

Health Advisor for Mandarin-Speaking Students (HAMSS) Pilot

Impact Report September 2025

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1 Introduction

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The Health Advisor for Mandarin-speaking Students (HAMSS) is a partnership pilot by King's College London Counselling & Mental Health Support (CMHS) Service and King's College NHS Health Centre (KCHC) GP. The project aim is to support King's international students whose first language is Mandarin in navigating university services and the NHS; we deliver 1-2-1 advisory support and focus on mental health psychoeducation and facilitating timely access to support at the University and in the NHS.

The HAMSS project launched in May 2023 and we published a mid-way review in June 2024. Now as the project draws to a close due to funding, we would like to further share the consolidated findings and learning.

This report is for colleagues in higher education who are interested in broadening and deepening their understanding of international students' mental health from a multicultural and intersectional standpoint.

In this report, we begin with an overview (1 Introduction) of the HAMSS project and follow up with our student support strategies (2 Project Strategies). We then present a contextual grounding of the project (3 Casework and Stakeholders), introducing key casework themes and partners. To illustrate the HAMSS project's impact and reach, we include both the quantitative data of student statistics (4 Measuring Engagement) and the qualitative data of case studies (5 Case Studies). We close with our reflections on this journey (6 Way Forward) and sincere acknowledgements to our fellow collaborators (07 Acknowledgements).



*A University-NHS
partnership
supporting
Mandarin-
speaking
international
students in
accessing
support and
healthcare.*

2 Project Strategies

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The HAMSS project design and our support strategies are driven by the local King's context. We engaged with community voices to identify the needs and challenges of our Mandarin-speaking student cohort when interacting with university support and NHS services, and based on this landscaping, we set out 3 main support strategies of the HAMSS project:

HAMSS is a multicultural listening space

- **Student need:** Our Mandarin-speaking student group identifies language and cultural differences as common barriers in seeking help.
- **Our approach:** HAMSS holds a culturally-aware, 1-2-1 listening space for students to talk about their experience and concerns and get bespoke advice in order to access the relevant support timely.

HAMSS offers service and procedure navigation

- **Student need:** Information gaps in knowing where, how and when to seek help can contribute to poorer student wellbeing.
- **Our approach:** HAMSS guides and advocates for students as they go through their support journey and university procedures, and provides patient/NHS navigation at KCHC GP.

