

# UMOJA

## BUDDY PROGRAMME

# Report on Student Integration Initiatives

2018 – 2019

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sitting in my drawer gathering dust.

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**Mrs Bulelwa Moikwatlhai**

Coordinator: Internationalisation at home

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## Editorial

The Office for International Affairs is proud to present the Report on Student Integration Initiatives 2018-2019, which evaluates the process resulting in the establishment of the flagship UMOJA Buddy Programme. Under the leadership of Bulelwa Moikwatlhai, this flagship programme was established to realise the university's vision that every student should have an international experience during UFS studies.

Internationalisation of higher education has undergone a paradigm shift over the past decades. From its roots in international education, it has evolved into a comprehensive process that permeates all spheres of the core business of a university. Internationalisation at Home (I@H), which the UFS understands as “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments” (Beelen and Jones, 2015), is a high priority for the UFS. One important aspect of I@H is social integration programmes, which connect international and domestic students.

The inception of the Umoja Buddy Programme did not happen overnight, but required years of careful planning, piloting, and phasing in. It started in 2018 as the ‘Wingman’ programme, which was predominantly aimed at improving the exchange student experience at the UFS. Following a successful pilot implementation, it was strengthened in 2019 to include all first-entering international

students. The process of refining the programme is ongoing; as this first evaluation report is being prepared, the programme had to be adapted to continue connecting students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report is an example of evidence-based programme development of the co-curricular programme. The continuous evaluation allows the project leaders to constantly improve the programme, thus ensuring that it stays relevant and responsive to changing circumstances at all times. This report will enable the further development of the UMOJA Buddy Programme and other social integration initiatives aimed at connecting international and local students.



**Mr Cornelius Hagenmeier**

Director: Office for International Affairs

As part of the University of the Free State's Integrated Transformation Plan in 2017, enhancing the student experience became one of the key objectives of the Office for International Affairs. Thus, a pilot Wingman programme was launched in February 2018 to assist new international

exchange students with their adjustment process at the university and in the country. The programme was launched to connect international students with local students, foster friendships, and realise the goal of internationalisation at home.

To evaluate the success of the programme and recommend improvements for future implementation of the programme, several evaluations were conducted in each semester of 2018 and 2019 respectively. The 2018 first semester evaluations were geared towards determining how effective the programme has been in terms of participants' satisfaction with the initial experience as well as services that were provided. Two sets of evaluation forms were administered to participants, one for the Buddies and the other for the Wingmen. In total, there were 29 programme participants, of which 25 questionnaires were completed correctly (13 Buddies and 12 Wingmen). In evaluating the semester 2 programme, the success and effectiveness of three aspects were assessed. Firstly, the training sessions provided for the Wingmen; secondly, the second-semester cohort of 16 Buddies was asked to provide feedback on their initial experience as a Buddy; finally, 37 Buddies and Wingmen participated in an evaluation of the launch event.

Following the success of its pilot programme in 2018, the Umoja Buddy Programme (UBP), formerly known as the Wingman Programme, was launched in February 2019. The programme, now in its third semester, not only provides services to incoming exchange students at the University of the Free State (UFS) but has also evolved to incorporate all new international students at the UFS. The Umoja Buddy Programme has received great feedback from UFS students, as many applications were received from UFS senior students wanting to take part in the programme.

Subsequently, numerous surveys were conducted with the participants of the programme for 2019. These included, but was not limited to, surveys to evaluate the efficiency of the events hosted in the first semester. These evaluations looked at the satisfaction levels; whether the functions were helpful and if each event managed to meet its set objectives. Additionally, the participants were allowed to give qualitative responses that made the research richer. Finally, to evaluate the success of the Umoja Buddy Programme for the first semester of 2019 and to recommend improvements for future implementation of the programme, online evaluation surveys were conducted towards the end of the first semester. The first survey was conducted with a cohort of 2019 Ambassadors. Of the 45 Ambassadors involved in the programme, 26 completed the online evaluation survey.

The results of the respective surveys showed that the participants were mostly satisfied with the various aspects of the programme; all respondents were very complimentary about the programme, the coordinators, and the events that were hosted. Regardless of how successful these events may have been, feedback from the evaluations can be used to make improvements to each of the events to cater for the needs of all participants.

# Consolidated 2018 wingman programme

## Introduction

Internationalisation at home has traditionally not been a central focus of the University of the Free State's (UFS) internationalisation process. In the period 2008-2015, administrative support for incoming exchange students and the hosting of functions aimed at integrating international students was a function provided by two staff members from the Office for International Affairs. At the time, great emphasis was placed on successful administration support and the hosting of incoming exchange students. Activities towards the social and cultural integration of international students were limited to hosting an orientation session, welcome function, and a city tour. With the development of the new internationalisation strategy for the period 2015-2020, came a greater focus on partnerships.

Furthermore, with the formulation of the university's Integrated Transformation Plan in 2017, the emphasis was placed on enhancing the student experience. Therefore, the Office for International Affairs at the UFS launched a pilot 'Wingman' programme on 16 February 2018 to assist newly arriving, incoming international exchange students with their adjustment process in the UFS student life and community. This programme is concerned with the smooth transition and integration of international students into student life at the UFS. It provides international experience to local students and helps international students to integrate into the campus and local communities. The programme aims to connect international and local students through meaningful lifelong friendships and to

foster their academic, social, and cultural integration at the UFS.

Designed to enhance the international and intercultural competencies of UFS students, the programme pairs first-entering international students with senior students, providing a warm welcome, a friendly face, a helping hand, and a first UFS friendship that makes a world of difference for the new arrivals. The programme adopts the UFS vision, whereby every student will in future have an international experience during UFS studies through internationalisation at home.

To evaluate the success of the Wingman Programme and to recommend improvements for future implementation of the programme, two evaluation sessions were conducted. The first evaluation was carried out towards the end of the first semester and the other at the end of the second semester of 2018. This report provides feedback on the results obtained from these evaluations, as well as a comparison between findings from the first semester and that of the second semester. Furthermore, an overview of the challenges experienced along with possible recommendations are outlined in this report



# Section 1: Findings from Semester 1

The Wingman Pilot Programme was designed to pair first-entering international exchange students with senior students at the UFS. The international students were called 'Buddies', while their partner senior students were their 'Wingmen'. These international students were assigned a Wingman as part of the programme to enhance their study-abroad experience at the UFS.

To ensure that the programme meets the needs of both Buddies and Wingmen, an initial evaluation of the Wingman Pilot Programme was conducted towards the end of the first semester. This evaluation aimed to gauge the satisfaction of participants with the programme, as well as its effectiveness. Participant responses would assist with improvement strategies for the programme to ensure that the Office for International Affairs does not compromise on high-quality service to its students.

Two sets of evaluation forms were distributed to participants, one for the Buddies and the other for the Wingmen. In total, there were 29 programme participants, of which 25 questionnaires were completed correctly (13 Buddies and 12 Wingmen). This represented a response rate of 86%.

## 2018 First Semester Evaluations for wingman programme



12  
Wingmen



13  
Buddies

## Buddy Analysis

This section provides the responses received from the Buddies in the study sample. It includes why the respondents chose to join the programme, their satisfaction levels with the various services provided by the Wingmen and programme coordinator, typical

questions that the respondents asked the Wingmen, what the respondents liked about the programme, what they would change, as well as any recommendations the respondents had to help improve the programme.

## Reasons for joining the programme

Figure 1 portrays the most frequently mentioned reasons why these international students chose to have a Wingman assigned to them. As international students entering the country and the university for the first time, the experience was overwhelming. Participants indicated that they had joined this programme so that the experience would be less daunting. They acknowledged that

they wanted a Wingman assigned to them so that they could have someone who would be able to assist them in adjusting to a new environment, who could show them around and help them meet new people and make friends.

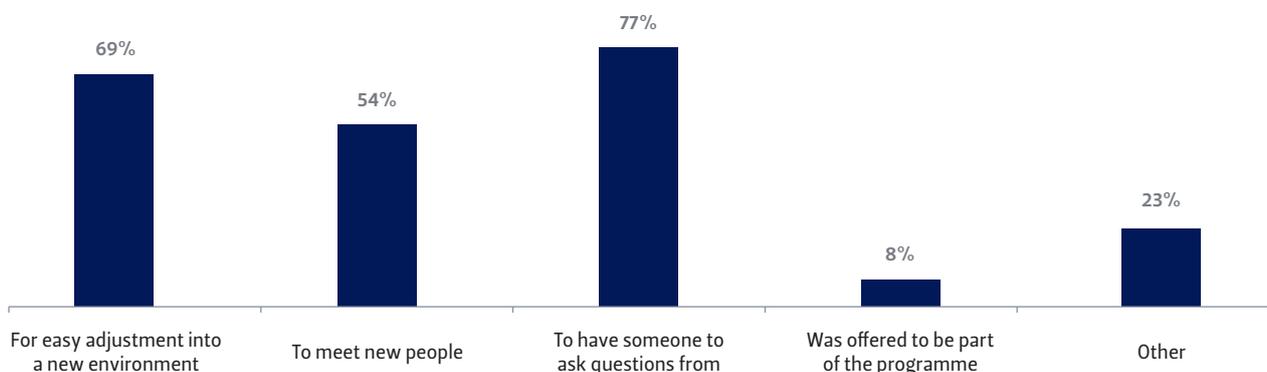


Figure 1: Reasons for choosing to have a Wingman assigned to them

The majority of participating Buddies (77%) indicated that they had joined the programme so that they could have someone to ask questions to. These would be questions about where to find certain places on campus and in Bloemfontein, as well as having someone to contact should they run into any difficulties. Some of the participants also mentioned that they joined the programme as

they wanted to meet local students and have contacts who could help with their adjustment process. Only one participant indicated that he/she joined the programme simply because of an invitation email and deciding that it would make sense to participate in the initiative.

## Satisfaction with the Wingman Programme

Participating Buddies were asked to rate their level of agreement with eight statements relating to their satisfaction with services received from the Wingmen and the programme coordinator, how the programme assisted with their transition to the UFS, as well as how it helped to provide them with knowledge about the university's systems.

On average, participating Buddies were mostly satisfied with aspects of the programme, as more than 50% of participants

agreed to some extent (agreed and strongly agreed) with each of the statements. Most impressively, 92% of participants agreed that the services provided by the programme coordinator were satisfactory, that they felt comfortable asking their Wingmen questions, and that they felt welcomed by their Wingmen. One aspect that may require further attention relates to the information that was provided by the Wingmen before their first day. Only half of the participating Buddies found this information helpful and insightful.

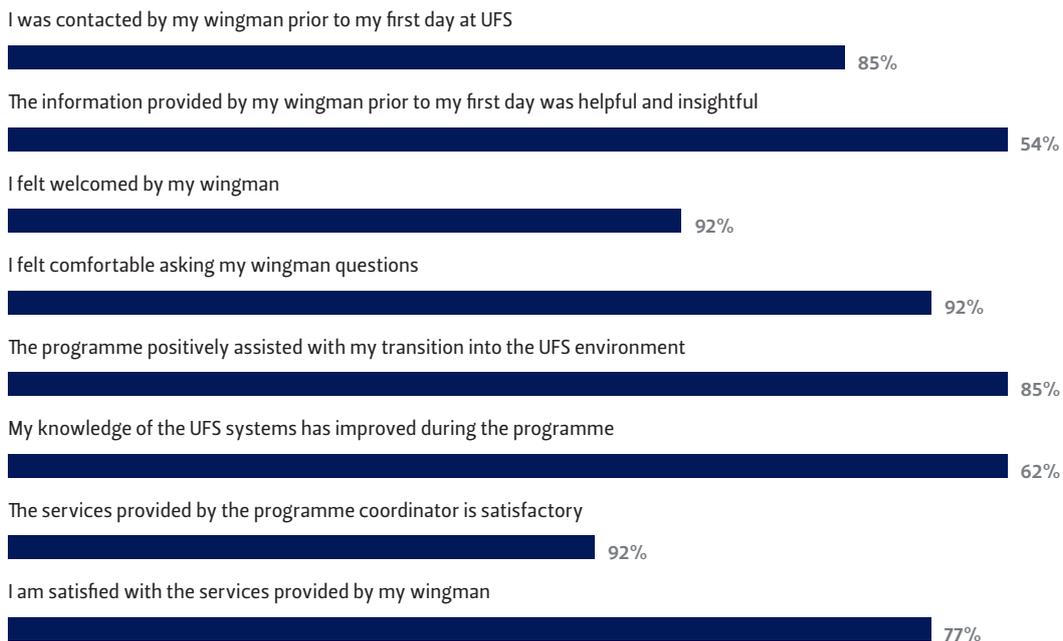


Figure 2: Participants' satisfaction with the Wingman Programme

However, about three-quarters of the sample were satisfied with the services provided by the Wingmen. For those few participants who were less satisfied with the services provided by the programme coordinator or their Wingman, feedback was provided on their reasons. One participant indicated that it was not necessary and that he/she did not feel the need to ask for help. However, the participant did acknowledge that it was good to have someone should the need arise. Another participant mentioned that he/she did not meet the Wingman before registering and tackling the first few difficult days on campus. This participant acknowledged that it

would have been more beneficial to meet directly after arrival and having someone to help within the first week.

Nevertheless, more than 80% of participants agreed to some extent that the programme positively assisted with their transition to the university environment, and that they were contacted by their Wingmen before their first day at the UFS. These findings are indicative that the programme was largely viewed as beneficial and successful by the Buddies who were involved in the programme.

### Typical questions asked by the Buddies

Participants were asked to list the typical questions they would ask their Wingmen. Their responses were categorised into four core themes, namely information about South African, UFS resources, information on different cultures, and activities in Bloemfontein.

The majority of participants (92%) indicated that they would typically ask their Wingmen about UFS resources. These included questions about registration, where certain buildings were on campus, where to obtain books, and how to use Blackboard. Participants also frequently mentioned that they would ask

questions about activities in Bloemfontein (69%) and what it was like in South Africa (54%). In this regard, they would ask about the weather and what they should pack and bring with them so that they can be prepared, as well as the traditions of the country, such as food and public holidays. Other questions that were less frequently asked, included questions about how to get a SIM card for their mobile devices and how to access Wi-Fi services, personal preferences for hobbies, advice on academic modules, and how to implement certain dress codes.

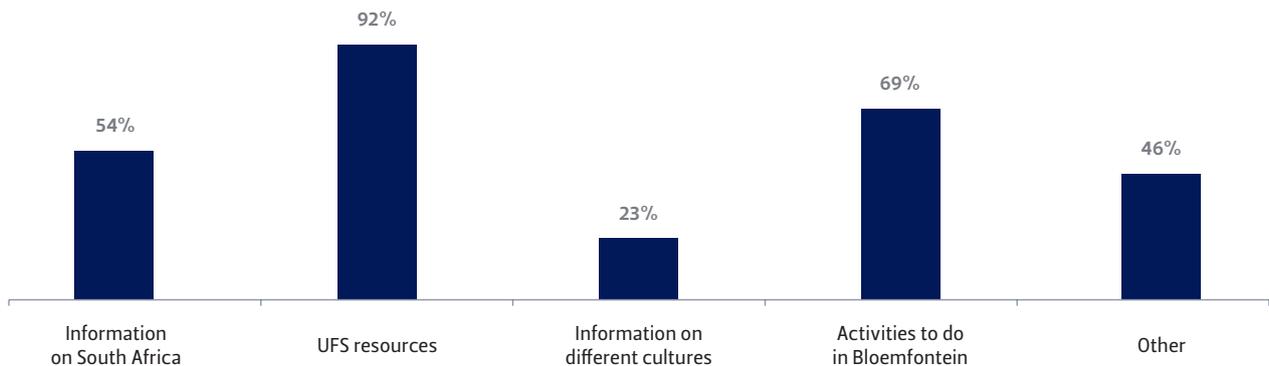


Figure 3: Typical questions asked by the Buddies

### Opinions of the Wingman Programme

When asked what they liked best about the programme, Buddies most frequently reported that they liked building networks, gaining a friend, the sense of security, and cultural exchanges. More than half of the participants highlighted building networks as something they liked about the programme, as they were able to meet different people from different cultures through the programme. Participating Buddies also mentioned that they felt more secure because they

had someone to help them and show them around and ultimately make the transition to the university environment much easier. Participants were very complimentary of their Wingmen in their responses, acknowledging that they were friendly and welcoming and that they enjoyed spending time and doing various activities with their Wingmen.

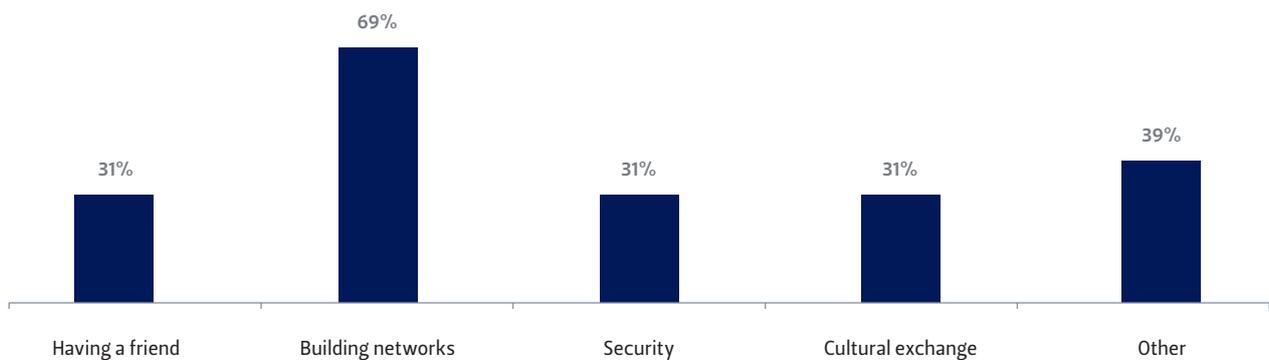


Figure 4: What the Buddies liked best about the Wingman Programme

## Suggestions and recommendations

Participants were asked about any changes that could be made to the programme to improve its effectiveness. Participants most frequently suggested that Wingmen should meet their Buddies at the airport or on the day of their arrival so that immediate contact could be established. Furthermore, some participants suggested that more South African students should become Wingmen, especially students who are from Bloemfontein and who would be able to easily assist with the culture in Bloemfontein, as well as what to do and what not to do. Other participants acknowledged that they would have liked more meeting opportunities with their Wingmen as well as the group as a whole. Emphasis was placed on having more social,

less formal interactions with the programme participants. Additional suggestions included making the launch event earlier in the year so that connections could be formed earlier on, and that two Buddies could perhaps be assigned to one Wingman, who could assist both of them at the same time. Moreover, it was also suggested that international students should be more integrated into residence activities and that they be assigned to a Wingman from the same residence. These recommendations are relevant to the planning of future programmes to ensure that participants are satisfied with the experience of the programme and its services.

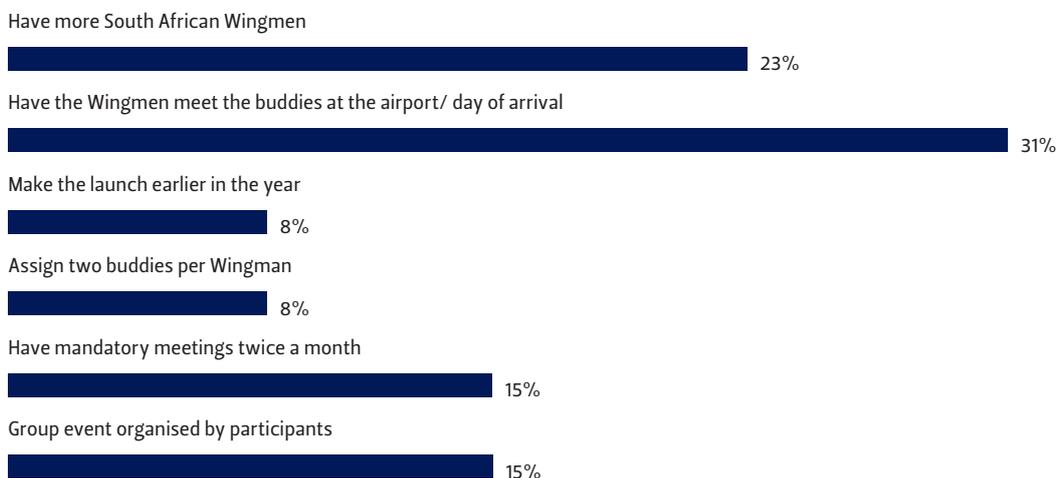


Figure 5: Recommendations for the programme

## Wingman Analysis

This section provides the responses received from the Wingmen in the study sample. This includes why the respondents got involved in the programme, their satisfaction levels with the various services provided by the programme coordinator, typical questions the

respondents were asked by their Buddies, what the respondents liked about the programme, what they would change, and any recommendations from the respondents to help improve the programme.

### Reasons for joining the programme

Participating Wingmen were asked why they became involved in the Wingman Programme for 2018. Several reasons were highlighted in their responses, but most

frequently, participants acknowledged that they, too, were international students and wanted to help others who were in similar situations as they were when they first arrived.

