



SUPPORT SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

A STUDY ON STUDENTS' NEEDS AND SERVICE DELIVERY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between December 2017 and January 2018, AMSSA conducted research with post-secondary international students, and with staff from service provider organizations (SPOs) and post-secondary institutions (PSIs) who work with international students. The objective of the study was to identify the services international students use and require, understand their experience seeking support services, and identify issues related to service delivery. Below is a summary of the research findings.

1. Support Service Needs: There are seven types of support services that international students access: **a) Orientation support**, including information about their campus and city, and support finding off-campus housing; **b) Support with documents**, such as study permits, work permits, immigration applications, taxes, and medical insurance; **c) Career and employment support**, including local job market orientation, career counseling, support with resumes, cover letters, and interview skills, and networking or volunteer opportunities; **d) Social, cultural, and emotional support**, including counseling services, orientation to Canadian culture, and building community connection; **e) Financial and material support**, including financial aid, and support accessing basic necessities such as food and clothing; **f) Legal and Crisis support**, including education on workplace and tenancy rights and support in the event of violations; and finally, **g) Support for spouses and dependents**.

2. Barriers to Access and Gaps in Services: The most-cited barrier to accessing services was a *lack of awareness of available supports*. Many students are unfamiliar with SPO services, unclear about which services they are eligible for with a temporary resident status, and/or forget about campus services they were introduced during campus orientation. *Culture barriers and social stigma* can also deter students from seeking support services, particularly for mental health. *Lack of multilingual mental health services* may also hamper accessibility. A *lack of clarity around confidentiality and disclosure policies* lead some students to fear that seeking support services may affect their current or future immigration status. Finally, *geographic distance and scheduling conflicts* can be a barrier, particularly for students living off-campus and/or who work during regular daytime service hours.

The research also found a need for more support services for: **a) Financial and material aid** for students facing unexpected financial crises; **b) Support finding off-campus housing**, especially in communities facing low rental vacancy rates and affordability crises; and **c) Career and employment services**, to address the unique barriers international students face in finding employment.

3. Trends in Service Delivery: PSIs are typically post-secondary international students' primary source for support services, while SPOs tend to be a tertiary source of support. Students are equally or more likely to seek support from other sources (friends, family, online research, social media, or paid services) than from SPOs. There are areas where SPOs offer complementary services to PSIs: **a) Post-graduation support** to supplement limited alumni services; **b) Support for spouses and dependents;** **c) Specialized and multi-lingual services;** **d) Opportunities to establish broader social or career connections** in the community; **e) Services at more convenient times or locations;** and **f) Off-campus alternatives** for students who feel uncomfortable seeking support services from their institution.

The degree of *coordination and collaboration between SPOs and PSIs varies greatly* in different communities. Some SPO and PSI staff described strong cross-sector collaborations, while others reported that they were unaware of the services provided by other organizations or institutions, or that they were just beginning to develop partnerships.

4. Barriers to Service Delivery and Coordination: Staff's *lack of awareness of cross-sector support services* is the biggest impediment to collaboration and coordination between SPOs and PSIs. Several SPOs also stated that their *organization lacks the space, staffing, and funding* to meet the growing demand for international student support services. Limited capacity deters many SPOs from advertising their services or seeking further collaborations.

5. Recommendations for Service Delivery and Coordination to improve cross-sector coordination and collaboration between SPOs and PSIs include: **a) Creating local directories** of international student support services to facilitate referrals and collaboration, address gaps and duplication, and to build student awareness about services; **b) Establishing a staff member in SPOs and PSIs to act as a liaison** for collaborations around the needs of international students; **c) Regular meetings between local service providers** to discuss emerging student needs, and coordinate services based on organizational capacity or areas of expertise; **d) Collaboration with other key stakeholders**, including religious institutions, cultural community groups, secondary schools, and government institutions; and **e) Working with international students** to identify emerging needs, receive input on new initiatives, and involve students in peer support services.

6. Priority areas to address in collaboration include: **a) Assisting international students in transitioning to community-based supports** after graduation; **b) Supporting students in finding off-campus housing**, and advocating for *affordable housing options* in new developments; **c) Addressing discrimination** among community members, employers, and faculty; **d) Creating opportunities to build connections and mentorship** between international students, domestic students, and community members; **e) Developing low barrier volunteer and work opportunities** for international students through partnerships with on-campus and community employers; and **f) Increasing the visibility of support services** available to students.

INTRODUCTION

A growing number of international students are enrolling in BC post-secondary institutions each year, bringing social, cultural, and economic benefits to communities and institutions throughout the province.

International students require specific settlement support services as they make BC their temporary home. Many of these students intend to remain in BC after graduation by becoming permanent residents. It is important to ensure that they receive the support they need to achieve their goals, remain in BC, and help meet provincial labour market needs.

In 2015, through funding provided by BC's Ministry of Jobs, Trade and Technology (JTT), post-secondary international students were added to the list of eligible clients for support services offered by settlement service provider organizations (SPOs). International students who are studying in institutions and programs that are eligible for the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWPP) can now access SPO services that will help them transition into the labour market after graduation and apply for permanent residency.

These services are intended to be complementary to the services provided by post-secondary institutions (PSIs). However, to date, there has been no research on the collaboration between SPOs and PSIs in BC in regards to support services for international students.

Research Purpose:

In 2017, The Ministry of Jobs, Trade, and Technology contracted the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA) to research support services available to post-secondary international students in BC, from pre-arrival to the pathway to permanent residency. The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills training also provided advise and input. This research project aims to:

1. Understand what types of support services international students require while they study and after graduation as they plan to transition into the labour market.
2. Identify any overlaps in services, barriers, challenges, and best practices for SPOs and PSIs supporting international students.
3. Support further collaboration and coordination between SPOs and PSIs.

Methodology:

Between December 2017 and January 2018, AMSSA conducted a mixed-methods study including:

- An anonymous online survey of staff from SPOs in BC that receive funding from the BC Settlement and Integration Services (BC-SIS) and public and private PSIs in BC that participate in the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWPP)
- Three dialogues with staff from SPOs and PSIs from across BC
- An anonymous online survey of international students who were enrolled in a public or private BC PSI, or had been enrolled at some point between 2014 and 2017

Data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods to develop a final report, a public webinar presenting findings from the research, and a series of tools and guidelines to support collaboration between SPOs and PSIs to serve international students in BC.

Before presenting the findings, below is an elaborated explanation of the research method employed in this study and a description of the respondents.

METHODOLOGY

Between December 2017 and January 2018, AMSSA conducted a mixed-methods study, including three surveys (of SPO staff, PSI staff, and post-secondary international students) and three dialogues (focus groups) with staff from SPOs and PSIs across BC. Surveys and dialogues were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Survey of SPO and PSI Staff:

In December 2017, AMSSA conducted two anonymous online surveys of SPO and PSI staff in BC.

AMSSA sent the survey to representatives from 55 SPOs in BC that receive funding from the BC Settlement and Integration Services (BC-SIS) to support international students and to 39 public and private PSIs in BC that participate in the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWPP). AMSSA encouraged survey recipients to forward the survey to other staff in their organizations who provide support services to international students.

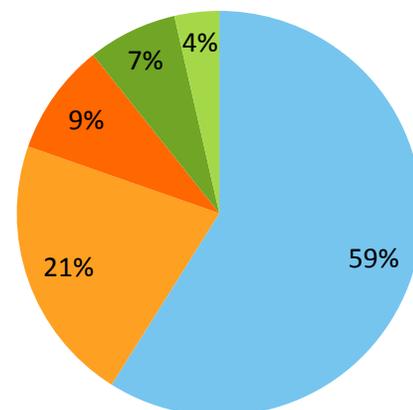
The surveys inquired into the support services SPOs and PSIs offer international students before, during, and after their studies. They also explored the barriers international students face in accessing services. Further, they asked about staff's degree of familiarity with cross-sector services, the nature of current collaborations between SPOs and PSIs, and ideas for potential partnership.

20 SPO staff and **36 PSI staff** responded to the survey. In order to ensure the anonymity of the survey, respondents did not identify their specific organization or institution.

93% of respondents work directly with international students, while the remaining respondents are in management roles.

Figure 1. Geographic representation of SPO and PSI survey respondents.

- Metro Vancouver, 33 respondents
- Vancouver Island, 12 respondents
- Interior BC, 5 respondents
- Fraser Valley, 4 respondents
- Northern BC, 2 respondents



Dialogues with SPO and PSI Staff:

In January 2018, AMSSA hosted three dialogues with SPOs and PSIs across BC. Two occurred via teleconference and the third was in-person. The dialogues aimed to expand on the questions posed in the surveys, seek feedback on key themes emerging from the survey data, and brainstorm ideas for tools and guidelines that could support cross-sector coordination and collaboration.

For the first teleconference dialogue, AMSSA invited staff from two SPOs from each region in BC outside Metro Vancouver. For the second teleconference dialogue, AMSSA invited staff from two PSIs from each region in BC outside Metro Vancouver.

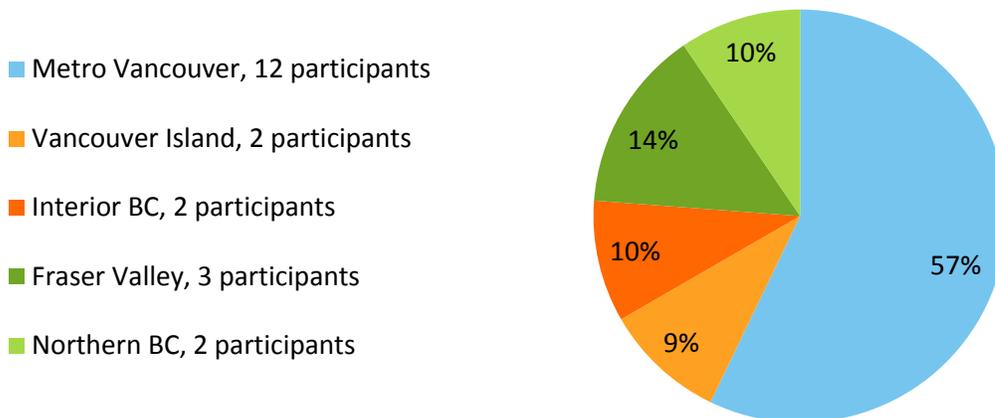
AMSSA also hosted an in-person dialogue, inviting eight SPOs and ten PSIs from Metro Vancouver.

Staff from 6 SPOs attended the SPO teleconference dialogue, representing all regions of BC outside Metro Vancouver.

Staff from 3 PSIs attended the PSI teleconference dialogue. Unfortunately, representatives from PSIs in the Interior and Northern BC were absent.

Staff from 8 SPOs and 4 PSIs attended the Metro Vancouver dialogue. Various communities were represented including Vancouver, North Vancouver, Burnaby, Surrey, and Richmond.

Figure 2. Geographic representation of SPO and PSI dialogue participants.



Survey of International Students:

In January 2018, AMSSA conducted an anonymous online survey of international students who were enrolled in a public or private BC PSI, or had been enrolled at some point between 2014 and 2017.

