



**IELTS**

# How English Language Proficiency supports Student well-being and success

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## Today's session will cover:

- Insights into research and key findings to support admissions and recruitment decisions
- A deeper understanding of latest research on the relationship between English language proficiency and student wellbeing
- Practical suggestions on how to support student wellbeing and success

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# Key insights

# English: The Language of Learning and Employment

**5 million students**

**seek to travel abroad.**

Source: UNESCO, 2023

**Over 80%**

**of academic journals are written in English.**

van Weijen, D (2012)

**72%**

**of prospective international students are interested in studying in English.**

Source: QS 2019

**Nearly 85%**

**of international organizations use English as their working language**

Source: Cambridge English, 2016

**Most Popular Destinations**

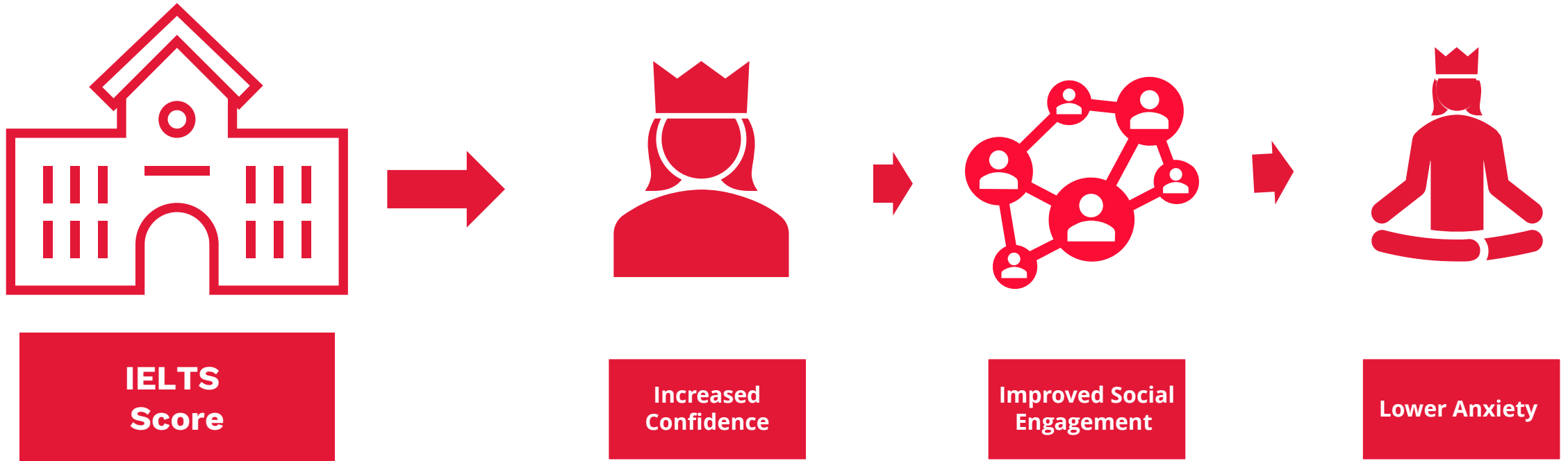
Source: IDP, 2023



# Success in English Medium Institutions



# Confidence, Culture and Enriching Experiences



# From IELTS to Academia: Translating Skills for Success

## Soft Skills



**Time Management**



**Stress Management**

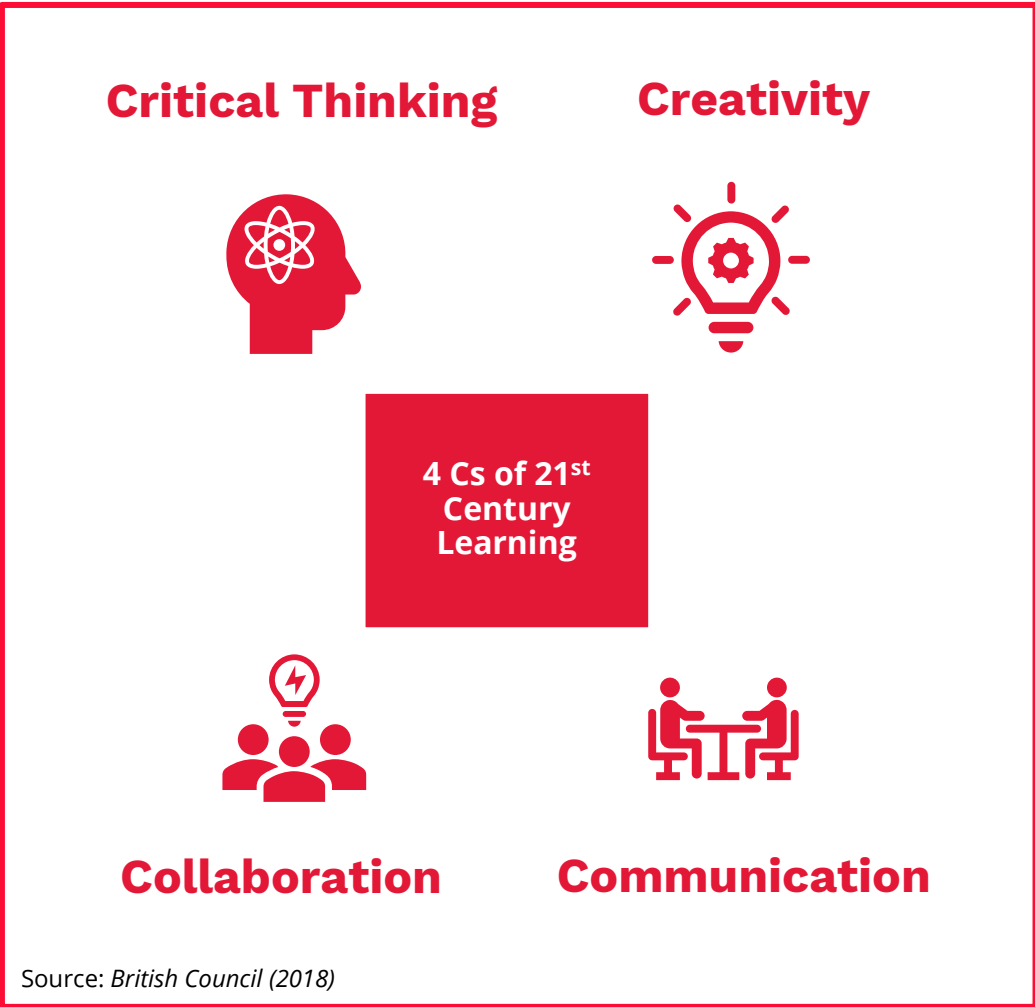


**Emotional Management**



**Leadership Skills**

Source: Green (2018)



## Language Proficiency

**Listening**



**Reading**



**Writing**



**Speaking**



# Writing Skills: From Assessment to Real-World Use

- What IELTS Assesses
  - Ability to coherently provide an argument or explanation
  - Ability to structure a cohesive message with appropriate and effective words and linking phrases
  - Demonstrating accuracy in word choice
  - Building grammatically correct written texts
- How IELTS Assesses Writing
  - 60 minutes | 2 Tasks
    - Describe Information from a Graph, Table, Chart or Diagram – 20 minutes
    - Respond to a point of view, argument, or problem – 40 minutes

## Relevance

- Students:
  - Academic writing, presentations, asking for help, navigating transportation systems, access library
- Employment:
  - Communication is vital skill in the workforce
    - Teams, clients, managers, external customers
- Immigration:
  - Able to live, thrive and work in an English-speaking country



# Does the assessment test the *right* skills?

- Our testing methodology prioritises *using* language, rather than *knowing* it. What does this mean?
- We measure the tasks that your applicants will need to complete at university: extended listening, reading and writing tasks – this is not the same as writing a shopping list !
- Positive washback: as we measure these tasks, we encourage the practice of these tasks in the classroom, as opposed to learning by rote.