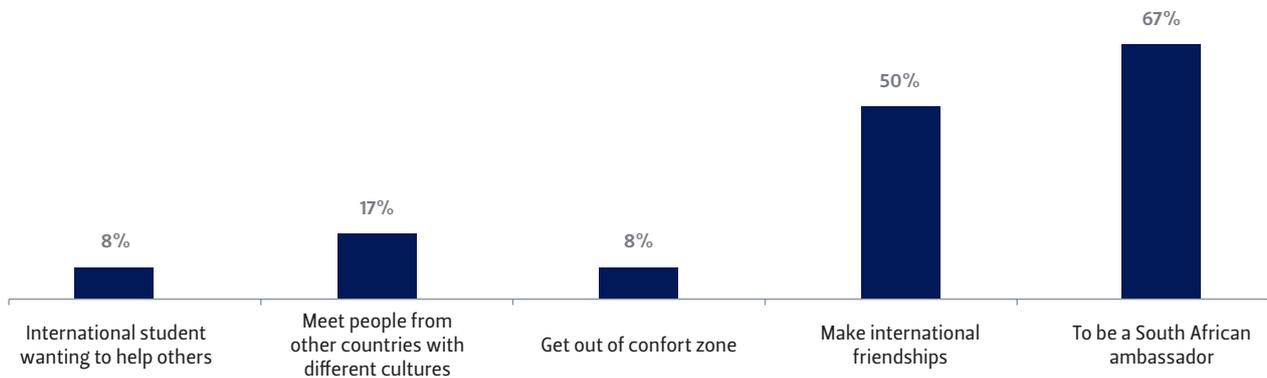


Figure 6: Reasons for joining the programme

Furthermore, half of the participants mentioned that they joined the programme because they wanted to meet people from other countries who have different cultural backgrounds from their own. In line with this, participants also indicated that they wanted to make international friends. Additional reasons included wanting to get out of their comfort zone so that they could learn more about

themselves and be South African ambassadors. In their responses, participating Wingmen were very grateful for the help they themselves received from the UFS and the Office for International Affairs and acknowledged that they wanted to give back and assist other students.

## Satisfaction with the Wingman Programme

Participating Wingmen were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with eight statements about the services received from the programme coordinator, how the programme assisted with their

knowledge of the university, as well as the improvement of their communication skills.

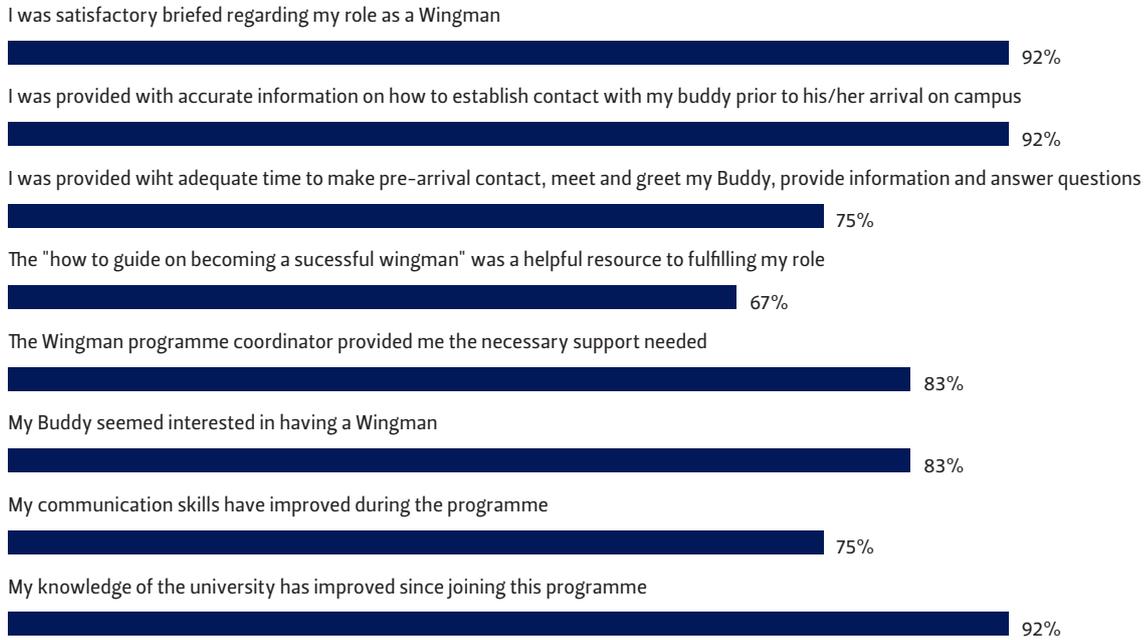


Figure 7: Satisfaction with the Wingman Programme

On average, Wingmen were very satisfied with all the aspects of the programme, as more than 60% of the participants agreed to some extent that the programme delivered on its expectations. Almost all of the participants (92%) agreed that they were satisfied with the brief on their role as a Wingman, that they were provided with accurate information on how to establish contact with their Buddy, and that their knowledge of the university improved as a result of

their participation in the programme. Participants also frequently indicated that their Buddies seemed interested in having a Wingman and that they received the necessary support from the programme coordinator. It can be concluded that participating Wingmen were overall satisfied with the Wingman Programme and how it was administered by the programme coordinator.

## Typical questions asked by the Buddies

Participating Wingmen were asked to list some of the typical questions they were asked by their Buddies. Wingmen most frequently reported that their Buddies would ask about the UFS culture. In this regard, they would typically ask what academic life on campus was like and what they could expect from lecturers. Wingmen would also frequently be asked to show their Buddies

around campus if they did not know where a particular building or venue was. Other questions that were less frequently asked included questions about free Wi-Fi services, what to expect from the weather, what the racial situation in the country was like, and whether there were any safety concerns in the country in general and on campus specifically.

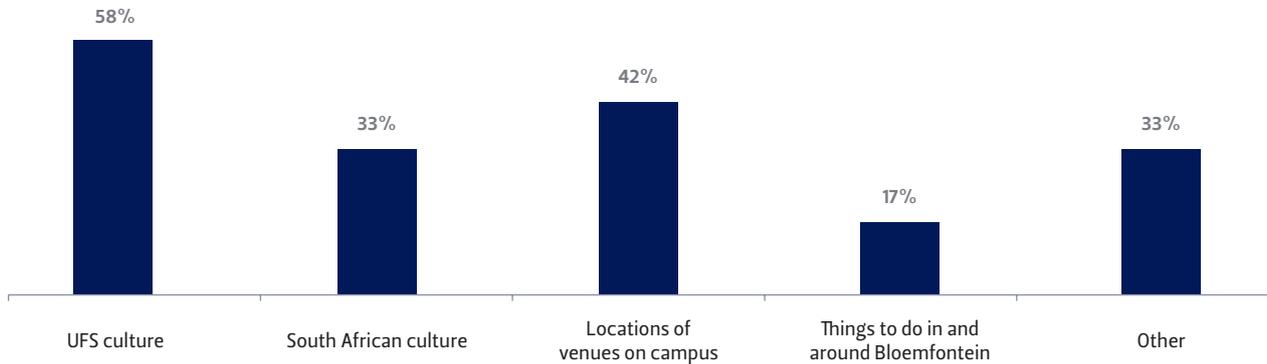


Figure 8: Typical questions asked by the Buddies

## Opinions of the Wingman Programme

When asked to indicate what they liked best about the Wingman Programme, participants most frequently reported that they liked meeting people from different cultural backgrounds and countries. This is in line with one of the main reasons for becoming involved in the programme in the first place. Additionally, participants liked being part of a programme fostering friendships that allow them to broaden their horizons and engage in new experiences. Some

participants also mentioned that they liked the opportunity to help other international students who were coming to the university for the first time. These findings are indicative of the respondents' willingness and openness to the programme's goal of creating internationalisation at home.

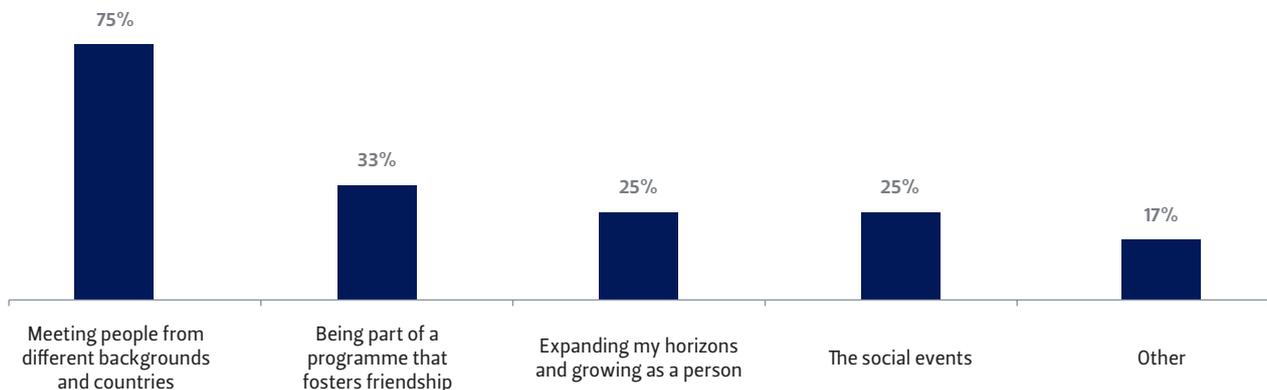


Figure 9: What the Wingmen liked best about the programme

## Suggestions and recommendations

Wingmen were asked to indicate if there was anything that they would change about the programme, as well as to provide suggestions for improving the programme.

All international students should get a buddy



Arrange it so that wingemen are there for the arrival of the buddies



Have more official things for the wingmen and buddies to do together



The introduction email should be more personal



Trust the wingmen to create an unforced friendship



Let the wingmen get to know each other better/have more meetings



Hold the wingman training earlier, before the international students arrive



The initial approach should be done with more importance/more personal (meeting on arrival)



Make the wingman training longer than just a day/let the wingmen meet beforehand



The programme is good as is



Figure 10: Suggestions and recommendations

The majority of participants (67%) acknowledged that the programme was good as it is and did not have any recommendations for changes or improvements. The recommendations of participants who did have suggestions were very similar to those mentioned by the Buddies in their evaluation of the programme. Like the Buddies, mention was made of more meetings or opportunities to get to know each other and making contact sooner; the importance of the initial meeting and the need for early assistance after arriving in the country were also emphasised. Additionally, Wingmen

suggested that training should be longer, and that participating Wingmen should meet beforehand. Furthermore, some participants indicated that the Wingmen should be trusted to form friendships with their Buddies that were not forced by the programme. Finally, it was recommended that all international students be assigned a Buddy/Wingman. This, along with the other responses, validated the importance of the programme for international students and realising internationalisation at home.

# Section 2: Findings from Semester 2

During the second semester of 2018, further evaluation of the Wingman Programme was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the programme, as well as to gain intel on the acquired understanding and experience of the programme during the period it had been running. Three aspects of the programme were of interest for investigation. Therefore, evaluations were conducted on the training provided to the Wingmen, the initial Buddy experience, and the experience of the official welcoming and Buddy reveal. The feedback provided by these three evaluations was geared at recognising the successes of the programme as well as areas for improvement. Thus, to ensure that the programme meets the needs of Wingmen and Buddies, both sample groups were asked to evaluate the programme's effectiveness and impact.

## 2018 Second Semester Evaluations for wingman programme



**19  
Wingmen  
for Training  
Evaluation**



**16 Buddies  
for the  
initial Buddy  
Experience  
Evaluation**



**37  
Buddies and  
Wingmen for  
the Launch  
Evaluation**

### Training Evaluation

The training provided for the volunteer Wingmen was divided into two parts. The first session – the meet and greet – took place on 22 July 2018, and the continuation of the training on 27 July 2018. The training was divided as such to reduce the risk of participants becoming overwhelmed with the amount of new information. Furthermore, the Wingmen needed to start the semester on 23 July 2018, having already been assigned to their Buddies to reinforce the friendship from the first day. The training evaluation forms were

completed by 19 Wingmen, who responded to eight open-ended questions about the two training sessions.

Firstly, participants were asked whether they felt that hosting the event over two days was effective. The large majority of the participating Wingmen agreed that it was effective, as 95% of participants responded 'yes' to the question. Only one participant indicated uncertainty in this regard. Furthermore, participants were asked if they found the time spent with other Wingmen valuable.



Impressively, all of the respondents agreed with this, as it provided them the opportunity to share experiences, advice, and information on activities that they could do with their Buddies. Additionally, all of the respondents acknowledged that they experienced no problems with their Buddies that had not been addressed during the training. This indicates that the training was rather thorough, and it fully prepared the Wingmen for the arrival of their Buddies. It was also mentioned that even if something came up, the training served as a guideline to deal with those issues.

In response to the question of whether there were elements of the training that they found unnecessary, all of the participating Wingmen indicated that everything covered was applicable. Regarding elements of the training that potentially needed to be discussed more extensively, one of the participants highlighted social cohesion, and another mentioned academic performance and UFS support systems (apart from the Office for International Affairs) as aspects of the training that could have been dealt with more intensely. Nevertheless, all of the participating Wingmen acknowledged that the training equipped them to be better Wingmen.

Furthermore, all of the respondents found that the training improved certain skills that could be used in their daily lives. Specific skills mentioned by 42% of the respondents were related to improved communication skills. Two of the participants acknowledged that they now had a better ability to accept and deal with people from different backgrounds. One participant also mentioned having improved ability to deal with questions as they arise, and not to take everything at face value.

Final suggestions for the improvement of the training sessions were provided by some of the participants. These included that training sessions should take place on consecutive days and that all Wingmen should attend, that there should be more events, that Wingmen should receive some kind of recognition (such as a certificate), and that the training should be held earlier. These suggestions, as well as the overall feedback, should be taken into consideration for future implementation of the programme. However, the overall positive response to the evaluation indicates that the training has achieved its objectives and successfully provided practical guidelines for the Wingmen to assist their assigned Buddies.

Do you think hosting the event over a two-day period was effective?



Do you think the time spent with other wingmen was valuable to your experience?



To date, have you encountered a problem with your buddy that was not addressed in the training?



Were there elements of the training that you felt were unnecessary?



Were there elements of the training that you felt should have been discussed more extensively?



Do you think that the training equipped you to be a better wingman?



Do you think that you improved upon skills that you can apply in your day to day life?



Figure 11: Wingmen's opinions of the training received

## Initial Buddy Experience Evaluation

The participating Buddies in the programme were asked to provide feedback on their initial experience as a Buddy. This evaluation was conducted to investigate elements of the Wingman Programme that could be improved upon, as well as to identify elements that will ensure that the exchange students are ready for South Africa. Feedback on seven open-ended questions was provided by 16 Buddies regarding their initial experience of the programme.

In the first question, Buddies were asked if they had any uncertainties before coming to South Africa that the Office for International Affairs did not address. The vast majority of participants were satisfied with this aspect and applauded the office for being very helpful. However, two of the participants mentioned that students should be informed about campus retail stores being closed on Sundays. Furthermore, one of the Buddies requested that people be available to help students at their respective places of accommodation. A further two participating Buddies requested that the communication to them – or the website – should contain links to timetables and information on where and how one can obtain a student card, among others.

Secondly, 75% of the participants noted that they had no problems settling in at the university. However, two participants mentioned that it would have been ideal to go directly to the designated residence instead of having to move later on. One of the participants also stated that it would have been beneficial for them to know where their lecture halls were before the commencement of lectures. Lastly, three participants mentioned that they experienced trouble with the following: Wi-Fi, rooms, bedding, neatness of the accommodation, and registration, although they did not elaborate on these matters.

When asked if their assigned Wingmen had communicated with them beforehand and helped them to be prepared for their arrival in South Africa, only 44% of the Buddies acknowledged that they had been contacted, which was very helpful. The other 56% of the participants indicated that they were only contacted after arriving in the country and that the communication should have taken place earlier. Furthermore, 94% of participants reported that their Wingmen eased their adaptation at the university, while one of the participating Buddies found fellow international students to be of more help than his/her Wingman.



Several responses were provided to the question relating to what has surprised the Buddies the most since starting at the university. Six of the Buddies were surprised at how early the sun sets in the evenings and how cold it gets during the winter months. Two participants were surprised at how large the campus is, while three of the participants were alarmed about the racial inequality at the university. Furthermore, one participant was unpleasantly surprised by the number of tests scheduled during the semester.

The majority of the participating Buddies (81%) acknowledged that their Wingmen were very helpful in every way, whereas three of the participants felt that their Wingmen could have warned them about the weather in South Africa. Moreover, a couple of suggestions were put forward to improve the programme, which included having the programme start earlier, that there should be better communication about lectures, and what to do after arriving at the university.

## Official Welcoming and Buddy Reveal Evaluation

This evaluation was conducted to determine the overall success of the launch, as well as to find ways to further improve the programme in order to ensure its overall success in future years. Both Wingmen and Buddies participated in this evaluation, with 37 participants providing feedback on their experience of the launch. Six open-ended questions were posed to participants regarding their perceptions of the official welcoming and Buddy reveal, as well as the programme as a whole.

Firstly, participants were asked whether or not they found the launch event a good platform to get to know their Wingman/ Buddy. Most of the participants (68%) highlighted that the launch was a good platform to get to know their Wingmen/ Buddies. Additionally, eight of the participants indicated that they would have preferred to sit next to their Wingman/ Buddy, and one participant suggested that they should rotate seats during the function so that they could interact with more people. Nonetheless, three participants mentioned that they enjoyed the opportunity of interacting with individuals other than their Wingmen/ Buddies.

In terms of the launch being a good platform for meeting and spending time with other Wingmen/ Buddies, the large majority of participants (95%) agreed. However, mention was again made of rotating seats throughout the event and having Buddies sit next to their assigned Wingmen. Furthermore, 89% of the participants agreed that the speeches at the launch gave them a better idea of what the Office for International Affairs is all about, while three participants remarked that the speeches were too long. One participant also indicated that he/she would have liked to hear more about campus and student life during the launch event.

Moreover, participants were asked if there were activities that could have been performed that would have had a more significant impact on them. Most of the participants (73%) reported that they found the event to be good and that the activities were relevant and sparked social cohesion. Again, three of the participants said that there could have been a better mixing of the seats between the different parties involved, while four participants mentioned that a cultural/ language-based activity would be ideal for getting to know people better. Three of the participants advised that the function should be longer.

When asked if they would like to see more of these types of events during the semester, 95% of the participants agreed to have more events, especially towards the end of the semester. Four of the participants who indicated a desire for more events mentioned that more informal events would be better. However, two participants indicated that their schedules for the semester were already full and that they would not like more events of this nature. Finally, three suggestions were brought forward regarding improvements to the Wingman Programme. Firstly, three participants recommended that the office be more involved in ensuring that the Wingmen do contact their Buddies. Secondly, more activities should be hosted for both Wingmen and Buddies, as mentioned by two participants. Lastly, one participant suggested that activities be held during the day to make it easier for students to attend who stay off campus.

From the responses obtained from the evaluations during the second semester, it can be deduced that the objectives of each event were successfully attained. Suggestions and recommendations for improvement should be considered when implementing future programmes of the same nature. This will ensure that the Office for International Affairs provides sufficient support to exchange students, as well as allowing all students at the UFS to have an international experience, realising their goal of internationalisation at home.



# Section 3: Comparison of Semester 1 and 2

## Comparison of Buddy Experience

### *Satisfaction with communication and information provided before arriving in South Africa*

The second-semester Buddy cohort were more positive about the information and communication received from the UFS before arriving in South Africa than the first-semester Buddy cohort, although it should be noted that the questions were asked differently in the two semesters. In semester 1, Buddies were asked to reflect on the communication received from their Wingmen before arriving in South Africa, whereas in semester 2, Buddies were asked if they were satisfied with the communication received from the Office for International Affairs at the UFS. In the semester 1 Buddy cohort, only about half of the Buddies (54%) indicated that the information

provided by their wingmen before their arrival in South Africa was helpful and insightful. In comparison, nearly all Buddies in the second-semester cohort (94%) indicated that they did not have any uncertainties that were not addressed by the Office for International Affairs. Conversely, a greater percentage of the semester 1 cohort Buddies (85%) were contacted by their Wingmen before arriving in South Africa than in the semester 2 cohort (44%).

### *Transitioning to and settling into the UFS environment*

Both the semester 1 and semester 2 Buddy cohorts were positive about the programme helping them to transition into the university environment, with more than 80% of the semester 1 Buddies agreeing to some extent that the programme positively assisted with their transition into the university environment, and three-

quarters of semester 2 Buddies indicating that they had no problems settling in at the university. Additionally, nearly all semester 2 Buddies (94%) indicated that their Wingmen eased their adaption into the UFS environment.

### *Satisfaction with services provided by Wingmen*

Buddies in both the semester 1 and 2 cohorts were complimentary of the services provided by their Wingmen. In semester 1, more than three-quarters of the Buddies were satisfied with the services provided by their Wingmen, while more than 90% indicated that

they felt comfortable asking their Wingmen questions and felt welcomed by their Wingmen. Of the semester 2 Buddy cohort, more than 80% acknowledged that their Wingmen were helpful in every way.

