



BRIGHTON
STUDENTS' UNION

Student Focus Group Report

International Students' Experiences of the University Application Process

Date of focus group: 14th May 2026

Location: Elm House, Room 503, Moulsecoomb Campus

Time: 1-2pm

Hosts: Tom Siviter-Foy, Saskia McKay

Contents

• Summary	3
• Introduction	3
• Methodology	4
• Participants	5-6
• Findings	7-15
◦ Discovering, Applying and Transition	7-8
◦ Support during the process	9-10
◦ CAS and Visa Experiences	11-12
◦ Communication, Websites and Navigation	13-14
◦ Differences Between UG / PGT / PGR Experiences.....	15
• Conclusions: Per Objective	8-9
◦ Objective 1:	16
◦ Objective 2:	16-17
◦ Objective 3:	17
• Future Considerations:	18
• Appendix	19-21
◦ Results: Activity 1	19-20
◦ Results: Activity 2:	21-23
◦ Results: Activity 3:	24-25
◦ Reflection Task	26
◦ Participation - Demographic Breakdown:	27

Summary

This report looks into findings from a student focus group which explored international students' experiences of applying to and preparing to study at the University of Brighton. It also investigates what communication and support they used throughout the process, and how they experienced the CAS and visa stages of the application journey.

Students mainly relied on the University website, emails, agents, and other students throughout the process. Whilst most felt the information they needed did exist, many described the process of finding and understanding it as difficult, and heavily reliant on students being proactive.

A major theme throughout the session was inconsistent communication between departments, particularly around scholarships, CAS documents, tuition payments, and visa requirements. Students often described receiving conflicting information or being passed between teams, which added stress during time-sensitive stages of the process.

Students also highlighted challenges with university websites and systems, including outdated information, unclear guidance, and difficulties navigating between multiple platforms.

Some differences emerged between levels of study. Undergraduate students spoke more about placements and course expectations, while postgraduate taught students more commonly discussed scholarship administration and CAS-related communication.

Students valued direct and personalised support, particularly through WhatsApp groups, Discord, phone calls, video calls, and proactive communication from staff.

Overall, the findings highlight the need for clearer communication, more consistent information between departments, and easier-to-navigate systems throughout the international student application journey.

Introduction

This report presents findings from an international student focus group carried out on behalf of the University of Brighton, looking at students' experiences of applying to and preparing to study at the university.

The focus group explored three main areas:

- 1. How international students first discovered the University and their course, and**

how they experienced the application process

- 2. What types of support and communication methods students used throughout the application journey, and which they found most helpful**
- 3. How students experienced the CAS and visa process, including areas that felt clear, confusing, or stressful**

These objectives were explored through a series of structured activities and group discussions focused on different stages of the international student journey, from researching courses through to arriving at university.

The findings provide insight into the challenges, expectations, communication preferences, and support needs of international students throughout the application process, and are intended to help identify areas where communication, support, and systems could be improved.

Methodology

A one-hour, in-person focus group was carried out to explore international students' experiences of applying to and preparing to study at the University of Brighton. The session used a series of structured activities to explore different stages of the application journey, alongside wider group discussion.

Activity 1: Discovering and Applying

- Students were asked to reflect on their experiences from first discovering the university through to starting university.
- Participants wrote comments, experiences, concerns, and challenges onto sticky notes and placed them against different stages of the journey, including:
 - Finding the course
 - Researching universities
 - Applying
 - Receiving updates
 - Receiving an offer
 - CAS process
 - Visa application
 - Preparing to arrive
 - Starting university
- This activity explored what students found straightforward, what they struggled with, and where information or support felt unclear throughout the process.

Activity 2: Support During the Process

- Students were given a range of common situations linked to the international student application process and asked to match them to where they would go for support.
- Support options included:
 - Agents
 - University staff

- Websites
- Emails
- Phone calls
- Friends and family
- Social media or online groups
- Other students
- The activity looked at which types of support and communication methods students preferred throughout the process, and which parts of the journey felt unsupported or confusing.

Activity 3: CAS and Visa Experiences

- This focused on the CAS and visa stages of the application process.
- Participants wrote feedback on sticky-notes and stuck them underneath headings:
 - Clear and easy to understand
 - Confusing or unclear
 - Support that helped most
 - Stressful or difficult moments
 - Information I wish I had earlier
 - What the university could improve
- This activity explored the main challenges students experienced during the CAS and visa process, alongside the types of support they found most useful.

Final Reflection

At the end of the session, students were asked:

"If you could change one thing about the application process for future international students, what would it be?"

This final discussion helped identify the areas students felt would make the biggest difference to improving the international student application journey.

Participants

A total of 8 students took part in the focus group. The group included international students from different countries, courses, and stages of study, including undergraduate (UG), postgraduate taught (PGT), and postgraduate research (PGR) students.

Participants came from a range of subject areas, including Psychology, Medical Science, Robotics and Mechatronics Engineering, Sociology, Finance, and Research degrees.

The group also included students with different experiences of the application process, including:

- students who applied independently

- students who used agents
- students who had received scholarships
- students interested in placements
- students applying from different international education systems

This provided a range of perspectives across different parts of the international student application journey. A full breakdown of participant demographics can be found in the Appendix.

Findings

1. Discovering, Applying and Transition - Placement Focus

Addressing Objective 1 - To understand how international students first became aware of the University and their course, and how they experienced the application process

Students generally described the early stages of the application process positively, particularly when researching courses and initially applying.

Discovery:

In Activity 1, students commonly identified course content, employability, placements, location, and university reputation as key reasons for choosing the University of Brighton.