The survey explored their experiences accessing support services, including where they sought support services, barriers they faced in seeking support services, and their satisfaction with the services they received.

The survey was promoted on AMSSA’s social media, as well as through student unions, international student clubs, and cultural clubs at public and private PSIs that participate in the PGWPP in BC.

To help promote the survey, participants were invited to enter a draw for a \$20 Starbucks gift card upon completion of the survey. Participants entered the draw through a separate link provided at the end of the research survey in order to maintain the anonymity of their responses.

76 international students responded to the survey.

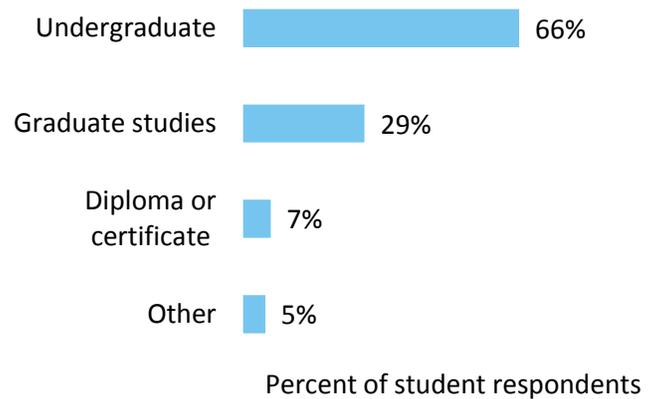
88% of participants were attending or had attended a PSI in Metro Vancouver.

There was a small representation of students from the Fraser Valley (4%), Vancouver Island (3%), the Interior (4%), and Northern BC (1%).

58% had never lived in residence on campus. Only 13% had always lived in residence.

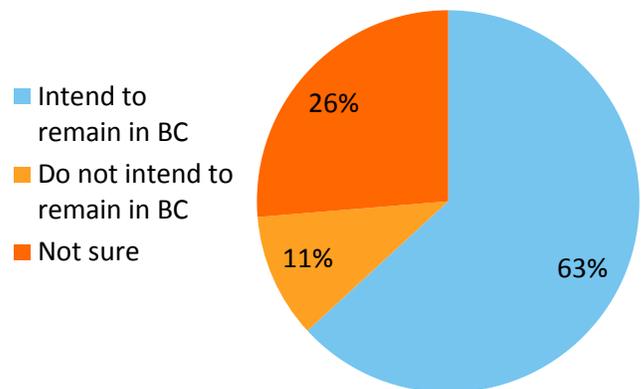
Respondents were asked to indicate all programs of studies they were currently enrolled in and/or had completed (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Student survey respondents’ current or completed programs of study



79% had been studying in BC for over 1 year, and the majority of respondents intend to remain in BC after graduation (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Post-graduation plans of student survey respondents.



SUPPORT SERVICE NEEDS

Post-secondary international students require various services to support them through the multiple transitions involved in leaving their home country, settling in BC, commencing their studies, transitioning into the labour force, and possibly beginning the pathway to citizenship.

The research identified seven categories of support services that international students access before, during, and after their studies.

Orientation Support:

Although some post-secondary international students have previous experience living or studying in Canada (with family, or for previous employment or studies), the majority are new to the country and need assistance to familiarize themselves with their campus and city. Additionally, many international students must find off-campus housing. Thus, orientation services that students seek include:

- Information about life in their city, such as costs of living, transportation, banking, shopping, etc.
- Orientation, information, and referrals to community resources and government services
- Orientation to campus spaces and services
- Arrival support, such as airport pickups and suggested packing lists
- Support finding off-campus housing (including connections to homestay programs, and orientation to rental markets and applications)

Support with Immigration and Other Documents:

International students often require information, advising, and support to obtain the necessary documents to study, work, and/or immigrate to Canada. While some students only require general information, clarification of requirements and regulations, or a quick review of completed documents, others need more involved support, such as advise on immigration options or help filling out applications.

The support students seek before, during, and after their studies as they navigate multiple applications include:

- Application or renewal of temporary resident permits (study permits, work permits, temporary resident visas, etc.)
- Immigration applications (permanent residency, refugee claims and appeals, etc.)
- Filing taxes

- Obtaining provincial medical insurance
- Obtaining social insurance numbers

Career and Employment Services:

Many international students seek part-time employment or volunteer opportunities during their studies. Working during their studies can support students financially, while helping them gain Canadian work experience. Additionally, for students who intend to immigrate to Canada, securing full-time employment after graduation is an important requirement for permanent residence applications. SPOs and PSIs offer a number of services to help students find employment, including:

- Job market information
- Career counseling or mentorship
- Resume and cover letter advise and editing services
- Support with interview skills
- Job postings and orientation to job search resources
- Networking opportunities and hiring fairs
- Information about volunteer opportunities
- Orientation to Canadian workplace culture

Social, Cultural and Emotional Support:

Social, cultural, and emotional support can be as important as academic support for the retention, academic success, and wellbeing of international students. Alongside the stresses of work and school, international students may also experience social isolation, homesickness, and culture shock. Additionally, some students require support for post-traumatic stress from experiences in their home country, such as war.

A variety of supports, services, and activities can help international students adjust to Canadian culture, integrate into the community, build social networks, and maintain their mental health and wellbeing. These include:

- Counseling services
- Support groups
- Resources for mental health and wellbeing
- Activities to build community connections (e.g.: social events, cross-cultural activities, peer mentorship programs)
- Information on Canadian culture

Financial and Material Support:

Some international students need financial or material support as they initially settle in BC and during unexpected financial hardship. International students, however, are eligible for fewer forms of financial assistance than domestic students, and can only work limited hours on student work permits, while paying higher tuition fees. Financial and material support international students seek include:

- Financial aid (e.g.: scholarships, grants, bursaries, or emergency financial aid)
- Financial advising
- Support in accessing basic necessities such as food and clothing

Legal and Crisis Support:

Staff and international students that participated in the research described numerous instances where international students faced violations of tenancy laws, workplace safety, or employment standards. Additionally, some international students require support services for crisis situations, such as domestic violence or sexual assault.

International students are particularly vulnerable to abuse or exploitation because they may be unfamiliar or misinformed about their rights as tenants and workers, unaware of legal resources available to them, or they may fear that seeking legal support will have negative repercussions for their work permits or immigration applications.

“Last time we had an employment standards workshop and [none of the participants knew] they had the right to file a complaint against the employer, because they thought the right was only for someone who was permanent here in Canada [...] We file a lot of complaints also against employers.” (SPO staff)

Legal and crisis services that can support international students include:

- Education on workplace and tenancy rights and responsibilities
- Education on workplace safety
- Supported access to appropriate enforcement authorities in the event of violations to workplace or tenancy rights
- Victim support services
- Advocacy
- Referrals to legal aid

Support for Spouses and Dependents:

Some international students, particularly those attending graduate school, arrive to BC with their families. The spouses and dependents of international students often require additional support in the previous service areas, as well as unique settlement services. Additionally, some international students who are fleeing unsafe situations in their home countries may be seeking information and advice about family re-settlement and immigration. International students and their families seek support with:

- Support in finding schools and/or childcare for children
- English language training for spouses and children
- Financial advising for families, such as how to apply for appropriate tax credits or benefits
- Support for immigration and other documents for spouses and children
- Career and employment services for spouses
- Orientation to community resources and services for families
- Opportunities for spouses and children to get involved in the community, such as volunteer opportunities, or family-friendly social events
- Information and advising on family re-settlement and immigration

BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND GAPS IN SERVICES

Student Awareness of Available Services:

Surveys of both post-secondary international students and support service staff indicated that the biggest barrier international students face in accessing support services is a lack of awareness of available services. In the survey of international students, 54-69% of respondents reported that they did not know where to go for help, and 31-40% did not know they could ask for help with a given issue (see Figure 5, p. 14).

Similarly, 95% of SPO survey respondents, and 85% of PSI survey respondents cited “lack of awareness of available supports” as a barrier students face in seeking support services. SPO and PSI staff noted that students are often unfamiliar with SPO services, or unclear about which services they are eligible for with a temporary resident status.

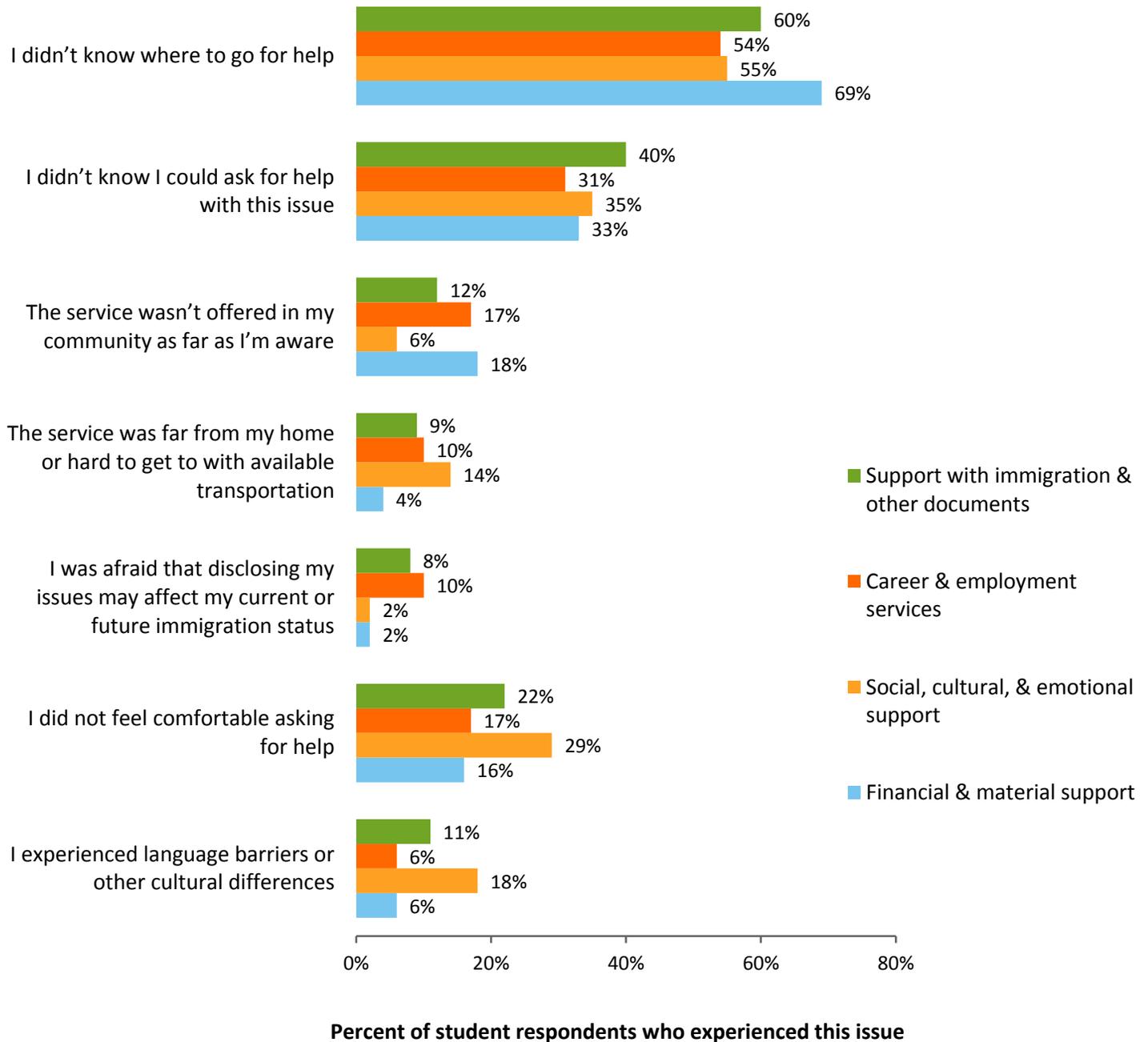
“We have to do lots of the outreach to reach them, because they usually don't come to us directly, and lots of the students they even don't know we provide free, like employment services and settlement services to them [...] Lots of the students, they don't know our services, the eligibility, like what kind of service they can access. They're really confused. They think the service is just for the, like the PR, [they think that] the free service is not for them.” (SPO staff)

Students who are unaware of available services may turn to informal sources of support, such as family, friends, or social media, or to paid services such as immigration consultants, lawyers, and agents. While it can be valuable for students to have multiple sources of support, informal sources may provide incorrect or misleading information. Paid services can also present an unnecessary cost to students who only require basic orientation or clarification, or whose PSIs already offer RISIA or RCIC support on campus.