HAMSS values mental health psychoeducation

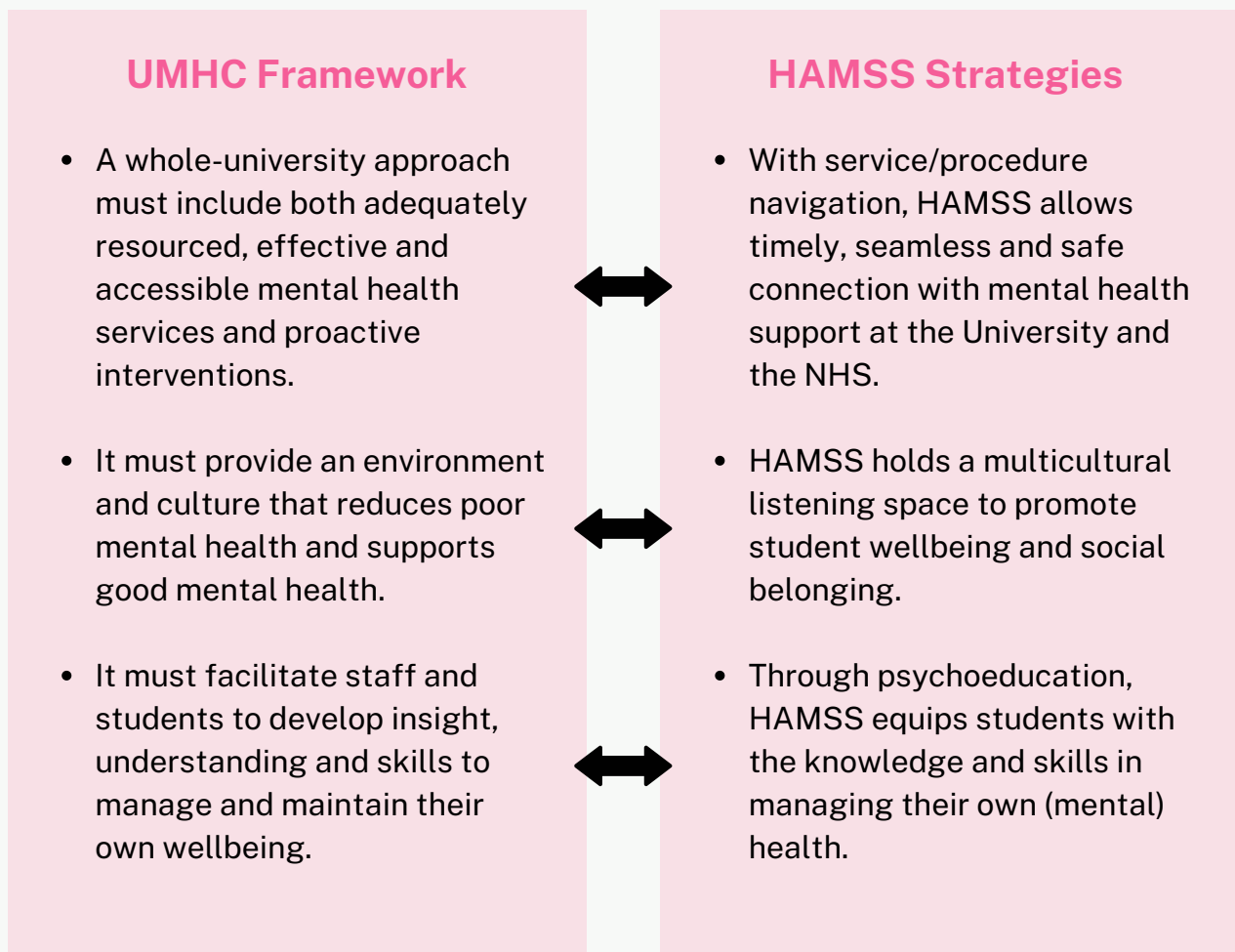
- **Student need:** Cultural/societal attitudes, beliefs and actual provision of mental health care in the students' home countries can influence their willingness in seeking support and making disclosures.
- **Our approach:** HAMSS integrates culturally-sensitive mental health psychoeducation to demystify, destigmatise and raise awareness.

Inclusivity in mind: “Mandarin-speaking support”

We consciously highlight the Mandarin language element when naming the project with inclusivity in mind. This is to signal to students that the support is available to those who speak the Mandarin language, regardless of their nationality or ethnic or cultural identification.

A whole-university approach to mental health

We align the HAMSS project strategies with the King’s strategic action plan[1] and respond to the broader University Mental Health Charter (UMHC) Framework of a whole-university approach to mental health[2], as demonstrated below:



[1] King’s College London Strategic Action Plan: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/smhwh/strategic-action-plan>

[2] University Mental Health Charter (UMHC) Framework: <https://hub.studentminds.org.uk/resources/charter-framework/>

3 Casework and Stakeholders

We contextualise the HAMSS project here to inform readers the types of concerns we support and our partners in student support in the King's community.

Casework by themes: what do students seek support on?

Four themes have emerged from our student casework, which outline the main support need areas for our Mandarin-speaking students:

- **Mental health psychoeducation:** Many students seek HAMSS to inquire about mental health resources in the UK, particularly counselling/talking therapies and diagnosing/assessment for specific psychological conditions. We note an increase in students seeking information on Autism and Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosing. We also see students with diagnosed mental health conditions (most commonly Depression, Anxiety and Bipolar Disorders) hoping to seek re-assessment with the NHS and explore treatment options.
- **NHS and patient navigation:** Orienting international students to the NHS is a major strand of our casework at KCHC GP. We proactively engage students during key times to prompt timely GP registration, offer guidance on system and service navigation, and run health promotion campaigns throughout the academic year. For students with complex needs, HAMSS offers advocacy support at GP consultations to facilitate rapport and informed-consent building.
- **Liaison with University Student Support Services:** HAMSS provides 121 support for students going through formal university procedures, such as Student of Concern (SoC) and Support for Study (SfS), for reasons including mental or physical ill health and welfare issues. We regularly liaise with the relevant Student Support Services to ensure a coordinated support provision. As there are often no equivalent support procedures/measures in the higher education systems in the students' home countries, our students benefit from having HAMSS input in building a practical understanding of the UK HE procedures/policies and their rights and responsibilities as students.
- **Outreach with Trusted Contact (TC):** King's safeguarding procedures stipulate that where there are circumstances concerning a student's vital interest and safety, the University may contact the student's nominated Trusted Contact (TC). When needed, HAMSS acts as the main contact point for our Mandarin-speaking students' TC, who is often their parent(s) back home and speaks limited English, to manage risk and deliver duty of care.