- Students discovered the university through Google searches, university rankings, recommendations, previous subject interests, and location:
 - Undergraduate students more commonly discussed interest in placements, employability, and student lifestyle
 - Postgraduate students focused more on course fit and academic opportunities.
- Several students highlighted placements and employability as attractive:
 - *"The course is practical, and hands on. It also focuses on employability."*
 - *"Brighton had a critical accreditation that Sussex didn't."*
- Location and student lifestyle were also important factors:
 - *"I knew what course I wanted, loved the waterfront and beach, location and Brighton."*
 - *"I liked UoB because it seemed inclusive and more diverse than other places."*
 - *"Found the university by looking at locations across UK-proximity to London."*

Application Process:

The application process itself was often described as "easy", "straightforward", or "not difficult" in the early stages. However, as students progressed further through the application process, it became more complicated, particularly when navigating multiple systems and platforms including UCAS, Student View, university webpages, Discord, UniBuddy, WhatsApp groups, Discord, emails, and external organisations. Several students described this as confusing:

- *"There were a lot of different platforms to keep track of."*
- *"The UoB website had a lot of links that led you on a loop, which made it difficult to find information."*

As the process continued, students relied more on direct communication methods such as phone calls, WhatsApp groups, regional ambassadors, and agents. Several students spoke positively about proactive communication from staff:

- *"I liked the call with the regional admissions ambassador."*
- *"Got some phone calls from uni to ensure I was happy to come and if I had any questions."*

Although only one student had used an external organisation, they spoke positively about the support received: *"Across the Pond helped me. All from entry registration, to applying and accepting."*

English Language Evidence:

One postgraduate research student described difficulties proving English proficiency despite already holding qualifications. Although they had previously studied in English, they were later asked to provide additional ECCTIS confirmation during the application process, even though initially being told this would not be required. The student described the process as confusing and frustrating, particularly as the information on the website did not appear to match the guidance they later received from staff. The student felt the guidance changed throughout the process, creating delays and uncertainty.

Placements - Major Theme

Another major theme emerging from Activity 1 and the wider discussion was placements. Placement opportunities were often a major reason students chose Brighton, particularly amongst undergraduate students:

- *"I can do placement after my second year, and that was one of the main reasons I wanted to come to the University of Brighton."*
- However, several students later felt the reality of placements had not been clearly explained: *"Placement year was falsely advertised, not explained, and needed me to be overly proactive to receive any information on it."*
- One student explained they only later discovered how competitive placements actually were: *"The website made it quite appealing... but it's not really available..."*
- Another student described assuming placements would be assigned automatically: *"My thought was they assigned you to a placement... then I got here and realised you had to apply."*

Students felt placement information online did not always clearly explain:

- How placements worked
- Whether placements were guaranteed
- How competitive they were
- What students were expected to organise independently

Transition to University

Students also described the transition into university as more difficult or isolating than expected:

- *"Starting the course itself was a lot different to anticipated - more chaotic, less academically challenging, and more isolated."*
- Another postgraduate research student felt arrival activities lacked practical information: *"The 'Belong at Brighton' event was too formulaic and didn't do too much work on equipping with proper information on school resources."*

Overall, students generally found discovering and applying to the university manageable, but the process became increasingly complex during later stages involving placements, CAS, visas, accommodation, and arrival preparation.

2. Support During the Process

Addressing Objective 2 - To understand what support international students used throughout the application process, and which sources of support they trusted most

Activity 2 showed that students relied heavily on university websites throughout the application process, particularly for practical or administrative questions.

The website was the most commonly used support source for:

- Understanding entry requirements (7 responses)
- Receiving application updates (6 responses)
- Understanding English language requirements (5 responses)
- Understanding enrolment information (4 responses)
- Understanding accommodation options (4 responses)
- Understanding deadlines (4 responses)

Students expect the university website to be the main source of information throughout the process. However, the activity also showed that websites alone were often not enough, particularly during more stressful or confusing stages of the application journey. Students often moved towards more direct forms of support, including:

- Emails
- Phone calls
- WhatsApp groups
- Social media groups
- Other students
- Agents

Emails were mainly used for receiving updates, asking urgent questions, and chasing delayed responses, while phone calls were associated with more urgent or unresolved issues.

A clear pattern throughout Activity 2 was the growing importance of informal support networks during later stages of the process.

Social media groups and other students were particularly relied on for:

- Preparing to move to the UK
- Healthcare information
- Airport arrival information
- Understanding student life

WhatsApp and Discord

WhatsApp and Discord groups appeared especially important for international students, and were discussed multiple times:

- *"The WhatsApp group chats were actually more effective for passing information."*
- This was particularly important for some international students who felt platforms such as Discord were less accessible or harder to engage with: *"Especially in Nigeria, I think WhatsApp is generally most useful as I couldn't get onto Discord."*
- Another student explained they struggled to access the Discord server altogether: *"I couldn't even get on the Discord... I sent a request and still wouldn't get a response."*

However, students also explained that both Discord and WhatsApp groups relied heavily on students themselves keeping conversations active, answering questions, and sharing information:

- *"The Discord was a great place to make community... if you were proactive enough to take part."*
- Students described needing to constantly monitor chats to avoid missing information: *"You have to literally ask a question and look at your phone... otherwise there are a lot of other messages and your message is literally just gone."*
- Views on community-building through these groups were mixed. Some students felt WhatsApp and Discord helped them connect with people before arriving at university, making the transition feel less isolating: *"It felt like you already had friends before you even got here."* Whilst another student felt the groups did not naturally create much sense of community unless students made a strong effort themselves: *"The Discord server was nice, but the community building felt very proactive."*

Less confident in where to go for support

The highest "Nobody / unsupported" responses were for:

- Preparing financial documents (4 responses)
- Booking visa appointments (3 responses)
- Understanding next steps after receiving an offer (3 responses)
- Understanding CAS documents (2 responses)
- Airport arrival information (2 responses)

Students were less confident about where to go for support during financial and visa-related stages of the process. Although only one student had used an external agent, they spoke positively about the support received: *"Agent helped a lot - they had previous experience and provided good help... I connected with them when I was in my first year of high school, and they helped me through the entire process until I got here."*

Communication

Another major theme throughout the discussion was students valuing communication that felt direct, quick, and personalised.

Students repeatedly spoke positively about:

- proactive (UoB) staff communication
- phone calls
- direct answers
- WhatsApp groups
- support from other students

One student explained: *"She (staff at UoB) gave me a little bit more direct understanding of the situation."*

At the same time, students were frustrated by communication that felt reactive rather than proactive: *"It was almost like you're waiting for the problem to arise, and then you have to email someone or poke around the system to figure out how to fix it."*

Overall, Activity 2 showed that while websites were the main starting point for information, students relied much more on direct communication and informal support networks when dealing with uncertainty, urgency, or more complicated parts of the application process.

3. CAS and Visa Experiences

Addressing Objective 3 - To understand how students experienced the CAS and visa process, including areas that felt clear, confusing, or stressful

Students frequently described the CAS and visa stages as one of the most stressful parts of the application journey.

Common issues raised during Activity 3 included:

- conflicting information between departments
- uncertainty around financial evidence
- scholarship documentation
- delays in receiving CAS documents
- repeated requests for information
- unclear guidance around required documents

Scholarships:

Several students described receiving different answers from different university teams about the same issue: *"One department was like, pay your full tuition and then we'll refund the scholarship amount. Another said it should reflect on your offer letter. Another said don't worry about it."*

Issues linked to scholarships and tuition payments were raised particularly by postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students.

