churches, how to reach out to international students stranded in their universities or who have had to travel unexpectedly.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”
Romans 8:28

Moving forward, we are working out how to return our ministry back to physical meetings. This is a challenge, especially as we realise that some things may have changed for good. Please be in prayer that over these coming weeks we would be able to start ministering to students face-to-face again.

In October we are inviting you to the Just Say Hello Day – a day for stepping forward to welcome international students to the UK and Ireland, and to support the work of Friends International. We would love you to be a part of this initiative. Find out more at: friendsinternational.uk/hello.

Finally, in this edition of *Opportunity* you can read our Impact Report – showing the impact Friends International has made in the lives of international students.

Thank you for your partnership in this valuable ministry.

Alan

Alan Tower
National Director

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New
Arrivals

How do Arriving Students Feel?

Naturally, during a global pandemic, the idea of leaving home and travelling abroad may cause stress and anxiety. Yet, hundreds of thousands of international students will arrive in the UK and Ireland this month to begin studying at university.

We asked a few students how they felt about coming to the UK to study...

“For me, I am a bit excited to come back to university because I’ve been staying at home for so long,” said a student from China. “I am especially eager to return to living in a normal way.”

Students coming to Southampton shared with our staff worker their concerns: “Will people discriminate against me because of what people are calling the ‘Chinese Coronavirus’?” Another said: “I’m nervous about coming on my own to another country; will I be able to communicate with people as I’m not confident in English?”

Some of these are common concerns for students studying abroad. Other students don’t seem too worried, as one Chinese student studying a PhD in Leeds shared: “I am looking forward to my study life, I think the UK is doing pretty well in controlling the virus so I believe everything will be back in order soon!”

A student from France, studying in Cardiff, shared how their university was changing: “The usual starting date has been postponed. The earliest induction date will not be until 19th October. They will also change the teaching experience: it will be mostly online and small-group teaching.”

“The uni experience will certainly be different, but all those thorough implementations aim to ensure the safety of everyone. After all, better safe than sorry.”

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October 18th is Just Say Hello Day

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**Loads of fun
things to get
your small group
talking and
laughing**

Sometimes, all you need to do is
just say “hello”.

Saying “hello” can be the beginning of an incredible adventure of meeting new people and seeing lives changed. That is why we are inviting you to be part of the Just Say Hello Day – a day to warmly welcome an international student by starting a conversation.

It is also so much more than that! Access the Just Say Hello Resource Pack on our website so that your church or small group can be inspired to partner with us in supporting international students from all over the world. It includes some useful tips for welcoming students from other cultures, a Bible study resource to get you started on cross-cultural mission and loads of fun things to get your small group talking and laughing.

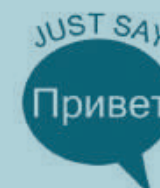
We have even included a map of each region of the UK and Ireland so you can see where there are international students near you, and how you can get involved with a Friends International Centre and pray for students in your area.

Although universities up and down the country are reeling from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, hundreds of thousands of students are now arriving in the UK for the start of the new academic year. This is an amazing opportunity for Christians to meet people from around the world and share friendship and faith as we reach out to them with the love of Christ.

We have earmarked 18th October for you and your church, but don't worry if that day doesn't work, just choose another date to just say “hello”. Take this opportunity to get to know more about the work of Friends International as we support international students. Sign up now to get access to the full digital resources pack and be inspired by how God is moving and transforming lives.

It is simple to just say “hello”, but it can make a huge difference to someone.

Join the Just Say Hello Day here:
friendsinternational.uk/hello



We're Working Closely with...

Universities

A new initiative saw Friends International working with **Southampton University** Student's Union to provide informal English practice and a community for the online pre-sessional English students. Over 1,300 of their incoming international students were informed of our activities. Twice a week for 9 weeks we ran 1-hour sessions that revolved around stimulating conversation that both aided their English but also answered many of their questions and worries about moving to the UK.

The same has been happening at **Edinburgh University** where Friends International staff have run English Corner (EC) for students required to raise their academic English level. EC is ideal for the students, most of whom are presently at home in China. During EC they can meet local people from Edinburgh and learn about Scottish culture. We have had over 200 students sign up to join us. The EC WeChat group now has 160 people in it, with lots of people messaging to thank the team and saying they cannot wait for next week.

Christian Unions (CUs)

Over the summer, Friends International connected with 47 Christian Unions (CUs) from across the UK and Ireland, giving them valuable online training to prepare them for welcoming and ministering to international students come the new term.

Our training featured a short talk from Peter Teagle and we heard from two international students about their experiences of moving to the UK, and what they would recommend for CUs to do to welcome international students well.

In late August, Friends International staff gave a session at UCCF's Forum, a training week for Christian Union leaders.

If you're part of a CU and would like to get in touch with your local Friends International Staff Worker to access training and resources, please visit: **friendsinternational.uk/where-we-work**

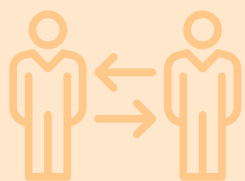
Churches

A recent survey of our activities has shown that over 280 churches are involved in running international student events with support from Friends International. Many more churches, throughout the world, are generously donating and praying for the ministry.

Without the church playing its role, international students would not have the chance to experience the Christian welcome and hospitality that changes lives.

That is why we are inviting churches and small groups to join our Just Say Hello Day by supporting Friends International and welcoming international students to the UK and Ireland. Read how to get involved in this edition of *Opportunity*.

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Over 280 churches are involved in running international student events



New Faith in Quarantine

Just before the UK lockdown came into effect in March, Jade* flew back to China. The day before she flew home, she prayed and committed her life to Christ.

I have been privileged to get to know her well as she attended the Friends International café and Bible study in Leicester.