### *Suggestions for improvement*

In both the first and second semester Buddy cohorts, several suggestions were made for improving the programme. The semester 1 cohort mainly made suggestions around providing more opportunities for socialising and making connections, including that they would have liked more meeting opportunities with the Wingmen and the group as a whole. They also mentioned that they would have liked more social and less formal interactions with the programme participants, that the launch event be held earlier in the year so that connections can be made earlier on, and that they

would have liked to be more integrated into residence activities.

In the second semester cohort, suggestions for improvement were more logistical. For example, second-semester Buddies noted that it would have been beneficial if more information was provided on how to obtain a student card and where their lecture halls were before commencement of lectures. Additionally, this cohort experienced problems with Wi-Fi, their rooms, the bedding, and neatness of the accommodation.

# Comparison of Wingman Experience

## *General satisfaction and knowledge gained*

Apart from the evaluations of the events held in the second semester for the Wingmen, the Wingman experience itself was not evaluated in the second semester as in the first semester. However, it was clear from both the event evaluations in the second semester and the more thorough Wingman experience evaluation in the first semester, that the Wingmen were satisfied with the programme in both semesters.

Regarding the Wingman training event, extending the training from one day in the first semester to two days in the second semester was successful, with a quarter of the Wingmen in the first semester suggesting that the training be made longer than just a day, and nearly all Wingmen in semester 2 (95%) noting that hosting the event over two days was effective. Moreover, results from semesters 1 and 2 also correspond with each other in terms of allowing Wingmen to spend more time together, with nearly half of the Wingmen in semester 1 asking for more opportunities to interact

with other Wingmen, and all Wingmen in semester 2 indicating that they found the time spent with other Wingmen during the training to be of great value.

In both the first and second semesters, specific skills were mentioned that Wingmen gained due to their participation in the programme. In particular, improved communication skills were highlighted in both semesters. Furthermore, meeting people from different backgrounds and countries and being able to deal with people from different backgrounds were also mentioned in both semesters.

Finally, in both semesters 1 and 2, Wingmen suggested that more events should be held to allow Wingmen to interact with one another and that the Wingman training should be held earlier in the year.

## Conclusion

As part of the University of the Free State's vision to create a sense of internationalisation at home, the Office for International Affairs launched a pilot Wingman Programme in 2018. This programme aimed to assist new international exchange students with their adjustment process at the university specifically, and in South Africa in general. As such, the programme was launched to connect international students with local students to foster meaningful friendships and to assist international students with their transition to the UFS environment.

Two cohorts of participants were involved in the Wingman Programme during 2018, one in the first semester and the other in the second semester. Programme participants provided insightful feedback on evaluation surveys that were conducted with the two cohorts to obtain information on how effective the programme was during the two semesters. Overall, both semester programmes were viewed as largely successful and that the objectives of the Wingman Programme have mostly been attained. Issues raised in the first semester were successfully addressed and the improvements were noted by the second-semester participants.

Nevertheless, several similarities were found between the two groups with regard to aspects that are vital for the success of the programme, as well as further improvements that could be made in future. Regarding communication with the Buddies before their arrival in South Africa, it became evident that having the Wingmen

along with representatives from the Office for International Affairs contact them is paramount for easing their fears about entering an unfamiliar environment. It is important to answer all their questions so that they may feel more comfortable when they arrived and are in contact with people who could assist them where necessary.

Along with successful communication, the programme as a whole was largely viewed as effective in helping Buddies with their transition to the UFS environment. Wingmen were commended for being helpful and friendly, aiding with various services in and around the university environment. The participating Wingmen also found the programme to be largely successful and acknowledged various skills they had gained or improved. These include better communication skills, learning how to deal with people from different backgrounds, how to be sensitive towards cultural differences, and improved knowledge of the university's systems.

Furthermore, both participating Buddies and Wingmen were appreciative of the opportunity to meet new people from different countries, although it became apparent that there is a need for more social opportunities for the programme participants. Several requests were made for spending more time with other Buddies and Wingmen. These types of informal social interactions would allow for better connections to be formed with the Buddies and provide a platform for Wingmen to support each other in their roles.

The feedback received from programme participants is indicative of the respondents' willingness and openness to the programme's goal of creating internationalisation at home. However, despite its success, several challenges have been experienced. Recommendations for improvements to

certain aspects of the programme should be considered for the implementation of future programmes of this nature.

## Challenges and Recommendations

One of the most salient challenges experienced by the Buddies was the communication with their Wingmen before arriving in South Africa. During the first semester, an adequate number of Wingmen contacted their Buddies, but the quality of the communication was not satisfactory; only half of the Buddies indicated that the information was helpful and insightful. During the second semester, the Buddies who were contacted by their Wingmen noted that the information received was very helpful, but more than half of the Buddies did not receive any communication from their Wingmen beforehand.

### **Recommendation:**

- *Ensure that all Wingmen contact their Buddies before they arrive in South Africa and provide them with information that is helpful and insightful to ease their transition into the country and the university.*

A further challenge that became apparent was that both Wingmen and Buddies felt that the frequency of interactions between all programme participants (Wingmen and Buddies, Wingmen and Wingmen, Buddies and Buddies) was not enough. Requests were made for more emphasis to be placed on the initial meeting between a Wingman and Buddy, for more social and less formal interactions to take place between programme participants, that Buddies be assigned Wingmen from the same residence, and for more official activities for Wingmen and Buddies to do together.

### **Recommendations:**

- *Arrange for Wingmen to meet Buddies at the airport to establish rapport early on.*
- *Arrange more formal and informal activities to allow all programme participants to socialise and interact more frequently.*
- *Ensure that Wingmen and Buddies paired together are from the same residence to allow more time for interaction.*

During the second semester, in particular, there seems to have been some issues with the logistical information provided for the programme, with the Buddies' concerns mostly centring around aspects such as where and how to obtain timetables and student cards and where lecture halls are.

### **Recommendation:**

- *Make sure that Buddies are provided with adequate assistance with regard to the practical aspects of adapting to life on campus. The Wingmen can play an important role here by perhaps arranging a time with their Buddies to accompany them to obtain their student cards, show them where the lecture halls are, and help them with any of the other necessary logistical arrangements needed to adapt to life on the UFS campus.*

Furthermore, it became apparent from the evaluations that the majority of Wingmen were also international students who came to the university earlier. This is certainly helpful in the sense that these Wingmen know what the Buddies are going through and can thus support them accordingly. However, it limits the exposure of South African students to international cultures, and international students to South African cultures.

### **Recommendation:**

- *Do what is necessary to ensure that South African students also participate in the Wingman Programme to allow both South African students and international students the opportunity to experience unfamiliar cultures, thereby meeting the objectives of internationalisation at home.*

Regarding the Wingman training and the Buddy and Wingman launch events, it is clear from the evaluation that these events were successful. From the evaluation, it also became clear, however, that there is still room for improvement. Regarding the training, the shift from one day of training in semester 1 to two in semester 2 were received favourably, but Wingmen felt that it would have been more beneficial if it took place on consecutive days and if all Wingmen were required to attend. There were also suggestions that more events of this nature be arranged. Since it became clear from the evaluation that the training was thorough and that it fully prepared the Wingmen for their Buddies' arrival, the Wingmen's desire for more events of this nature is probably more reflective of their need for greater interaction between programme participants than any inadequacy in the training itself. For the launch event, the only real concern was about the seating arrangements, with Buddies and Wingmen noting that it would have been more beneficial if the Buddies and their assigned Wingmen were seated next to each other. Moreover, frequent mention was made of rotating seats

throughout the event to allow for interactions with other Buddies and Wingmen.

**Recommendations:**

- *Make the training compulsory for all Wingmen to attend.*
- *Arrange for the training to take place on consecutive days to aid retention of learned material.*
- *At the launch event, change the seating arrangements so that Buddies and their assigned Wingmen are seated next to each other to provide an opportunity for them to get to know each other.*
- *Allow for participants to change seats throughout the launch event to meet new people.*

## Umoja Buddy Programme events report 2019

In 2018, the Office for International Affairs launched a pilot Wingman Programme to assist newly arriving, incoming international exchange students with their adjustment process in the University of the Free State (UFS) student life and community. The results of the pilot study revealed that the students' adjustment process in the UFS environment was much quicker and smoother as a result of the programme. The students felt a sense of belonging and appreciated the holistic support that was provided by their Wingmen. This was one of the significant contributing factors to rolling out the programme to all first-entry international students.

Although the heartbeat of the programme has promoted student support, well-being, and inclusivity, the name 'Wingman' itself has been perceived to be gender biased and non-inclusive for today's society. It was, therefore, important to re-think the name so that it upheld the spirit of human embrace and acceptance. The name was thus changed to 'Umoja' which is a Swahili term meaning 'unity and the spirit of togetherness'. This was deemed an appropriate name since it embodied the heart of the programme, which is to

- celebrate unity in diversity;
- promote the intersectionality of events and functions with core stakeholders and representatives from various student communities on campus;
- strive for academic excellence;
- foster the building of lifelong friendships and lifelong learning; and
- promote intercultural understanding, which is a key graduate attribute for the UFS.

In light of this, the Office for International Affairs, in collaboration with the Department of Student Affairs, launched the Umoja Buddy Programme (UBP) in February 2019. Designed to enhance the international and intercultural competencies of UFS students, the programme pairs first-entering international students (Buddies) with senior students (Ambassadors), providing a warm, welcoming, and friendly face, a helping hand, and a first UFS friendship that makes a world of difference to the new arrivals. The Umoja Buddy Programme seeks to ensure the smooth transition and integration

of international students into student life at the UFS by helping them to integrate into the campus and local communities. Moreover, the programme aims to connect international and local students through meaningful lifelong friendships and fostering their academic, social, and cultural integration at the UFS. In essence, the programme adopts the UFS vision whereby every student will in future have an international experience during their UFS studies through internationalisation at home.

Since the programme was launched and training was provided to the participating Ambassadors, programme participants were requested to evaluate the effectiveness and success of several events that took place in the first semester of 2019. This includes two training events that were provided for participating Ambassadors, as well as a speed culturing and welcoming launch event held for all of the Buddies and their Ambassadors, and an international food and indigenous games event held for all university students. The salient findings from each of these events are highlighted in the report to assess the success of each event and to identify areas that may require further attention.

Subsequently, the second semester of the programme was launched in July 2019 with a welcome function/ information session held for the incoming exchange students and the participating Ambassadors. At the end of the function, students were requested to complete an online evaluation survey of the event, where they were encouraged to provide feedback that would aid in the improvement of the event's logistics and content. During the second semester, the Office for International Affairs also evaluated the experiences of inbound mobility students. Finally, to evaluate the effectiveness and success of the second-semester programme, students were requested to complete a post-evaluation survey, detailing their experience of the Umoja Buddy Programme. The salient findings from each of these surveys are highlighted in this report to assess the success of the second-semester programme and to identify areas that may require further attention.

## Mentorship Training

Twenty-two Ambassadors from the Umoja Buddy Programme had the opportunity to take part in the UFS Mentor Training hosted by the Department of Student Affairs, which took place at Kopanong from 21 to 24 January 2019. The objective of the training was to equip the students with the basic skills needed to be a mentor, giving them an overall understanding of the university systems, and teaching them about the basic values that the university deems significant. It also created an opportunity for the students to build networks among themselves. The training ended with an interactive team-building session, which highlighted the positive integration among the mentor groups. The participating Ambassadors were requested to complete an online evaluation of the effectiveness of the mentorship training event. Of the 22 Ambassadors who attended, 19 completed the evaluation form.

Most of the participating Ambassadors were satisfied with the mentorship training event (79%) and found it relevant (74%). In their qualitative feedback on their key takeaways from the training, it was echoed by 16 of the 19 participants that this training was relevant and helpful for their job as Ambassadors. Participants most frequently reported that they learnt the importance of time management (25%). Several participants highlighted other aspects of the training

that they found important. These included focusing on the mentee (Buddy), learning about different university programmes such as the Centre for Teaching and Learning, and how to refer students to the relevant university personnel and departments for assistance.

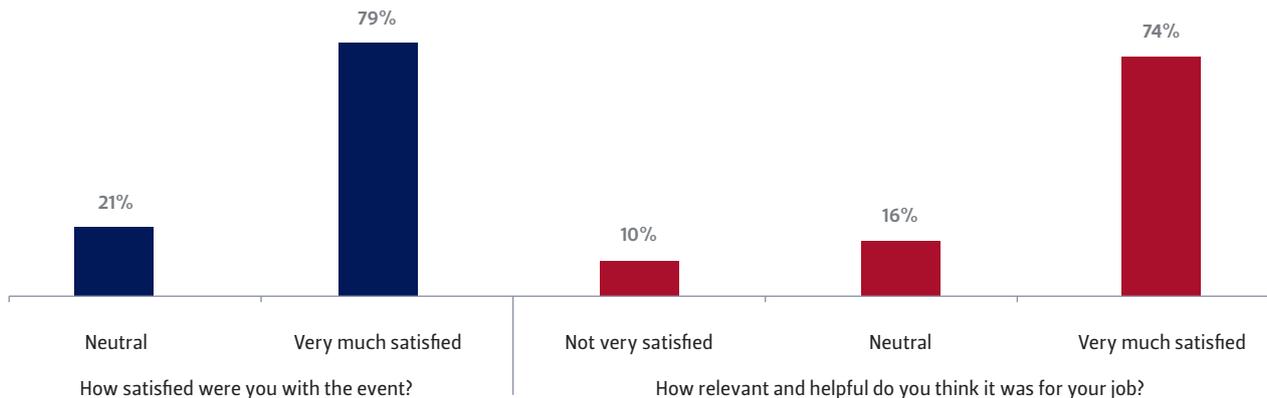


Figure 12: Ambassadors' satisfaction and perception of relevance with the mentorship training

In terms of their satisfaction with the logistical arrangements for the mentorship training event, participants had mixed responses. Overall, participants were mostly satisfied with the registration for the event and the refreshments provided throughout the training course. More than half of the participants were also satisfied with

the communication received, the various activities conducted throughout the function, as well as the closing ceremony. However, only 37% of participating Ambassadors were satisfied with the venue where the training was held.

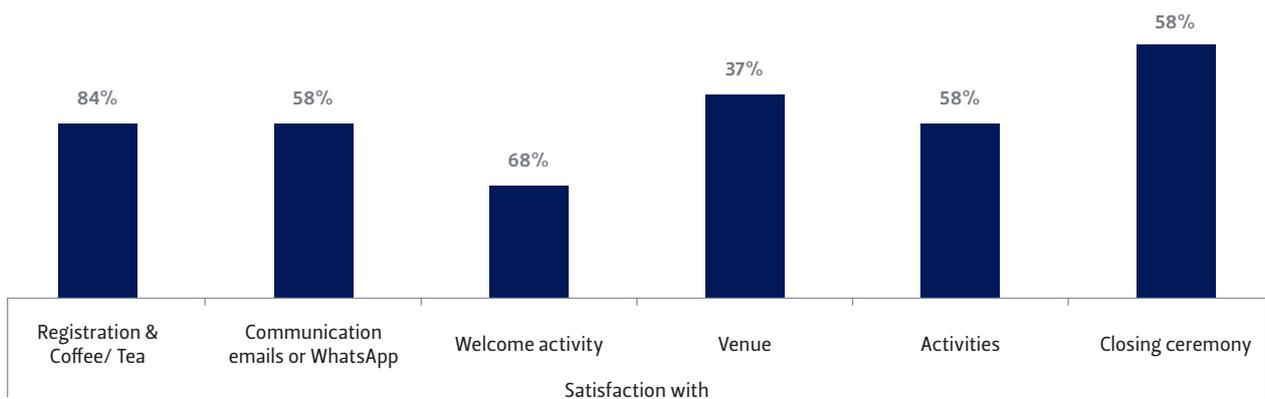


Figure 13: Satisfaction with logistics for the mentorship training

The qualitative feedback provided some insight into why participants were generally dissatisfied with the training venue, as several participants indicated that the venue became very hot and did not have any air-conditioning facilities.

Additional problems encountered had to do with the food provided. Mention was made of meal breaks being too short, that the meals did not cater for everyone, and general dissatisfaction with the quality of food provided.

Participants were also asked to rate the relevance of the various sessions that took place throughout the training course. All sessions were most frequently rated as relevant or very relevant by the majority of participating Ambassadors (Table 1). The sessions that stood out as very relevant by more than 60% of the sample included

those of academic advising, the university's registration process, services learning, and time management skills.

Sessions that were less well received and frequently reported as not relevant included the welcome activity, mediated learning experience, and the information session on the Gateway Programme. It is, however, not clear from the responses why these sessions were frequently rated as irrelevant. Perhaps the content covered in those sessions were not entirely applicable to the Ambassadors in the Umoja Buddy Programme. Nevertheless, 68% of Ambassadors indicated that they were to some extent satisfied with the overall session content. None of the participants indicated dissatisfaction with the session content (Figure 14).

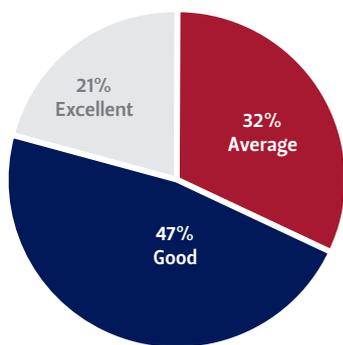


Figure 14: Satisfaction with session content at the mentorship training

“Perhaps a venue with air-conditioning could be used next time as it was hard to concentrate in the heat.” – Qualitative response from an Ambassador

| Sessions   | Not relevant | Relevant | Very relevant | Did not attend |
|--|--------------|----------|---------------|----------------|
| Welcome activity                                   | 37%          | 53%      | 5%            | 5%             |
| Mediated Learning experience                       | 21%          | 42%      | 37%           | 0%             |
| Academic Advising                                  | 0%           | 26%      | 74%           | 0%             |
| Support services: Referrals & UFS 101              | 11%          | 47%      | 26%           | 16%            |
| Faculty specific training                          | 16%          | 32%      | 42%           | 11%            |
| Registration process                               | 0%           | 21%      | 74%           | 5%             |
| Services Learning                                  | 5%           | 26%      | 63%           | 5%             |
| ACT  | 5%           | 63%      | 26%           | 5%             |
| Library services: Information session              | 5%           | 37%      | 58%           | 0%             |
| Skills: Time Management                            | 0%           | 21%      | 74%           | 5%             |
| Skills: Professional Conduct                       | 0%           | 42%      | 53%           | 5%             |
| Skills: Communication/Facilitation/Public speaking | 5%           | 42%      | 53%           | 0%             |
| Information session: Gateway                       | 26%          | 53%      | 21%           | 0%             |
| Activity: Group goals                              | 16%          | 58%      | 21%           | 5%             |
| Team building                                      | 11%          | 58%      | 32%           | 0%             |
| Closing activity                                   | 16%          | 47%      | 37%           | 0%             |

Table 1: Relevance of sessions at the mentorship training

When asked about any additional comments regarding the sessions or overall agenda, suggestions were made for the training event to be more inclusive of international students and Ambassadors participating in the Umoja Buddy Programme.

“Perhaps international students could be taken into account during training as they may be assigned to some of the mentors. For example, mentors can be informed what additional documentation international student need to register.” - Qualitative response from an Ambassador

“It should be more inclusive for everyone that is not a P3 Mentor. Everything was mainly focused around residence Mentors.” - Qualitative response from an Ambassador

## Umoja Buddy Programme Ambassador Training

The Umoja Buddy Programme hosted an Ambassador’s Training event on Saturday 26 January 2019. The aim of the function was to provide information sessions for the participating group of 2019 Ambassadors, where the purpose of the programme was unpacked, and the role of the Ambassadors was discussed in detail. The event also aimed to provide training on the UFS systems and to share testimonials from returning Ambassadors, as well as a segment for the new Ambassadors to ask questions. The core goal of the function was to equip the new Ambassadors with the necessary skills to take on their new role, while giving advice and providing guidelines on how to fulfil their role. This also afforded Ambassadors an opportunity to get to know each other better.

This one-day training event was attended by 41 of the 51 volunteer Ambassadors taking part in the programme for 2019. It was

facilitated by staff members from the Office for International Affairs, as well as former volunteers who had returned to the programme. After the commencement of the training event, participating Ambassadors were requested to complete an online survey, evaluating the success and effectiveness of the training event. The feedback from the participants would be used to improve the logistics and content covered in the event. Of the 41 attendees, 39 Ambassadors completed the evaluation survey.

The vast majority of participants were very satisfied with the event (97%) and found it very relevant and helpful for their job as an Ambassador (92%). None of the participants reported being dissatisfied with the training event and only 5% of the sample reported it to be not very relevant and helpful for their job.