One postgraduate research student described the process as especially difficult because they had received a partial scholarship. The student explained that their CAS and offer documentation did not clearly reflect how the scholarship affected the amount they needed to prove financially for their visa. After receiving conflicting advice from different departments, the student eventually decided to pay the tuition fees upfront themselves in order to progress the process:

"The CAS process was a mess because I had a partial scholarship. The amount of money that I had to prove to have was different from the amount of money the university really was gonna collect from me. At the end of the day, I just settled on paying it."

Another student backed up these concerns around scholarships and CAS documentation. As an undergraduate student with a partial scholarship, they described confusion around tuition payments, CAS requirements, and how the scholarship was portrayed within the system. However, they felt unable to make this payment before receiving their CAS or starting the course. As a result, the scholarship was not fully reflected within the documents needed for their application. The student also described being passed between departments for clarification:

"I got an email saying I had a scholarship, but they were like, you need to pay some amount to confirm the scholarship... I couldn't do that until I had my CAS, or until I started the course. I couldn't pay the full amount which means the scholarship wasn't confirmed. Which means I couldn't have proof of it to confirm my own application. The international office told me to email someone else, who told me to email someone else, who told me to email the international office."

CAS Document Confusion and Delays

Delays in receiving CAS documents were another major source of stress:

- *"My CAS was delayed by a month or two... I almost didn't make it to the first day."* One undergraduate student explained they nearly missed visa deadlines because of how late the CAS arrived: *"I had to pay for an expedited visa decision."*

Students also described uncertainty around what documents were actually required, particularly where personal circumstances were more complex: *"Sometimes when the uni needs evidence for residence or finance, it was not clear enough. It took longer than it should have."*

Despite this, students spoke positively about situations where staff provided direct explanations or quickly resolved problems. Clear communication and quick responses were seen as especially important during time-sensitive parts of the process.

Students want clearer and more consistent communication during the CAS and visa stages, particularly where multiple departments are involved.

4. Communication, Websites Navigation

Addressing Objectives 2 and 3 – understanding how students accessed information and support throughout the application journey, and how communication impacted more complex stages such as CAS and visas.

Students generally described university websites and online systems as the main starting point for finding information throughout the application process. However, many participants described difficulties navigating systems, locating information efficiently, and understanding which guidance applied to them.

A major theme throughout the discussion was information being spread across multiple systems and departments, including:

- University website
- Student View
- Emails
- Discord
- WhatsApp groups
- External guidance and documents

While students generally felt the information they needed did exist somewhere, many described the process of finding it as confusing and fragmented:

- *"The information was there, but you had to click through a bunch of different things."*
- *"The UoB website had a lot of links that led you on a loop."*

Student View:

Students also described difficulties understanding how to use systems such as Student View, particularly around:

- navigation
- understanding processes
- completing actions
- identifying next steps

"There wasn't much of a walkthrough or FAQ of how to actually navigate Student View. If they did, it would be really helpful."

Receiving Conflicting Information:

Several students also described receiving conflicting information depending on which department or platform they used. This was particularly common around:

- scholarships
- tuition payments
- English language requirements
- placements
- CAS documentation

Students often felt they needed to repeatedly follow up themselves for clarification: *"I had to send new emails asking what can I do."*

Information Online Appeared Outdated:

Students also highlighted situations where information online appeared outdated, inaccurate, 13

or had not updated after actions had been completed.

- *"After I paid the deposit, the view was still the same saying I had to pay."*
- Another student described frustration where online guidance around English language requirements did not match the advice they later received from staff. The student initially believed their qualification would be accepted as proof of English proficiency based on the university website, but was later told this was not valid: *"On the website it was still there that I could use it... then later they told me I couldn't."*

Students also felt some systems assumed prior knowledge or confidence navigating university processes independently, particularly during more complex stages involving visas, finance, and placements.

Overall, students felt communication and digital systems could be clearer, and more 'merged', and easier to navigate, particularly for international students unfamiliar with UK university processes.

5. Differences Between UG / PGT / PGR Experiences

Addressing Objectives 1 and 2 – understanding how experiences of the application process and support needs differed between undergraduate, postgraduate taught, and postgraduate research students.

Some clear differences emerged between undergraduate, postgraduate taught, and postgraduate research students throughout the discussion.

Undergraduate (UG) Students

Undergraduate students spoke more about:

- placements
- course expectations
- student community
- settling into university life
- finding information themselves

Placements were a major reason many undergraduate students chose Brighton, but several later felt the reality of placements had not been clearly explained, particularly around how competitive they were and how much students were expected to organise independently. UG students also discussed the social side of starting university more frequently, including making friends, adjusting to university life, and feeling prepared before arriving.

Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Students

Postgraduate taught students more commonly discussed:

- scholarships
- tuition payments
- CAS administration
- financial evidence
- communication between departments

PGT students often described more complex administrative issues, particularly where scholarships or funding were involved. Several described confusion around payments, financial proof, and receiving different information from different departments.

Postgraduate Research (PGR) Students

Postgraduate research students more frequently discussed:

- navigating systems independently
- communication quality
- needing direct answers from staff
- differences between information online and the reality of university processes

PGR students were generally more critical of unclear systems and fragmented communication, particularly around English language evidence, CAS processes, and university platforms.

Across all groups, students valued communication that felt direct, clear, and personalised. However, the specific issues students faced often depended on their level and type of study.

Conclusions: Per Objective

1. To understand how international students first became aware of the University and their course, and how they experienced the application process

Students discovered the University of Brighton through online research, university rankings, recommendations, location, and opportunities such as placements and employability. Course content, placements, scholarships, and Brighton itself were all important reasons students chose the university.

Students generally described the early stages of the process positively, especially when researching courses and initially applying. However, as the process continued, many felt things became more complicated due to the number of systems, platforms, and departments involved. Students often felt they had to find information themselves, chase responses, and work out parts of the process independently.

Placements were a major factor for many undergraduate students when choosing Brighton. However, several students later felt the reality of placements had not been fully explained, particularly around how competitive they were and how much students were expected to organise themselves.

Overall, although students were able to complete the process successfully, many felt the application journey relied heavily on students being proactive and confident navigating university systems on their own.

2. To understand what support international students used throughout the application journey, which communication methods they preferred, and which sources of support they found most useful

Students relied heavily on university websites throughout the application process, particularly for information around entry requirements, enrolment, deadlines, and accommodation.

However, during more stressful or confusing parts of the process, students often moved towards more direct forms of support such as WhatsApp groups, phone calls, emails, university staff, social media groups, and other students.