“It really makes them vulnerable because if they go to their peers, it's always based on their own individual experience, or so and so who has told me this and that.” (PSI staff)

PSI staff described the need to frequently remind students about the services covered by their student fees. Although international students generally receive an orientation to PSI support services when they begin their studies, staff noted that students may no longer remember what services are available when they encounter an issue. Staff discussed various recommendations for ongoing promotion of services (see p. 37).

Figure 5. Barriers international students experienced when accessing support services.



Cultural Barriers or Stigma:

The third highest-rated barrier to seeking support in AMSSA's survey of international students was "not feeling comfortable asking for help," followed closely by "language barriers or cultural differences" (see Figure 5, p. 14). Student's discomfort in seeking help may be indicative of an individual preference, but can also be influenced by family attitudes to seeking support, or cultural stigma. Indeed, 77% of PSI staff, and 26% of SPO staff cited "stigma or social attitudes to seeking support services" as barriers to accessing support services.

"Students [may have concerns] about the pressure and judgment from family and community in home country if they require and access student support services." (PSI staff)

"Help-seeking behaviour is very culturally-based, and so I think that's part of the challenge is feeling comfortable in asking for help, and being worried about what the implications of asking for help." (PSI staff)

There is often more cultural stigma to seeking mental health supports. This is reflected in the student survey results, where nearly a third of respondents stated that they did not feel comfortable asking for social, cultural and emotional support services (see Figure 5, p. 14). Some students may also have difficulty assessing their needs, particularly for services that they are not accustomed to seeking.

"For health and counseling services (especially mental health), as a student who was an adult but still young and inexperienced, I didn't know I could receive support for depression issues I went through." (International student)

Several PSI staff survey respondents reported that there is a "lack of culturally-appropriate support services" in post-secondary institutions, particularly in the areas of mental health. For example, One PSI staff suggested that international students may lack "culturally-relevant role models seeking help." Another PSI staff described how they need to "discuss physical and mental health in relation to health insurance and counseling differently with international students," starting by discussing the value of these services.

"There is an overall lack of knowledge of cultural understanding especially as it pertains to students coming from high-risk regions, highly patriarchal regions or regions and cultures where demonstration of needing support is considered shameful or inappropriate. "International Students" are often spoken about as a lump, as though they do not have their own characteristics within that group, and/or a more diverse set of needs depending on their understanding of North American culture, bureaucracy and institutional trust." (PSI staff)

Finally, some students fear that seeking support, particularly for immigration or career and employment issues, can affect their current or future immigration status if support service staff disclose their information (see Figure 5, p. 14). 68% of PSI staff and 37% of SPO staff similarly listed this concern as a barrier to accessing support services, noting that this fear can be based in students' experiences with government and institutions in their home country. PSI staff discussed how being aware of and addressing this concern is an important component of developing culturally-sensitive support services.

“They may be coming from a country where if they're telling people at an institution something, that information will follow them, and will be a black mark against them. So that cultural competency piece, and awareness.” (PSI staff)

Additionally, several students and support service staff highlighted language barriers in accessing supports. As one SPO staff describes, even if students speak English well, they may “still struggle to navigate mainstream supports” in English. This barrier can be significantly higher for the spouses and dependents of international students, or when students seek legal or crisis support.

Geographic or Scheduling Barriers:

Finally, 4-14% of international students who responded to the survey reported that desired services were too far from their home or difficult to access with public transportation (see Figure 5, p. 14). Distance can present a particular challenge to students who live off-campus and who sometimes must commute for over an hour to reach their PSI, such as in the Metro Vancouver region. Support service staff also mentioned that students often have classes and/or work during their hours of operation.

Gaps in Services:

A) Financial and Material Aid

Both SPO and PSI respondents indicated that their organizations and institutions offer international students significantly less financial and material support services in comparison to other services they provide (see Appendix B).

18% of student survey respondents indicated that there was a lack of financial and material support in their community (see Figure 5, p. 14). When student survey respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the available financial, material, and orientation supports in their campus and community, the average rating was 53% satisfaction.

SPO and PSI staff noted that there is a common misconception that international students

come from affluent families and do not require financial support. On the contrary, staff have seen a “huge spike in financial crises” amongst international students. Causes of financial hardship include changes in family income and expenses (unemployment, births, illnesses, death, etc.); political upheavals in their home country, leading to currency devaluation or inability to transfer money abroad; or students who are seeking financial independence in order to flee from family violence.

“There are so many assumptions that are made about international students, and how they're wealthy, they don't need support services, they don't need our support, they don't need free services [...] [These assumptions are] not even true—I mean we have students that are sponsored by their home governments, that come on, you know, scholarships, and what not, or their parents are really struggling to pay for their tuition, or they're getting it from like a family member, or the entire family is paying for it, and sacrificing.” (PSI staff)

Financial and material hardship is further exacerbated by the fact that international students are neither eligible for as many grants, scholarships, and bursaries as domestic students nor can they apply for Canadian bank loans. The federal government also places limitations on the number of hours they can work while studying.

Alongside more scholarships and bursaries for international students, student survey respondents stated that receiving clear information about available financial aid, costs of living, and projected tuition increases could help them with financial planning.

B) Support Finding Off-campus Housing

Another common suggestion for improving financial and material aid amongst student survey respondents was support in finding affordable housing in their community.

Several PSI staff noted that their institutions have very limited capacity for campus residence, especially for families. Indeed, out of the international students who responded to the survey, only 13% lived in residence on campus. 58% had never lived in residence, and 29% had only lived in residence for part of their studies.

In many BC communities, students seeking off-campus housing encounter low rental vacancy rates and a lack of affordable housing options. It can be particularly challenging for international students to apply for rental units as they often lack Canadian references or proof of sufficient income.

Difficulty finding affordable housing can make international students vulnerable to unsafe housing and violations to tenancy rights. For instance, students and support service staff

described instances where students did not receive assistance with emergency repair in their unit, leaving them stranded for days, or being asked for unreasonable security deposits.

Support service staff emphasized that students need an increase in housing options in the community, and practical support securing housing, beyond education about tenancy rights.

“I had trouble finding an apartment during my internship; there did not seem to be many affordable, 'official' sources available. I used Craigslist, but it felt like a very informal platform that could be unsafe. Additionally, I had trouble qualifying for some apartments with my internship pay. Most people asked for a referral and credit check as well, which I can imagine would be very difficult for someone new to here.” (International student)

“When we have international students attending [work or volunteer] placements, for example, one of the things that we continually talk about is at-risk environments for the places that they're staying at, and looking at alternatives and safe places”. (SPO staff)

C) Career and Employment Support

AMSSA's survey of international students also surfaced a gap in career and employment services. 17% of respondents indicated that there was a lack of career and employment support in their community (see Figure 5, p. 14). 51% experienced difficulty finding employment during their studies, and 56% of those who had graduated from their program of studies were also experiencing challenges finding employment.

International students face a number of unique barriers to finding employment, especially within their field, including language barriers, unfamiliarity with Canadian hiring processes and expectations, a lack of Canadian networks and work experience, and discrimination. Many students and support service staff noted that employers can be hesitant to hire international students on temporary work permits or work permits with restricted hours.

“A large number of jobs are available through personal connections but I lacked such connections as an international student. Also, the connections I had were mostly within my ethnic community, which makes job opportunities and (often times) the quality of jobs limited.” (International student)

Both PSIs and SPOs offer a number of career and employment support services to students, however, participants noted that international students are not always eligible for the full suite of services at SPOs and employment agencies in the community. For instance, international students are not eligible for individual case management services at employment agencies. They are also not eligible for short-term training courses such as FoodSafe or First Aid that SPOs offer other newcomers, which are not usually offered at PSIs. Additionally, one SPO

staff mentioned that their local college lacked advisors with career development training who could fully orient international students to the labour market and develop employment skills.

SPO & PSI SUPPORT SERVICE DELIVERY

Trends in Support Service Delivery:

The research found that PSIs are typically post-secondary international students' primary source for support services, while SPOs tend to be a tertiary source of support. In the survey of international students, participants were asked to indicate where they had sought support for 21 different services (see Appendix A). For all the listed services, students most often sought support from their PSI, and for most services students were equally or more likely to seek support from other sources (friends, family, online research, social media, or paid services) than from SPOs. The survey of support service staff confirmed that PSIs offer more services to international students compared to SPOs (see Appendix B).

A) Pre-arrival Support

In particular, PSIs offer a broader range of pre-arrival support services to students, including information on immigration and other documents, academic advising, and orientation supports. Pre-arrival support is delivered through multiple channels, including online non-credit courses, webinars, apps, phone, email, and online resources.

In contrast, 75% of the SPO survey respondents indicated their organization offered *no* pre-arrival support to international students because it often falls outside of their mandate. BC-SIS funding only covers support services for international students who are already enrolled in an eligible PSI and intend to transition to permanent residency or into the labour market after graduation.

Some SPO staff explained that their organizations offer online resources and respond to email or phone queries for orientation information. One respondent also stated that their organization offers connections to employers and work placements.