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# Latest research

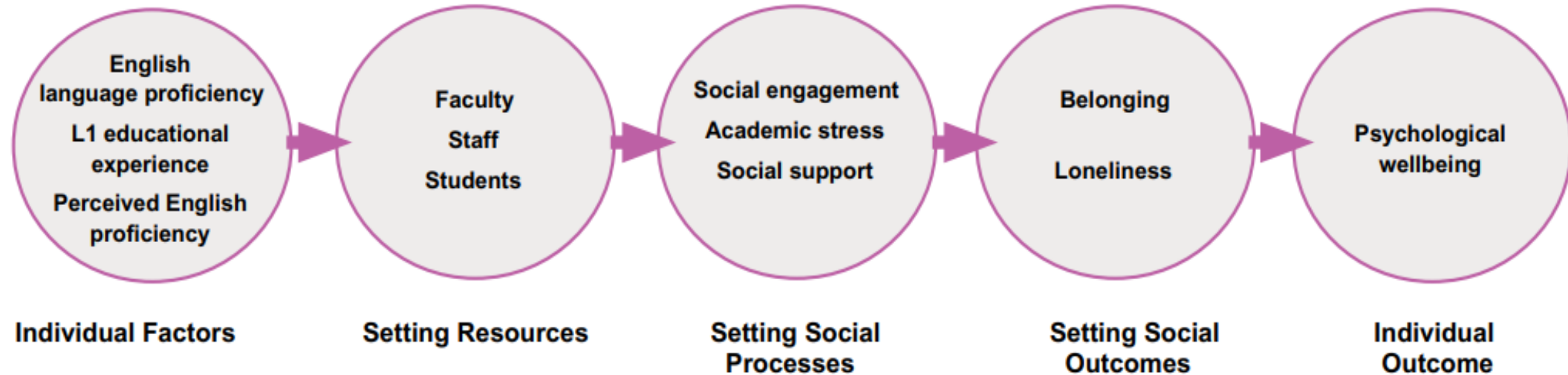
# Investigating linkages between international students' English language proficiency, social-contextual outcomes and well-being in the U.S. universities

- Four authors: Nelson Brunsting, Qiaona Yu, Jon Smart, W. Patrick Bingham
- Explores the potential interplay between the language proficiency (as represented by IELTS scores) of international students attending US universities
- 188 international students at 14 different US universities across the country
- Three time points: Spring 2021, Fall 2021 and Spring 2022

# The Framework – Brunsting et al.

- Brunsting et al. surveyed 14 higher education institutions in the US over a 1.5-year period
- Findings shaped the framework which can be applied to higher education in Canada

Figure 1: Theoretical framework for the current study



# What the Framework Measured

English Proficiency Scores (IELTS score)