Key stakeholders in delivering a-whole-university support

To facilitate and deliver holistic student support, the HAMSS project has embedded ourselves across King's Student Support Services and our NHS partner KCHC GP. As such, we have established a wide spread of stakeholder network in the community (see list below).

HAMSS' strong liaison links with the key stakeholders means that we are able to create seamless referral pathways in managing student cases of various nature. And for our stakeholders, collaborating with HAMSS means that where needed, they could offer Mandarin-speaking students enhanced support in terms of cultural awareness and linguistic proximity.

King's College London

Student Support Services

- Counselling & Mental Health Support
- Student of Concern (SoC)
- Support for Study (SfS)
- Student Welfare Advice
- Money & Housing Advice
- Visa & International Student Advice
- Disability Support & Inclusion
- Student Conducts & Appeals
- Report + Support

Academic Faculty

- King's International Foundation
- Faculty Wellbeing Advice
- Personal Tutors
- King's Doctoral College
- IoPPN PhD Research

NHS & External

King's College NHS Health Centre GP

NHS Central North West London (CNWL) Trust

- London College/University Mental Health Network
- Westminster Talking Therapies

Royal College of Art (RCA)

HAMSS runs an extension at RCA as a secondment.

4 Measuring Engagement

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The HAMSS project began delivering 1-2-1 student appointments in May 2023 and operates on 2 sites: King's Counselling & Mental Health Support (CMHS) Service and King's College NHS Health Centre (KCHC) GP. We accept student self-referrals and referrals from University's professional services, academic faculty and KCHC GP.

1 FTE HAMSS Advisor was in post in the 2023/2024 academic year, and 0.8 FTE in 2024/2025, with 0.2 FTE delivering a secondment at Royal College of Art (RCA).

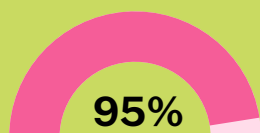
From May 2023 to September 2025 (29 months), we had 709 booked appointments and maintained an attendance rate of 84%. The statistics show a steady flow of students coming for support throughout the academic year, with peaks during the September-October welcome period. We see an upward trend in student self-referral as the HAMSS project embeds in the community; on average, 41% of the HAMSS cases seen at CMHS are self-referral.

A further breakdown of student demographics can be seen below; we collect data in relation to students' nationality, gender, age and level of study.

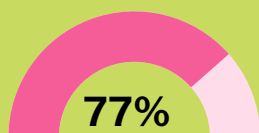
+700
appointments
booked

84%
attendance
rate

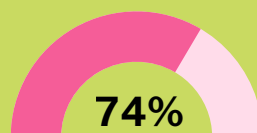
41%
from
self-referral



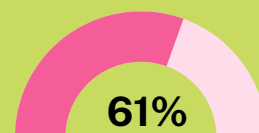
of Chinese
nationality



Female gender

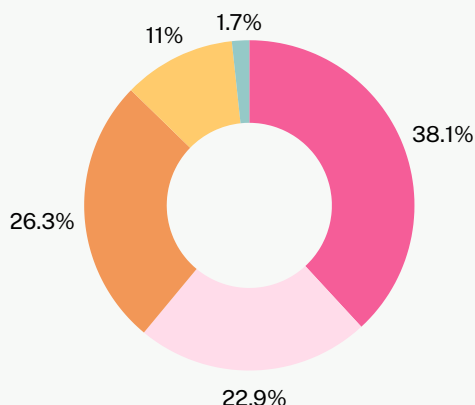


Age 18 to 24



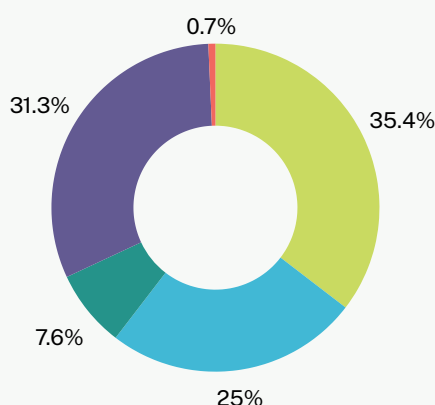
Postgraduate
study

Engagement through students' perspectives: what are students saying about HAMSS?[1]