Students consistently responded more positively to communication that felt direct, personalised, quick, and proactive.

WhatsApp groups and peer networks were especially important in helping students prepare for moving to the UK and feel less isolated before starting university. At the same time, students also felt these groups relied heavily on students themselves actively answering questions, sharing information, and keeping conversations going. The findings also showed that some stages of the process felt less supported,

particularly around financial evidence, visa appointments, CAS documentation, and understanding next steps after receiving offers.

In conclusion, students valued support that felt accessible, responsive, and human, particularly during more time-sensitive or uncertain parts of the application process.

3. To understand how students experienced the CAS and visa process, including areas that felt clear, confusing, or stressful

Students frequently described the CAS and visa stages as some of the most stressful parts of the application process. Common issues included delays in receiving CAS documents, uncertainty around financial evidence, unclear guidance, repeated requests for information, and receiving different advice from different departments.

Issues around scholarships were raised particularly by postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students. Several students described confusion around how scholarships linked to tuition payments, financial evidence, and CAS documentation. Some students received conflicting information from different university teams, while others were unclear about what payments or documents were actually required during the visa process.

Students also described frustration where information online did not match the guidance they later received from staff, particularly around English language evidence and financial requirements.

Students spoke positively about situations where staff provided direct explanations, proactive communication, or quick responses during time-sensitive parts of the process.

Overall, students wanted clearer communication, more consistent information between departments, and better guidance throughout the CAS and visa process.

Future Considerations

Improve Communication Between Departments

Students often described receiving different answers from different departments, particularly around scholarships, tuition payments, CAS documents, and financial evidence. Better communication between teams would help reduce confusion and stop students needing to repeatedly chase updates or clarification.

Create Clearer Step-by-Step Guidance

Many students felt they had to work out large parts of the process themselves. Clearer step-by-step guidance throughout the application journey, especially during CAS and visa stages, would help students better understand what they need to do and when.

Simplify Websites and Online Systems

Students frequently discussed difficulties navigating between Student View, webpages, emails, and external platforms. Simplifying systems, improving signposting, and creating clearer walkthroughs or FAQs could make information easier to find and understand.

Be Clearer About Placements

Placements were one of the main reasons many students chose Brighton, particularly undergraduate students. However, several students later felt the realities of placements had not been clearly explained. Students wanted more transparency around:

- How placements work
- How competitive they are
- Whether placements are guaranteed
- What students are expected to organise themselves

Improve Guidance Around Scholarships and Financial Evidence

Scholarships and financial evidence were a major source of confusion for several students, particularly around tuition payments, CAS documents, and visa requirements. Clearer guidance around how these processes connect together would help reduce uncertainty and stress.

Continue Direct and Personal Communication

Students consistently responded positively to communication that felt direct and personal, particularly phone calls, WhatsApp groups, proactive emails, and quick responses from staff. Continuing these forms of communication would help students feel more supported throughout the process.

Improve Support Before Students Arrive

Several students described feeling underprepared before arriving at university, particularly around university systems, practical information, and settling into student life. More practical arrival guidance and clearer information before students arrive could help make the transition into university smoother.