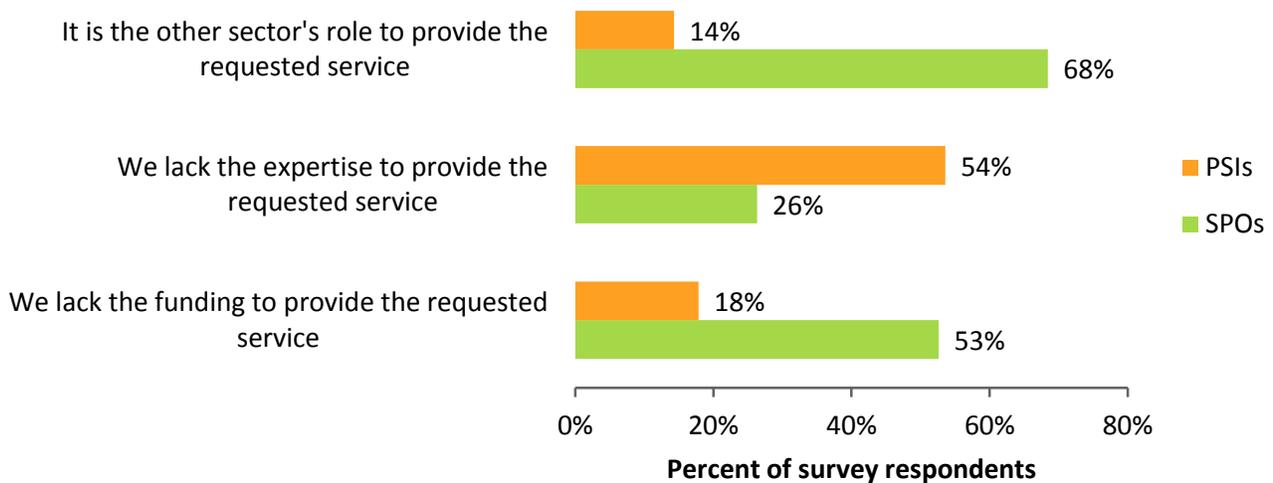
Complementary SPO Services:

“We don't want to duplicate services; we want to work collaboratively.” (SPO staff)

Participants in the dialogues stressed that SPOs aim to complement PSI services, not duplicate them. In the survey of SPO staff, the majority of respondents reported that they refer

students to PSI services when they lack the funding or the mandate to offer a requested service. The most common reason why PSI staff would refer students to SPO support services was when the PSI lacked the expertise to offer the requested service (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Reasons to refer students to cross-sector services.



Participants identified areas where SPOs can offer support services that fall outside of PSIs' expertise or mandates, or where SPO services may be more accessible for students.

A) Post-Graduation Support Services

"The students that we see often times cannot be served by the academic institution anymore-- they're no longer a student, so they're not eligible for service." (SPO staff)

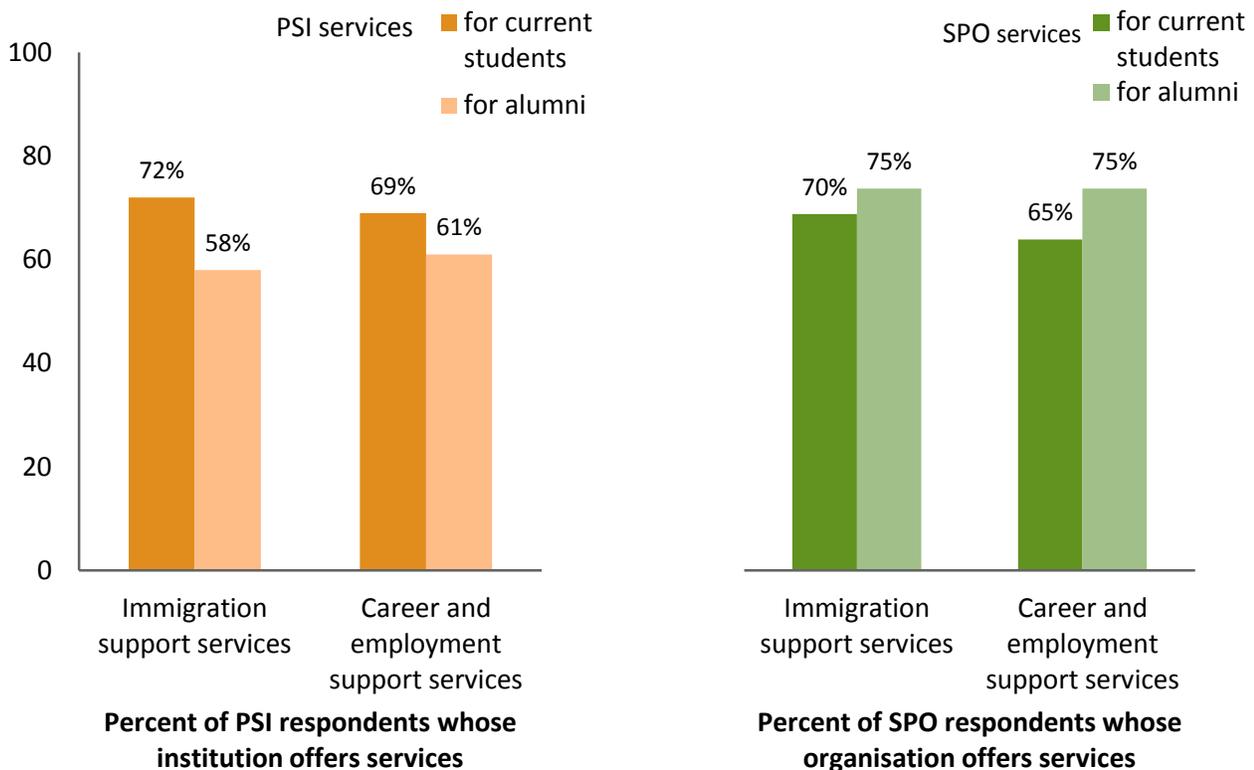
SPOs are an important source of support for international students after graduation, as they enter the labour market through a PGWP and seek pathways to citizenship. Although most PSIs allow alumni to access some support services at their institution for up to a year after graduation, SPOs can usually offer clients a broader range of services at this stage, and help them transition to community-based support.

"We promote the [PGWP], etc. but there are not a lot of services available for students once they graduate except for those within alumni [programming], which would be considered "lite" offerings with more of a social component than anything. [...] Once students have graduated, post-degree support is distinctly not within our mandate and we do not have the resources for these types of activities, so we do the best we can while they are here, and hope for the best beyond. Some students do reach out, expressing frustration with job search, feeling discriminated against, etc. but we are not

really in a position to advise when we have a robust current student load that requires tending to (and for which we are funded to support)”. (PSI staff)

AMSSA’s survey of SPO and PSI staff found that there are more immigration, and career and employment services offered to alumni by SPOs, while in PSIs the availability of these services decreases for alumni (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Support services available to international students and alumni.



PSIs usually only support international students with *temporary* resident applications such as study permits, work permits, and the post-graduate work permit. Some PSIs also offer students workshops, resources, and general information about immigration options after graduation, however they do not offer advising or support with applications for permanent residency despite students’ strong interest. In contrast, SPOs offer alumni support with a variety of immigration options.

“The boundary is [...] life after the post-grad work permit, so we’ll sort of get you to that stage [but not really after that].” (PSI staff)

Participants also noted that international students are particularly vulnerable to violations of

employment rights and safety standards after graduation, because they are focused on securing any employment in order to apply for permanent residency. It is critical for students at this stage to receive reliable advice for immigration applications and work permits, support with resumes, cover letters, and interview skills, as well as legal support in cases of employment violations.

“We’re doing a lot of work around connecting with potential employers, making sure they have open visas, not closed visas, looking at how to actually get a PR.” (SPO staff)

Additionally, international students who are receiving mental health support benefit from assistance transitioning to community-based services *before* graduation to ensure they do not experience gaps in services.

“Especially for those students who want to stay in Canada, we’re trying to help them link with other mental health supports as they transition out of our college.” (PSI staff)

B) Support for Spouses and Dependents

Another service area that tends to fall beyond PSI mandates is serving spouses and dependents. In AMSSA’s survey, only 28% of PSI staff reported that their institution offers support for spouses and dependents, while 70% of SPO staff reported that their organization offers services to this population (see Appendix B).

“If a student comes with a spouse, we give them advise on the spousal work permit, for sure. But we don’t have capacity to, you know, start doing, like workshops for them.” (PSI staff)

“[Spouses and dependents] often fall through the cracks. This can increase isolation.” (SPO staff)

C) Specialized and Multilingual Support Services

In many service areas, SPOs and other community organizations are able to offer specialized supports, addressing needs that cannot be met by PSI support services. For instance, PSI staff described how they sometimes refer clients to community-based mental health services for support with post-traumatic stress, eating disorders, sexual assault, substance misuse, or family violence.

“We have a lot of services in the university for mental health, but sometimes our services are also exhausted, and so we need to link people up with new services.” (PSI staff)

SPO staff may also have more expertise in settlement and integration challenges, employment service needs, and immigration options for newcomers. For instance, some PSI staff described how they refer students to SPOs for support with refugee claims and workshops on Canadian workplace culture.

“Refugee claimants is one where often the supports of the institution [...] we have to let go of those.” (PSI staff)

Additionally, SPOs often offer support services in more languages than PSIs. For instance, one participant in the research mentioned that they worked at a SPO where staff spoke more than 20 languages. Multilingual services can be particularly important in supporting the spouses and dependents of international students.

“We don't typically provide language-specific supports, and I think that navigating that piece [...] is so critical, and that is often a piece where we'll provide a referral back [to SPOs].” (PSI staff)

“Sometimes the partners of the international students contact us. They do not usually speak English. They approach us because we provide services in their mother tongue.” (SPO staff)

D) Broader Community Connections

International students can benefit from receiving additional support from SPOs in order to establish broader connections to their community. For instance, social events organized by SPOs can help integrate students and their families into community life beyond their campus. Several PSI staff also mentioned that they connect students with SPOs for volunteer opportunities, and students often come to SPOs for job fairs and networking events.

“SPOs can offer community-based offerings that are much more inclusive of all international students. It gives the opportunity for international students to meet more people in the community.” (PSI staff)

“Our institution collaborates with SPO's in our community. The more and broader services we provide the better.” (PSI staff)

E) Accessibility of SPO Services

Particularly for international students who live off-campus, SPOs may offer services at more convenient times or that are more geographically accessible. SPOs can also offer services to international students who are passing through a different city in BC. For example, one SPO in

the Fraser Valley reported that they serve not only international students from local PSIs, but also students who transit into PSIs in Metro Vancouver or students who are headed to the Interior.

“This is a commuter campus, and sometimes getting to the space where the service exists, and the hours that it is open can present challenges.” (PSI staff)

“There are a lot of students who come on transit, that means they come to Vancouver and they're going to Kamloops.” (SPO staff)

Sometimes SPOs can also offer support services with shorter wait times. While PSI staff stressed that they encourage students to wait for services at PSIs in order to avoid exhausting community services, SPOs can offer an alternative for time-sensitive situations.

“There is a basic triage and support mechanism in place, but the role of counseling services in the university and the demands on their time seem to be at critical mass, and the students we support often have life issues or challenges that cannot wait for a 2-3 week appointment time, so we support students seeking services through their GP and will pay for services in the greater Vancouver community to ensure the students well-being.” (PSI staff)

“We see students who say ‘if I have to wait three weeks to see a career advisor, but I need a job now, I am going to see everyone who will talk to me about my resume, right?’” (PSI staff)

F) Off-Campus Alternatives

Many PSIs noted that some international students feel uncomfortable seeking certain support services from their school. Students may be unclear about PSI policies around confidentiality, and fear that PSI staff will disclose their information to professors or the government, leading to negative repercussions for their studies or immigration status. This is a particular concern when accessing immigration services and mental health support or if students wish to discuss concerns about their PSI. By offering a wide range of services, SPOs offer students a valuable alternative or secondary source for support.