English confidence

First language educational experience

Academic stress

Domestic student social support

Social engagement

Belonging

Loneliness

Psychological wellbeing

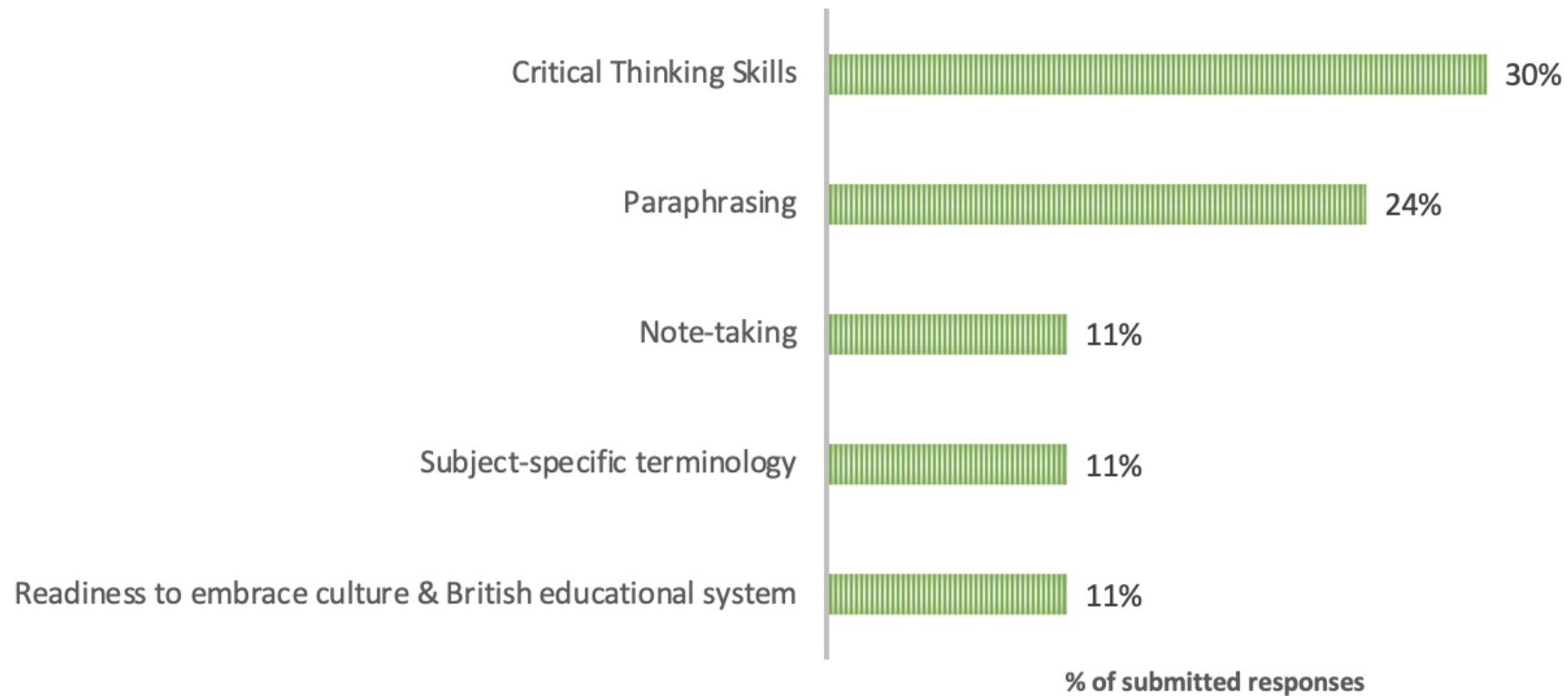


# British Council Impact Study: Is this test fit for purpose? Evaluating the impact of English tests for Higher Education admissions

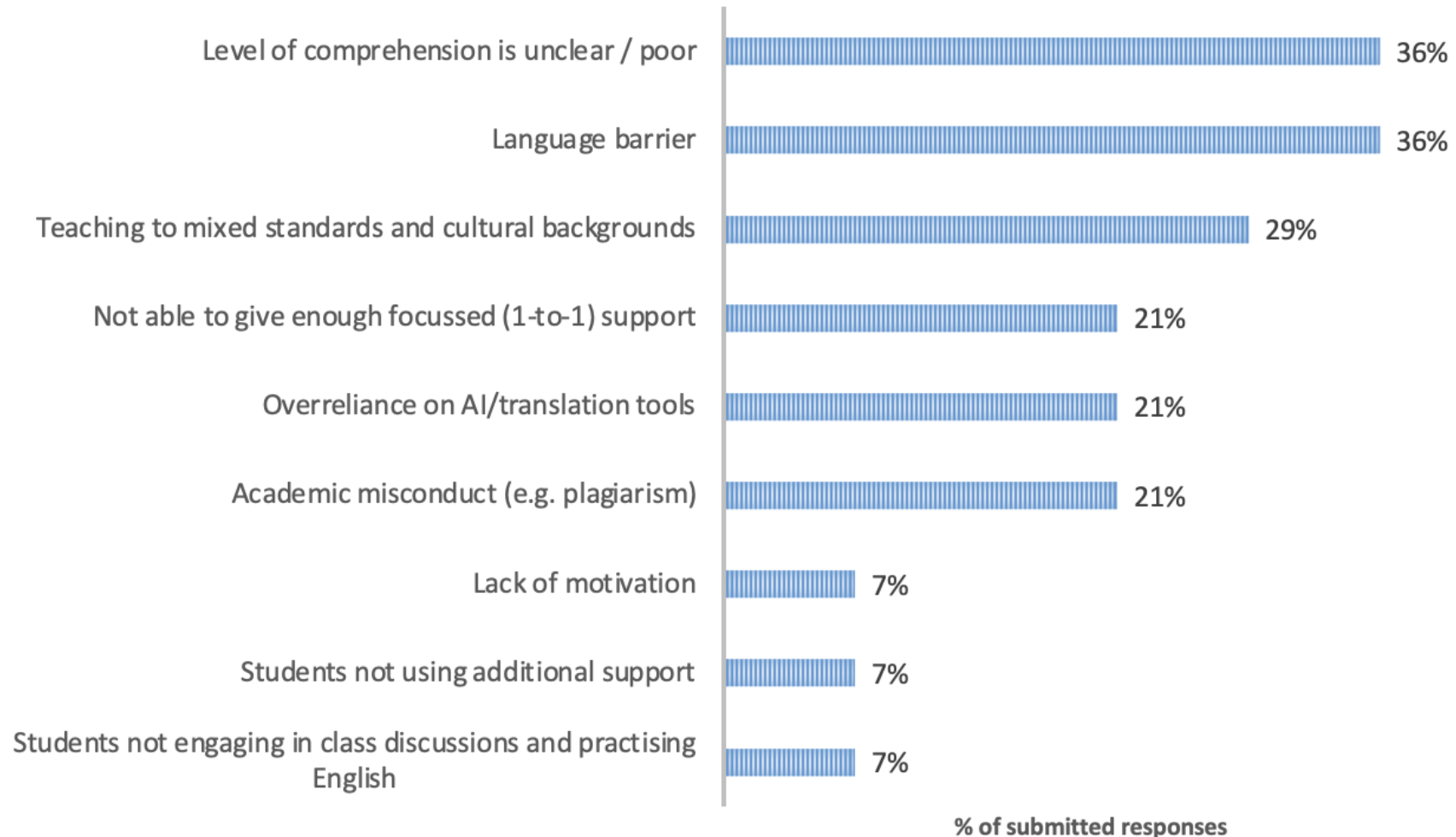
- Since 2020, a broader range of English language tests have been used for university admissions
- However, it is time to take stock: **are tests currently used in a high-stakes context fit for purpose?**
- Concerns about students' English language proficiency levels (Wood, 2023) and lack of institutional support are often cited (Russell et al. 2022)
- There may remain an underrepresentation of the language and skills needed for academic study in test constructs (Bruce & Hamp-Lyons, 2015); this has been reduced further in recent years (Wagner, 2020, Clark, 2022)
- Survey conducted Fall 2023