Reasons for accessing HAMSS (multiple choice)

- Get advice about the NHS and/or KCHC GP
- Find out more about university support
- Need help navigating the support offered to me by the university and/or my GP
- I am struggling with university life and I want to speak with a university staff member in Mandarin
- Other



How has HAMSS supported you? (multiple choice)

- I am more knowledgeable about the university services and procedures and how to access them
- I've learned more about the university counselling service, what counselling is and mental health services in the UK
- Accompanied me to GP appointment
- It offered a supportive space to talk about my difficulties in my native tongue
- Other

"HAMSS made me feel safe to discuss my concerns in my native language and provided clear directions on how to seek help."

"HAMSS assistance in liaising with GP and various departments [...] contributed to the positive outcome of my hearing."

"HAMSS support, both psychological and practical, has been instrumental in allowing me to move forward."

[1] Results from HAMSS Student Feedback Survey from May 2023 to September 2025:

https://forms.office.com/Pages/AnalysisPage.aspx?AnalyzerToken=gtlVnWipWIKe8ORXWPgSHEOd21ceOBZc&id=FM9wg_MWfky4PHJAcWVDVm8SIGvk249HpL2ZR2OzDL5UMktaWklyMIlNTVU4T0l1WUFUQzg5MDVGWS4u

https://forms.office.com/Pages/AnalysisPage.aspx?AnalyzerToken=gtlVnWipWIKe8ORXWPgSHEOd21ceOBZc&id=FM9wg_MWfky4PHJAcWVDVm8SIGvk249HpL2ZR2OzDL5UMktaWklyMIlNTVU4T0l1WUFUQzg5MDVGWS4u

5 Case Studies

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To demonstrate the HAMSS project's impact, we are weaving together the quantitative data (as shown in 4 Measuring Engagement) with the qualitative data of case studies. From the following anonymised vignettes, we invite readers to see the lived experiences of our Mandarin-speaking international students, as well as how HAMSS supports students and collaborates with key stakeholders in delivering a whole-university support.

Case Study (A) Physical health conditions & support navigation

Background

A is a Chinese international student who is studying abroad and living independently for the first time. He has a chronic physical health condition and underwent a medical operation a couple of years ago. Soon after arriving London for his postgraduate study, A developed new, debilitating symptoms and was referred into NHS secondary care for investigation. A found this process highly stressful, and he did not have any social support in the UK. The constant flare-ups and hospital visits meant that A had to miss teaching time, with the end-of-term academic assessments fast approaching.

Coming from a culture with different understandings of disability and support at university, A did not make a disclosure of his health condition pre-arrival, nor did he ever consider seeking reasonable adjustments. He was not known to any University's Student Support Services as a result.

Keywords: NHS navigation; liaison between the NHS and University Support; a cultural holding space; remove barriers to disclosure; improve access to support

HAMSS Input

A was first referred to HAMSS by KCHC GP for a wellbeing discussion and NHS navigation support. Being part of KCHC GP practice, HAMSS was able to review with A his patient record (with his consent) and together they built an informed understanding of the treatment plan and the referral processes. HAMSS also accompanied A to his GP appointments for emotional support.

Concurrently, to support A in managing his academic journey, HAMSS held a culturally-aware safe space for A to consider connecting with university support. Through discussion in Mandarin, A was able to talk extensively about his ambivalence of making a disclosure to the University. In turns, HAMSS addressed A's concerns by giving clear and detailed advice on the student support provision, as well as King's policies on handling personal and sensitive information.

HAMSS remained A's liaison contact with the NHS GP and the University until his health conditions stabilised and he registered with the University's Disability Support & Inclusion Service.

Case Study (B) Acute mental health & liaison with Trusted Contact

Keywords:

*Trusted Contact
(Emergency
Contact) liaison;
enhanced
capacity for duty
of care; complex
mental health;
safeguarding;
NHS-University
partnership in
student mental
health*

Background

A Student of Concern (SoC) report was raised for B about declining mental health. B was often seen wandering in student hall late at night and in unkempt clothing; she did not respond to the hall's welfare checks and had blocked out access to her room. Moreover, B had stopped attending lectures and her academic faculty could not reach her. Prior to the report, B was not known to Student Support. Student Records showed that B was an international student whose native tongue was Mandarin, and she listed her mother as her Trust Contact, with an overseas phone number.