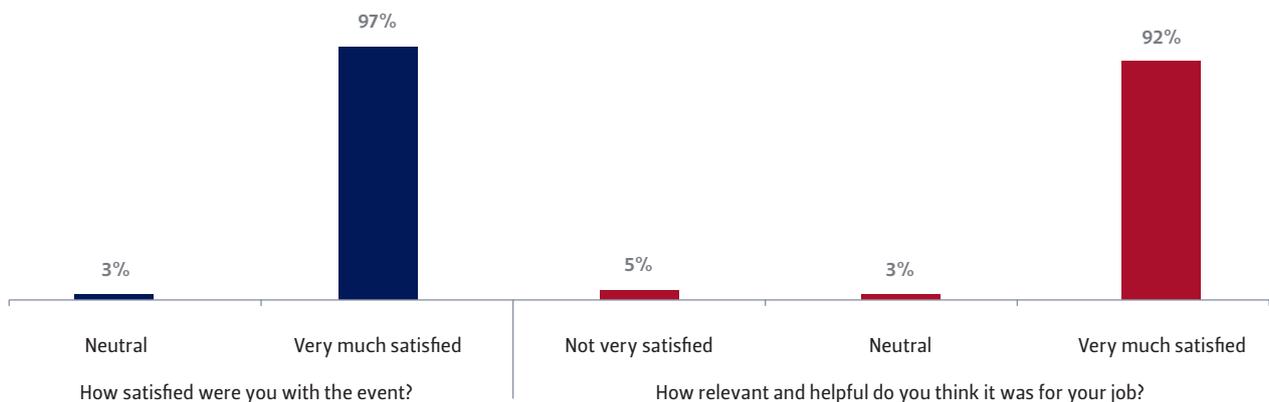


Figure 15: Ambassadors’ level of satisfaction and perception of relevance with the UBP training event

Regardless of how well the event was received by almost all the participants, several topics were highlighted as elements that should have been discussed more extensively. These include topics such as registration, Ambassador rules and regulations, activities, sensitivity to differences, and general tips and advice. The largest proportion of respondents (23%) indicated that more emphasis should have been placed on the procedures to be followed to assist their Buddies with the university’s registration process. Furthermore, 15% of Ambassadors would have appreciated more guidance about their role and what is expected of them.

In terms of the participating Ambassadors’ experience of the one-day training event, 90% of respondents agreed that hosting the training on a single day was effective. Furthermore, 92% of respondents found the time spent with other Ambassadors valuable to their experience of the event.

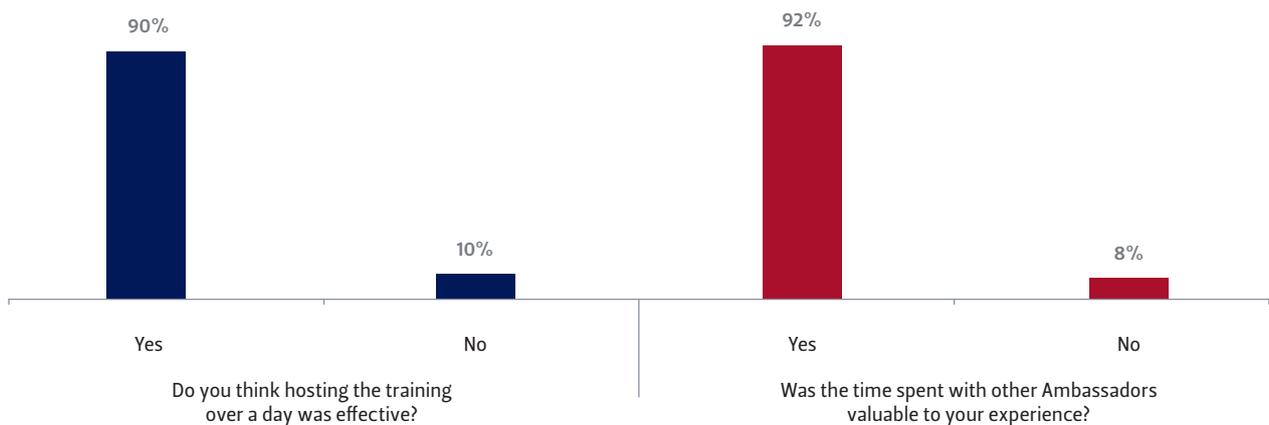


Figure 16: Experience of the one-day UBP training event

When asked about what elements of the training could be improved upon, participants most frequently reported (36%) that there should be more interaction. In this regard, participants would have liked more former Ambassadors and Buddies to share their experiences, as well as team building and icebreaker activities to encourage all participants to get involved. Frequent mention was also made of having more practical examples during the training.

“Make the training more engaging and more practical, so that everybody feels included – in a way, it will prepare one for all the hypothetical situations they may encounter with their Buddies.” Qualitative response from an Ambassador

Additional suggestions included aspects of general logistics, such as making use of microphones and shorter training. With regard to their key takeaways from the training, the majority of Ambassadors (49%) said that learning how to build relationships with their Buddies stood out for them. Other aspects that stood out were the lessons on culture shock, learning about the programme’s background, and how to deal with different circumstances.

“To build a relationship and a friendship with my Buddy based on trust, friendship, and internationally integrated being.” Qualitative response from an Ambassador

Participants were further asked to rate how satisfied they were with several aspects of the logistics of the training event. More than half of the participating Ambassadors were satisfied with all aspects of the event logistics. About three-quarters of the participants were especially satisfied with the communication received, the venue, and the closing ceremony. However, Ambassadors were less satisfied with the welcome kit, with only 54% indicating that they were to some extent satisfied with this aspect. From the qualitative feedback, it was noted that welcome kits were not provided, which would explain the general dissatisfaction with this logistical arrangement.

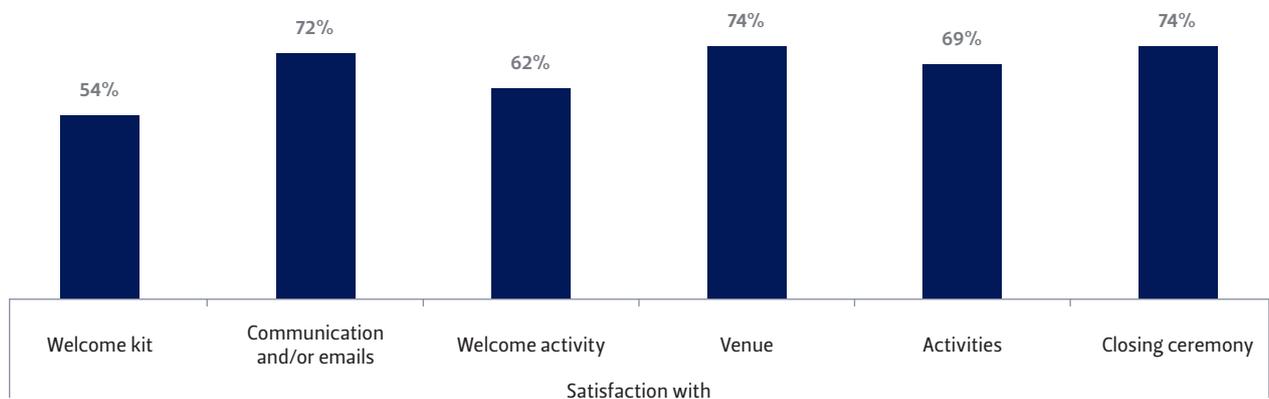


Figure 17: Satisfaction with logistics for the UBP training event

In their qualitative feedback, participants were mostly positive about the logistics and did not have anything to add. Nevertheless, a few of the participants listed some recommendations for improvement:

- Include more activities such as icebreakers
- Better preparation of activities
- Larger venue
- Include a welcome kit
- Make use of microphones
- Provide accommodation and transportation
- Use WhatsApp for communication rather than email.

Furthermore, participating Ambassadors were asked to rate the relevance of the sessions provided during the training. The large majority of participants found all of the sessions to be relevant to some degree, except for the welcome activity. For this session, 13% of the participants found it not to be relevant, and only 36% indicated that it was very relevant. This is in contrast to the other sessions, as more than 60% of participants found each of those sessions to be very relevant. This was particularly true for the session on sensitivity to different cultures, as 82% reported that this session was very relevant. About three-quarters of the sample also found the session on programme information and culture shock to be of relevance.

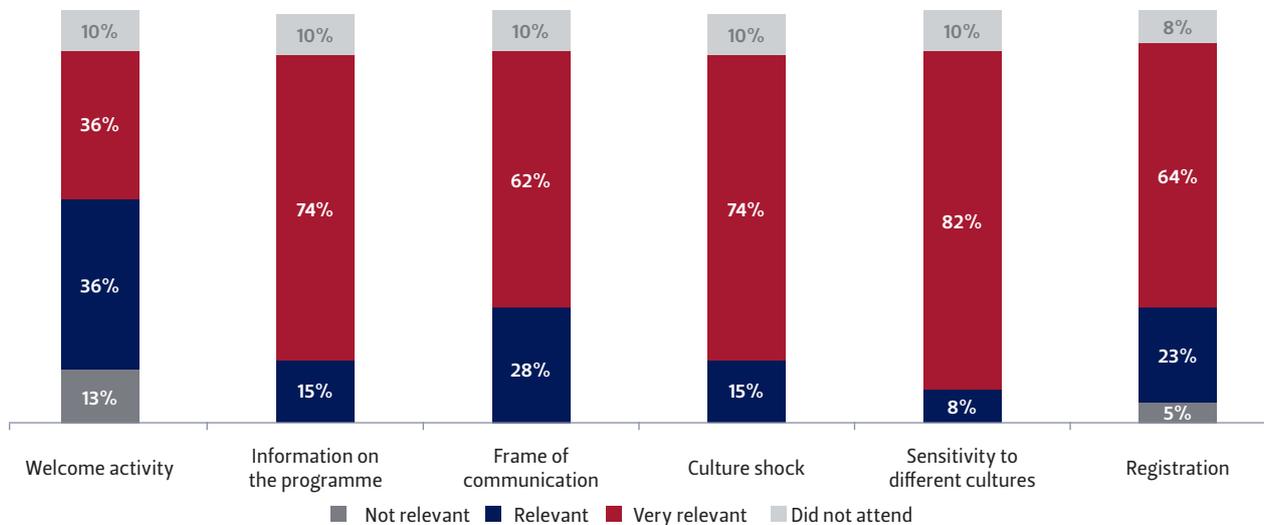


Figure 18: Relevance of sessions at the UBP training event

Moreover, participants were generally satisfied with the overall session content, as almost all of the Ambassadors stated that it was either good (41%) or excellent (54%). A very small percentage of participants (5%) had an average level of satisfaction, whereas none of the participants reported dissatisfaction with the session content.

In their final qualitative feedback, participants were again mostly complimentary towards the training event, stating that it went well, that they learnt a lot, and that the support received from other Ambassadors was very helpful.

“I think the emphasis placed on Ambassadors being a form of support system for one another is great, rather than depending solely on the office when it is not necessary.”  
Qualitative response from an Ambassador

“Great event! I feel like I have the correct tools to interact with colleagues and Buddies. Really learnt a lot!”

Qualitative response from an Ambassador

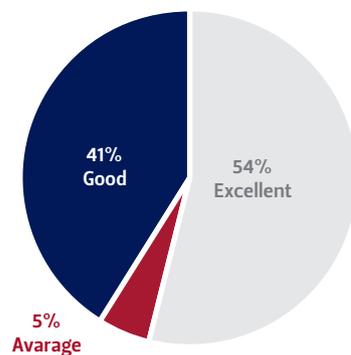


Figure 19: Satisfaction with session content at the UBP training event

## Umoja Buddy Programme Launch

The Umoja Buddy Programme Launch was held on 14 February 2019 at the Rag Farm. This launch event served as a welcoming for first-entry international exchange students as well as the official launch of the 2019 programme. The programme for the launch expressed what it means to be a South African, with showcases of scripted acts and plays performed by Umoja Ambassadors, as well as the 'Kasi Flava' theme that brought different South African cultures together through the décor and menu for the evening. Furthermore, various university departments were represented by speakers welcoming international students to the university. These included the Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Petersen, the Director of the Office for International Affairs, Mr Hagenmeier, the Dean of Student Affairs, Mr Mgolombane, and the International Student Representative Council member, Omar Tabengwa.

The event was attended by 120 guests, which included university representatives, the international students (Buddies), and the volunteer Umoja Ambassadors. Buddies and Ambassadors were requested to complete an online survey, evaluating the logistics and content of the launch event. Of those who attended the launch, 35 participants completed the online evaluation, 28 of which were Ambassadors and seven Buddies. The sample of Buddies was too small to make meaningful comparisons between the two groups of participants. Therefore, the results obtained were for the total sample of survey participants.

When asked how satisfied participants were with the launch event in general, the majority (77%) reported that they were very satisfied. Only 6% of the sample indicated that they were not very satisfied with the event. In general, it would appear that the launch event was well received, and participants were mostly satisfied with how the event was run.



Furthermore, the vast majority of participants had positive perceptions about the Umoja Buddy Programme Launch. More than half of the respondents (69%) found the launch to be a good platform to get to know their assigned Buddy or Ambassador. Impressively, 91% of respondents reported that the event was a good platform to meet and spend time with other Buddies and Ambassadors, and that the speeches gave them a better idea of the strategic impact of the programme. The majority of participants (89%) also agreed that the speeches helped them to understand the importance of their role in the programme.

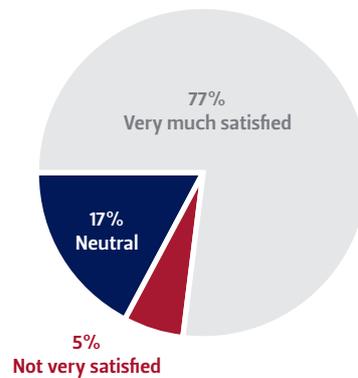


Figure 20: Satisfaction with UBP launch

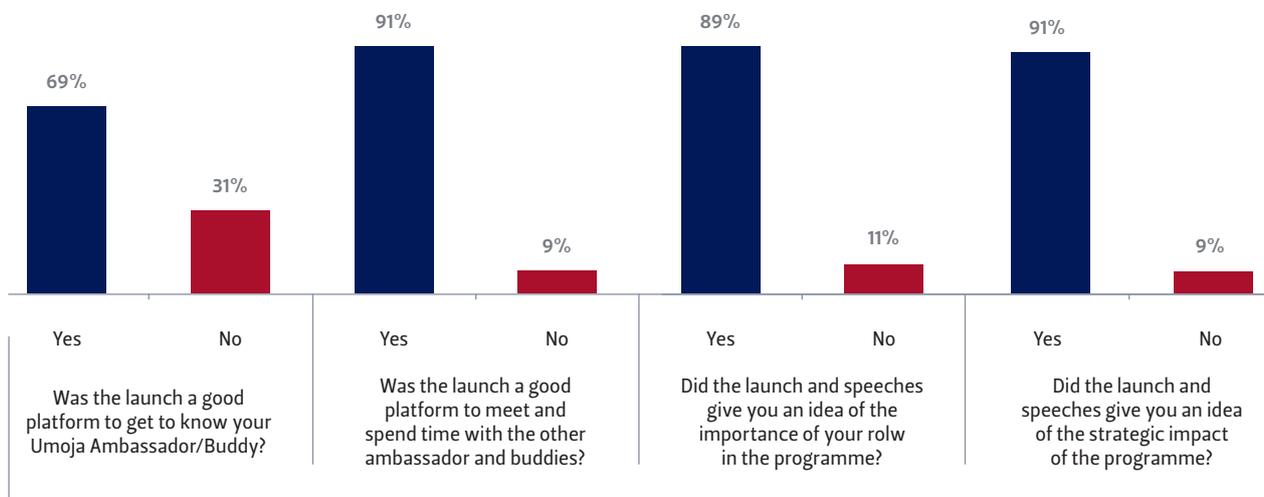


Figure 21: Participants' perceptions of the UBP launch

Participants were asked to list some of their key takeaways from the launch event. Qualitative responses again highlighted the effectiveness of the event, as participants listed several aspects of the launch that stood out for them. Most frequently (32%), participants appreciated learning about the purpose and importance of the programme.

“That this is an important programme to be a part of because I get to learn from other people and play an important role in someone else’s life so that they transition better into the university and South Africa.” Qualitative response from an Ambassador

Several participants (27%) mentioned that the launch provided a good platform to build relationships with other programme participants. Respondents also gained perspective on how they can make a difference and the fact that there is a rather diverse group of people at the UFS specifically, and in South Africa in general.

“The fact that the little I do as an Ambassador impact immensely on the Buddies made me realise that our function as a team results in creating a welcoming environment for the Buddies.” Qualitative response from an Ambassador

Furthermore, a couple of suggestions were offered regarding activities that could have been included that might have had a significant impact. Some of the participants felt that more time should have been allowed for socialising so that they could have talked to more people and meet more of the programme participants. Furthermore, a few of the Ambassadors indicated that an activity should have been done with the Buddies to introduce them to the Ambassadors.



In terms of the event’s logistics, participants were mostly satisfied, as more than 60% of respondents indicated that they were to some extent satisfied with almost all of the logistical arrangements. Participants were especially satisfied (69%) with both the communication emails received before the event and the traditional South African food provided at the launch. Furthermore, 77% of respondents were complimentary of the closing ceremony. However, just under 50% of participants indicated satisfaction with the welcome kit. The reason for this general dissatisfaction was unfortunately not elaborated on in the qualitative feedback.

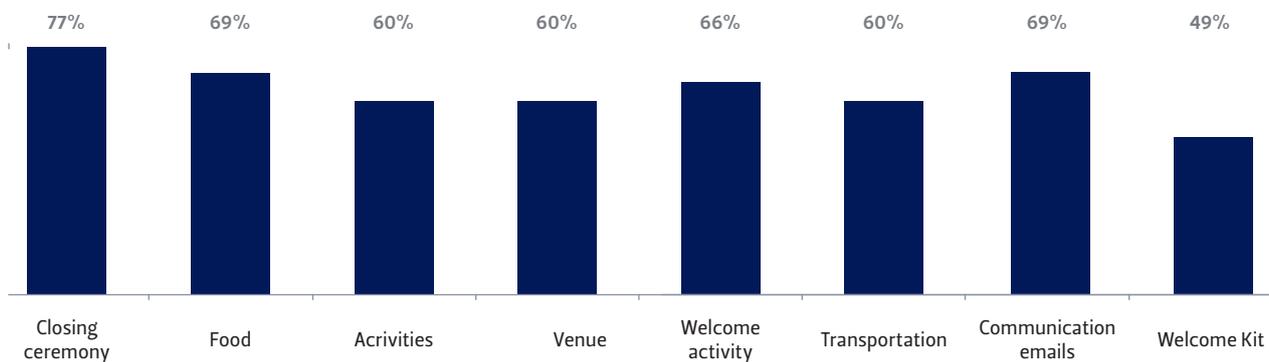


Figure 22: Satisfaction with UBP launch logistics

Although participants were mostly satisfied with the logistical arrangements and appreciative of the effort taken to organise the event, a couple of suggestions were put forward. These suggestions included the following:

- Sharing the programme of the event with guests the day before the event.
- Ensuring that the driver has a navigation system and knows where to take guests.
- Communicating all logistical arrangements more effectively.

As a further indication of the success of the launch event, the vast majority of participants found all of the sessions to be either relevant or very relevant (Figure 12). More than 80% of respondents rated each session as relevant to some extent. Less than 15% of respondents perceived the different sessions to be irrelevant to the purpose of the event. Moreover, the activities and speeches were well received by the attendees and effectively portrayed the purpose of the event and the Umoja Buddy Programme. This

was again echoed when none of the participants indicated being dissatisfied with the overall session content. As such, 63% of respondents indicated that they were fairly satisfied with both the presented and pre-read material for the launch event.

In the qualitative feedback regarding the session content and overall agenda, a few of the participants made recommendations for improvements. One participant requested that more events be held with all programme participants, and another participant suggested that a welcome session with smaller groups would have been beneficial for everyone to get to know each other better. Mention was again made of sharing the event’s agenda beforehand, and that a more formal theme should be considered. In line with the suggestion for more events, 86% of the participants indicated that they would like to have more events of this nature during the semester. In the qualitative feedback, 27% of participants acknowledged a desire for more interactive events for the Buddies and their Ambassadors.

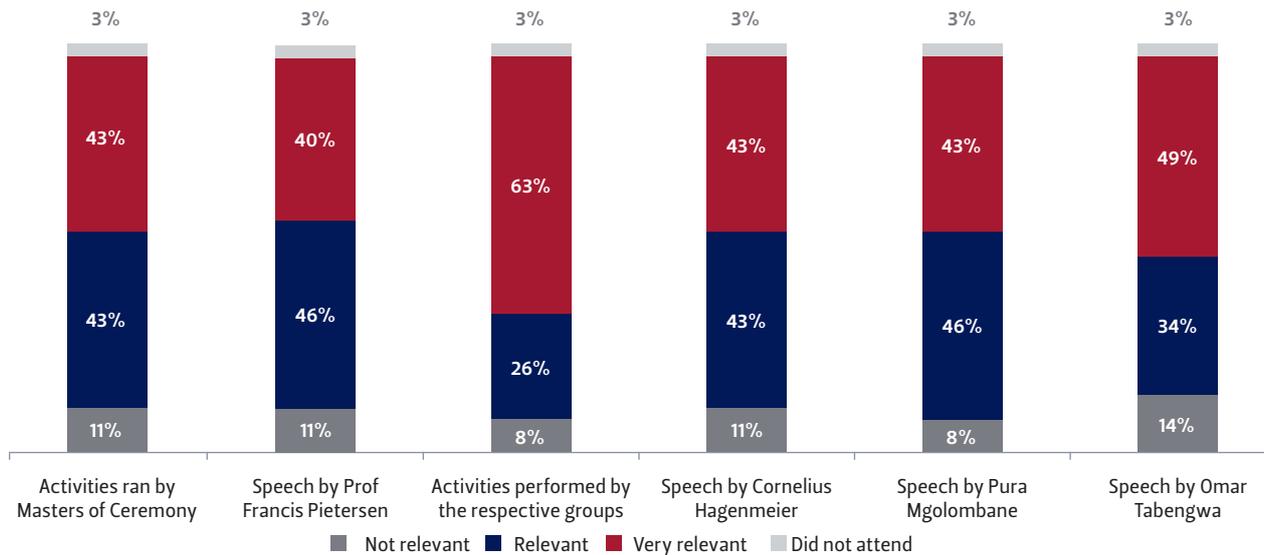


Figure 23: Relevance of UBP launch sessions

Finally, very positive feedback was received from the programme participants about the overall success of the launch event. More than half of the respondents (58%) acknowledged that the event was well organised and most enjoyable. Specific mention was made of how well the event was structured, the good choice of music, and the platform created by the event for students to interact. However, it was also suggested that the agenda allow more opportunity for participants to socialise and interact.