Appendix

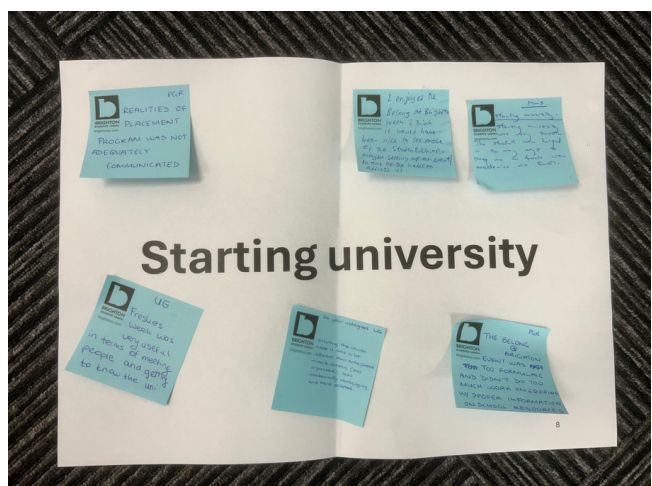
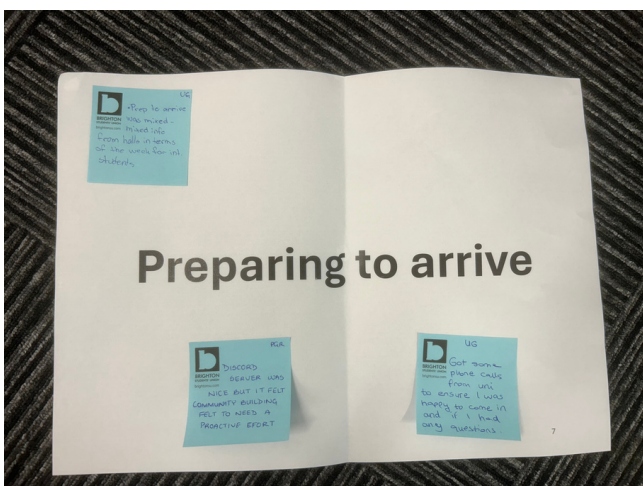
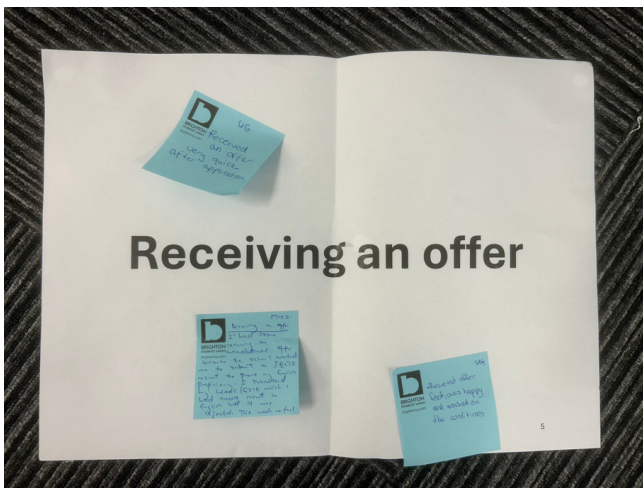
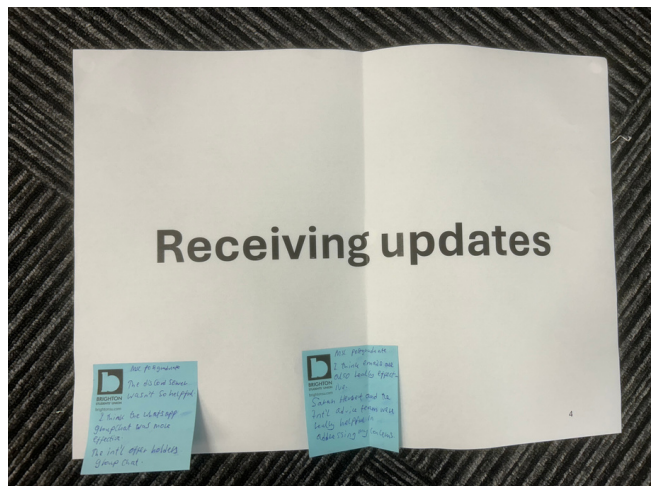
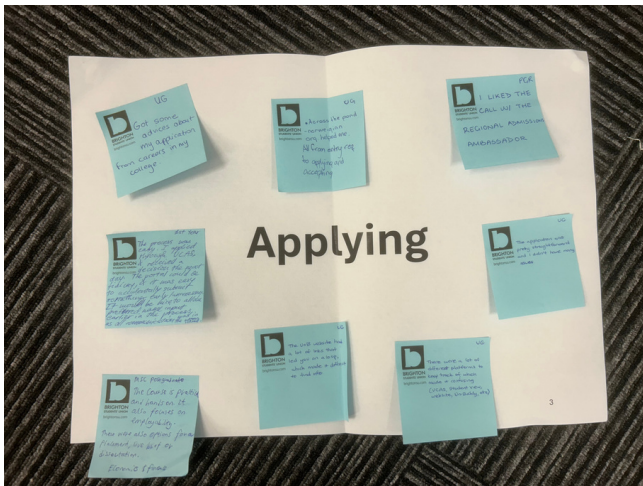
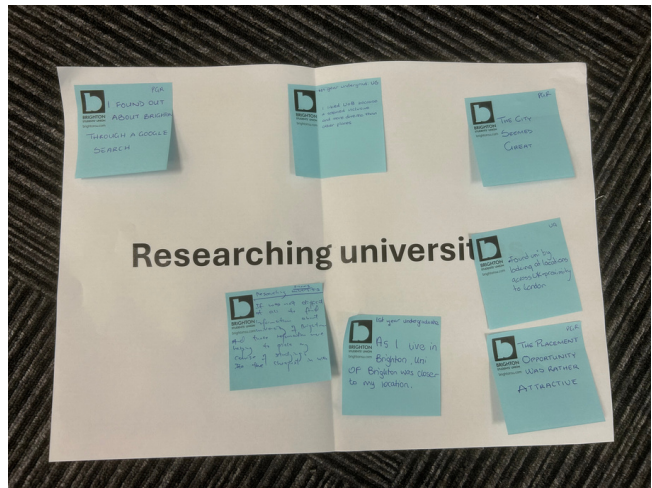
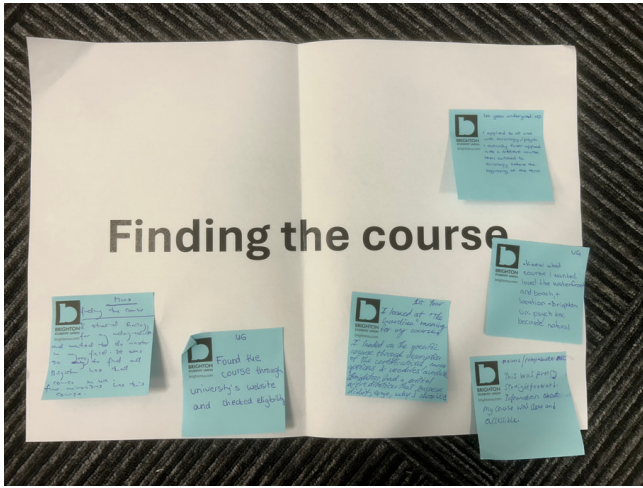
Results from Activity 1:

Students reflected on their experiences from first discovering the university through to starting university, including applying, receiving offers, and the CAS and visa process. Using sticky notes, students identified what they found positive, challenging, or unclear throughout the application journey.

ACTIVITY 1 - written-up from sticky notes		
	Level	Comment
Finding the course	UG	I applied to all unis with Sociology/ Psych. I actually first applied to a different course and then switched to Sociology before the beginning of term.
	UG	I knew what course I wanted, loved the waterfront and beach, location and Brighton.
	UG	I looked at the Guardian 'ranking' for my course. I landed on the specific course through descriptions of the certifications, career options and modules available. Brighton had a critical accreditation that Sussex didn't, which is why I chose UoB.
	UG	Found the course through the University's website and checked eligibility.
	PGT	This was pretty straightforward. Information about my course was clear and accessible.
	PGT	I studied Geology for my undergraduate. I wanted to do a masters in my field. It was so easy to find out that UoB had that course.
Researching universities	UG	I liked UoB because it seemed inclusive and more diverse than other places
	UG	Found university by looking at locations across UK-proximity to London
	UG	The placement opportunity was rather attractive
	UG	As I live in Brighton, the UoB was closer to my location.
	PGR	I found out about Brighton through a Google search
	PGR	The city seemed great
Applying	PGR	It was not difficult at all to find information about the University of Brighton. And this information helped me pick my course of studying. It was the cheapest.
	UG	Got some advice about my application from careers in my college
	UG	The course is practical, and hands on. It also focuses on employability. There were also options for a placement, live brief or dissertation.
	UG	The UoB website had a lot of links that led you on a loop, which made it difficult to find information.
	UG	There were a lot of different platforms to keep track of, which made it confusing (UCAS, Student View, website, UniBuddy, etc)
	UG	I liked the call with the regional admissions ambassador
	UG	Across the pond (Norwegian Org.) helped me. All from entry registration, to applying and accepting.
	PGT	The process was easy. I applied through UCAS, and received a decision the day. The portal could be tricky, and it was easy to accidentally submit something early/ unnecessarily. It would be nice to allow 'preferred name' input earlier in the process - as all communication was in the wrong name.
	PGR	The application was pretty straightforward and I didn't have many issues