When she arrived back in China, she was sent to a hotel for quarantine. Then she was told that there was a confirmed Covid-19 case on her flight. As a result, she was transferred to a hospital. Two days later, she was told that there was only one person between her and the confirmed case. Her temperature was slightly high, so she had to be transferred to another hospital. By this point, she was emotionally drained and exhausted. Yet, this

drove her to reading the Bible and to prayer. She was finally discharged after two weeks.

I was amazed by how her young faith was strengthened in this trial. She grew so much as a Christian in just two weeks!

Now she is back home with her family and still joins our Bible studies online.

Jade's family practises Buddhism. One of her relatives is even a fortune teller. When she got home, her mum asked her to worship the idols. She said to me, "I do not know where I got the courage, but I said no to my mum".

Please pray for Jade as she wrestles with her new faith and learns how to live for Jesus in China.

Penny Wang, Staff Worker, Leicester

I was amazed by how her young faith was strengthened in this trial.

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*Not her real name.

Impact Report



The Year in Numbers

We have connected with over 10,000 international students this year! This statistic and others show just a glimpse of what is happening across the country, while demonstrating the significant impact the ministry is having transforming the lives of international students.

An exciting development is the rise in students participating in Bible studies – a rise of 25% from the previous 12 months. With more international student Bible studies, more students are encountering the Living God. We thank God that this year 68 students made a commitment of faith.

Unsurprisingly, due to Covid-19, we have been in contact with fewer international students than last year. However, during lockdown, we connected with an additional 1,000 students on Zoom.

Another quirk of lockdown has meant that we have connected with far more returnees. This means we have been in touch with more international students who have returned home in years gone by. Lockdown has caused a greater desire to reconnect from across the globe.

Looking Forward

At the start of this new academic year, we are as committed as ever to growing friendship and faith with international students.

Our 'Vision for Growth' – laid out in the March edition of *Opportunity* – is to see the work expand into an additional nine locations and strengthen six other locations with extra staff. Please join us in praying for this growth and consider making a financial gift to help make this vision a reality. You can do this at: [friendsinternational.uk/give](https://www.friendsinternational.uk/give).

Financial Summary

We give thanks and praise to God for His continued financial provision, which enables us to connect with thousands of international students every year. The outcome for 2019 was a small deficit of £7,345. By excluding legacies, the deficit would have been £66,714. The equivalent the previous year was an underlying deficit of £81,725.

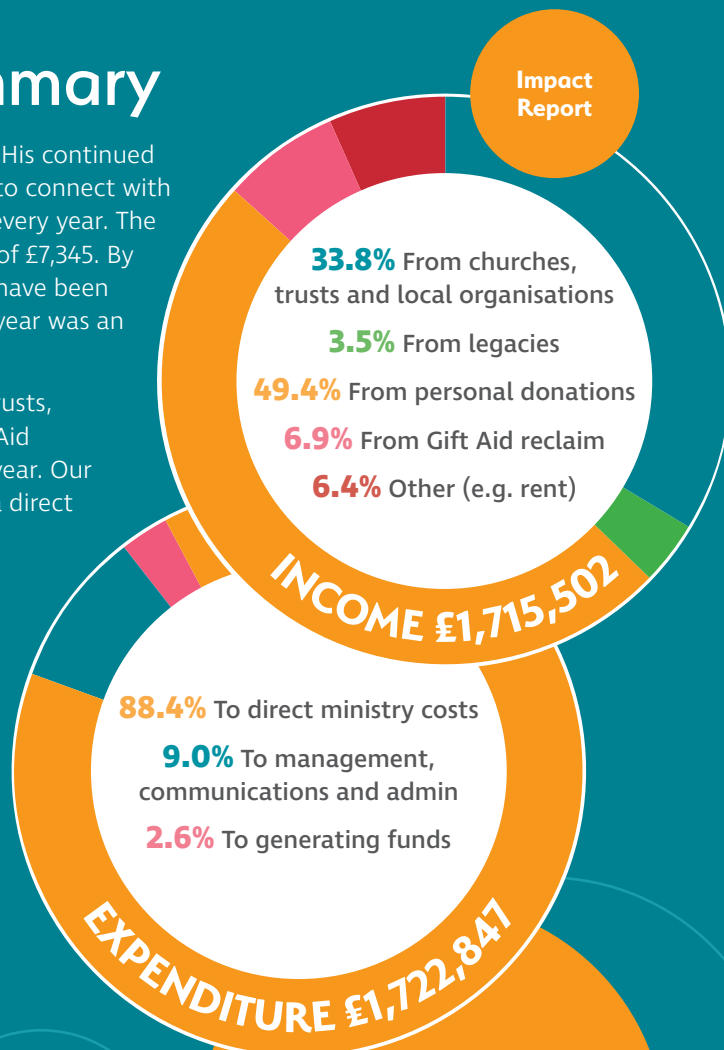
Donations and gifts from churches, trusts, personal supporters and related Gift Aid were 14.3% higher than the previous year. Our expenses have risen by 13.9%. This is a direct result of employing more staff, which enables our ministry to grow.

We are incredibly thankful to our donors, who give generously to the work.

Ministry Stats

Academic Year 2019-20

Impact Report



Ministry Impact

Academic Year 2019-20

10,000

International students contacted

1,300

International students who attended a Bible study

68

International students who have made a faith commitment

80

Friends International Staff and Admin workers

63

Affiliates on our Affiliate Scheme

1,500

Number of volunteers active in the ministry

730

International students who have been hosted

8

Reach Trainees

300

Number of churches we work with in ministry

40

UK and Irish cities and towns with ministry to international students

68

International students who attended the Philip Project Course

510

International students who attended our English language classes/groups





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