Furthermore, it was recommended that the survey be conducted the same night or soon afterwards, as many details were forgotten by the time participants were requested to complete the online survey.

“The event was a success. I was impressed with the way it was structured, from start to finish.” Qualitative response from an Ambassador

“Great event! Got to engage with a couple of people I usually wouldn’t have in everyday campus life.” Qualitative response from an Ambassador

## Speed Culturing

Speed culturing was an event held to facilitate the exchange of cultural information between Ambassadors and Buddies, as well as to serve as a team-building activity to strengthen and create meaningful relationships. The event was held on 21 March 2019 at the Outdoor Gym on the UFS Bloemfontein Campus. The participating Ambassadors and Buddies were requested to complete an online evaluation of the event so that the Office for International Affairs could obtain feedback that would assist in creating future events that cater to the needs of the students. Of those who attended the speed culturing event, 23 students completed the evaluation form, 21 of which were Ambassadors. Only two participating Buddies

completed the online evaluation, which rendered this group too small to make meaningful comparisons with the Ambassadors. Therefore, the results obtained and discussed are for the total sample, consisting of both participating Ambassadors and Buddies.

When asked how they would rate the overall event, about three-quarters of the sample rated the event as very good. A further 22% rated the event as good (Figure 24). None of the participants rated the event poorly, which indicated that the event was enjoyed by the participating Ambassadors and Buddies.

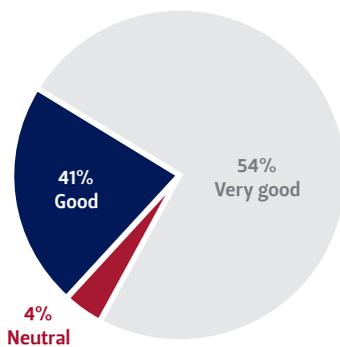


Figure 24: Overall rating of the speed culturing event

Additionally, participants were asked to rate three individual aspects of the event, namely the diversity activity, cultural speed dating, and team-building games. The team-building games were rated very highly, with 91% of respondents rating it as very good (Figure 25). The other two aspects were less well received, although still rated as either good or very good by the majority of respondents. There were, however, a couple of participants who rated the diversity activity and cultural speed dating poorly.

The very positive response received for the team-building games was echoed in the qualitative feedback, where 74% of participants highlighted the team-building activities as the most enjoyable of the event. Mention was made of the various games that took place and how the friendly competitive nature of the activities allowed them to work well together in groups. Several respondents indicated that these games were fun and enjoyable.

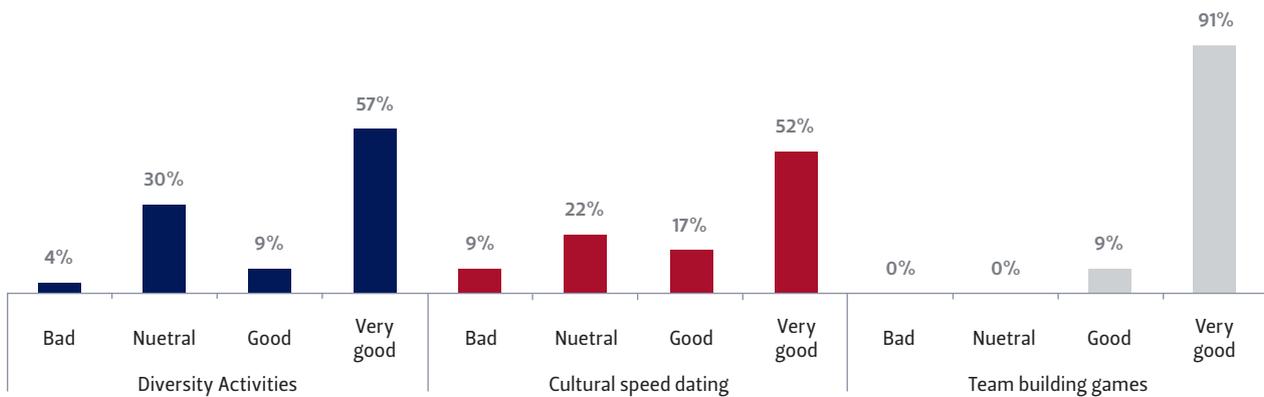


Figure 25: Ratings of individuals aspects of the speed culturing event

More than half of the participating Ambassadors and Buddies indicated that the speed culturing event made a very good contribution towards both their cultural immersion and strengthening and creating relationships. Furthermore, 70% of participants agreed that the event made a very good contribution

towards strengthening and creating relationships with other Ambassadors. These results are indicative of the event mostly fulfilling its purpose of strengthening and creating meaningful relationships; however, not all of the respondents felt as though these objectives were met.

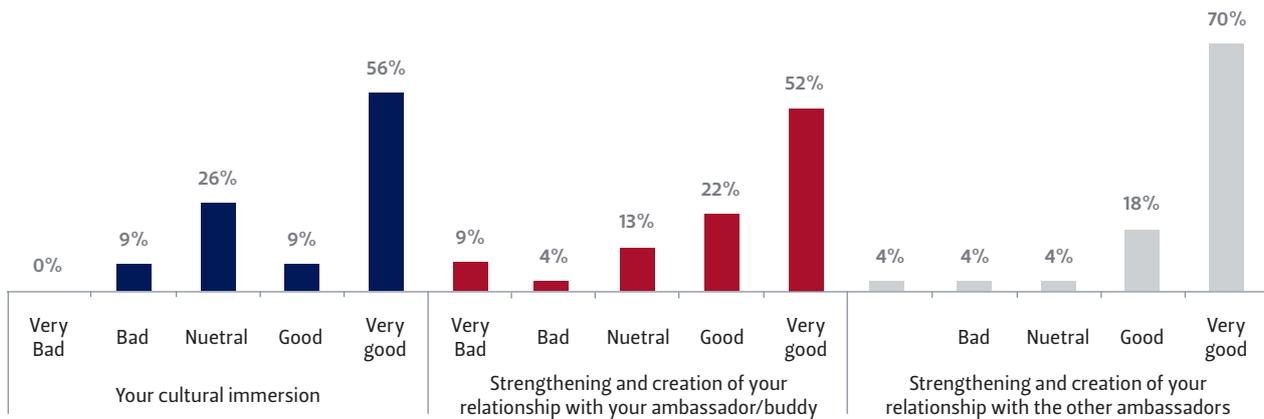


Figure 26: Contributions of the speed culturing event

When asked what participants liked the least about the speed culturing event, the majority of participants (57%) indicated that there was nothing they did not enjoy. Nevertheless, a few of the participating Ambassadors and Buddies mentioned the heat, the thorns in the grass, and the food as unsatisfactory aspects. Moreover, a few recommendations for future events were put forward, where 22% of respondents suggested that there should be better time management. This referred to starting the event earlier in the day before it gets too hot, starting on time, and having shorter activities. Several participants also recommended having

more team-building activities, such as obstacle courses, sporting activities, and non-physical activities such as mind games or puzzles.

Other recommendations included

- more food and water;
- a location without thorns;
- photos to be taken of Ambassadors with their Buddies; and
- linking activities to the theme.

## International Food and Indigenous Games

The Office for International Affairs hosted an International Food and Indigenous Games event for the university's students. This event took place on 11 May 2019 at the Office for International Affairs and was divided into two segments. The first segment comprised international food. The exchange students were divided into groups according to their respective home countries (for example, there was a group of four students from Sweden, three from the Netherlands, and four from Germany). These groups of exchange students had to prepare and present traditional cuisine from their home countries for the local students to taste. Furthermore, they had to deliver a short oral presentation about the food they prepared.

The second segment was indigenous games. In this segment, all students attending the event were randomly divided into groups. There were four groups of students playing indigenous games against each other for a surprise prize. For each game played, there was a scoreboard and teams were scored according to their performances. The group with the highest overall points won the prize. The main reason for the two segments of this event was to integrate local and international students by providing the local students with a platform to learn a little more about the exchange students through the food they shared. It also allowed the exchange students to get to know more about the local students through the indigenous games played.

After the event, participants were asked to provide feedback on how successful the event was for their cultural exchange. Feedback was received from 21 students, 15 of whom were part of the Umoja Buddy Programme. A total of 12 Ambassadors responded to the evaluation survey, while three Buddies provided their insights. The other six survey respondents were other university students at the UFS. Regarding how the students found out about the event, seven of the participants indicated that they saw it being advertised on the Umoja

Buddy Programme's social-media page. The other participants heard about the event from other Ambassadors, Buddies, or other people. This included hearing about it from Florry, a friend, and the Global Café Ambassador group.

Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with several aspects of the event. In general, the respondents expressed an average satisfaction with the aspects of the event. About half of the respondents (48%) were to some extent satisfied with both the date and time, as well as the location of the event. Fewer participants were satisfied with the host/ speaker, as only 43% indicated satisfaction with this. The food and games received the highest rating, although more participants were satisfied with the food than with the games at the event. Overall, just more than half of the respondents (52%) acknowledged that they were satisfied with the overall International Food and Indigenous Games event.

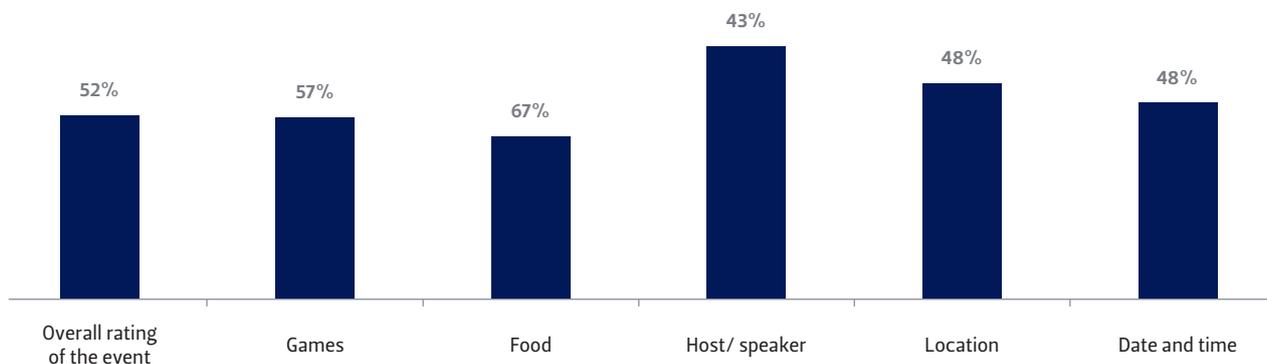


Figure 27: Satisfaction with aspects of the International Food and Indigenous Games event

The qualitative feedback from participants provided some insight into these ratings. When asked what they liked most about the event, the majority of participants (67%) again listed the food element as most enjoyable. Regarding this, mention was made of the fact that they were able to taste all the different foods, appreciating having the Buddies explain how they prepared the food, as well as how the food was presented. Several participants (33%) also highlighted the indigenous games as entertaining and enjoyable, while two participants indicated that they liked the venue and the opportunity to meet new people.

Very few participants listed elements of the event that they did not like. However, mention was made of the poor timing of the event, as it started late and was also scheduled during test time. In general, a couple of respondents raised concern over the disorder of the event due to poor planning. Three of the participants indicated that they did not enjoy the games, while one participant did not like the food. Furthermore, being in the hot sun was highlighted as an issue by two of the participants, and one participant explained that the host had a negative attitude towards the Buddies. In their final comments, complaints were made about not all students participating in the event, and that very little information about the event was received beforehand.

“We did not get a lot of information about the event. Also, during the international meeting, we all said that we did not want an international food day if it was not going to be only ambassador and buddies. Feel like no one listened to what we wanted.” Qualitative response from a survey participant

Nevertheless, 33% of respondents commended the event for being a success, where they were able to meet new people. It was echoed that the event was enjoyable and well received by participants who attended.

“Great experience, I got to meet new and nice people! And I had fun the whole day!” Qualitative response from a survey participant

Several suggestions have been made for possible improvements to future events of this nature. These included the following:

- Start on time/ better time management
- Have one venue
- More food to be prepared
- Make South African food for the international students to taste
- Do not let participants leave the event early
- Have more diversity in the food and games



## Conclusion

The Umoja Buddy Programme was launched at the beginning of 2019, following the success of the pilot Wingman Programme in 2018. The programme has undergone a name change, as the name ‘Wingman’ itself has been perceived to be gender biased and non-inclusive of today’s society. The name ‘Umoja’ was introduced, which is a Swahili term meaning ‘unity and the spirit of togetherness’. The programme was developed to provide student support, well-being, and inclusivity for international exchange students at the University of the Free State.

Furthermore, the Umoja Buddy Programme seeks to ensure the smooth transition and integration of international students into student life at the University of the Free State by helping them to integrate into the campus and local communities. Moreover, the programme aims to connect international and local students through meaningful lifelong friendships and foster their academic, social, and cultural integration at the university. In essence, the programme adopts the university's vision whereby every student will in future have an international experience during their studies through internationalisation at home.

Since the programme was launched and training has been provided to the participating Ambassadors, programme participants were requested to evaluate the effectiveness and success of five events that took place in the first semester of 2019. This includes two training events for participating Ambassadors, as well as the welcoming launch event, a speed culturing event held for all of the Buddies and their Ambassadors, and an international food and indigenous games event hosted for all university students. The feedback from the online evaluations indicated that these training and launch events were by and large successful. Even though it has been evaluated as effective and successful, several recommendations have been made that should be taken into consideration for the improvement of future events.

Broadly speaking, the 2019 events seem to have succeeded in meeting their respective objectives. The mentorship training was found by the Ambassadors to be relevant and helpful to prepare them for their role, teaching them about the different university systems, and how to refer students to the relevant personnel and departments for assistance. Likewise, participants felt that the Ambassador training equipped them well for their job as Ambassadors, while the

launch event allowed both Buddies and Ambassadors a platform to get to know their assigned Buddy or Ambassador and to meet and spend time with other Buddies and Ambassadors. Furthermore, none of the participants rated the speed culturing event poorly, and in particular, the team-building activities were highlighted as contributing towards both participants' cultural immersion and strengthening and creating relationships. The only event that received a somewhat lower overall rating was the international food and indigenous games event, although the food element of this event was well received and seems to have served its purpose of introducing local students to international cultures and flavours.

That said, from the evaluations it also became apparent that there was still some room for improvement, with concerns mostly raised around the logistics of the events. For the mentorship training, concerns were raised regarding the venue, with participants noting that the venue was too hot and lacked air-conditioning facilities. There was dissatisfaction with the welcome kits in both the Ambassador training and the launch events, with some participants noting that welcome kits were not provided. For the speed culturing and the international food and indigenous games events, the main concerns centred around better time management, with participants in the speed culturing event requesting that events start earlier, start on time, and that the activities be shortened, while participants in the international food and indigenous games event also noted that the event started late and that it was scheduled during test time.

It can therefore be concluded that the event organisers are on the right track, having launched a series of successful and impactful events that could be made even better in future iterations if more attention is given to some of the logistical arrangements.

## Overall Recommendations

### *Mentorship Training*

The following recommendations can be put forward for the mentorship training:

- Conduct the training in a venue with air-conditioning facilities so that participants can concentrate without being affected by the heat.
- Provide better quality food that is suitable for all dietary preferences.
- Make the training more inclusive for international students and Ambassadors participating in the Umoja Buddy Programme.

### *Ambassador Training*

It is recommended that the following topics be emphasised more during the Ambassador training:

- assisting Buddies with university registration
- Ambassador rules and regulations
- the role of Ambassadors and what is expected of them
- sensitivity to differences
- general tips and advice for being an Ambassador.

Recommendations regarding logistical arrangements include the

following:

- larger venue
- include a welcome kit
- make use of microphones
- provide accommodation and transportation
- use WhatsApp for communication rather than email.

Additional recommendations for the training event, in general, include the following:

- Provide more time for interaction during the training event.
- Allow more time for previous Ambassadors and Buddies to share their experiences.
- Include team-building activities and/or an icebreaker activity.
- Provide more practical examples during the training event.

### *Launch*

The following recommendations can be taken into consideration for improving the launch event:

- Allow more time for social interactions.
- A welcome session with smaller groups could be beneficial for everyone to get to know each other better.
- Conduct the survey immediately after the launch event.

Recommendations regarding logistical arrangements include the following:

- Share the event's programme with all participants beforehand.
- Ensure that the driver has a navigation system and knows where to take guests.
- Communicate all logistical arrangements more effectively.

### *Speed Culturing*

The following recommendations are highlighted for the improvement of future events of this nature:

- Host the event earlier in the day before it gets too hot to participate in outdoor activities.
- Ensure better time management by starting on time and having shorter activities.
- Incorporate more team-building activities, such as obstacle courses and sporting activities.
- Include non-physical activities, such as mind games and puzzles.
- Provide more food and water during the event, especially if activities take place in the sun.
- Select a better venue without thorns.
- Have a photographer take photos to capture the event.
- Link activities to the theme of the event.

### *International Food and Indigenous Games*

The following logistical recommendations for future events of this nature include the following:

- Start the event on time.
- Do not schedule the event during test times.
- Provide more information about the event beforehand.
- Stick to one venue.

Other recommendations for improvement include

- allowing more food to be prepared by the Buddies;
- making South African food for the international students to taste; and
- having more diversity in food and games.

# 2019 first semester overall evaluation

After the success of the Wingman Programme in the first semester of 2018, the programme was repeated with the second cohort of participants in the second semester of 2018. Both cohorts of programme participants provided insightful feedback on evaluation surveys conducted to obtain information on how effective the programme was during the two semesters. Overall, both semester programmes were viewed as largely successful and the objectives of the Wingman Programme have mostly been attained. These results revealed that the international students' adjustment process in the UFS environment was much quicker and smoother as a result of the programme. The students felt a sense of belonging and appreciated the holistic support that was provided by their Wingmen.

Therefore, the programme was again offered in the first semester of 2019, taking into consideration the various recommendations for improvement made in 2018. Firstly, the programme has undergone a name change, as the term 'Wingman' was perceived to be gender biased and non-inclusive for today's society. The name was thus changed to 'Umoja', which is a Swahili term meaning 'unity and the spirit of togetherness'. This was deemed an appropriate name since it embodied the heart of the programme, which is to enhance the international and intercultural competencies of UFS students. As such, the Office for International Affairs, in collaboration with the Department of Student Affairs, launched the 2019 Umoja Buddy Programme (UBP) in February 2019. The programme pairs first-entering international students (Buddies) with senior students (Ambassadors), providing a warm, welcoming, friendly face, a helping hand, and a first UFS friendship that makes a world of difference for the new arrivals.

Secondly, the 2019 programme was opened up to all first-entry international students, with each of them automatically forming part of the programme and being allocated an Ambassador. As a result, more South African students were selected to be Ambassadors in the programme to accommodate the increase in international Buddies. These local students were required to apply to be part of the programme. A total of 45 students were selected to be Ambassadors, after which two training sessions were conducted with the successful candidates before the launch of the programme.

Moreover, there were 77 first-entry international students for the first semester of 2019, thus some of the Ambassadors had more than one Buddy allocated to them.

A further improvement to the programme was a training session provided for the Ambassadors, which focused on the university's systems in order to improve their knowledge of these systems at the UFS. The objective of this training was to equip the Ambassadors with skills to effectively assist the international students with processes they frequently struggled with. Apart from the additional training, more informal events with various activities were hosted throughout the first semester with all programme participants. These events were aimed at creating platforms for the Buddies and Ambassadors to integrate and socialise with other programme participants.

A final change made to the Umoja Buddy Programme for 2019 was that Ambassadors were divided into four groups, namely Community Engagement, Global Café, In-House Social, and First Generation. Each Ambassador chose a group to be a part of and based on the mandate of each group, they set their own goals, annual plan, and budget. The purpose of having these smaller groups of Ambassadors was to create a sense of community among them, where they could support each other and share their ideas and experiences. It provided an opportunity for Ambassadors to meet and interact with other Ambassadors, where they could assist one another in dealings with their Buddies and feel engaged in the programme, even in the event of having no response from an allocated Buddy.