“If someone doesn't want to come to our office, we cannot make them. So then actually those relationships are good because then we can give them the contact, “Ok, if you don't want to get service here—for whatever reason that made be—then we have a path already created with...” (PSI staff)

“Student's don't always want to get the service at school, or vice versa, in community.

It's up to them to decide where they feel safe and comfortable.” (PSI staff)

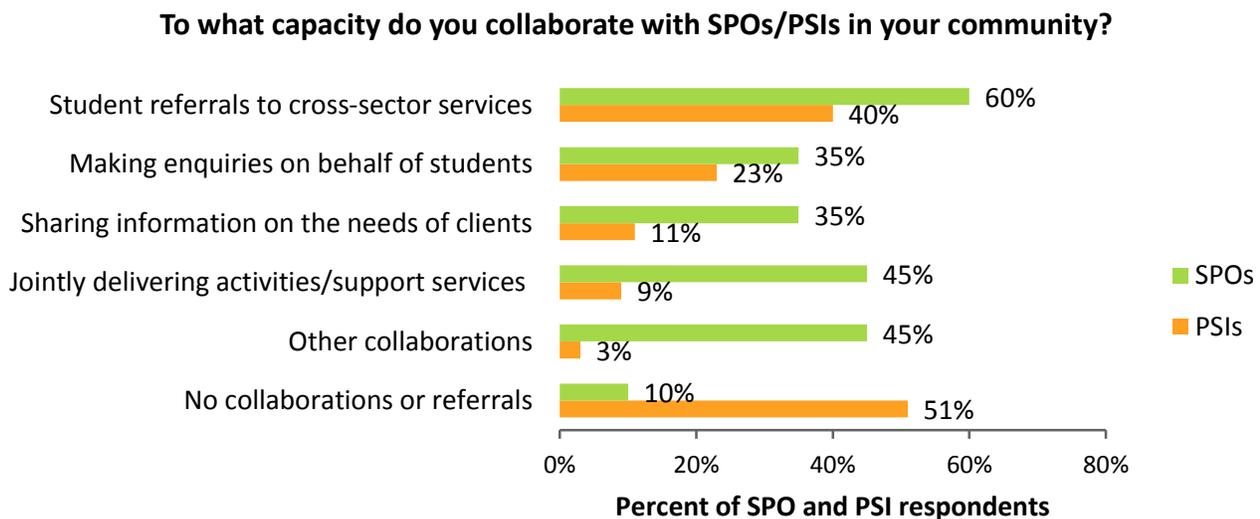
SPO & PSI Collaboration and Coordination:

The degree of coordination and collaboration between SPOs and PSIs varies greatly in different communities. Some SPO and PSI staff described strong cross-sector collaborations, while others reported that they were largely unaware of the services provided by other organizations or institutions, or that they were just beginning to develop partnerships. Collaborations range from indirect support through referrals to formal partnerships with established agreements:

“We are always interested in expanding and enhancing our collaborative relationship with our regional college and we have been actively working on this. We already have a very good relationship with our regional college and we have an ongoing dialogue about the gaps and barriers that we experience. In addition to this, we have agreed to work together via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlines our working relationship. We are currently reviewing this to see where we can strengthen this in order to enhance our current relationship.” (SPO staff)

Notably, SPO staff that responded to AMSSA’s survey reported having more cross-sector collaborations than PSI staff did (see Figure 8). In fact, 51% of PSI respondents reported having *no* collaborations with SPOs in their community. Many PSI staff reported that they were unfamiliar with the services SPOs offer for international students (see Figure 9, p. 28).

Figure 8. Current collaboration between SPOs and PSIs for international student service delivery



A) Promotion and Referrals

Many SPOs depend on collaboration with PSIs to promote their services to international students, either through referrals, student newsletters or outreach opportunities, such as facilitating workshops and presentations for students, or participating in student orientation events. Referrals were the most common form of collaboration PSI staff reported engaging in with local SPOs, with 40% indicating that they offer students referrals to SPO services (see Figure 8, p. 25).

“We don’t get the clients like drop-ins, right? We get most of our clients because we do fairs, we do workshops, so they see our brochure or our flyer at the library, or they see it on Facebook, or a friend tells them, so that’s how they go and visit us.” (SPO staff)

“Often times they have this orientation program at the start of their semester, and that is a very good way for them to know about our services.” (SPO staff)

Similarly, some PSIs reach out to local SPOs to orient them about services offered on campus. 60% of SPO survey respondents reported offering students referrals to services offered at their PSI.

“We frequently see students in our office who are unaware of what [PSI] services are included in their tuition, do not know who can help them with settlement services, and are not receiving responses from their International Service Advisor’s office when they try to contact them. [...] We contact the university and coordinate the services for these international students.” (SPO staff)

B) Knowledge Exchange and Coordination

A third of SPO survey respondents reported engaging in knowledge exchange and coordination with local PSIs by making enquiries on behalf of students or sharing information on the needs of clients. For instance, one SPO staff from Northern BC described how in their small community (with only one college and one university) communication and coordination is easier: “we try to be in constant touch with the university and the college, so that there’s no duplication of services, and we are aware [of services offered at the PSI]”

“The college has contacted us, you know, their advisors came here and explained what services they provide.” (SPO staff)

C) Collaboration on Service Delivery

Additionally, some SPOs and PSIs described partnering to deliver programs, events, or



services including orientation programs, workshops, or cultural events.

“The college here [...] has expanded their international program just this year, so [AMSSA’s research] is really timely; we’re working on collaboration, so we have done three events together.” (SPO staff)

“What we have done this past fall with the students was celebrating some of their special holidays, so this has been very useful, and we partnered with the college on that.” (SPO staff)

“We offer a joint International Welcome event annually. We often share information and resources between the college and our organization. This includes joint proposal writing for collaborative programs.” (SPO staff)

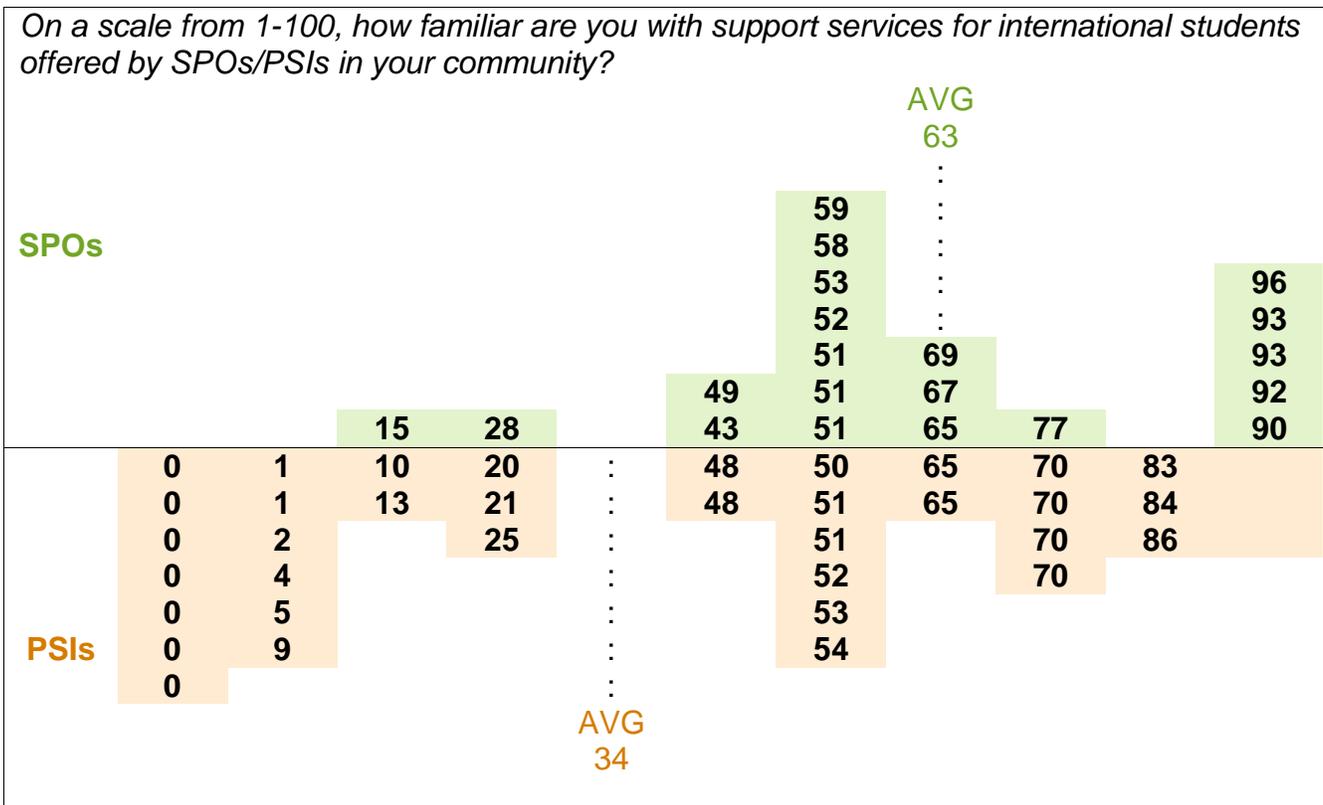
BARRIERS TO SERVICE DELIVERY AND COORDINATION

Awareness of Cross-Sector Services:

The majority of SPO and PSI survey respondents indicated that they are not familiar with the support services that the other sector offers for international students (see Figure 9). In particular, several PSI staff stated that they were not aware that SPOs offered services to international students or were unclear about the scope of services international students were eligible for. Many assumed that SPOs only served permanent residents and citizens.

Meanwhile, SPO staff reported that they were not always aware of the extent of PSI support services for international students. For example, many SPOs in the Metro Vancouver research dialogue expressed surprise when local PSIs explained that they offer some services for alumni up to a year after graduation. Other SPO staff noted that they sometimes serve international students enrolled in PSIs outside of their region, and are therefore less familiar with the services offered.

Figure 9. SPO and PSI staff awareness of cross-sector services.



Limited Organizational Capacity:

Several SPOs stated that their organization lacks the space, staffing, and funding to meet the growing demand for international student support services. When discussing possible strategies to increase the visibility of available support services, many SPO staff explained that their limited capacity actually *deters* them from advertising their services, or from seeking further collaborations with PSIs, in order to limit the number of clients they receive.

“We don't want to advertise services, because we have one and a half staff to provide services. [...] So we can provide services to international students, but the numbers are very, very low. And for us to openly advertise, we would be swamped.” (SPO staff)

“We'd like to be connected with international students, but we are already 150% [above] of our target. We have limited staff, so we just take drop-ins.” (SPO staff)

“It's challenging to try and go out and establish those partnerships because of the amount of work that falls on everyone's plates. But yeah, I think just, we're not aware because—yeah, some organizations tend not to advertise their services, not to reach out, because of that underfunding and the limited resources.” (PSI staff)

SPOs will often refer students back to their PSI to access support services. While this does help lessen the demand on SPO services, and increase students' awareness of available supports at their PSI, it can also lead to situations where students are continually bounced between support service providers and duplication of initial appointments to assess student needs.