# Current British Council impact study findings

## KEY SKILLS INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS SHOULD COME EQUIPPED WITH



## MAIN CHALLENGES ACADEMICS FACE IN TEACHING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



Open ended question  
Faculty only  
14 responses



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# **Practical suggestions on how to support student well-being and success**

# Cost to institutions of poorer language skills

- Cost to institutions of students with poorer language skills is considerable
- A 2023 Russell Group study of 8,800 UK students found that almost a third were living off less than £50 a month.
- Those most affected were international students, and particularly female international students who were most at risk of precarity (Koebel, 2023).
- Students with poorer language skills are less likely to be able to access work opportunities and healthcare support.
- In response, universities have been forced to:
  - Increase bursaries (One UK Russell Group university has had to increase bursary support by £1.5million this year alone)
  - Increase staffing budgets for additional Student Funding Advisors and Students Union Advisors
  - Increase staffing support for Mental Health Counselling and Wellbeing Support

# Cost to students of poorer language skills

- International students are most affected by mental health impacts, and those with poorer language skills are doubly so:
  - “I can never go out with my friends and peers because everything is so expensive, so I sit at home alone. Being in a foreign country for the first time, away from family and friends, is already lonely enough” (UCL Student Survey, 2023)
- NUS UK survey reports that 90% of students say poor mental health is impacting their ability to study (NUS, 2022):
  - “Greater precarity and poor mental health transform the cost-of-living crisis into a cost-of-learning crisis, with 53% of students saying that their academic performance has suffered” (Koebel, 2023).
- The Russell Group Students' Unions Survey reports that 21% of students have considered deferring their studies and 18% have considered dropping out:
  - “I was thinking about dropping the program and go back to my country, because the circumstances here are unbelievably terrible.”

# Wraparound Services available by a typical Canadian HEI



Mental health services and counseling

Healthcare

Academic support

Going beyond study permit requirements

Fitness and clubs

Events and outings

Seasonal adjustments

Housing

International Student Support

# Key Consideration: Duty of Care



HEIs have a *duty of care*, both to their institution, but primarily to the international students that they are looking to attract, when selecting the English language tests that they accept.

Greater Language Assessment literacy is therefore required by HEIs both in making such decisions but also in understanding what additional support international students may need on arrival in order to successfully acculturate into the English-speaking academic environment.

# We are interested in the success of the student, and the institution

- Initial studies show that students are better equipped to deal with university life if they start out with the correct English proficiency level
- Good classroom and social integration is important for the wellbeing of domestic students as well as international students
- Costs of poor integration in terms of EAP programs is very high
- Ultimately, if university success partly rests on the contribution of international students, then their student experience is key



# Findings and Conclusion

- The importance of using high stakes test and setting the correct score for admission is a good determiner of academic success
- Wraparound services are vital to the growth, support and language development of students
- There is a cost to the transition and can impact the success of a student in higher education
- Duty of care for admissions policies, student support and academic support
- Impact study is coming to Canada, stay tuned!





**Questions?**

**Thank you!**



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