To evaluate the success of the Umoja Buddy Programme for the first semester of 2019 and to recommend improvements for future implementation of the programme, two online evaluation surveys were conducted towards the end of the first semester. One survey was conducted with the international Buddies and the other with the Ambassadors. The response rate on the surveys was rather low, particularly for the cohort of Buddies, where only three participants completed the online evaluation survey. As a result, it was not possible to conduct data analysis for the Buddies, and therefore they are not reported on in this report. Possible reasons for the lack of response from the Buddies will, however, be put forward.

As such, this report provides feedback on the results obtained only from the participating Ambassadors, as well as a comparison between findings from the first semester of 2018 and the first semester of 2019. Furthermore, an overview of challenges experienced along with possible recommendations are outlined in this report.



## Findings from Semester 1: Ambassadors

To determine the effectiveness as well as the impact of the Umoja Buddy Programme, Ambassadors who took part in the programme for the first semester of 2019 were requested to provide feedback on an online evaluation survey. Feedback of this nature is essential to ensure that the programme meets the needs of all participants. Therefore, the purpose of this evaluation was to gauge the success of the programme, so that the Office for International Affairs can implement improvement strategies to ensure that they deliver high-quality services to the students.

### *Reasons for joining the Umoja Buddy Programme*

Firstly, participating Ambassadors were asked to explain why they volunteered as Ambassadors in the Umoja Buddy Programme. About half of the respondents (46%) indicated that they wanted to be part of the programme because they were interested in helping international students with their adjustment at the university. A few of these respondents expressed an inherent desire to help other people.

“I am a natural giver, so I like lending a hand where necessary.” Qualitative response from an Ambassador

“I volunteered to be an ambassador because I want to make people feel welcome around me and I want to give that comfort and ease to international students to never feel isolated and not at home. I want to give them a home away from home.” Qualitative response from an Ambassador



This section provides a discussion of the responses received from the Ambassadors in the study sample. This includes why the respondents became involved in the programme, their satisfaction levels with the various services provided by the programme coordinator, typical questions the respondents were asked by their Buddies, what the respondents liked about the programme, what they did not enjoy, and any recommendations the respondents had to help improve the programme. Of the 45 Ambassadors who were selected to participate in the Umoja Buddy Programme, 26 completed the online evaluation survey. This represented a response rate of 58%.

Furthermore, several participants acknowledged that they volunteered as Ambassadors because they wanted to establish new friendships with international students and for personal growth. Here, participants highlighted a desire to improve on interpersonal skills, communication skills, as well as the ability to engage in teamwork.

“To make lifelong friendships, better my communication skills and most of all to grow as a person.” Qualitative response from an Ambassador

Additional reasons that were less frequently mentioned, included a desire to engage with people from different backgrounds, to learn about other cultures, to meet new people, and to have a new experience. The Ambassadors' reasons for volunteering to be part of the Umoja Buddy Programme echo some of the objectives of the programme, including celebrating unity in diversity, building lifelong friendships, and promoting intercultural understanding.



## Logistics of the Umoja Buddy Programme

There were 77 first-entry international students for the first semester of 2019; therefore, some of the selected Ambassadors were allocated more than one Buddy. For the sample of 26 Ambassador respondents, half indicated that they were assigned two Buddies. Furthermore, eight respondents had only one Buddy, while four respondents had three Buddies. One of the respondents also indicated that more than three Buddies had been assigned to him/her. This finding is of interest, as it is unusual that some Ambassadors were assigned three or more Buddies while others only had one Buddy. Given the number of participating Buddies (n=77) and Ambassadors (n=45), it would have been expected that 32 of the Ambassadors be allocated two Buddies, whereas the remaining 13 Ambassadors be paired with one Buddy only.

Furthermore, after the Ambassadors had been notified that their applications were successful, they were provided with their Buddies' email addresses and were sent a template of an introduction email to send to their Buddies. In light of this, Ambassadors were motivated to start their conversations with their Buddies so that the international students could feel more at ease about entering a foreign environment, knowing that there was someone who would be able to assist them. It is therefore surprising that only 73% of the participating Ambassadors acknowledged that they were put into contact with their assigned Buddy/Buddies before arriving in South Africa.

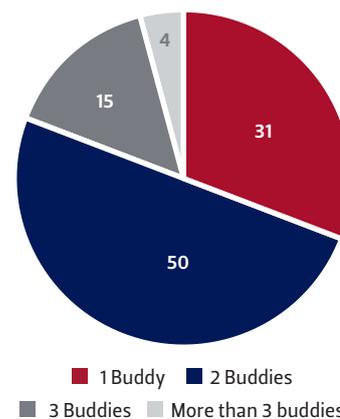


Figure 28: Number of Buddies assigned to Ambassadors

## Satisfaction with the Umoja Buddy Programme

Participating Ambassadors were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with seven statements about the services received from the programme coordinator, how the programme assisted with their knowledge of the university, as well as the improvement of their communication skills.

Overall, the respondents appeared to be very satisfied with the various aspects of the programme, as more than three-quarters of the participating Ambassadors agreed with six of the seven statements. The respondents were particularly satisfied with the support provided by the programme coordinator (86%) and with the accurate information provided on how to establish contact with the Buddies before they arrived in the country (92%).

Fewer participants (77%), however, agreed that they were provided with adequate time to make pre-arrival contact with their Buddies or to arrange to meet them before the commencement of the programme. This finding could shed some light on why only 73% of participating Ambassadors acknowledged being put into contact with their Buddies. It could perhaps be that the Ambassadors were not given sufficient time to contact their Buddies before they arrived in the country, and not that the Office for International Affairs did not provide contact details to Ambassadors. Some of the international students may already have arrived in South Africa before the Ambassadors were able to contact them and offer their assistance.

In this case, some of the international students might perhaps already have found their way around campus or met other people to assist them, which would have meant that they no longer required assistance from Ambassadors by the time they contacted them. This might also explain why only 50% of the participating Ambassadors reported that their Buddies seemed interested in having an Ambassador. Nevertheless, Ambassadors were generally satisfied with the Umoja Buddy Programme, pointing out that their communication skills and knowledge of the university had improved as a result of the training received and by being involved in the programme.





Figure 29: Ambassadors' satisfaction with the UBP

### Ambassador groups

Since there was a larger group of Ambassadors for 2019, it was decided to establish four Ambassador groups, each incorporating its own set of goals. These smaller groups were established to provide Ambassadors with a support system and a sense of community with other Ambassadors. The four groups were Community Engagement,

First Generation, Global Café, and In-House Social. Each of these Ambassador groups was represented in the evaluation. The survey respondents were fairly evenly divided between the first three groups, whereas there were only four respondents who formed part of the In-House Social group.

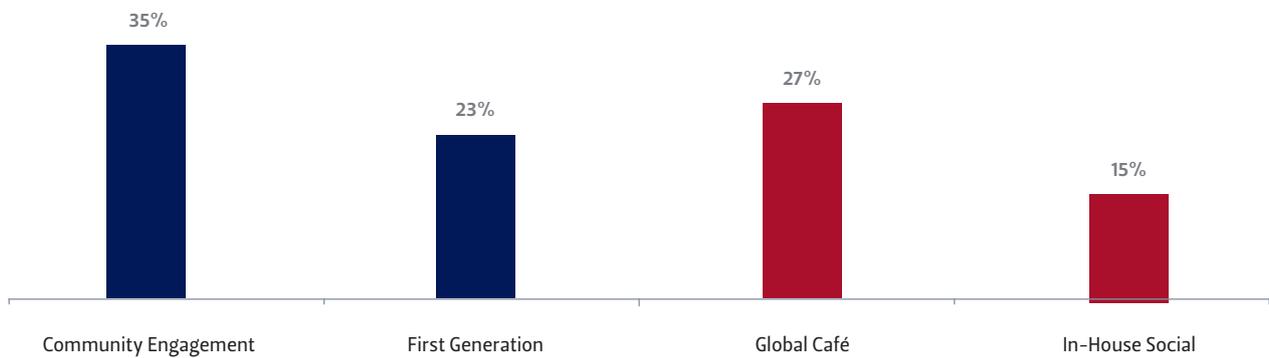


Figure 30: Ambassador groups

When asked if they found it helpful to be part of a smaller Ambassador group, the vast majority of respondents (89%) indicated that it was helpful. Qualitative responses from those participants who did find the groups helpful provided some insight as to why this was the case. As such, 83% of respondents listed various advantages of being part of an Ambassador group. The most frequently reported advantage is that the groups helped them with their team-building skills and the ability to work effectively in a group. Furthermore,

Ambassadors acknowledged that the groups fostered the building of friendships with other Ambassadors where they could share their problems and experiences. Mention was also made of it being easier to express yourself in a smaller group, that the group provided a support structure, and that it allowed them to meet and interact with new people.

Frequent mention was also made of how participating Ambassadors were able to experience personal growth as a result of the Ambassador groups. They acknowledged that they had developed management skills and improved interpersonal and communication skills.

“Being part of a smaller group meant we knew each other better and were able to share our experiences.” Qualitative response from an Ambassador

“The connection with others is unmatched in a manner that helped me aid my comfort zone loving self through uncomfortable situations. I enjoy teamwork and having a team taught me some fundamental lessons, particularly listening to learn and appreciating the background of other people’s ideas.”

Qualitative response from an Ambassador

“Team building was the first thing I had to develop to work well with my colleagues in the group. I’ve learnt how to communicate and understand well with group members and establish a great and effective relationship with all of them.”

Qualitative response from an Ambassador

There were, however, three respondents who indicated that they did not find the Ambassador groups to be helpful. The following reasons were listed for their dissatisfaction with the Ambassador groups:

- Nothing was done to engage Buddies with the community.
- Their ideas were disregarded.
- There was a decreased sense of responsibility for both Ambassadors and international students.
- Groups were perceived to have no specific mandates.
- Group members felt unimportant and did not know what was expected of them.

“Our group had no specific mandate. The coordinator should have had a plan B for us had her plan A failed. This also resulted in the members feeling unimportant or like an afterthought. Members were not sure as to what was expected from them, in turn, they distanced themselves from the whole thing.”

Qualitative response from an Ambassador

### *Typical questions asked by Buddies*

Participating Ambassadors were asked to list some of the typical questions they were asked by their Buddies. Most frequently reported by 58% of the sample, were questions about Bloemfontein in particular and South Africa in general. Here, several respondents indicated that Buddies asked safety and crime-related questions. Mention was also made of questions about local food and drink, the cost of goods, the different languages spoken in South Africa, things to do in Bloemfontein, and participation in sporting activities.

Several participants (35%) also listed typically asked questions that had to do with the university and campus. These most frequently included questions about where certain buildings and venues on

campus were. Also, the international Buddies had questions about registration, exams, and academic-related issues, and whether or not they needed to carry their passports with them at all times.

Furthermore, a few of the Ambassadors indicated that Buddies had programme-related questions. A couple of the Ambassadors were asked if they received payment for being Ambassadors. Mention was also made of questions about the purpose of the Umoja Buddy Programme and whether Ambassadors would be interested in visiting the Buddies’ countries.

### *Effectiveness of the programme for full-degree international students*

Some of the international students were registered for a full degree at the UFS, meaning that they would be at the university for a few years as opposed to just one semester. Programme coordinators wished to determine whether a programme of this nature was effective for interacting with full-degree international students. More than half (69%; n=18) of the participating Ambassadors responded that their assigned Buddy/ Buddies were full-degree international students. Of the 18 respondents who had full-degree Buddies, the vast majority acknowledged that the programme was effective for interacting with full-degree international students.

For those Ambassadors who indicated that a programme of this nature is effective for interacting with full-degree international students, it was emphasised that their Buddies would be at the

university for a longer period, allowing them more time to form natural friendships instead of having a forced connection. They echoed that they could build long-term relationships with the full-degree international students and also have more time to plan and participate in various events.

“That means that the relationship built with them will be long term. And I can help them with their growth as they complete their degree.”

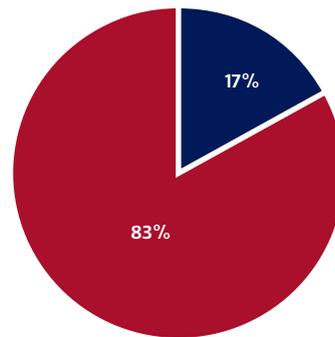
Qualitative response from an Ambassador

“The buddy is here for longer and one can plan more events. You get the opportunity to see your buddy more often throughout the year. One is not forced to plan dates/ activities within a short period.”

Qualitative response from an Ambassador

For the few participating Ambassadors who did not find the Umoja Buddy Programme effective for interacting with full-degree international students, a few reasons were highlighted in the qualitative responses. One such reason was that international students did their own thing and lost interest in the programme. Another reason was that the international students were already familiar with the area and therefore did not need much assistance from the Ambassadors.

“The full degree international student I was assigned was from Lesotho. They are somewhat familiar with the area and did not require much assistance. As such, they lost interest in the programme.”  
Qualitative response from an Ambassador



- UBP is NOT effective for interacting with full degree international students
- UBP is effective for interacting with full degree international students

Figure 31: Ambassadors' opinion of the UBP's effectiveness for interacting with full-degree international students

### Opinions of the Umoja Buddy Programme

When asked to indicate what they liked best about the programme, just over half of the Ambassadors (52%) highlighted the organised events and activities as most enjoyable. Many Ambassadors also applauded the structure of the programme as well as the programme coordinators. Frequent mention was also made of enjoying the opportunity to work within a team, to interact with culturally diverse students, and to build friendships and create networks.

“There were events planned by the office in case you and your buddy didn't have time to meet up. So, I liked the fact that these events allowed us to bond.”  
Qualitative response from an Ambassador

“Interacting with students from other countries and learning to view the world and our country from a different perspective.” Qualitative response from an Ambassador

“The UBP Coordinators are the best. Secondly, the kind of inclusive and diverse events hosted in the programme for both ambassador and International Students.”  
Qualitative response from an Ambassador

Less frequently highlighted in the qualitative feedback, yet still indicative of what Ambassadors enjoyed about the programme, was the support provided to them, the opportunity to meet new people, receiving helpful training, and being able to have a new experience. Overall, the Umoja Buddy Programme was largely viewed as enjoyable by the Ambassadors, meeting its objectives of fostering friendships and promoting intercultural experiences at the UFS.

However, seven of the respondents indicated that there were aspects of the programme that they did not enjoy. The following were highlighted as problematic:

- Lack of communication.
- Poor planning.
- Difficulty in planning events.
- Participants lost interest in the programme.
- Not everyone was equally invested in the programme.
- Not having an assigned Buddy.

The last remark is of interest, as one of the participating Ambassadors indicated not being assigned a Buddy. This is concerning, as all Ambassadors should have been allocated at least one Buddy. Nevertheless, a couple of suggestions were put forward by the participating Ambassadors to address these issues. Firstly, it was suggested that stricter rules be applied to the programme, specifically to the selection of Ambassadors. Furthermore, both Ambassadors and international students should understand that there are certain things that they should be held responsible for as part of the programme. A second suggestion was that only international students wishing to be part of the programme should be assigned to an Ambassador.

## Suggestions and recommendations

Participating Ambassadors were asked to provide any further suggestions for improving the Umoja Buddy Programme. Of those who responded, 65% had various suggestions about the logistical arrangements of the programme. Most frequently recommended was for better communication with international students. Mention was again made that the programme should be more exclusive and not open to all first-entry international students. Furthermore, it was suggested that programme events should be better planned well in advance and that the programme coordinator should ensure full participation in organised events. Additional suggestions included the following:

- International students need to be briefed about what is expected of them.
- Email event photos to participants.
- Host more events.

- The Office for International Affairs' website should be updated on events that are taking place.
- The Office for International Affairs should collaborate with other offices/faculties.
- Ambassadors' CVs should be checked.
- Ambassador duties should be explained in the application phase.
- Provide basic language courses for Buddies and Ambassadors.

Two additional suggestions were made regarding the Ambassador groups. Firstly, it was indicated that Ambassador groups require training on the purpose of the group. Secondly, it was recommended that the Office for International Affairs facilitate group meetings.

## Findings from Semester 1: Buddies

An online evaluation survey was sent to all the international students who formed part of the Umoja Buddy Programme as Buddies. This evaluation was designed to determine how effective the programme had been in assisting with their adjustment at the university and in the community. The programme aimed to enhance their study abroad experience and participants were requested to provide feedback on various aspects of the programme. These aspects included their satisfaction levels with the various services provided by the Ambassadors and the programme coordinator, typical questions the respondents asked the Ambassadors, what the respondents liked about the programme, as well as any recommendations that the respondents had to help improve the programme.

Unfortunately, the response rate from Buddies was particularly low, as only three responses were received to the evaluation survey. This small sample size meant that it was not possible to analyse the data received from the Buddies. As such, feedback on the Buddies' experience of the programme could not be provided for the first semester of 2019. A few reasons that might explain the lack of response from the Buddies became apparent from the feedback provided by participating Ambassadors.

Firstly, only 50% of the participating Ambassadors acknowledged that their Buddies seemed interested in having an Ambassador. This sentiment was again expressed in their qualitative feedback, where mention was made of the Buddies not being interested in

the programme or needing assistance from the Ambassadors. As a result, the Ambassadors also lost interest in the programme.

A second reason for the Buddies' disinterest might be as a result of not being contacted by the Ambassadors before they arrived in the country and at the university. If contact was only made after they had arrived, it is plausible that the international students had already found their way or met other people who assisted them with their adjustment. This would then have meant that they no longer required assistance from the Ambassadors.

In line with this, mention was also made of Buddies who come from some of South Africa's neighbouring countries and are already familiar with the area. In this case, these international students did not require any assistance from the programme or the Ambassadors, as they already felt comfortable enough to become acquainted on their own. Furthermore, there is a general perception that the international students preferred to do their own thing and therefore lost interest in the Umoja Buddy Programme.

It could therefore be recommended that, as important as it is to integrate students, there should be university functions aimed solely at international students. Moreover, international students should be allowed to indicate whether they wish to be involved in a programme of this nature. Thus, it should be more exclusive to include only those students who would appreciate being assisted by an Ambassador and who would benefit from the programme as a whole.

# Comparison of 2018 and 2019: Semester 1

## *Reasons for joining the Umoja Buddy Programme*

With the 2018 first-semester cohort of Wingmen, the majority of respondents acknowledged that they became involved in the programme because they too were international students and wanted to help others who found themselves in similar situations as when they first arrived. This was no longer the case for the 2019 first-semester cohort of Ambassadors, as the programme included more South African students as Ambassadors.

However, the 2019 Ambassadors frequently indicated that they volunteered as Ambassadors because they wanted to assist international students with their adjustment at the university. Reasons for joining the programme that were similar for both groups, included the desire to establish new friendships, to engage with culturally diverse students, and to meet new people.

## *Satisfaction with the Umoja Buddy Programme*

In terms of participants' satisfaction with the Umoja Buddy Programme, responses from the 2018 and 2019 first-semester cohorts were very similar. Wingmen from the 2018 cohort were, on average, very satisfied with all aspects of the programme, as more than 60% of the participants agreed to some extent that the programme delivered on its expectations. This was also true for the 2019 cohort of Ambassadors, as more than three-quarters of the participating Ambassadors agreed with six of the seven statements. Another similarity is that both groups of respondents were less satisfied with the provision of adequate time to make pre-arrival

contact with their Buddies or to arrange to meet them before the commencement of the programme.

There was, however, a discrepancy between the two groups regarding their Buddies seeming interested in having a Wingman/Ambassador. The 2018 cohort of Wingmen mostly agreed (83%) that their Buddies appeared to be interested in them and the programme. However, only half of the 2019 cohort of Ambassadors expressed the same sentiment. It would appear that the 2019 Buddies were less interested in the programme and/or being assigned to an Ambassador.

## *Typical questions asked by Buddies*

When asked to list some of the typical questions asked by Buddies, not much has changed from 2018 to 2019. Participating Wingmen and Ambassadors listed similar questions that were asked by their Buddies. These included questions about the UFS and the campus, with specific reference to academic queries. Both cohorts also frequently mentioned that Buddies would ask about the locations of

various buildings and venues on campus. Furthermore, both groups of Buddies were particularly concerned about safety and crime in the country in general and in Bloemfontein specifically. Additionally, mention was made of Buddies being interested in the South African culture as well as what activities they could participate in while they were studying in Bloemfontein.

## *Opinions of the Umoja Buddy Programme*

Both cohorts of respondents were very appreciative of the programme, in particular the events that were hosted. They stated that these organised events and activities were most enjoyable and provided them the opportunity to meet new people and to interact with other programme participants. In line with this, both the 2018 and 2019 groups of participants liked being part of a programme that fosters friendships, and which allows them to broaden their horizons, to grow personally, and to engage with new experiences.

The only difference between the two groups is that the 2019 cohort of Ambassadors was very complimentary towards the programme coordinators, whereas this was not mentioned by the 2018 Wingmen. The 2019 Ambassadors, however, were pleased with how the programme was structured and with the support they received from the coordinators. They also highlighted the opportunity to work in a team regarding the establishment of Ambassador groups. This is something that would not have been mentioned by the 2018 group of Wingmen, as it was only introduced in the first semester of 2019.