Receiving updates	PGT	The Discord server wasn't so helpful. I think the WhatsApp groupchat was more effective (The International Holders group chat)
	PGT	I think emails are also really effective. Sarah Herbert and the International Team were really helpful in addressing my concerns.
Receiving an offer	UG	Received offer fast, was happy and worked on the conditions.
	UG	Received an offer very quick after application.
	PGR	I had an issue receiving an unconditional offer because the school wanted me to submit ECCTIS result to prove my English proficiency. I submitted my RHACC (GCSE which had a credit result in English), but it was rejected. This made me feel bad.
CAS process	UG	Took a while for CAS. I nearly didn't meet the deadline, I had to pay for an expedited Vias decision. Due to the lateness of CAS, all affordable accommodation were no longer available :(Stress inducing
	PGT	Information about the application process was provided. More information on the CAS and proof of funds process would have been helpful.
	PGR	The CAS process was a mess because I had a partial scholarship.
Visa application	UG	The Visa application was very confusing and it was difficult to know what the put for specific questions - more individual, quick support is necessary.
	UG	Visa app was long, but across the pond agent provided support.
Preparing to arrive	UG	Prep to arrive was mixed - mixed information from halls in terms of the week for international students.
	UG	Got some phone calls from uni to ensure I was happy to come in and if I had any questions.
	PGR	Discord server was nice, but it the 'community building' - felt there was a need for a proactive effort (from students)
Starting university	UG	Freshers week was useful in terms of meeting people and getting to know the university
	UG	I enjoyed the 'Belong at Brighton' week. I think it would have been nice to see more of the Student Union. Maybe setting up an event/ be in one of the halls to address us.
	UG	Starting the course itself was a lot different to anticipated - more chaotic (less organised), less academically challenging, and more isolated
	PGT	Starting university was very smooth. The Student Union helped in so many ways to keep me on track with academics via email.
	PGR	The realities of the placement programme was not adequately communicated
	PGR	The 'Belong at Brighton' event was too formulaic and didn't do too much work on equipping with proper information on school resources

Photographs from Activity 1:

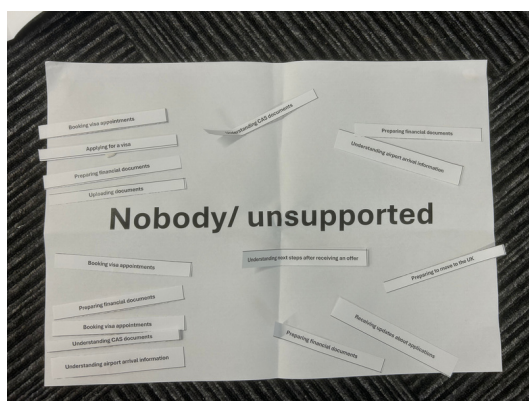
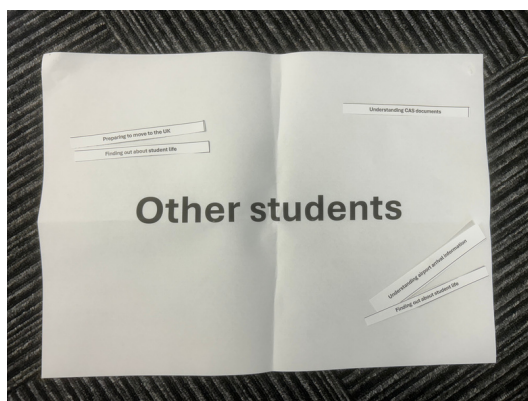
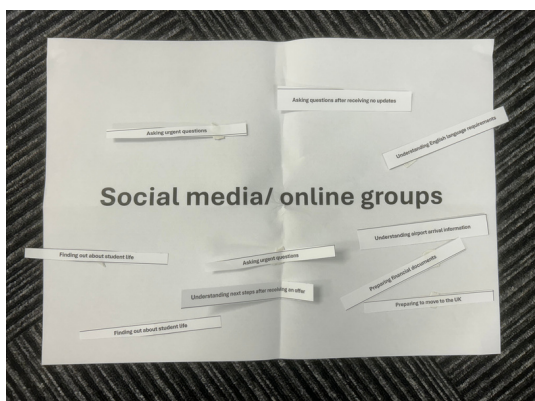
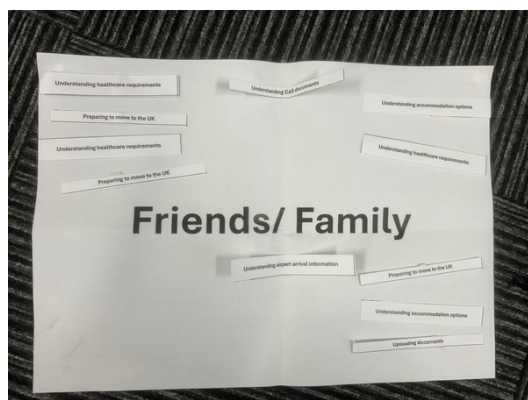
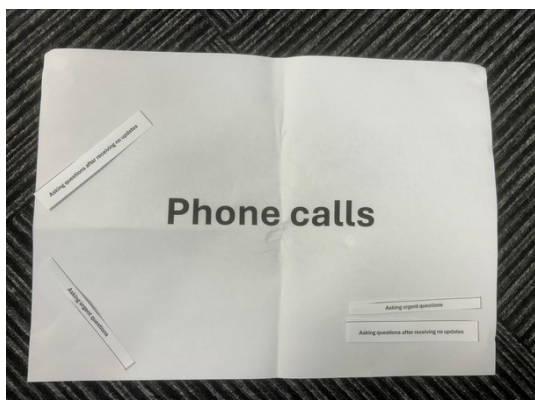
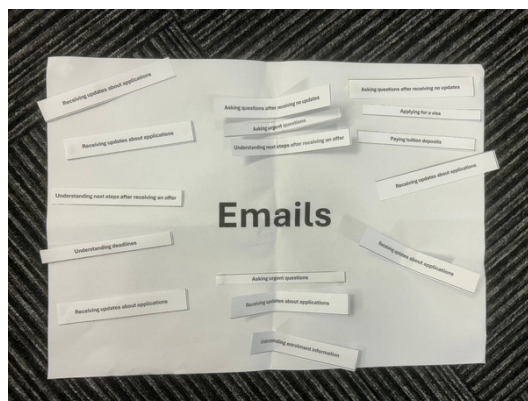
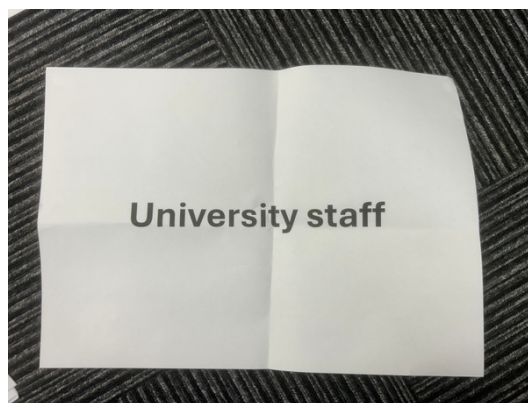
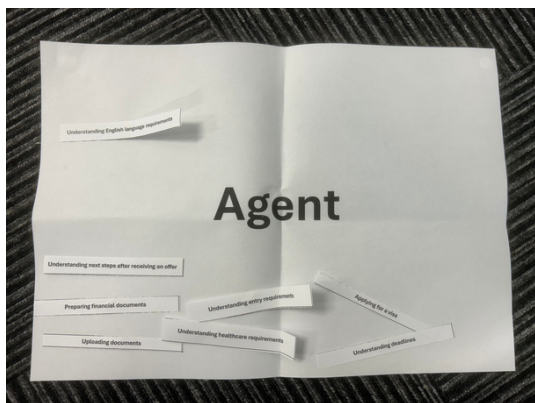