Some PSI staff also noted that their institution has limited capacity, leading to long wait times for services such as campus residence and mental health services.

“We are also a public service, we are also funded by the government, we also have resources that are stretched thin.” (PSI staff)

“We're challenged by a real significant number of students. We're just sort of overwhelmed with the numbers.” (PSI staff)

“The role of counseling services in the university and the demands on their time seem to be at critical mass, and the students we support often have life issues or challenges that cannot wait for a 2-3 week appointment time” (PSI staff)

Limited Immigration Support:

Both SPO and PSI staff noted that immigration support services are in high demand, however, the extent of available services depends on whether SPOs and PSIs have Regulated International Student Immigration Advisors (RISIAs) or Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultants (RCICs) on staff.

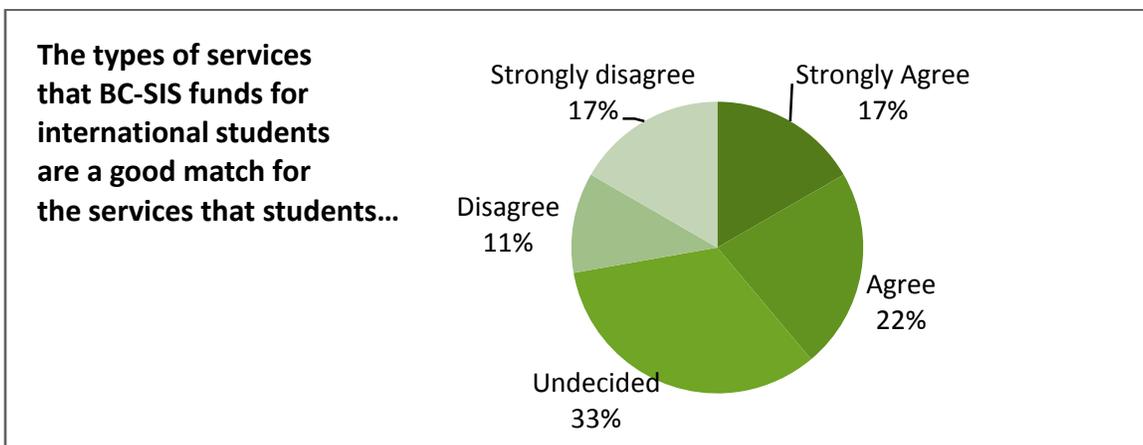
SPOs and PSIs that have RISIAs or RCICs on staff can offer more in-depth, individual advising and support with study permits, work permits, and immigration applications. Organizations and institutions that lack certified staff can only offer basic information, orientation to IRCC websites, IRCC contact information, and referrals to RISIAs, RCICs or lawyers for further assistance. However, respondents noted that consultations with private RISIAs, RCICs, and lawyers can be expensive and inaccessible to some students who need assistance. Several support staff and students also described long wait times to reach the IRCC call centre with questions.

The government of BC is working to develop guidelines on how SPO staff can assist temporary resident clients in immigration processes.

BC-SIS Eligibility Criteria:

Only 39% of SPO staff agree that the types of services that BC-SIS funds for international students are a good match for the services that students request from their organization (see Figure 10). Unfortunately, this was a closed question and AMSSA does not have more specific feedback or suggestions from staff about services that could be funded by BC-SIS to better serve their clientele.

Figure 10. SPO staff feedback on BC-SIS-funded services.



Unregulated Recruitment Agencies:

Both international students and support service staff who participated in the research noted instances where international students received incorrect or misleading information from private international education recruitment agents working in Canada or overseas. For instance, some students are led to believe that studying in Canada will guarantee permanent residence status, while others are advised to apply to particular programs of study to improve their eligibility for immigration and work permits, regardless of the students' needs or interests. Students consequently face academic difficulties, a lack of motivation, or even financial consequences when they begin their studies. PSI staff noted that there are currently no federal or provincial regulations on private international education recruitment agencies.

“Without some standardized processes and expectations around who can be an agent and what those look like, I think we run the risk as a community, within the province of BC, for dissatisfaction. So we have students arriving whose agents told them, you know, “you don't need to worry about what you're choosing, you just be able to arrive,” well our own institutional policy, we have a zero-refund policy, unless extenuating circumstances such as your visa being denied. But all of a sudden you're out [thousands of] dollars because someone has told you “you can just come and don't worry about it.” (PSI staff)

“We expect certain standards to be met. We don't have that right now, so it's up to individual institutions to be monitoring and keeping track what have you, versus a more holistic approach: if you're going to be working with Canada, or if you're going to be working with BC, these are our expectations of you working and sending us students.” (PSI staff)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SERVICE DELIVERY AND COORDINATION

AMSSA's surveys found that the majority of SPO respondents (85%) and PSI respondents (82%) desire to increase collaboration and coordination between the two sectors. The research surfaced a number of recommendations to develop and improve cross-sector coordination and collaboration between SPOs and PSIs, as well as with other key stakeholders. Additionally, support service staff identified priority areas for collaboration and recommendations to address barriers students face in accessing support services.

Developing SPO-PSI Coordination and Collaboration:

A) Directory of Services and Resources

Both SPO and PSI staff emphasized that it is critical for service providers to develop greater awareness of the range of support services available to international students in their community.

In particular, staff suggested that local directories of support services for international students could facilitate referrals, open doors for collaboration, and help SPOs and PSIs coordinate efforts to address gaps and avoid duplication. Staff identified various pieces of information that would be important to include in a local directory, such as:

- A list of all local SPOs and PSIs, with their contact information and hours of operation
- A list of services offered, including specialized services such as RISIA/RCIC staff, services for alumni, and services for spouses and dependents, and
- Languages services are offered in

Staff suggested that the directory could be made available to both staff and international students. An even more robust student directory could also include basic settlement resources in their region and answers to frequently asked questions. One participant suggested that the directory could be modeled on the "Welcome BC" guide that is available to new permanent residents.

SPO staff additionally noted that a directory could help clarify international students' eligibility criteria for SPO services, supporting staff who are offering services, as well as helping students understand the services available to them.

"When we look at the BC SIS template to help the international students [...] there is no clarity as to how much can we go, right? So if there are material sheets like helping an

international student with permanent residency, or work permit, or study permit, whatever—if there are some fact sheets which are available as resources that would be much interesting for everybody to pass it on when they meet an international students” (SPO staff)

B) Cross-Sector Personal Connections

SPO and PSI staff noted that a key aspect of a directory of services would be the contact information of key staff members who can be contacted for questions, referrals, or to discuss possibilities for collaboration. They described how personal relationships with staff members are key to establishing cross-sector partnerships.

“I think that maybe just relationship, I think, is a big piece.” (SPO staff)

“A directory. A directory of people, not necessarily services, but people.” (SPO staff)

For instance, one SPO stated that their organization is “fairly linked” with social work faculties and gerontology departments in local universities, but that they lack a “point person” within their PSI’s international student office to open dialogue about potential partnerships or discuss the needs of particular clients.

“If there's some problem that the university is running into, or if I'm running into any problems, then I can just phone [...] and say, [...] “we're having problems about this, should we meet, should we not meet, like what are your ideas?” Or, “this is the student that we're running into. I can't tell you the student name, or all that kinds of stuff, but I can give you some of the information to [find out] how can we be of help to this particular student from...” (SPO staff)

Participants in AMSSA’s dialogues recommended that SPOs and PSIs establish a staff member in their organizations to act as a liaison for collaborations with other support service providers around the needs of international students. For instance, one PSI participant suggested that their new transition case manager, who supports international students who transition from a local college, could also serve as a liaison with SPOs.

“I think where we've been successful at the institutions I've worked at is [when] it's actually been tacked to somebody as part of their role within the institution [...] to actually strategically make those connections with community.” (PSI staff)

C) Ongoing Dialogue to Coordinate Services

Participants stressed that coordination of SPO and PSI service delivery must be tailored to emerging students' needs and the specific services and capacity of local organizations and institutions.

“Immigration, settlement and employment services offered for international students at post-secondary institutions can vary significantly due to student population, courses offered and school capacity; thus, collaborations need to be unique and customized based on the strengths and needs of both the school and SPO. The capacity of a SPO and the nature of the collaboration have to be matched in order to address service gaps and ensure the needs of international students are identified and addressed.” (SPO staff)

They recommended regular meetings between local service providers to discuss student enrollment rates, demographics, emerging needs, and available services. One SPO staff, for instance, described how despite working with multiple universities and colleges they had never “sat down” together with their partners to have a specific conversation on these questions. These discussions can help service providers plan their services to meet gaps and coordinate referrals for specific services, such as access to RCICs and RISIAs or multilingual services.

Additionally, participants noted that it is important to communicate current staffing, workloads, and waitlists so that referrals and promotion of services can be balanced with organizational capacity to meet higher demands. In some cases, this may mean agreeing *not* to widely promote an SPO's services to the student population or delineate specific criteria for referrals.

D) Funding for Community-University Partnerships

A growing number of PSIs are offering funding for community-university partnerships for research and community engagement initiatives. Participants recommended PSI staff to share information about funding opportunities with SPOs, and collaborate on proposals that could address emerging student needs, or replicate successful programs offered to other newcomers such as refugees.

Priority Areas for Coordination and Collaboration:

Many SPO and PSI staff expressed an interest in increasing not only referrals and cross-promotion of services, but also community-university partnerships to address student needs. Participants identified a number of issues that they felt were best addressed working in collaboration.

A) Post-Graduation Support

Several PSI participants suggested collaborations with SPOs to assist international students in preparing for life and work after graduation, and transitioning to community-based supports. For instance, SPOs could offer workshops to international students as they near completion of their programs to orient them to services in their community.

“It would be helpful to have a collaborative “Transitioning Out” program for students beginning in their 3rd year to ensure students do not “fall off” after graduation and to continue to support their wellbeing in the community.” (PSI staff)

B) Supporting Students in Finding Off-Campus Housing

Participants brainstormed concrete approaches to supporting international students secure affordable housing off-campus. For instance, one PSI participant described how they currently support developers in advocating to include subsidized and/or student housing in new projects:

“We’ll go with them to present to council, or what have you. So we could see us doing that jointly with the local community organizations to really be prioritizing recent Canadians, whether those are through the settlement agencies, and/or new international students, to do that as a direct advocacy piece.” (PSI staff)

Further, participants suggested working together to promote homestay programs amongst community members, and develop inventories of affordable and accessible housing for students.

C) Addressing Discrimination

Several students and support service staff highlighted the prevalence of stereotypes and assumptions about international students among community members, employers, and even faculty that lead to discrimination and misunderstanding. They described how both SPOs and PSIs can play a role in building understanding of the value for international students for BC communities and more positive relationships between natural born citizens and newcomers.