## *Suggestions and recommendations*

With the 2018 cohort of Wingmen, mention was made of having more meetings or opportunities to get to know each other, and making contact sooner to give more importance to the initial meeting and the need for early assistance after arriving in the country. This suggestion was accepted, as more events were hosted throughout the first semester of 2019, which were very well received by programme participants. The vast majority of 2019 Ambassadors

who acknowledged that they enjoyed the events the most, is indicative of this issue being successfully addressed. However, it would appear that there were still issues regarding making early contact with the international Buddies, as many of the 2019 Ambassadors stated that they were not provided with sufficient time to contact their Buddies before their arrival in South Africa.

Moreover, the 2018 Wingmen suggested that more opportunities be created for the Wingmen to meet and interact. They explained that it would be beneficial for participating Wingmen to meet before the arrival of the Buddies and to be able to support one another. The 2019

## **Conclusion**

As part of the University of the Free State's vision to create a sense of internationalisation at home, the Office for International Affairs launched a pilot Wingman Programme in 2018. This programme aimed to assist new international exchange students with their adjustment process at the university specifically, and in South Africa in general. As such, the programme was launched to connect international students with local students to foster meaningful friendships and to assist international students with their transition to the UFS environment.

Following the success of this programme in 2018, the Umoja Buddy Programme was launched at the beginning of 2019. The programme has undergone a name change, as the name 'Wingman' itself was perceived as gender biased and non-inclusive of today's society. The name 'Umoja' was introduced, which is a Swahili term meaning 'unity and the spirit of togetherness'. As such, the programme was launched to provide student support, well-being, and inclusivity to international exchange students at the UFS.

Several improvement strategies have been implemented for the 2019 Umoja Buddy Programme. One such change was that the 2019 programme was opened up to all first-entry international students, with each of them automatically forming part of the programme and being allocated an Ambassador. As a result, more South African students have been selected to be Ambassadors in the programme to accommodate the increase in international Buddies. The findings from the 2019 first semester evaluation, however, indicate that this change was probably unsuccessful, as many Ambassadors indicated that not all the Buddies seemed to be interested in the programme

Ambassadors experienced the benefits of this recommendation, as Ambassador groups were created for this purpose. This was found to be a successful change to the programme, as participating Ambassadors were mostly appreciative of being part of an Ambassador group, stating that being part of a team was most beneficial.

It was also recommended by the 2018 cohort of Wingmen that all international students be assigned a Wingman. This recommendation was put into practice for the first semester of 2019, as the programme was opened up to all first-entry international students coming to the UFS. However, this change was not well received by the 2019 cohort of Ambassadors, as they frequently stated that the programme should be more exclusive and not be open to all international students. Mention was made of the Buddies losing interest in the programme or not needing assistance from the Ambassadors. Therefore, it was further suggested that only those international students who express an interest in the programme should be assigned to an Ambassador.

or in having an Ambassador to assist them. This finding was echoed by the very poor response rate received from Buddies, meaning that an evaluation of their experience could not be carried out.

A further improvement to the programme was a training session provided for the Ambassadors, which focused on the university's systems in order to improve their knowledge of these systems at the UFS. This was well received by participating Ambassadors, as they acknowledged that the training equipped them with skills to effectively assist the international students. Apart from the additional training, more informal events with various activities were hosted throughout the first semester with all programme participants. These events were aimed at creating platforms for the Buddies and Ambassadors to integrate and socialise with other programme participants. The cohort of 2019 Ambassadors was very appreciative of this improvement, most frequently listing the events as what they enjoyed most about the programme.

A final change made to the Umoja Buddy Programme for 2019 was that Ambassadors were divided into four groups, namely Community Engagement, Global Café, In-House Social, and First Generation. The purpose of these smaller groups of Ambassadors was to create a sense of community among them, where they could support each other and share their ideas and experiences. The creation of Ambassador groups appears to have been successful, as many participating Ambassadors said it provided them with the opportunity to meet other Ambassadors, to work in a team, and to assist one another in dealing with their Buddies.

The feedback received from participating Ambassadors is indicative of the respondents' willingness and openness to the programme's goal of creating internationalisation at home. However, several

challenges were experienced. Recommendations for improving certain aspects of the programme should be considered for the implementation of future programmes of this nature.

## Challenges and Recommendations

One of the most salient challenges experienced by the 2019 first-semester cohort of Ambassadors, was the disinterest expressed by international Buddies. It was highlighted that Buddies did not appear to be interested in the programme, nor did they require the assistance of Ambassadors. Two possible explanations for the Buddies' disinterest became apparent in the evaluation feedback. Firstly, concerns were raised about not being provided sufficient time to contact the international students before they arrived in South Africa. In this regard, it is possible that if Buddies arrived in the country before Ambassadors contacted them, they may already have found their way or met other people to help them and to answer their questions. Therefore, they would not have been interested in the programme or needed assistance from the Ambassadors.

### **Recommendation:**

- *Make sure that Ambassadors make contact with their assigned Buddy/Buddies well in advance so that they would already have formed a connection before they arrived in the country.*

The second possible explanation for the Buddies' lack of interest is that international students from neighbouring countries were already familiar with the area and did not need much assistance from Ambassadors. Along with this, the Buddies would have lost interest in the programme, preferring to do their own thing.

### **Recommendation:**

- *Allow international students to indicate whether or not they want to be involved in the programme.*

A further concern is the uneven distribution of assigned Buddies to Ambassadors. There were 77 Buddies and 45 selected Ambassadors. This means that 32 of the Ambassadors should have been allocated two Buddies each, while the remaining 13 Ambassadors would have been paired with one Buddy. This, however, was not the case as several participating Ambassadors indicated that they had three or more assigned Buddies. This distribution is unfair, especially considering that one of the respondents indicated that no Buddy was assigned to him/ her.

### **Recommendation:**

- *Divide the number of participating Buddies more evenly among the number of participating Ambassadors.*

Although the Ambassador groups were largely viewed as beneficial, there were a few of the respondents who did not find these groups to be helpful. In their qualitative feedback, Ambassadors stated that the groups did nothing to engage the Buddies with the community and that their ideas were disregarded by other group members. Furthermore, it was mentioned that the groups did not have specific mandates and that group members felt unimportant, not knowing what was expected of them.

### **Recommendations:**

- *Provide additional training on the purpose of the Ambassador groups.*
- *The Office for International Affairs should facilitate Ambassador group meetings.*

Furthermore, various challenges were experienced with regard to the logistical arrangements of the programme in general. For example, mention was made of poor planning, difficulty in planning events, and that not everyone participated equally in the programme and the organised events.

- *Recommendation: Events need to be better planned well in advance and programme coordinators should ensure full participation in organised events.*

Moreover, concern was raised about both Buddies and Ambassadors not having a sense of responsibility in the programme. This further contributes to loss of interest in the programme.

### **Recommendations:**

- *Stricter rules should be applied to the programme, specifically to the selection of Ambassadors.*
- *Both Ambassadors and international students should understand that there are certain things they are held responsible for as part of the programme.*
- *There needs to be better communication with the international students, where they are briefed on what is expected of them.*

# 2019 Second semester events report

The Office for International Affairs hosted a welcome function for the second-semester cohort of incoming exchange students, along with the volunteering Ambassadors. This function was held to introduce the Buddies (exchange students) to their Ambassadors, who would aid in their transition to the university environment. The exchange students were also provided with the necessary information to ensure that they were orientated with student life and the UFS community at large.

Students were requested to complete an online evaluation survey of the event, encouraging them to provide feedback that would aid the improvement of the event's logistics and content. From the 25 students who completed the survey, it was apparent that the event was successful, as all participating students indicated that they were satisfied with the welcome function. Additionally, all of the respondents agreed that the event and speeches gave them a better idea of both the importance of their role in the programme and the strategic impact of the programme. Furthermore, the concept of integration was highlighted throughout the participants' feedback. Mention was made of the importance of integration and an appreciation thereof, as well as a need for more activities aimed at integrating the Buddies and Ambassadors. This is something that should be taken into consideration when planning future events of this nature.

The Office for International Affairs also conducted an evaluation of the experiences of inbound mobility students, of which 20 students participated in the survey. Participating exchange students were from Germany, Austria, France, the Netherlands, and Spain. These students most frequently reported that they chose to be an exchange student at the UFS as they were referred by someone who had previously studied at the university. This is testament to the positive experience that international exchange students have had at the UFS, as they recommended the experience to peers in their home countries. Furthermore, exchange students acknowledged that they had a desire to learn about the culture and people in South Africa. Mention was also made of wanting to meet new people, to explore South Africa, and to learn English or a foreign language.

Impressively, all 20 participating exchange students acknowledged that they found the Office for International Affairs helpful while studying at the UFS. Specifically, the students mentioned that the support provided by the office with regard to the Umoja Buddy Programme and its activities assisted with their transition to the local community. Even though this is evidence of the success of the programme, several concerns have been raised regarding the provision of useful information, especially about visa applications. Most of the participants found the visa application to be difficult and time consuming, and the South African embassy/consulate to be unpleasant and a poor representation of the country. A useful suggestion was made that the UFS should assist with the visa application process by providing the necessary documentation.

Finally, the Office for International Affairs conducted a post-evaluation on the experiences of inbound mobility students towards the end of the second semester of 2019. Feedback was received from nine participating exchange students, which provided some insight into their study-abroad experience, as well as their experience with the Office for International Affairs and the Umoja Buddy Programme. Their feedback was very positive regarding the support and services received from the Office for International Affairs and their experience of the South African people.

However, a few issues were raised with regard to the academic sphere of the university. Exchange students frequently reported that more information should have been provided before the commencement of classes in terms of the academic systems at the university and about module choices that would be of interest to them. Although the students were mostly complimentary of lecturers and listed several modules that they liked, one module in particular (Performance Management) was reported by several participants as unenjoyable. The reason being that students experienced issues with the lecturer for this module.

Nevertheless, the exchange students were exceptionally satisfied with the support and assistance provided by the Umoja Buddy Programme Ambassadors, and that their initial expectations of studying abroad had been met by the UFS. They were excited about their new cultural experience and being able to meet South African people who were welcoming, friendly, and helpful. Therefore, it can be concluded that the second-semester cohort of exchange students found the experience to be most enjoyable and beneficial and that the services provided by the Office for International Affairs were appreciated.

## Welcome Function

On 15 July 2019, the Office for International Affairs hosted a welcome function for the second-semester cohort of incoming exchange students (Buddies), along with the volunteering Ambassadors. This function was held to welcome the incoming exchange students to the UFS, Bloemfontein, and South Africa. During the event, Buddies were introduced to their Ambassadors in the Umoja Buddy Programme and were provided with the necessary information to ensure their smooth transition and integration into the student life and the UFS community at large.

Although the key element of this function was to welcome the incoming exchange students and to integrate them with their fellow students, it was also a successful platform for delivering an array of important information. This included information related to housing and residence, rules and regulations, home institution and UFS administrative documentation, academic services, student life, as well as the Office for International Affairs' framework and upcoming functions. At the end of the function, students were requested to complete an online evaluation survey of the event, encouraging them to provide feedback that would aid in improving the logistics and content of the event.

A total of 25 students attended the welcome function and completed the survey, 10 of whom were Ambassadors and 15 were Buddies. These participating students were all to some extent satisfied, as none of the participants indicated dissatisfaction with the event (Figure 32). Furthermore, all of the participants agreed that the event was a good platform to meet and get to know their Ambassador/Buddy, whereas only one participant did not find the event to be a good platform to meet and spend time with other Ambassadors and Buddies. Additionally, all of the respondents agreed that the event and speeches gave them a better idea of both the importance of their role in the programme and the strategic impact of the programme.

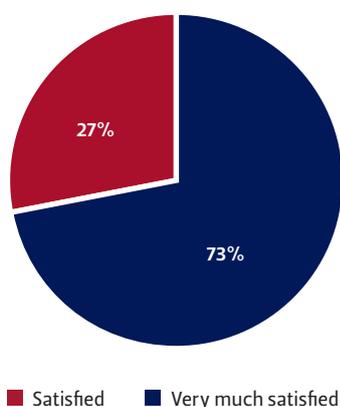


Figure 32: Level of satisfaction with welcome function



When asked to list their key takeaways from the event, the most frequently mentioned aspect was the integration of Buddies and Ambassadors. Participants explained that they enjoyed the opportunity to meet and interact with other people from different countries. Some of the responses also echoed the programme objectives relating to integration.

“Integration is an important factor in the programme.”  
Qualitative response from a Buddy

Frequent mention was also made that the event as a whole was a great experience and that they enjoyed learning something new as well as learning from one another. There was also a keen interest in cultural diversity and an appreciation for the South African people and their culture. Participating Buddies acknowledged that the local people they encountered were very helpful and friendly.

Participating students were also asked if any activities could have been performed that would have had a more significant impact. More than half of the respondents said that there were none; however, eight of the respondents listed several activities or suggestions for future events of this nature. Three of the participants stated that there should have been more activities aimed at integrating the Buddies and Ambassadors. Furthermore, mention was made of having some of the Buddies talk about their home countries, having a more organised way of paying, academic advice for Buddies, as well as general information such as how to become involved in sports on campus.

In terms of the logistics of the welcome function, more than half of the participants were to some extent satisfied with all aspects, except for the welcome kit (Figure 33). Only 44% of participants indicated satisfaction with the welcome kit. Nevertheless, the majority of participants (64%) were equally satisfied with the welcome activity, the venue, as well as the activities that took place during the event. In their qualitative feedback, frequent mention was made of the event as a good experience. Compliments were made about the transport, food, venue, and the icebreakers performed with participants.

“Everything was on point and well prepared.”  
Qualitative response from an Ambassador  
“Good idea with icebreakers, great food”  
Qualitative response from a Buddy

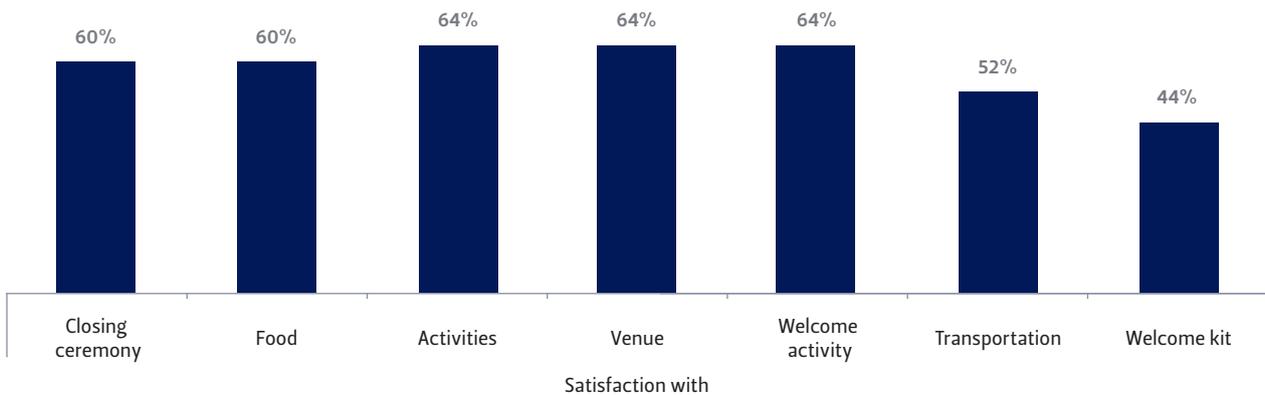


Figure 33: Satisfaction with logistics of welcome function

Participants were also asked to rate the relevance of the various sessions that took place during the welcoming function. All sessions were most frequently rated as relevant or very relevant by the vast majority of participants (Table 2). The sessions that stood out as very relevant by more than 60% of the sample, included speeches by Zenzele Mdletshe and Florry, and the activities run by the master of ceremonies, Bulelwa Moikwatlhai. Furthermore, an impressive 92% of participants indicated that they were to some extent satisfied with the overall session content, both presented and pre-read material (Figure 34). None of the participants indicated dissatisfaction with the session content, whereas only 8% had a neutral expression towards the speeches and activities that took place at the welcoming function.

In their qualitative feedback, participants echoed their satisfaction by stating that the function met all of their expectations and that they enjoyed the event. One of the participating Ambassadors also made a suggestion to have a session on learning common phrases in different foreign languages.

The welcome function was found to be most enjoyable by the majority of participants, as all but one participant indicated that they would like to see more events of this kind during the semester. It was acknowledged that the event was well planned and that it provided important information for both the Buddies and the Ambassadors.

“The event was fruitful, and had very important information for both ambassadors and buddies.”  
Qualitative response from an Ambassador

| Sessions                                  | Not relevant | Relevant | Very relevant |
|---|--------------|----------|---------------|
| Activities run by MC: Bulelwa Moikwatlhai | 4%           | 24%      | 72%           |
| Speech by Zenzele Mdletshe                | 0%           | 36%      | 64%           |
| Speech by Bonolo Lulu Makhalemele         | 0%           | 44%      | 56%           |
| Speech by Sonya                           | 4%           | 44%      | 52%           |
| Activity by Nceba                         | 4%           | 44%      | 52%           |
| Activity by Linda                         | 4%           | 40%      | 56%           |
| Speech by Florry                          | 0%           | 32%      | 68%           |

Table 2: Relevance of sessions at the welcome function

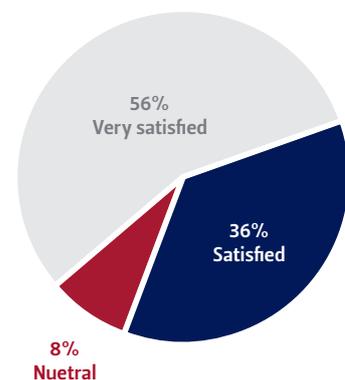


Figure 34: Satisfaction with session content at the welcome function.

## Inbound Student Mobility

The Office for International Affairs conducted an evaluation of the experiences of inbound mobility students, of which 20 students participated in the survey. Half of these students were from Germany, whereas the rest were divided between the home countries of Austria, France, the Netherlands, and Spain (Table 3). The majority of participants were female (75%) and between the ages of 18 and 25 years (85%). Almost three-quarters of the participants were at the university as undergraduate students (70%), while 30% were enrolled as postgraduate students.

Participants were asked to indicate why they chose to be an exchange student at the UFS. Just under half of the participants acknowledged that they had been referred by someone who had studied at the university. Furthermore, 40% of the exchange students indicated that they had been referred by their home institution's international affairs office (Figure 35).

|   | Home country | Percentage |
|---|--------------|------------|
|  | Austria      | 10%        |
|  | France       | 10%        |
|  | Germany      | 50%        |
|  | Netherlands  | 25%        |
|  | Spain        | 5%         |

Table 3: Participants' home countries

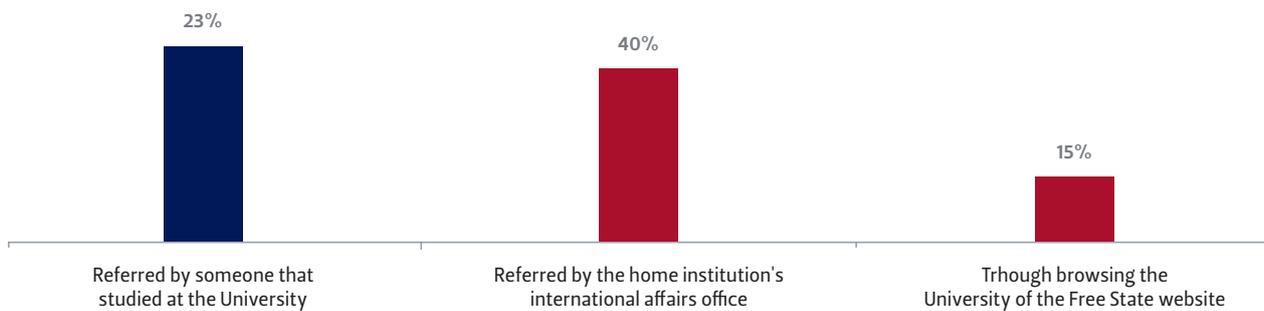


Figure 35: Reasons for choosing to be an exchange student at the UFS

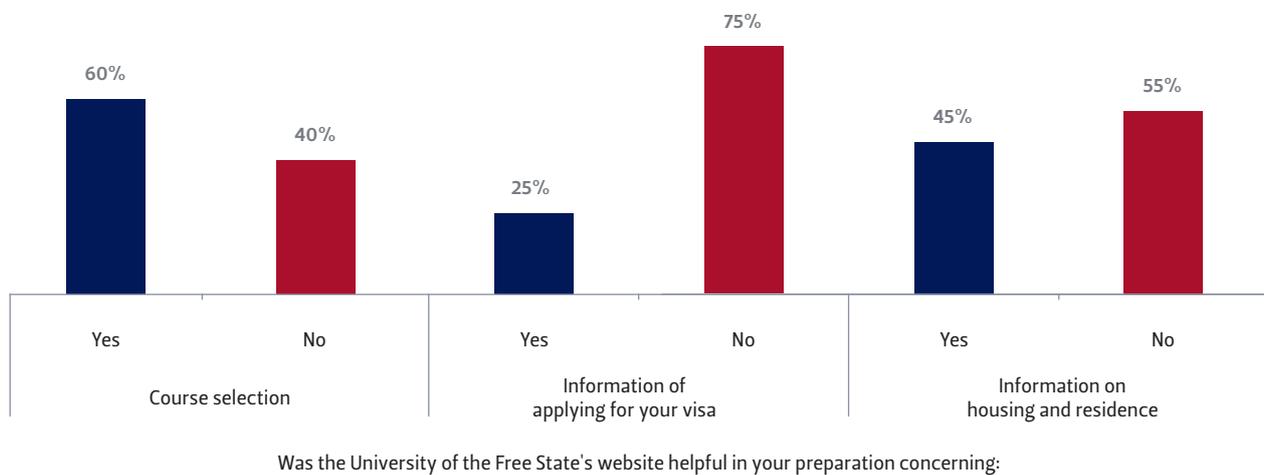


Figure 36: Helpfulness of the UFS website

Furthermore, participating exchange students were asked whether the university's website had been helpful in their preparations concerning course selection, information for visa applications, and information on housing and residence. Just over half of the participants found the website helpful for course selection; however, only a quarter were able to find information that was helpful for their visa applications. Moreover, just under half found the website helpful in terms of providing housing and residence information (Figure 36).