Results from Activity 2:

Students were given common situations linked to the international student application process and asked to match them to where they would go for support, using options such as websites, university staff, emails, phone calls, social media groups, and other students. The activity explored which types of support students trusted most and which parts of the process felt unclear or unsupported.

ACTIVITY 2 - numbers represent how often each scenario was placed per support area									
Scenario	Support Area								
	Agent	Univer sity staff	Webs ite	Emails	Phone calls	Friend s / family	Social media / online groups	Other stude nts	Nobod y / unsup ported
Understanding entry requirements	1		7						
Uploading documents	1		3			1			1
Understanding English language requirements	1		5				1		
Paying tuition deposits			3	1					
Understanding deadlines	1		4	1					
Receiving updates about applications				6					1
Understanding CAS documents			2			1		1	2
Applying for a visa	1		3	1					1
Preparing financial documents	1						1		4
Booking visa appointments									3
Understanding next steps after receiving an offer	1			2			1		3
Preparing to move to the UK						3	1	1	1
Understanding enrolment information			4	1					
Understanding healthcare requirements	1		1			3			
Understanding airport arrival information						1	1	1	2
Understanding accommodation options			4			2			
Finding out about student life							2	2	
Asking urgent questions				2	2		2		
Asking questions after receiving no updates				2	2		1		

Photographs from Activity 2:



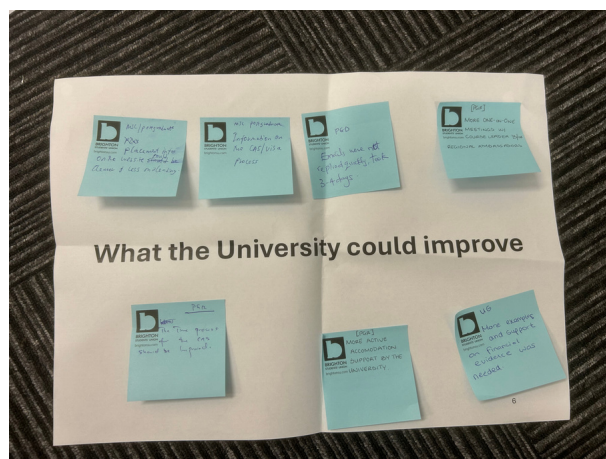
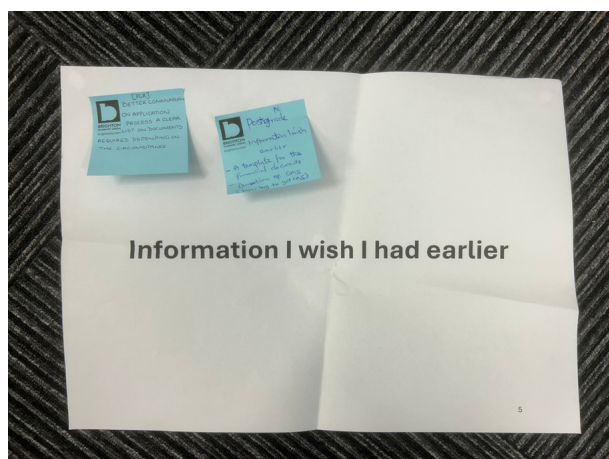
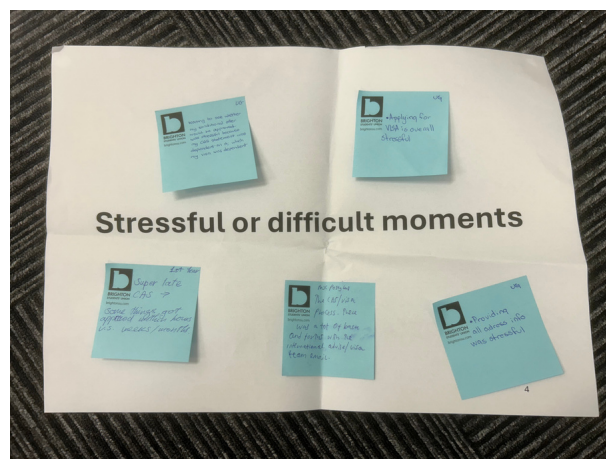
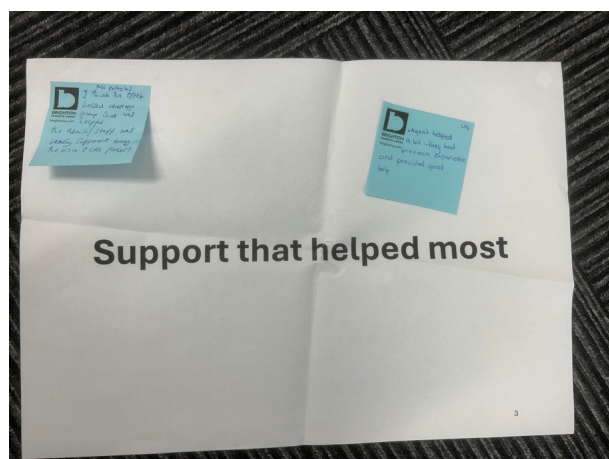
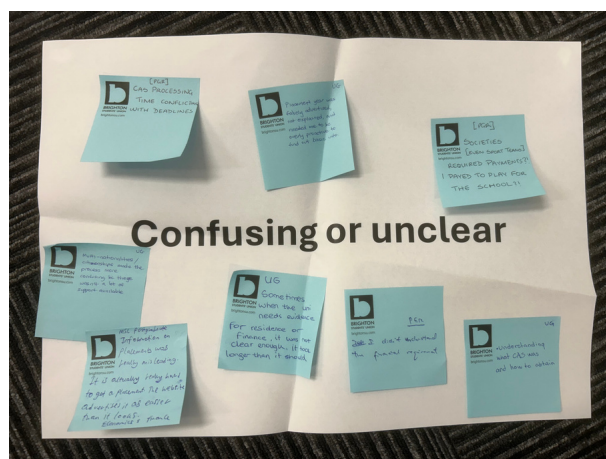
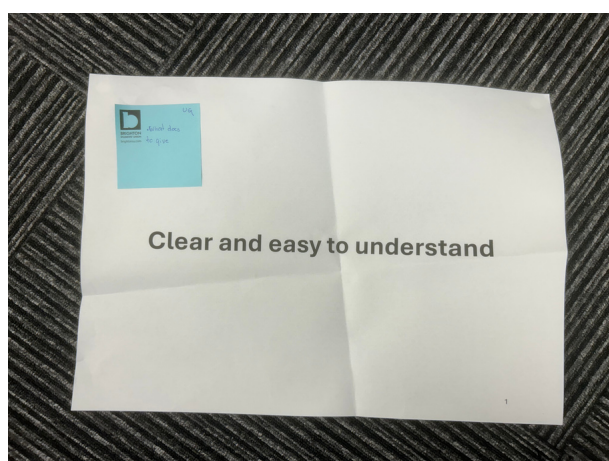
Results from Activity 3:

Students reflected specifically on their experiences of the CAS and visa stages of the application process using sticky notes under themes such as what felt clear, stressful, confusing, or supportive. The activity explored the main challenges students experienced during the CAS and visa process, alongside areas they felt could be improved.

ACTIVITY 3 - written-up from sticky notes		
	Level	Comment
Clear and easy to understand	UG	What documents to give
Confusing or unclear	UG	Multi-nationalities/ citizenships made the process more confusing because there wasn't a lot of support available
	UG	Sometimes when the uni needs evidence for residence or finance, it was not clear enough. It took longer than it should have
	UG	Understanding what CAS was and how to obtain it
	UG	Placement year was falsely advertised, not explained, and needed me to be overly proactive to find out basic information
	PGT	Information on placements was really misleading. It is actually really hard to get a placement. The website advertises it as easier than it looks (Economics & Finance)
	PGR	Societies (even sport teams) - require payments?! I payed to play for school?!
	PGR	CAS processing - it was time conflicting with deadlines
	PGR	I didn't understand the financial requirement
Support that helped most	UG	Agent helped a lot - they had previous experience and provided good help.
	PGT	I think the WhatsApp group groupchat was helpful. The admin staff was supportive during the Visa and CAS process.
Stressful or difficult moments	UG	Waiting to see whether my conditional offer would be approved was stressful because my CAS statement was dependant on it, which my Visa was dependant on
	UG	Super late CAS - some things got approved within hours vs weeks / months
	UG	Providing all address information was stressful
	UG	Applying for Visa is overall stressful
	PGT	The CAS / Visa process was a lot of back and forth with the international advice/ Visa team (email)
Information I wish I had earlier	PGT	A template for the financial documents
	PGT	Duration of CAS (how long to get CAS)
	PGR	Better communication on application process. A clear list on documents required depending on the circumstance.

What the University could improve	UG	More examples and support on financial evidence (was needed)
	PGT	Placement information on the website could be clearer and less misleading
	PGT	Information on CAS/ Visa process
	PGT	The time process for the CAS should be improved
	PGT	Emails were not replied to quickly, took 3-4 days.
	PGR	More active accomodation support from the university
	PGR	More one-on-one meetings with course leader (and/ or) regional ambassadors

Photographs from Activity 3:

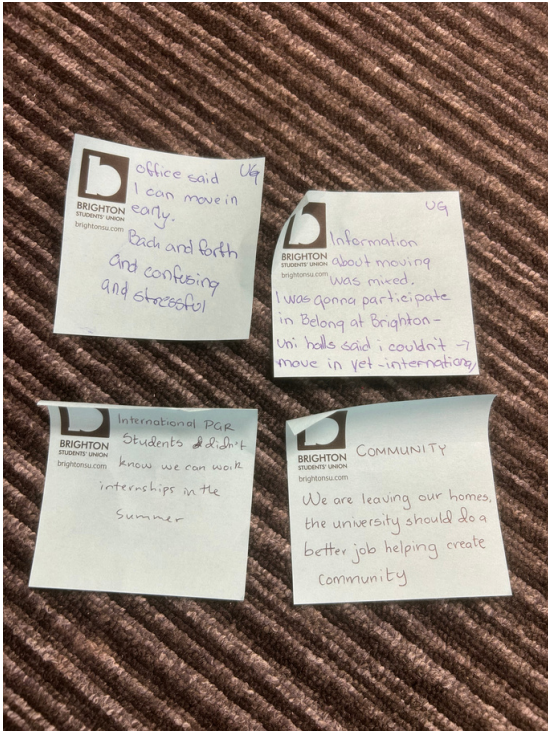


Results from Final Reflection

At the end of the session, students were asked what one change they would make to improve the application process for future international students. This discussion helped identify the areas students felt would make the biggest difference to the overall application experience.

Final Reflection - written-up from sticky note (left on desk at end of session)	
Level	Comment
UG	Office said I can move in early. Back and forth and confusing and stressful
UG	Information about moving was mixed. I was going to participate in Belong at Brighton - uni halls said I couldn't move in yet
PGT	Community - We are leaving our homes, the university should do a better job helping creat community.
PGR	Students didn't know we can work internships in the summer

Photograph of reflection task:



Participants - Demographic Breakdown

Demographic Breakdown			
8 Respondents		Number of Students	% of students
Level of Study	Undergraduate	4	50%
	Postgraduate Taught	3	38%
	Postgraduate Research	1	13%
School	Applied Sciences	2	25%
	Humanities and Social Science	2	25%
	Architecture, Technology and Engineering	2	25%
	Business and Law	2	25%
Gender	Male	4	50%
	Female	2	25%
	Other gender	2	25%
Age Group	18-20	4	50%
	21-22	2	25%
	31+	2	25%
Ethnicity	White	2	25%
	BAME	6	75%
Other demographics	Mature	3	38%
	On placement during studies	3	38%
	Disability	2	25%
	Neurodivergent	4	50%
	First in family to go to university	1	13%
	Commuter	3	38%
	Different term time address	3	38%