“The pervasive stereotyping of international students as “Asian ESL” taking seats away from Canadians continues to be disappointing, and sets an unwelcoming environment for students to live and study.” (PSI staff)

“I see so much potential in both international and domestic students, and it would be great to find more arenas to learn from each other and grow together. This needs to be a broader governmental/civic focus, and not just minimized to small symposiums among

academic elites on our campuses.” (PSI staff)

“The other big one for us, which we often don't talk about, but definitely is present, is the racism and support of diversity and awareness. So I think the more we can be doing as an institution to talk about that frankly, and to let students know that it does happen, and where the resources are, that's another area where I would absolutely see the community outreach piece as a "racism stops here" type of approach, and what do you do if it does happen” (PSI staff)

D) Community Engagement Initiatives

In particular, students and support service staff expressed a desire for opportunities to develop connections and mentorship between international students, domestic students, and community members. SPO and PSI staff suggested collaborating on cultural events, mentorship programs, youth programs, and community engagement opportunities to bring citizens and newcomers together for meaningful exchange.

“Meaningful community engagement [...] whether it's just hearing about opportunities, or co-developing mentorship for peer-to-peer, or youth-to-youth opportunities. Because I think where I see students engaging so heavily in their campus communities, wherever they are, and becoming these strong student leaders, and strong, you know, thinkers, and great community members in this space, but then they don't know anybody in the city, right? Or they don't know where to go, or they graduate and they, they just sort of are—and I think that loneliness factor gets [in].” (PSI staff)

“I hope there were more activities that allow international student to interact with locals...since most events are just involving international students themselves, which don't really help with understanding local culture.” (International student)

“One of our biggest challenges is helping students feel connected to a larger community [...] I think part of the challenge is that sometimes our domestic students don't have as much of that kind of information in terms of why it's important to make these connections. And so it can be challenging, I think, to build relationships—relationships that, from our international student's perspectives, they're really trying hard to seek.” (PSI staff)

E) Increasing Employment Opportunities

Both SPOs and PSIs described current and potential initiatives to increase work and volunteer opportunities for international students, such as:

- Developing and promoting low-barrier volunteer and work opportunities in PSIs and SPOs that can accommodate international students' work permit limitations and school schedules. For instance, some PSIs offer institutionally-funded wage subsidy programs or research initiatives to hire students.
- Developing partnerships with on-campus and community employers to encourage them to hire international students, and respond to questions and concerns about hiring individuals with temporary work permits.
- Partnerships with faculty, professional associations, alumni, and employers to develop career mentorship programs that support international students to plan and understand their career paths in different sectors.
- Community-university collaborations to address discrimination in the workplace

F) Improving Visibility of Available Services

SPO and PSI staff discussed various strategies to increase the visibility of support services available to students. In particular, staff noted the importance of ongoing orientation to services, as students may not remember information they received in their initial orientation. PSI staff recommended checking in with students individually mid-way through their studies, as well as when students approach graduation to assess needs and provide referrals. Some PSIs shared successful orientation models including:

- Mandatory pre-arrival online orientation courses
- International students sharing their experiences and discussing services they accessed, to help normalize help-seeking behavior
- “Strengths-based” and interactive approaches that develop students’ resource-seeking skills
- Addressing psycho-social issues related to transitioning to a new country and commencing post-secondary education
- Regular workshops around specific themes, such as mental health and wellbeing, academic success, and financial planning
- “Conference” or “resource fair” models that invite community service providers, alumni, and employers to introduce their services and connect with students

Student survey respondents expressed an interest in increased online information about available supports, such as a directory of available resources. Similarly, staff noted that they are more likely to provide referrals to services that have a strong online presence. Although some SPOs reported that they are increasingly using social media to advertise services (Facebook, Twitter, websites, We-chat), for others, managing social media platforms and regularly updating websites may be beyond their organizational capacity. However, PSIs can

support SPOs in promoting services and resources through international student newsletters, social media platforms, and other established means of communication.

G) Research and Policy Development

Participants identified various areas where PSIs and SPOs could collaborate on research that can inform support service provision and policy development, including:

- Ongoing analysis of demands on SPO services, particularly for regions that may see students in transit to other areas of BC
- Needs and experiences of recent graduates and students on the PGWPP
- Needs and experiences of families of international students
- Needs and experiences of international students transitioning from Canadian secondary education into BC PSIs
- Longitudinal studies on international student alumni to track employment outcomes, immigration outcomes, and other indicators

Collaborations with Other Stakeholders:

Participants identified a number of community stakeholders that could be valuable partners to help address international students' needs. SPO staff suggested that cross-sector collaborations for international students could draw from the successful model of local immigrant partnership planning tables that bring together key stakeholders in support of settlement outcomes for newcomers. Additionally, there was a call for greater knowledge exchange initiatives, such as a newsletter that could discuss emerging issues for international students, highlight student voices, and share statistics on international student enrollment and models of successful initiatives.

A) Religious Institutions and Cultural Groups

Many students survey respondents cited religious institutions or cultural community groups as an important source of culturally-relevant support, and opportunities for networking, mentorships, and building connections with community members.

“There is a growing number of newcomers and international students in church (more in ethnic churches than in local churches). Connecting with these churches and giving them resources and information would be a tremendous help for many international students.” (International student)

“I got tons of help from my ethnic church where people not just speak the same language as me but share the same kinds of struggles in terms of culture (because,

say, a Mexican person would experience different culture shocks and difficulties from what a Korean person would), so [it would] be helpful if [international] students could get help and advice from someone from the same ethnic background whether they are from [government] organization[s] or school.” (International student)

B) Secondary Schools

Collaborations with local high schools can help support international students who are already living in BC in their transition to university. One participant noted that this population has different needs, and may be less connected with the international student services at their PSI. They suggested developing outreach programs to connect with international high school students and support them with the requirements to apply to Canadian universities.

“They’ve been here for a year or two already in the city, and then they come to us. But I think, sometimes those students, they have different needs, because they don’t even come to our orientation, they know everything, they already know Vancouver, they already know Canada, so then it’s really hard to get the information to them about services we have on campus.” (PSI staff)

“We have a scholarship and bursary program to support Gr. 12’s transitioning to post-secondary, and would like to offer more support for international students. Some collaborative relationships would be to know the requirements international students need to apply for university and what courses are needed to qualify. Each university is different, and to have a platform for all universities would be great. This allows students to choose accordingly to their interest and not waste time to go to each institute to look up all the information needed.” (SPO staff)

C) Local Services

International students access many local services beyond SPOs and PSIs, including local employment agencies, immigration consultants, financial institutions, non-profit organizations, and legal aid. Additionally, SPOs noted that they are sometimes contacted by emergency responders in crisis situations such as hospitals or the RCMP.

Establishing more formal connections with these services can help facilitate referrals and open opportunities for collaborative programs, such as inviting service providers to host workshops for international students around particular needs.

“Our city is small, and we know many of our [...] certified immigration consultants, and what we do, we usually invite them over to talk about certain topics, and we invite our participants to come. Also [local universities] also invite these certified immigration

consultants to give them information about how to apply for permanent residence.”
(SPO staff)

“The other thing we've done recently [...] is our newcomers to [the city] event. We do this jointly with the school district, the high school, and our campus and our own students, so all new international students from Grade 10 and up are invited to come. We do it in a local museum downtown, and it's a jointly facilitated effort, and then we invite all the local community service organizations—the RCMP, Tourism, etc. to come—and they do door prizes, and giveaways at their tables, and there's events to connect them with. And that's really seen an uptake for students to actually get engaged, whether it be with the Better Business Bureau, or volunteering with a multicultural association, or what have you. (PSI staff)

D) International Students

International students themselves can be valuable partners in addressing peer needs and supporting program development. Several PSI staff described how they seek input from student advisors when developing new initiatives, or with forms of communication and outreach such as their monthly newsletter. Participants suggested that SPOs and PSIs could meet with international student representatives to discuss needs and ideas for improving support service delivery.

“In addition, we facilitate regular discussions with a group of international student leaders to elicit their opinions, ideas and experiences of post-secondary in the Canadian university context.” (PSI staff)

Respondents of the international student survey also expressed an interest in helping to mentor incoming international students. For instance, one student described how they “really wanted to [...] form a group of students who have succeeded in their education and life greatly, who work with different organizations and schools, and welcome their new students.” Their envisioned peer support program would include practical support such as airport pickups, and information on how to enroll for courses, orientation to the city such as banking and housing options, as well as culturally-specific support such as recommendations on where to find groceries offering halal food.

“I really want to help those who are coming behind me.” (International student)

Many PSIs currently offer peer mentorship programs, including alumni career mentorship. These could be expanded in collaboration with SPOs to develop further opportunities for international students to collaborate with local youth and community members.

E) University Faculty

Participants also recommended building further ties with university faculty as partners in career mentorship programs and research on the needs and experiences of international students.

“Connect with faculty members, with researchers who are interested in engaging in scholarly research around resettlement and newcomers [...] How do we start identifying who our researchers are, because we often [don’t] hear from them?” (PSI staff)

F) Government Institutions

Several support service staff and international students noted that they have experienced difficulties and long wait times when contacting Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) or the BC Provincial Nominee Program (BC PNP). There is a strong interest in developing a more direct pathway of communication between support service staff and these institutions, as well as resources addressing common questions.

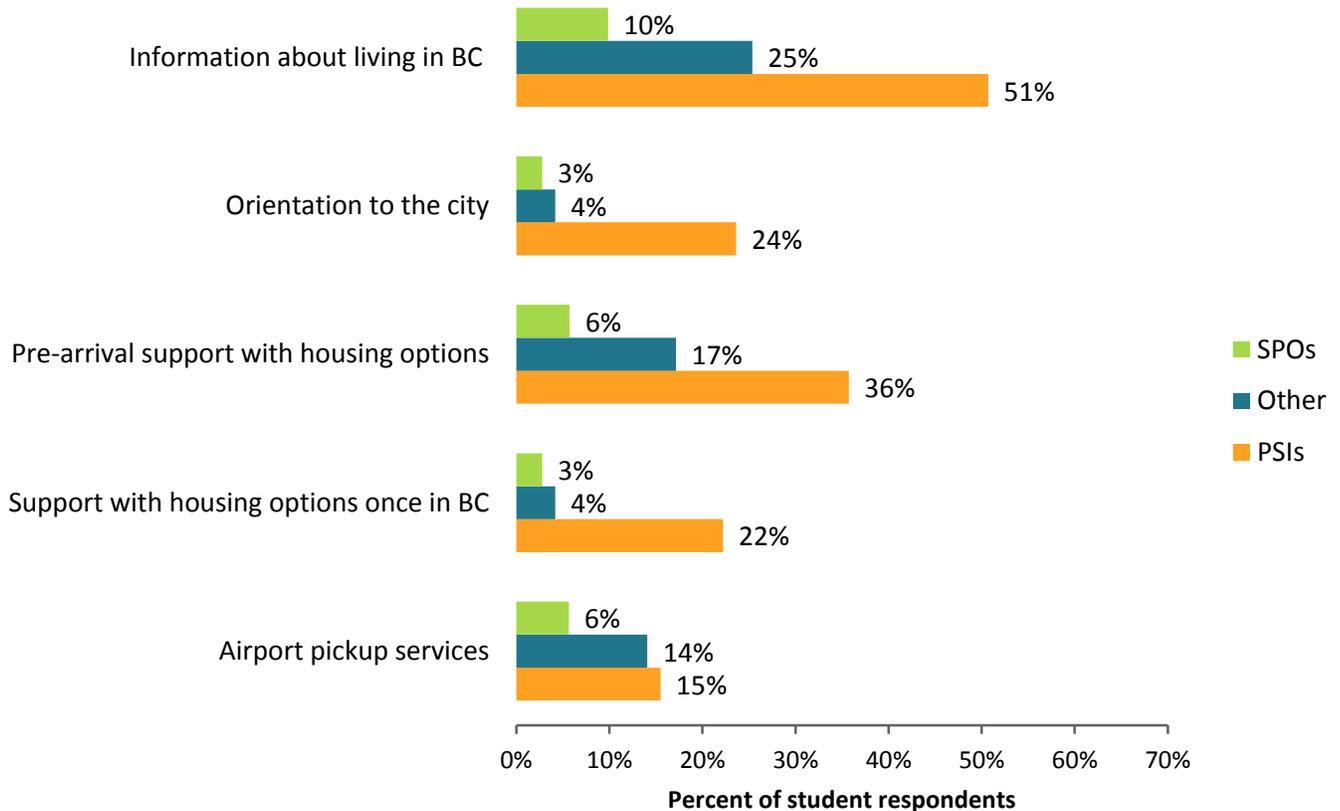
“I really don’t know where to turn to, then I write to BC PNP, and then I get the answer in around 10 working days later, sometimes I have to call up the IRCC number, but then again it’s almost 45 minutes of waiting. So in case we can get that information online, some kind of online training, or there’s some kind of hub we can approach directly, I think that would be a big help to me.” (SPO staff)