HAMSS input

Following King's safeguarding procedures, HAMSS contacted B's mother (Mandarin-speaking only) to inform her the concerns about B's mental health, and with the SoC team, assisted the parents with flying to London at a short notice.

Alongside the SoC Team, HAMSS conducted a hall outreach to meet with B, B's parents and the local NHS crisis team. HAMSS supported the NHS crisis team in their assessment and facilitated the parents in agreeing to the safety plan of B returning home and connecting with treatment locally. HAMSS also interpreted for B's parents in their understanding of the University's advice on internal procedures and support resources for interruption, returning to study and visas.

**Case Study
(C)
LGBTQA+
student
& welfare
support**

Keywords: NHS navigation; GP liaison; welfare support; LGBTQA+ student support; intersectionality; mental health

Background

C is a Chinese international student who self-referred to HAMSS for NHS guidance. C shared that he recently went on a date that left him feeling exposed – both physically and psychologically – and he was not sure if it was an assault. C would like to get medical advice but did not feel confident in navigating the NHS. C added that he had been questioning his sexual orientation, and growing up where being LGBTQA+ was often stigmatised and pathologised, he felt uneasy making this disclosure to medical professionals and worried about any implications it could have on his future.

HAMSS input

HAMSS held a psychological safe space for C to understand how disclosure and confidentiality works in the UK healthcare and university contexts, and for C to consider linking up with support for his experiences. HAMSS guided C in booking with KCHC GP for his health concerns and accompanied him to the appointment; the Advisor also acted as a cultural bridge for the GP to understand C's concerns around LGBTQA+ identity and fear of discrimination. GP and HAMSS provided C with comprehensive advice and resource on sexual violence support and LGBTQA+ support in the NHS and at King's. C eventually connected with the King's Counselling Support and paired with a counsellor with his preferred language and cultural backgrounds.

6 Way Forward

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As the project comes to an end, we have synthesized our learning and reflection into the following themes for future exploration and long-term knowledge building.

(Multi)cultural competency in student support

The HAMSS project anchors (multi)cultural competency in our service design and support delivery, and this approach has been warmly welcomed by our King's and NHS colleagues. Beyond the project, we envision ongoing scaffolding of cultural competency at King's and hope that colleagues when reflecting on good practices in student support, find HAMSS a useful example.

Research on international students and intersectionality

We have unearthed valuable narratives from our Mandarin-speaking international student cohort about their university experiences, and we invite researchers on HE student mental health to consider a deeper dive in this area. Specifically, a point of interest would be to consider international student experience through the lens of intersectionality, i.e. thinking about ways one's cultural, racial or ethnic backgrounds, class position, sexuality, gender, disability status and much more shape their intra- and inter-relational experiences.

Enrich the University-NHS partnership literature

There is a wealth of literature on University-NHS partnerships on student mental health, with the more recent publication from Universities UK (UUK) in 2022[1], and we would like to add the HAMSS project to the anthology. Our contribution highlights partnership practices in international students' mental health, removing cultural barriers to support, and managing data in an international student population.

A working model for HE student mental health service

The HAMSS project offers non-clinical support under a clinical mental health service at the University and receives regular clinical supervision. The role straddles the gap in between, complementing clinical provision whilst being meaningfully supervised by the existing clinical governance framework. We offer this as a working model to HE colleagues who are considering similar "bridging" support at their institution.

[1] UUK: NHS-university partnerships: working together for student mental health: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/nhs-university-partnerships-working>

7 Acknowledgements

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HAMSS project lead and impact report by:
Margaret Shih, Health Advisor for Mandarin Speaking Students

HAMSS project line management team:
Jo Levy, Head of King's Counselling & Mental Health Support Outreach and Training
Dr. Mona Vaidya, King's College NHS Health Centre Lead GP
Declan Stow, King's College NHS Health Centre Associate Partner

HAMSS project clinical supervision by:
Ogechi Anochie, CNWL NHS Young Adult (16-25) Mental Health Pathway Lead - Westminster

As always, gratitude to all the students who accessed the HAMSS project and entrusted their lived experiences with us.