A further concern was that about half of the participants acknowledged dissatisfaction regarding their experience with the South African embassy/consulate, stating that the staff were mostly unfriendly and not helpful. They explained that they found the embassy to be a poor representation of South Africa and that the process of obtaining a visa was very stressful. It was further mentioned that it was a difficult process that required a very long waiting period. A useful suggestion was made that the UFS should assist with the visa application process by providing the necessary documentation.

Even though the process was long and difficult, three-quarters of the participants indicated that the South African embassy/consulate did communicate all the necessary information in time. However, for some, visas only arrived hours before having to board a flight.

"The experience was bad! I waited a lot of time during many days in the consulate and my visa has been delivered to me 4 hours before my flight..."

Qualitative response from an exchange student

The vast majority of exchange students acknowledged that the embassy/consulate could have delivered better service in general, but with the following specifications:

- Friendlier/more professional service
- Adhering to visa application guidelines
- Clearer instructions/guidelines
- Quicker process
- Provision for appointments
- Better communication

Participating exchange students were also asked about the turnaround time from the Office for International Affairs at the UFS in responding to their enquiries. Most of the students indicated that it was either average or good, with only one participant stating that it was poor (Figure 37). Furthermore, eight of the 20 students indicated that there was information that the Office for International Affairs should have communicated to them beforehand. As such, students would have liked the office to have provided better communication with regard to the housing situation, arrival times, academic courses, their period of stay, as well as fees that needed to be paid. Some recommendations were also made. Firstly, it was suggested that information be provided to them on their first

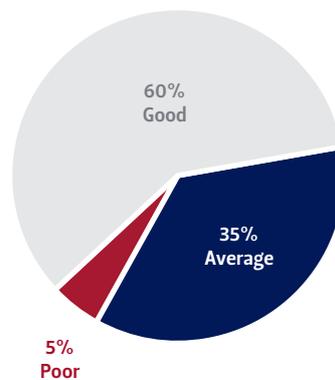


Figure 37: Turnaround time for responding to enquiries

day (day of arrival) or at least on registration day, so that students could familiarise themselves with the university's system and processes. Secondly, it was recommended that international students be mixed with local students in the residences. This would aid the development of integration and fostering friendships. It would also be beneficial for the international students, as they would have local students in their residences who could help them with their adjustment at the university.

The exchange students were also asked what their initial expectations were of studying abroad. Half of the participants acknowledged a desire to learn about the culture and people in South Africa. Several others made mention of meeting new people, exploring South Africa, and learning English or a foreign language. It was also evident from their qualitative responses that many students were excited about having a new experience and gaining a new perspective of an unfamiliar country.

"I expected to experience a different culture and study system. I wanted to meet local people and experience my studies in a completely different context."

Qualitative response from an exchange student

Although the majority of participants indicated that their expectations were met, a couple of exchange students stated that their expectations were not met. They expected that they would have more independence and freedom to move around, and that they would be able to do another academic module while studying at the UFS.

Participating exchange students were asked to list their top three reasons for studying abroad. As a first reason, participants mostly acknowledged a desire to live and make acquaintances in South Africa (35%), a desire to learn more about South Africa (20%), and a desire to interact with local people and learn more about the customs and traditions of South Africa (15%). Secondly, a desire to interact with local people and learn more about the customs and traditions of South Africa was again selected by 30% of participants, whereas 20% both had a desire to learn more about South Africa and a desire to travel within and around South Africa. Thirdly, 30%

of participants had a desire to develop their perspective on South Africa, 20% had a desire to interact with local people and learn more about the customs and traditions of South Africa, and 15% had a desire to gain insight into the cultural diversity of South Africa. Based on these findings, the top three reasons for studying abroad are the following:

1. Desire to interact with local people and learn more about the customs and traditions of South Africa.
2. Desire to learn more about South Africa.
3. Desire to live and make acquaintances in South Africa.

## Post-Evaluation

At the end of the second semester of 2019, the Office for International Affairs conducted a post-evaluation on the experiences of inbound mobility students. Sixteen exchange students formed part of the Umoja Buddy Programme for the second semester of 2019; however, feedback was received from only nine students. The purpose of this evaluation was to gain some insight into the exchange students' study-abroad experience, as well as their experience with the Office for International Affairs and the Umoja Buddy Programme.

The nine participating students were from five different countries, namely Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain. They were between the ages of 19 and 38, and fairly evenly divided between male (n=4) and female (n=5) students. Most of the exchange students (n=7) were studying as undergraduate students, whereas two of the participating students were completing postgraduate modules at the UFS. The faculty most represented in the second-semester cohort of exchange students was the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, with five students. The Faculty of the Humanities and the Faculty of Education each had one participating exchange student.

When asked about their experience with the Office for International Affairs, all of the participating exchange students acknowledged that they felt comfortable going to the office to ask for assistance. Furthermore, all of the participants reported that the staff members were either very or extremely friendly. This positive sentiment was further elaborated on when all of the participating exchange students reported that the staff members were helpful to some extent. Impressively, six of the nine students said that they would

Impressively, all 20 participating exchange students acknowledged that they found the Office for International Affairs to be helpful while studying at the UFS. Specifically, the students mentioned that the support provided by the office regarding the Umoja Buddy Programme and its activities assisted with their transition to the local community. The Ambassadors and the welcome function were also acknowledged for aiding in their transition.

 "OIA organised an event and set up a really nice Buddy Programme which is really helpful." Qualitative response from an exchange student

However, one of the respondents stated that the Office for International Affairs made no real effort to assist with their transition to the local community. The reason for this, as stated by the exchange student, was that the programme did not allow for interactions with local people and places. Instead, exchange students were grouped together and only given opportunities to interact with each other, not with local students. It was also stated that the international exchange students would have liked to visit places in and around Bloemfontein, and not be confined to campus.

rate their overall experience with the services provided by the Office for International Affairs as excellent. The remaining three students rated their experience of the services as good and very good.

Regarding their adjustment in the academic sphere of the university, participating students were asked how much information they received to support a smooth transition before the commencement of classes. Only one student indicated receiving all of the necessary information, whereas others received most or only some of the information. Moreover, mixed responses were received from students regarding their opinions on the exchange programme modules (Figure 38). The majority of students did, however, have more positive experiences of the modules and listed several modules as their favourites. These included digital marketing, introduction to individual differences, relationship marketing, and political ideologies. Participating exchange students indicated that they enjoyed these modules because of the lecturers, because they found the content interesting, and because it was useful for their internship.

 "Thank you for everything! The semester abroad has been a seamless experience from an organisational standpoint. The excellent service has helped everyone tremendously, especially at the beginning of the semester." Qualitative response from an exchange student

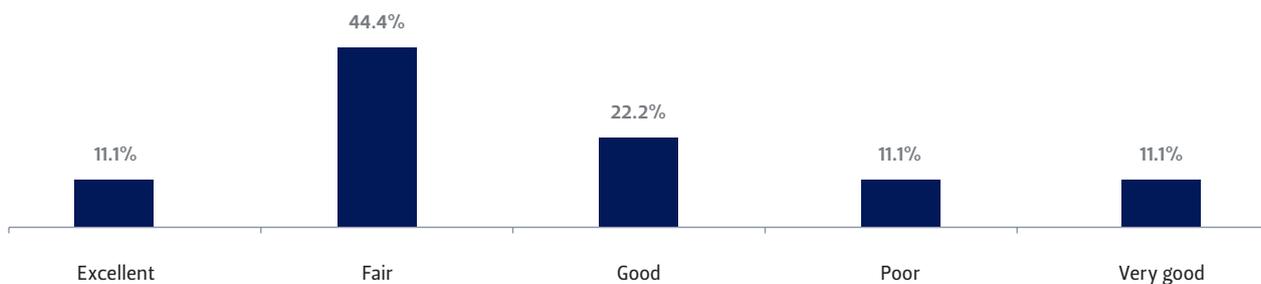


Figure 38: Exchange students' opinions of the exchange programme modules

In order to compare the classes presented at the UFS with those of their home universities, exchange students were asked about any differences. All but one student indicated that there were several differences. The participating exchange students most frequently acknowledged that there were more tests and assignments and a greater workload at the UFS. However, all of the participants reported that the workload was either somewhat or very manageable. Furthermore, students found that the South African lecturers at the UFS spend more time to work through the module content and that the class sizes (i.e. number of students in a class) are particularly larger than their home institutions. Finally, they also reported that there is a different approach to covering the module content, that lecturers more frequently involved students in discussions during the classes, and that the classes are conducted in two languages (English and Afrikaans).

“Definitely more workload during the semester and more tests, assignments, etc. Lecturers are as far as I experienced it slower in going through the lecture content and involve students more during classes.”  
Qualitative response from an exchange student

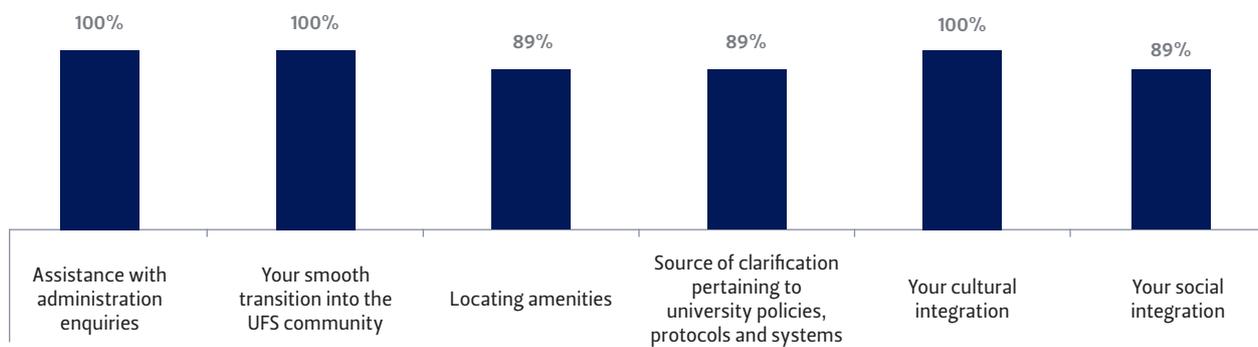
It did become apparent, however, that the exchange students required more information regarding the academic systems at the UFS, as well as descriptions of modules to assist with their selection of academic modules.

“I would recommend giving incoming students more information about the academic system at UFS. Furthermore, would it be helpful to inform about module contents and which courses can be picked and which not.”  
Qualitative response from an exchange student

“Please provide module descriptions in collaboration with the faculty to ease the process of module choices.”  
Qualitative response from an exchange student

Nevertheless, in terms of the exchange students' level of satisfaction with their Umoja Buddy Programme Ambassadors, exceptional ratings were received across the board (Figure 39). All of the participating exchange students were to some extent satisfied with their Ambassadors' assistance with administrative enquiries, with being a source of clarification about university policies, protocols and systems, and with their cultural integration.

In terms of their study-abroad experience, all of the participating exchange students acknowledged that their initial expectations had been met. Moreover, all nine participating students rated their overall study-abroad experience as good (11%), very good (33%), and excellent (56%). In their qualitative responses about what they liked most about their study-abroad experience, students most frequently reported the opportunity to experience a new culture and that the South African people are friendly and helpful. They



Satisfaction with Umoja Buddy Programme Ambassadors' assistance with:

Figure 39: Exchange students' satisfaction with UBP Ambassadors' assistance

also mentioned that it was a great experience to meet new people and to make new friends. Mention was also made of having a new experience in general, living in a different country, self-development, and the ability to travel.

“The openness and friendliness of South African people. During my short time here, I made a lot of friends, that will hopefully continue in the future.” – Qualitative response from an exchange student

“It was a unique experience to study at the UFS in Bloemfontein, both socially as well as academically. I think I could develop myself by being open and curious and interacting with diverse people. I learned a lot about myself, South Africa and social and cultural aspects.” Qualitative response from an exchange student

In contrast, students most frequently reported that they disliked certain academic modules, specifically Performance Management, during their study-abroad experience. This was as a result of issues experienced with the lecturer. Furthermore, it was mentioned that there is a divisive culture on the Bloemfontein Campus and that there is not much to do in Bloemfontein. A suggestion was again made to provide module descriptions before having to select modules, to assist exchange students with the selection of modules that would be of interest to them.

“The beginning was quite tough as we had some issues with the module selection. It would have helped to have module and course descriptions prior to coming to the UFS to make the selection easier and avoid misunderstandings.” Qualitative response from an exchange student

The second-semester cohort of exchange students was also asked if they thought that the UFS’s academic environment promotes diversity from a social and cultural perspective. The majority of participants (78%) reported that it does promote diversity from both a social and cultural perspective (Figure 40). One of the students emphasised that there are students at the university with vastly different backgrounds and that the campus is rich in different spoken languages.

With all of the feedback in mind, it is encouraging to note that all nine participating exchange students said that they would recommend the UFS to other prospective students. It was further recommended that incoming exchange students should be open-minded and should talk to the people as they are friendly and helpful. This was again a great testament to the South African people, as it was noted by an exchange student that the people in South Africa would make their stay even more worthwhile. As such, despite a few issues that were raised in their post-hosting evaluation, it can be concluded that the second-semester cohort of exchange students found the experience to be most enjoyable and beneficial and that the services provided by the Office for International Affairs were appreciated.

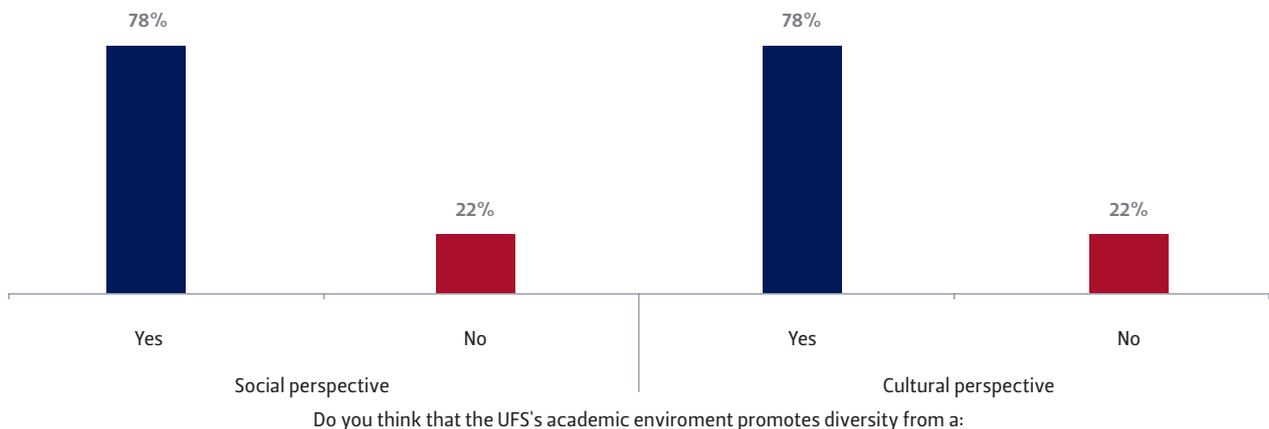


Figure 40: Exchange students' opinions of the UFS promoting diversity

## Conclusion

The Umoja Buddy Programme was launched at the beginning of 2019, following the success of the pilot Wingman Programme in 2018. As a result of the success of the programme in 2018, it was rolled out to all first-entry international students in 2019. However, after an evaluation of the programme at the end of the first semester, it was found that many of the international students were neither interested in the programme, nor did they require assistance in their transition to the university's environment. Therefore, it was decided that only those incoming exchange students and international students who wished to be part of the programme would be assisted, instead of automatically forming part of the programme.

As the Umoja Buddy Programme seeks to ensure the smooth transition and integration of international students into the student life at the University of the Free State by helping them to integrate into the campus and local communities, a welcome function was hosted in July 2019 by the Office for International Affairs to provide the second-semester cohort of exchange students with the necessary information to ensure this. Moreover, the programme aims to connect international and local students through meaningful lifelong friendships and to foster their academic, social, and cultural integration at the university. Therefore, each international exchange student was paired with a volunteering Ambassador who would aid them in this process.

During the second semester of 2019, participating Buddies and Ambassadors were requested to complete three evaluation surveys. Firstly, the second-semester cohort provided feedback on the welcome function, highlighting that the event was largely successful and effective in meeting its objectives. Secondly, the international exchange students completed an inbound student mobility survey regarding their reasons for choosing to be exchange students at the UFS and their experience thereof. Thirdly, a post-evaluation survey was conducted with the second-semester cohort of exchange students to gain some insight into their study-abroad experience, as well as their experience with the Office for International Affairs and the Umoja Buddy Programme.

The feedback from these three sets of evaluations demonstrated a general success of the Umoja Buddy Programme, and that the services being provided by the Office for International Affairs are both appropriate and necessary. The exchange students found their study-abroad experience at the UFS to be most enjoyable, stating that they would recommend this institution to other prospective exchange students. It was highlighted that the services and support provided by both the Office for International Affairs and the Umoja Buddy Programme Ambassadors aided in their transition to the university's culture and environment, and that the South African people made the experience even more worthwhile. Thus, despite a few concerns that would need to be addressed in future planning of programmes and events that deal with international students, it can be concluded that the endeavours for the second semester of 2019 were largely successful.

## Overall Recommendations

### Welcome Function

The following recommendations should be taken into consideration when planning future events of this nature:

- Host the event as soon as all exchange and local students have arrived on campus for the second semester. This will ensure that meaningful friendships are initiated early in the semester.
- Plan more activities aimed at integrating
  - the Buddies and Ambassadors.
  - Allow some of the Buddies to speak about their home countries during the event.
  - Provide more information about academic advice.
  - Have a session on learning common phrases in different foreign languages.

## Inbound Student Mobility

The following recommendations have been made to better assist the international exchange students:

- The website needs to be more helpful in providing information to exchange students regarding visa applications and housing and residences.
- The UFS should assist with the visa application process by providing the necessary documentation.
- Better service is needed from the South African embassy/consulate.
- The Office for International Affairs should provide better communication before arrival.
- Provide information on the first day/registration day.
- Mix international students with local students in residences.
- Allow for students to interact with locals and visit places in and around Bloemfontein.

## Post-Evaluation

The following recommendations have been made with regard to academic information that needs to be provided to students before the commencement of classes:

- Provide more information on the academic systems at the UFS to support a smooth transition to the university.
- Provide module descriptions to ease the process of module choices.

## Conclusion

The Umoja Buddy Programme was launched at the beginning of 2019, following the success of the pilot Wingman Programme in 2018. The programme has undergone a name change, as the name 'Wingman' itself was perceived as gender biased and non-inclusive of today's society. The name 'Umoja' was introduced, which is a Swahili term meaning 'unity and the spirit of togetherness'. The programme was developed to provide student support, well-being, and inclusivity to international exchange students at the UFS.

Furthermore, the Umoja Buddy Programme aimed to ensure the smooth transition and integration of international students into the student life at the UFS by helping them to integrate into the campus and local communities. Moreover, the programme aimed to connect international and local students through meaningful lifelong friendships and to foster their academic, social, and cultural integration at the university. In essence, the programme adopted the university's vision whereby every student will in the future have an international experience during their studies through internationalisation at home.

Over the past two years, the success and effectiveness of the programme have been evaluated at the end of each semester, with several evaluations of hosted events conducted throughout the semesters. Broadly speaking, the programme has received very positive feedback from programme participants, and it can be concluded that it has succeeded in meeting its specific objectives. That said, it has also become apparent that there is still room for improvement, as various concerns have been raised that would need to be addressed in future planning of a programme of this nature.

Nevertheless, the programme organisers are on the right track, having launched a very successful programme that has been largely impactful for both international and local students at the UFS. It is envisaged that, should the various recommendations be taken into consideration, there is no doubt that the services provided by this programme and the Office for International Affairs as a whole, are sufficient in supporting international students' adjustment at the university and the community at large.







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