Appendix A

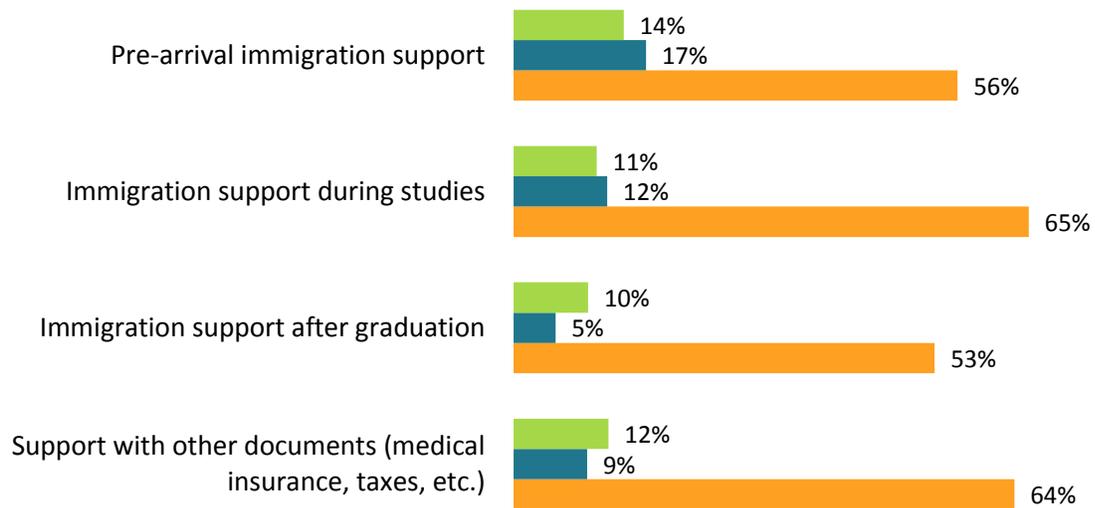
International Students' Sources of Support Services

AMSSA's survey of post-secondary international students in BC asked respondents if they had sought support for the following 21 support service needs, and if they had, to indicate all sources of support they had accessed. The following tables indicate the percent of respondents that sought support from SPOs, PSIs, and other sources for each service area.

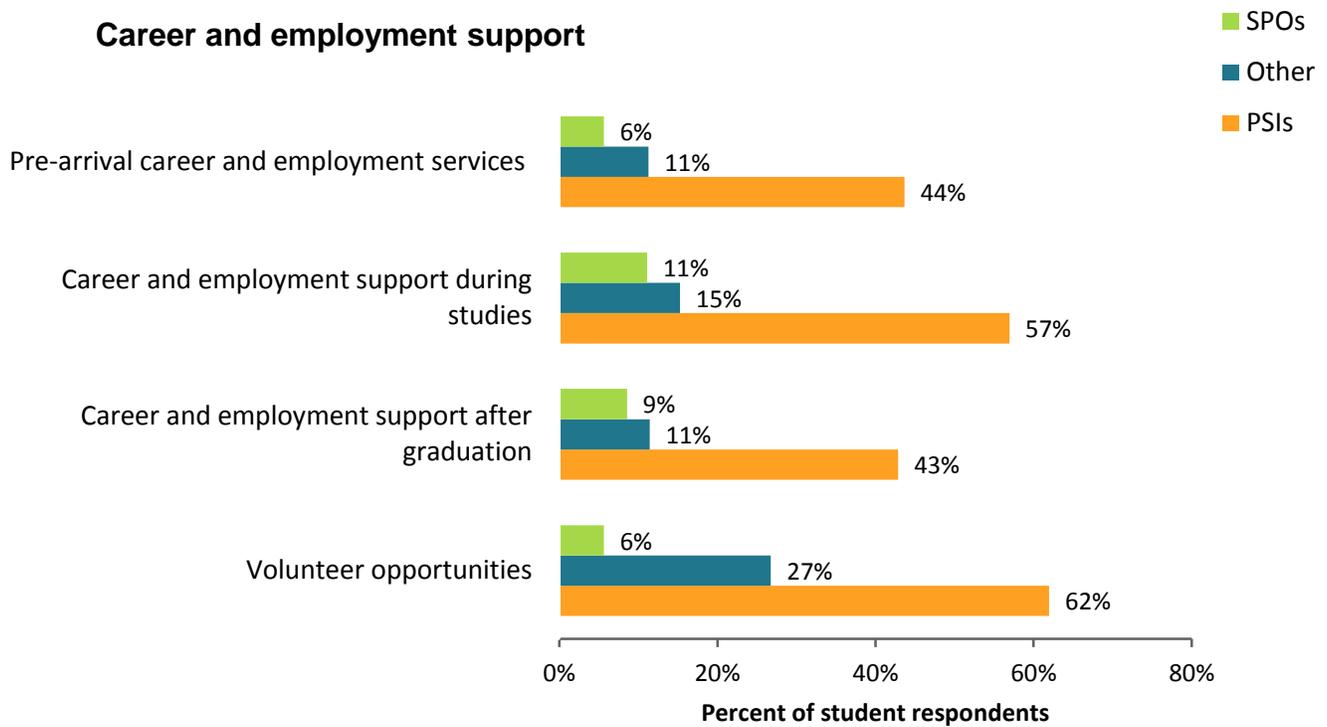
Orientation support



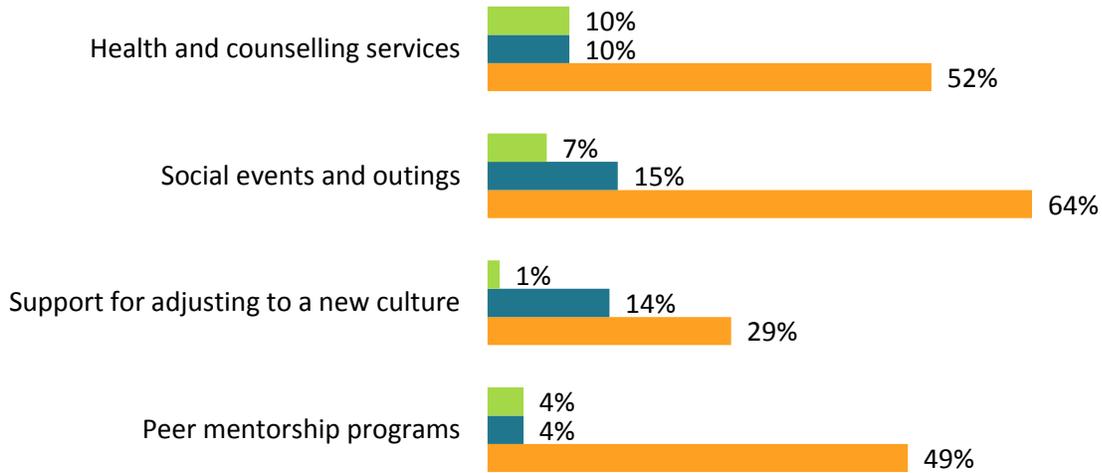
Support with immigration and other documents



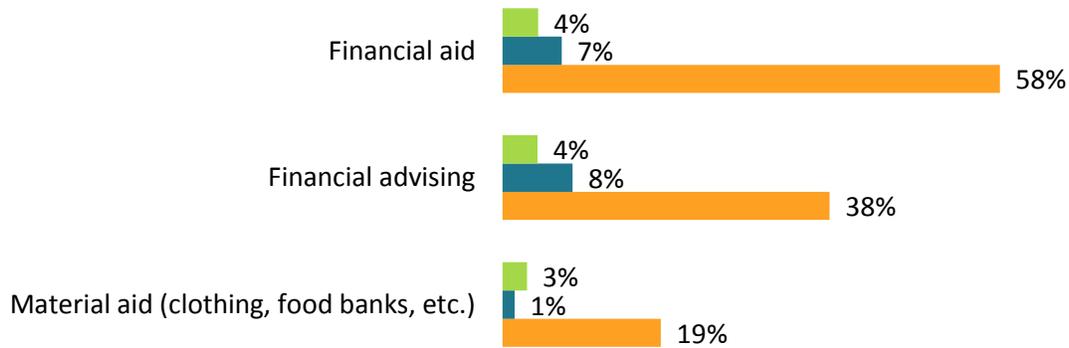
Career and employment support



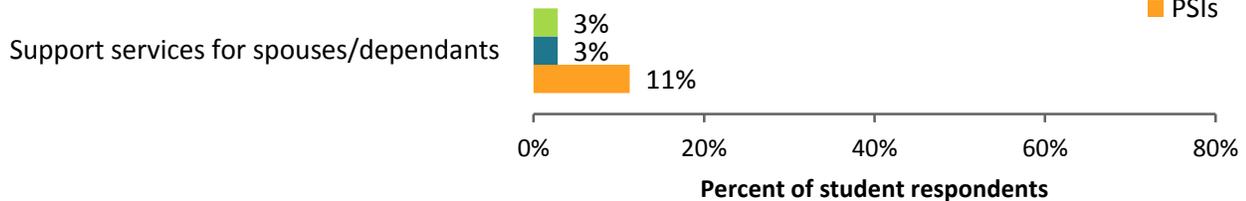
Social, cultural, and emotional support



Financial and Material Support



Support for spouses and dependents



■ SPOs
■ Other
■ PSIs

Appendix B

Support Services Offered by SPOs and PSIs

AMSSA's survey of SPO and PSI staff in BC asked respondents if their organization or institution offered the following 16 support services to post-secondary international students.

